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THE CONCEPT OF AMERICAN DREAM IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN DRAMA

**Diplomová práce**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem závěrečnou práci vypracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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## **Abstract**

This diploma thesis deals with the concept of American Dream; an ideology that very significantly helped shape the United States and still to this day greatly influences all Americans. The meaning of the phrase is explained and the history of the idea as well as its effect on various groups of people is described. Two plays, *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, are analyzed. The American Dream is a prevalent theme in both of these plays but is shown from different perspectives.

## **Introduction**

The concept of American Dream is present everywhere in American culture; from literature to the film industry to music and visual arts. And that is definitely not the whole list. It is an idea that perhaps the most captures the American spirit and identity. It had a great impact on the development of the United States and it shapes the lives of Americans to this day. If you work hard enough and play by the rules, you can rise from poverty to wealth; that is perhaps the most basic definition of the American Dream. However, the concept of American Dream cannot be so easily described, because it constantly changes and most importantly, it means something a little different to each American citizen.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the American Dream and its history, as well as its traces in American literature in the theoretical part and to analyse two contemporary plays which deal with the topic of American Dream in the practical part. The first chapter of the theoretical part deals with the concept of American Dream. In the beginning the origin as well as the meaning of the phrase is discussed. What the American Dream is and what it means to Americans is analysed.

In the following chapter the history of the American Dream is discussed in depth. From the early colonists to the twentieth century, the idea of the American Dream, even though it would not have been known as this phrase yet, is always present. Special attention is paid to the Founding Fathers who contributed, individually as well as collectively, a great deal to the idea of the American Dream in the Declaration of Independence. The American Dream continued developing throughout the nineteenth century with Abraham Lincoln being the representative statesman. The twentieth century is analysed in more detail as it had a rather great impact on the concept of American Dream.

The third chapter focuses on the American Dream in contemporary United States. In the beginning of the twenty first century the future was looking bright and so did the prospect of realizing the American Dream for many people; however, the economic crisis yet again diminished many people's chances of fulfilling the Dream. Special attention is paid to the presidents of the twenty first century as they used the concept very often during their presidential

campaigns and presidency and helped to shape the American Dream during the four years they were in the office.

The fourth chapter of the theoretical part deals with the way the American Dream has been an ideology that has excluded women and racial minorities. Since the Declaration of Independence, the American motto has been that 'all men are created equal', however it was not up until recently that women and non-white Americans started to be perceived as equal citizens to white men.

The last chapter in the theoretical part is concerned with the theme of American Dream in American literature. It is often said that the ideology of the American Dream is present in every great American novel. In this thesis the way the Dream is portrayed in the four selected American novels, such as *The Great Gatsby* or *Of Mice and Men*, is discussed.

The practical part in this thesis consists of an analysis of two prominent contemporary plays with the attention being on the way the theme of American Dream is depicted. The first analysis is of Arthur Miller's tragedy *Death of a Salesman*. This play is a story about a common American man who was crushed by his false values and his skewed version of the Dream. The second analyzed drama is *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry. The play follows an African American family in which each member has their own unique American Dream and they must fight against racism and segregation in order to make better lives for themselves and the family.

The last chapter in the practical part deals with the employment of the theme of the American Dream as well as the selected plays in English classes. Two lesson plans are presented with all needed materials attached in the appendices. The first lesson is meant to introduce the topic of the American Dream to the students and the aim of the second lesson is to analyze a part of a play and discuss the features of the American Dream in it.



## **Theoretical part**

### **1 The Concept of American Dream**

The topic of this chapter is the phrase American Dream; its origin and the most likely authors. The meaning behind the phrase American Dream is analyzed and different interpretation are discussed.

#### **1.1 Origin of the Phrase American Dream**

The term American dream was most probably coined by historian James Truslow Adams who featured the phrase in his most popular book *The Epic of America*, published in 1931. Adams wished to write a one volume book on American history, the result was a book that was not only a history book for the general public but also an analysis of the American people and their attitudes and dreams. Originally, Adams also wanted to name the whole book *The American Dream* but was talked out of it by his publisher since at that time the phrase did not carry the well known meaning as it does nowadays (American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation).

In *The Epic of America* Adams describes the American Dream as “...*that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. 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.*”

It is also suggested that Adams was not the one who created the term American Dream. For example John Kenneth White and Sandra L. Hanson (2011, p. 2-3) believe that that right belongs to journalist Walter Lippmann who used this term in his book *Drift and Mastery* from 1916 in which he criticizes American politics and encourages people to find their new American Dream for the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Anne Margaret Daniel (2016) on the other hand believes that it was the author of *The Great Gatsby*, perhaps the most iconic American Dream book, Francis Scott Fitzgerald who originally coined the term. Daniel (2016) points out that Fitzgerald used the phrase ‘my American dream girl’ in his story *The Hotel Child* which was published in The Saturday Evening Post in January 31<sup>st</sup> also in 1931. As Elizabeth Miossec-Backer (2014) points out, the idea was already analyzed by Henry David Thoreau or Walt Whitman before James Truslow Adams coined it.

And according to Norman Garfinkle (2006, p. 31) Alexis de Tocqueville is sometimes credited for the term American Dream. The French writer travelled the United States in the eighteen thirties and wrote his book *Democracy in America* about that experience. Even though he most likely did not coin the term, he did talk about the principles of the American Dream in his book. He was most noticeably impressed by the opportunity for social mobility Americans had at that time.

It is important to realize though, that this idea, of course, was not by any means new. The ideals that we nowadays understand behind the term American Dream were written already in the Declaration of Independence and even by that time the idea was already old, Jim Cullen (2012, p. 16) claims. It was only in the 1930s when the phrase American Dream came to life but the idea was already long established among the American citizens.

## **1.2 The Essence of the American Dream**

The American Dream is definitely a very prominent theme in the American culture, as Sandra L. Hanson and John Zogby (2010) point out. Nevertheless there is not one common definition of the phrase, even though all Americans are very familiar with it as it is an important part of the national character of Americans (The Battered American Dream).

In the Making of America Issue of TIME magazine John Meacham (2012) describes the idea as a conviction that the people who obey the rules and work hard enough will be rewarded with a prosperous life and a bright future for their children (Keeping the Dream Alive).

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines it simply as “*an American ideal of a happy and successful life to which all may aspire*“. In the Oxford Dictionary the American Dream is described as “*the ideal that every US citizen should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative*”. It is interesting to compare the Oxford definition of the American Dream from 2016 and the previous one, which Florian Keller talks about in his book published in 2005 (p. 49), “*ideal of a democratic and prosperous society which is the traditional aim of the American people*”. Whereas nowadays the major part of the American Dream is the success of individual people, in the previous definition the focus was on the prosperity of the whole nation (Andy Kaufman: *Wrestling with the American Dream*, 2005).

As Martha Bayles (2015) reports, the American Dream consists of three parts: prosperity, democracy and freedom. These, of course, are not dreams exclusive to only Americans, in fact almost everyone can relate to them but it is called the American dream because the United States of America was the first country in the world in which these dreams actually came true for a large amount of people.

There is no consensus on what the American Dream really is about as Lawrence Samuel (2012, p. 1) concludes. According to the historian, who calls the American Dream a “*guiding mythology of the most powerful civilization in history*”, it is rather a list of individual wishes, such as financial stability, chase for happiness or to have the infamous fifteen minutes of fame. The biggest problem being, according to Samuel (2012), this mythology simply does not exist. The American Dream is not real, and the fact that the majority of people assumed that it is, is the most compelling part of it all.

## 2 History of the American Dream

This chapter deals with the idea of American Dream from the very beginning; from the first colonists to the Declaration of Independence to the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. How the idea shaped the nation as well as the important figures is discussed in detail.

### 2.1 The Very Beginnings and Puritans

As it was said before, the concept of the Dream was present in the minds of Americans since the very beginning. As Cullen (2002, p. 16) suggests, even the Pilgrims would have already understood the idea even though they were not yet talking about the American Dream. The inception of the American Dream can be found already at the beginning of the nation in the seventeenth century according to Samuel (2012, p. 3).

Some researches, such as Tonya Flores (2012, p. 1), argue that the American Dream was inadvertently created by the Puritans who came to America because of the prospect of new land and freedom. However, many suffered so they could realize this dream of theirs, namely Native Americans and African slaves. It is a very prominent theme in the history of the American Dream that it was realized at the expense of minorities and women and it was not until almost the present day when all Americans have the same chance to reach their American Dream, as for example Jennifer. L. Hochschild (1995, p. 6) explains in her book *Facing up to the American Dream: Race, Class and the Soul of the Nation*.

John Winthrop, the founder of Massachusetts, did not use the words American Dream but in his sermon to his fellow colonists in 1630 there is the same sentiment when he compares America to “*a city upon a hill*” and states that it is a land where all can prosper if they work hard enough and live according to the Bible, Patrick J. Kiger (2011) says.

Diana Știuliuc (2011, p. 365) offers a different view of the origin of the Dream, claiming that Europeans at that time thought of America firstly as a dream and a vision and only after that it appeared to them as a country; essentially the American Dream was a product of the European imagination.

## **2.2 Founding Fathers and the Declaration of Independence**

The Founding Fathers are some of the most important figures in the history of the United States. However, as Allan Kulikoff (2014, p. 2) points out, little does the American public care about the actual philosophy or politics of the Founders. The Founding Fathers are seen as symbols and they are remembered for their best features. As Kulikoff (2014, p. 2) elaborates, “*Jefferson represents democracy and equality; Hamilton, capitalism and economic growth; Washington, courage under fire and integrity; Madison, the rule of law and constitutional liberty; and Franklin, inventiveness and upward mobility.*”

### **2.2.1 Declaration of Independence**

The time when the American Dream started to become more concrete was with the Declaration of Independence. The idea can be found in the opening clause of the second paragraph of the Declaration:

*"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.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."*

This is perhaps the most remembered part of the Declaration of Independence, as the rest is quite tedious for the modern day reader as Jim Cullen (2012, p. 49) claims. But this part resonates with Americans. “The pursuit of happiness” is a phrase that especially defines the idea that is the American Dream. Kimberly Amadeo (2016) suggests that by putting this idea into the law the Founding Fathers made sure that each individual’s pursuit of happiness was the driving force behind their ambition rather than just selfishness.

Once again, as Miossec-Backer (2014) suggests, there was, of course, quite a large percentage of Americans who were excluded from this ideal and that remained well into the 1930s when

Adams's book was written, when particularly women and people of colour were very far away from the dream as Samuel (2012) points out.

Selected Founding Fathers, those that are most frequently linked to the American Dream will be discussed in the following subchapters.

### **2.2.2 Benjamin Franklin**

Benjamin Franklin was a great example of a self-made man who rose from a child from a middle class family to a printer and finally into an author, editor, inventor, scientist and of course one of the Founding Fathers, just to name a few of his occupations. He worked his way up purely thanks to his work ethic not through any kind of luck. As Jim Powell (1997) claims, basically everything which Benjamin Franklin knew he taught himself. According to Powell (1997) Franklin's greatest invention was actually the American Dream.

To many Americans, Benjamin Franklin is the embodiment of the American Dream as Alan Houston (2009, p. 3) reports. His life was a perfect example of the fulfilment of the American Dream; the rise from rags to riches. It is also a prevailing theme in his autobiographical book *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* as J. A. Leo Lemay (2013, p. 232) points out. The *Autobiography* was a great inspiration to many people. According to Lemay (2013, p. 229) the *Autobiography's* popularity was due to "*the archetypal appeal of the individual's rise from impotence to importance, from dependence to independence, from helplessness to power*". The reason why the American Dream is so important to people is because it is about the individual person's transformation; it is a universal experience (The Life of Benjamin Franklin).

However, as Kulikoff (2014, p. 23) suggests, Americans like to remember quite an idealized version of Benjamin Franklin. He is often described as a middle-class American because that is what people can relate to. Nevertheless, as Kulikoff (2014, p.5) claims, Franklin would be best described as a member of the bourgeoisie and according to the historian, Franklin often resembled those of European Nobility.

### **2.2.3 Thomas Jefferson**

Thomas Jefferson was appointed the main writer of the Declaration of Independence, even though he was the youngest out of the five members of the committee that was put together by the Congress in order to create the Declaration. As Lewis E. Kaplan (2009, p. 65) suggests, this perhaps happened unintentionally as neither Benjamin Franklin nor John Adams, both of whom were great political writers, realized how important this document would become.

Even though the Declaration of Independence had a great impact on the America Dream and Jefferson was the main writer, it was clear that he did not had all Americans in mind when he wrote that “*all men are created equal*” or that everyone has the right to “*the pursuit of happiness*”. As Kulikoff (2014, p.1) suggests, Americans like to conveniently forget the Founding Fathers’ flaws, such as Jefferson’s racism and the fact that he was a slave-owner. His own way of living contradicts with what he put down in the Declaration. He thought of black people as little more than animals and, as Andrew Delbanco (2000, p. 73) reports, claimed that the fact that black people cannot blush is a sign that they live a primitive emotional life.

However as Cullen (2012, p. 47) points out, the Declaration did have its impact on slaves. According to Cullen the white Americans referred to themselves as the slaves; slaves of Great Britain. And if the Declaration freed the white men them from their masters it definitely could bring the same thought to the minds of African Americans.

### **2.2.4 Alexander Hamilton**

Some people see Alexander Hamilton as the forefather of the American Dream. As Stephen Ontko (2009) points out, what made Hamilton special was that he was not born in the American colonies but in the Caribbean. When Hamilton was eighteen years old he moved to New York. Because of that he was an inspiration to other immigrants that they too can make it in America and achieve their dreams there, as Hamilton did (Deconstructing Hamilton, I: The American Dream).

Hamilton had great hopes for America, as Samuel (2012, p. 66) points out. Hamilton thought that in the middle of the twentieth century the United States would be an industrial superpower and it turned out he was right, which is admirable considering that during his life America was a mostly rural country.

Hamilton was born outside of the United States and is one of the more overlooked Founding Fathers, however, as for example Averi Israel (2016) reports, Hamilton became recently incredibly popular because of Lin-Manuel Miranda's Broadway musical Hamilton. The American Dream is prominent even in this play. As Israel (2016) points out, the majority of the cast of the musical consists of non-white actors, which makes all the people of colour in the audience feel as if they too were included in the creation of the nation, as the creators not only the slaves.

## **2.3 Nineteenth Century**

The Dream continued developing well throughout the nineteenth century. The idea of American Dream became more concerned with individualism as a result of America no longer being under the rule of the British. As Frederic I. Carpenter (1955, p.8) points out, the transcendentalists in America celebrated a new Dream; one of a country that was no longer bound by the European traditions. Massive immigration also had a significant impact on the development of the country (The American Dream in the Nineteenth Century). It is important to note, however, as Cullen (2012, p. 70) proposes, that the dream of upward mobility in the nineteenth century was still available for white men only.

### **2.3.1 Abraham Lincoln**

If Jefferson and Franklin were the faces of the American Dream in the eighteenth century then Abraham Lincoln would be their counterpart in the nineteenth century. As Cullen (2012, p. 8) proposes, Abraham Lincoln is generally accepted as the greatest American. In his book *Lincoln as Hero* Frank J. Williams (2012, p. 7) calls Lincoln one of the finest examples of the American Dream. Likewise Edward Steers Jr. (2007, p. 2) suggests that Lincoln symbolizes the American Dream.



Garfinkle (2006, p. 24) even went as far as to say that Lincoln was the first person to “*fully grasp the meaning of what was later called the American Dream*” by being the first to properly understand that the American economic opportunity and the ability of upward mobility were the defining features and true essence of America. As Garfinkle (2006, p. 28) notes “*Lincoln is the father of the American Dream that all Americans should have the opportunity through hard work to build a comfortable middleclass life.*”

Similarly to Benjamin Franklin, Lincoln too came from humble beginnings. He was born in a log cabin to a simple family. As Frank J. Williams (2012, p. 7) claims, Lincoln rose from his modest background to one of the greatest American presidents through education. Lincoln was fuelled by his desire for knowledge. Lincoln was mostly self-educated since his formal education was largely limited.

According to Jason H. Silverman (2015, p.6) Lincoln’s creed for his whole life and career was that everyone should have the opportunity to rise in life and that everyone should be rewarded for their work, immigrants included. It is essentially what is understood as the American Dream nowadays. The main difference between Jefferson and Lincoln, both figures closely connected to the American Dream, was that while Jefferson often privileged “natural aristocracy” as Silverman (2015, p. 124) suggests, Lincoln appreciated hard work and conscientiousness the most and believed that the system should reward any individual that desired to work themselves up from poverty. As Garfinkle (2006, p. 15) says “*Lincoln’s American Dream emphasized prosperity and advancement for the ordinary worker*”. That is no surprise since Lincoln himself came from humble beginnings and worked himself up.

Jim Cullen (2012, p. 8) argues that even though Lincoln is usually known for putting an end to slavery and preserving the Union, both of these actions were a means to a greater end; keeping the American Dream alive.

### **2.3.2 Horatio Alger**

Horatio Alger was a nineteenth century writer who has been closely connected to the theme of the American Dream since the end of the nineteenth century. According to Samuel (2012, p. 4),

he was one of the most prominent spokespeople for the American Dream. He wrote more than a hundred books that followed a very similar storyline, one typical for the American Dream ideology and that is of the rise from rags to riches, as Rank et al. (2014, p. 3) claims. These stories were immensely popular with the American people in the late nineteenth century. A young boy works himself up through hard work and optimism. As Steven M. Gillon (2015) explains, Alger's characters did not get rich, but they became respected members of the middle class, which was something that really made an impression on immigrants coming to the United States.

According to Samuel (2012, p. 65-66) it is ironic that Horatio Alger's name is forever connected with the idea of the American Dream of success and basically a synonym for a rise from poverty to riches through virtue, since he himself dissipated all the money he earned from writing his books.

### **2.3.3 Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Ralph Waldo Emerson is perhaps the most influential writer of the nineteenth century (The Norton Anthology of American Literature, p. 211). According to John Izaguirre (2014, p. 19), Emerson's literary works depict precisely what would later be understood as the American Dream. As Izaguirre (2014, p. 19) says, in his essay *Self-Reliance* Emerson "*informs and demonstrates the persistent ideals that constitute the American dream in American literature*" and elaborates on the idea of the American Dream by defining the self-reliant American.

As Cullen (2012, p.70) points out, Emerson also explored one of the most prominent themes of the American Dream and that is the upward mobility. Emerson was in particular concerned with the metaphysical dimension of upward mobility. Emerson was also very much against slavery and a supporter of women's rights (Norton Anthology of American Literature, p. 213).

In his book *The Epic of America*, James Truslow Adams points out Emerson's importance. "*In no other author can we get so close to the whole of the American spirit as in Emerson.*" (in *The American Dream and Literature*, 2014, p. 21).

### **2.3.4 End of the Century**

According to Steven M. Gillon (2015) Jefferson's idea of the Dream, one of the pursuit of happiness and liberty for all individuals, was still perfectly valid in the nineteenth century. Majority of Americans lived in the countryside and were self-employed, majority of the workers were farmers. Classes or aristocracy did not exist. However, things started to change towards the end of the century as the United States transitioned from an agrarian state to an industrial one. There was no land available anymore and people went from farmers and independent workers to employees. Since the country has changed, the American Dream has changed as well.

## **2.4 Twentieth Century**

In the twentieth century many people came to the United States to seek their happiness; allured by the promise of the American Dream, despite the fact, as Rank et al. (2014, p. 2) suggests, that it was an enormous risk to move to the country when there was nothing waiting for them, except for the promise of the available land.

As Lawrence Samuel (2012, p. 24) suggests, during the thirties it was believed and pointed out by the *TIMES* magazine that the American Dream was an idea of the eighteenth and nineteenth century and was slowly getting destroyed by big corporations and Wall Street. America became even more concerned with the past when the present was unsettling due to the Great Depression and the future equally as unpleasant because of Hitler's actions in Europe.

### **2.4.1 The Great Depression**

It was also in the twentieth century when the idea of the American Dream got its name. It is definitely worth to mention that Adams examined the American Dream and coined the term during the Great Depression. As Matt Thompson (2015) suggests it was "*hardly the time for a national legend of progress and self-fulfillment to flourish*". Amadeo (2016) suggests that the

American Dream at that time was defined by greed, which made it unachievable since someone always had more hence causing the crash of the stock market in 1929.

In 1933 a new social and economic reform was introduced to end the Great Depression by the newly elected president, Franklin Roosevelt. The New Deal, as it was called, brought a feeling of confidence to the American people. What was impressive and novel about the New Deal was the speed at which it achieved its goals (An Outline of American History). As Samuel (2012, p. 3) proposes, the American Dream served as a defying ideology behind many of the twentieth century's social movements, including of course the New Deal. According to White and Hanson (2011, p. 4) the president knew that if he wanted his actions to last for a long time, they had to be connected to the American Dream. Lawrence Samuel (2012, p. 19) however suggests that at that time many people thought the opposite and insisted that the New Deal was a threat to the American Dream and that the government should not intervene in private enterprise.

Cullen (2012, p. 14) also points out, that the author of the term American Dream, James Adams, was as well disappointed by the New Deal and was under the impression that it was meant to create a very materialistic consumer society and betray America's values and autonomy. Adams was out of touch with the development of the economy and politics of the time and died disappointed in the United States. However, he still remained popular among the American people.

## **2.4.2 World War II**

Even though, as Donald Albrecht (1995) points out, almost twenty million Americans served in the Second World War and out of that number almost half a million lay down their lives for their country, the forties were a great era for the American economy and for the citizens back in the United States. Albrecht (1995) elaborates, “... a booming wartime economy produced a remarkable prosperity that ended the Great Depression, sparked a post-war economic miracle, and made the American dream of suburban homes, shopping centres, and modern kitchens a reality.”

### **2.4.3 After the Second World War**

Jim Cullen (2012, p. 201) amongst others suggests that the time after the Second World War was the golden age of the American Dream, not only in academic but also in historical circles. Maechem (2012) agrees stating that the victory over Hitler and imperial Japan significantly helped to revive the American Dream.

Cullen (2012, p. 201) argues that it were the features and promises of the American Dream, such as free government, social mobility or universal education, that helped the United States to resist the pull of totalitarianism in the critical years following the Second World War. After the war more people than ever before became members of the middle class, as Jon Meacham (2012) says, even those that for a long time were denied that opportunity.

On the other hand, Thompson (2015) suggests that the American Dream has been dying since the nineteen twenties and it was after the Second World War that the Dream was destroyed and exchanged for “*the cheap, consumerist facsimile with which Americans have been living ever since*”.

### **2.4.4 The Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King**

In the nineteen sixties African Americans started to fight for their right to fulfill their American Dreams; they were excluded from the idea for centuries, among other minorities and women. As Samuel (2012, p. 49) points out, in the sixties equal rights for African Americans were still a myth. According to Ştiuliuc (2011, p. 368) the American Dream meant an attempt to break free from systematic racism and segregation in general.

The American Dream was a very prominent theme in Martin Luther King's, who was the leader of the civil rights movement, ideals. The American Dream was also a significant theme in King's most famous speech *I Have a Dream* which he gave at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. in 1963 during the March on Washington. “... *And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, 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."* (Keeping the Dream Alive, 2012)

King mentioned the American Dream in many of his other speeches, for example in 1961 at the National Press Club *"We are simply seeking to bring into the full realization the American Dream - a dream yet unfulfilled. A dream of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a land where men no longer argue that the color of a man's skin determines the content of his character"*(American Dream: A Cultural History, p.50).

According to Cullen (2012, p. 18) it was a genius idea for King to define the struggles of African Americans in the terms of the American Dream since it made it difficult for his opponents to defy him. It was also a great idea to define the American Dream as the whole nation's goal rather than just the fulfillment of individual people.

Martin Luther King was undeniably one of the most important figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the fight for equality of African Americans; however there were some serious flaws in his thinking. Even though he fought for the African Americans to achieve their American Dream he did not really include women and their fight for equality. As Rufus Burrow Jr. (2014, p. 44) and Jim Cullen (2012, p. 137) point out, King ignored the issue of sexism and was even himself sexist when he denied women leadership positions in The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which is an organization for African-American civil rights.

#### **2.4.5 Materialism of the Second Half of the Century**

Throughout the centuries, the American Dream was always very materialistic to some but according to Matt Thompson (2015) it was around the nineteen seventies when the Dream really became purely materialistic. As Thompson (2015) proposes, the American Dream got reduced from the dream of self-realization to owning a house with a white picket fence. Similarly, in *Chasing the American Dream* Rank et al. (2014, p. 3) argues that the American Dream became one *"of achieving a comfortable middle class standard of living."*

Even the First Lady at that time, Eleanor Roosevelt, was herself concerned by this development. In 1961 she wrote an essay called *What Has Happened to the American Dream?* in which she analyzes the state of America in the nineteen sixties, saying “*The future will be determined by the young, and there is no more essential task today, it seems to me, than to bring before them once more, in all its brightness, in all its splendor and beauty, the American dream, lest we let it fade, too concerned with ways of earning a living or impressing our neighbors or getting ahead or finding bigger and more potent ways of destroying the world and all that is in it.*”

#### **2.4.6 End of the century**

According to Hanson and White (2011, p. 33) the nineties were, similarly to the twenties, a golden age for the American Dream. And with Bill Clinton being voted into office, a more individualistic version of the American Dream was brought back.

As Norton Garfinkle (2012, p. 189) claims, Bill Clinton carried forward the American Dream, as many twentieth century presidents did before him, inspired by president Lincoln. Homeownership, which was possible thanks to the economic boom in the late nineties as Lawrence Samuel (2012, p. 168) points out, was a part of the American Dream that Clinton supported, as Amadeo (2016) suggests. Nevertheless, it was becoming more and more difficult for Americans to hold onto the American Dream, according to Hanson and White (2011, p. 6).

The end of the twentieth century is also the time when demographic differences in American society became more prominent and people were slowly increasing their awareness of them, as Jim Cullen (2012, p. 188) says. Partially because of the still felt impact of the civil rights movement, people started to be more aware of how minorities did not have the same experiences and opportunities as “mainstream” Americans, since the American culture, which was dominant, overshadowed those of minorities. As Cullen (2012, p. 188-189) suggests, there was a new movement to celebrate alternative cultures to revive the American society.

## **Summary**

Up until the 21<sup>st</sup> century millions of people were mesmerized by the American Dream and came to the United States to work hard and find their fortune. America was the symbol of opportunity, freedom and success. However, very few achieved their own personal dreams and those who did often did at the expense of someone else. Nevertheless the American Dream has been one absolutely essential ideology in the development and history of the United States.



### 3 American Dream in the Twenty First Century USA

As Samuel (2012, p. 167-168) suggests, the future looked bright at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Unemployment was low, as well as inflation. More people than ever before realized a significant part of the American Dream in the last century; home ownership. Basically, as Samuel (2012, p. 168) states, “*Americans were determined to keep their Dream alive*”.

However, the country was also affected by a significant amount of social issues, such as high rates of crime or divorce (American Dream: A Cultural History, p. 172). Sandra L. Hanson (2011, p. 78) also suggests that the American Dream might not be progressing in the twenty first century due to the still present racial and gender inequality and widening wealth gap. Meacham (2012) adds that the growing gap between the poor and the rich makes the American Dream in the twenty first century more unreachable than ever before in the history of the United States. Amadeo (2016) is similarly pessimistic, saying that current social trends such child abuse or drug addiction as well as the continuing economic recession show that the American Dream is dead.

Wilber W. Caldwell (2006, p. 1) suggests that recently the American Dream has shifted to a shallow and selfish dream of easy money and that for many young Americans it is basically a dream of winning the lottery. This change in the Dream, as Caldwell (2006, p. 1) claims, is the reason for the significant increase in cynicism in contemporary United States. According to Caldwell (2006, p. 1) the American Dream reflects the national mood, and it is disappointment which leads to cynicism.

Finally, as Diana Știuliuc (2011, p. 370) notes, the American Dream was transformed in the twenty first century due to the terrorist attacks in September 2001 as well as the economic crisis in 2008. It changed from just a symbol of national identity to a powerful tool for the nation’s social revitalization.

### **3.1 Presidents of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the American Dream**

As David Z. Hambrick (2016) points out the American Dream has become a base for the majority of speeches in the majority of presidential campaigns. All recent presidents used the concept of American Dream and the way in which they did so is discussed in more detail in the following subchapters.

#### **3.1.1 George W. Bush**

When George W. Bush was elected, it was obvious that he was going to be an instrumental part in shaping the American Dream for the twenty-first century as Lawrence Samuel (2012, p. 168) suggests. As Hanson and White (2011, p. 45) claim, Bush was aware of the political potential of the American Dream and adopted the idea into his political views.

According to New York Times journalist Frank Rich, Bush's policies and personal history "*both fit the revised American Dream of our turn-of-the-century, in which the right connections, the leveraging of other people's money and the receiving of stock options are way cooler than the old Horatio Alger rags-to-riches attributes of hard work and business-building*" (in American Dream: A Cultural History, 2012, p. 168).

However when assessing the whole presidency of Bush, Sandra Hanson and John White (2011, p. 35) conclude that Bush's presidency is generally perceived as a failure and that he did not defend the Dream but admittedly he did not let it die either.

#### **3.1.2 Barack Obama**

According to Johnny Bernard Hill (2009, p. 1), in many ways Barack Obama is the example of the fulfilment of the American Dream. His presidency also signified a key moment for the African Americans' fight for freedom. "*With the election of Obama, America has experienced nothing short of a political and cultural revolution*" Hill (2009, p.1) says.

In 2006 Barack Obama wrote a book called *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*. In this book Obama suggests that the Dream is not lost and expresses his hopes that there is a possibility he could renew the Dream. In the book Obama defined the Dream in terms of freedom and all its positive attributes, such as discipline, hard work and self-reliance (The American Dream in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 2011, p. 12, 41).

As Cullen explains in his essay *Twilight's Gleaming: The American Dream and the Ends of Republics* (2011, p. 22) Obama used the idea of the American Dream throughout his presidential campaign. In March 2008 he incorporated the promise of upward mobility in his speech “*I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas [ ... ] I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave owners—an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters [ ... ] and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible*”. Hanson and White (2011, p. 41) add that Obama understood the power of the American Dream and used his personal history to prove that the Dream was here to stay.

Obama talked about the Dream in his speech after he won the race for president on November 4<sup>th</sup> 2008 saying “*This is our time, to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; [ ... ] to reclaim the American dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth, that, out of many, we are one.*” As Courtney Jue (2013, p. 59) America has changed because Obama was able to unite people and achieve communion. As Sandra Hanson and John White (2011, p.42) point out Obama did not think of himself being elected as a personal victory but rather as ratification of the American Dream.

Once elected, Obama decided to focus on dealing with the economic crisis, of course, but also to address the more long term issues that threaten to put the American Dream in danger, as Robert C. Rowland (2013, p. 20) comments.

It is important to mention the significance of the fact that Obama is an African American man. Heather E. Harris et al (2010, p. 6) argues that Obama's story being one of an African American success makes the American Dream myth all the more powerful and even more shows the potency of the Dream for all Americans.

### **3.1.3 Donald Trump and the 2016 Election**

During the presidential election in 2016, all three main presidential candidates used the American Dream in their speeches. As Michael Gerson (2016) suggests, they agreed on the fact that the state of the Dream is not good. In 2015, when announcing he is officially running for President, Donald Trump said that “*the American Dream is dead*”.

Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders was as well dissatisfied with the American Dream saying that “*for many, the American Dream has become a nightmare*”. And Hillary Clinton was not an exception, she mentioned the Dream several times during both of her presidential campaigns. At the start of her 2016 campaign she said “*we need to do a better job of getting our economy growing again and producing results and renewing the American dream*” and in October 2016 she said that “*the American Dream itself is at stake*” should Donald Trump win the election.

As Eldar Sarajlic (2016) suggests, Donald Trump’s slogan for the presidential election, Make America Great Again, is an indirect rephrasing of the American Dream and that could partially explain the reason for its success. As Sarajlic (2016) adds though, Trump’s version of greatness was always linked to discrimination and xenophobia as Trump is very openly excluding non-white minorities and women from his narrative of restoring America’s greatness. “*The more America is ‘great’, in Trump’s ideology, the more it will be discriminatory, exclusive, and xenophobic*” Sarajlic (2016) concludes.

## **3.2 Perception of the Idea among Americans Today**

It is true that the meaning of the phrase changed slightly throughout the decades; for Adams (1931) it was not about money and material wealth but rather about self realization and fulfilment (newdream.org). Nowadays it is mostly about personal achievement and materialism as Joseph L. DeVitis et al (1996, p. 8) and others suggest. For example Rank et al (2014, p. 3) notes that the American Dream today emphasizes financial security and economic prosperity.

The definition of the American Dream is also constantly changing because the goals in the past (such as high school education, which was a key part of the American Dream for people in 1986 as ascertained by a survey conducted by *Wall Street Journal*) are taken for granted nowadays

(The Battered American Dream). As Don Baer and Mark Penn (2015) say, in the past the Dream was for many people about a house with a picket fence and having children, nowadays these are not very important features of the American Dream for the majority of Americans.

According to a survey conducted in 2014 by ORC International for *CNN Money*, almost sixty percent of Americans feel that the American Dream is unattainable for them. Similarly, more than sixty percent of Americans are convinced that children will not be better off than their parents. Studies also show that nowadays mobility in America is worse than in many other developed countries as Tami Luhby (2016) states. Sociologist Richard Wilkinson suggests that “if you want to live the American dream, you should move to Finland or Denmark, which have much higher social mobility” (The Huffington Post, 2011). Kimberly Amadeo (2016) concludes that the notion that America is the land of opportunity is not accurate.

Another survey, conducted in 2015 for *The Atlantic* and the *Aspen Institute* found out that three quarters of Americans think that the American Dream is suffering and only slightly smaller amount of Americans, about sixty five percent, think that there are bigger obstacles to achieving the Dream than ever before and that generally the United States are not on the right path.

Interesting to note is also the difference in the attitude towards to American Dream based on which political party the respondent supports. In a poll conducted in 2014 by *CNN/Opinion Research* only about thirty three percent of Democrats responded that they still believed in the American Dream and almost the double, fifty five percent, of Republicans answered that they still have faith in the Dream (The Battered American Dream).

However, as Baer and Penn (2015) point out despite the pessimism Americans feel about the nation’s future, the same sentiment is not applied to their own lives. More than seventy percent of people responded that they are indeed living the American Dream or they expect to. Young generation feels especially hopeful but what is interesting is that non-white minorities do as well. Almost eighty percent of Millennials claim that they are living the Dream or are convinced they can, and among African Americans, Asian Americans and Latinos this number is even higher, at eighty two percent for the former two groups and eighty three for the latter.

## **Summary**

The American Dream is an ideology that continues developing in the twenty first century. Even though it has excluded millions of Americans in the history and Americans generally think that the Dream is unachievable they continue to believe in it and it is still one of the main driving forces behind the United States' development. Americans still believe that they will fulfil their American Dreams.

## 4 Gender and Race and the American Dream

As it was already previously stated, the American Dream was always a promise that was far more achievable for white men than it was for women or racial minorities. As Mark R. Rank et al (2014, p. 3) adds “*Millions of Americans have been excluded throughout our history from meaningful participation in the American Dream*“. However, as Samuel (2012, p. 3) points out, both the civil rights movement and the feminist movement were very greatly influenced by the American Dream.

### 4.1 Women and the American Dream

Samuel (2012, p. 38) suggests that it was after the Second World War when women had started to go after their own American Dreams. After serving in the military or working in factories in the home front, they were determined to work when the war ends or perhaps even start their own business. Samuel (2012, p. 47) also points out that in the post war era, women’s fight for equal right was greatly overshadowed by the nation’s racial issues.

Hanson (2011, p. 80) points out that inequality occurs in gender opportunity as well. If one achieves the American Dream it is not based solely on qualifications since men are for example paid more for their jobs largely because they are men.

*“They [women] are more likely to acknowledge racism, sexism, and other factors that limit the ability to achieve the Dream”* comments Hanson (2011, p. 81). Perhaps that is so because women know what it is like to experience inequality and can more clearly see the cracks in the American Dream.

A survey concluded by *Zogby International* shows that both men and women still believe in the American Dream, however men believe in it more than women do. On the other hand Jennifer Hochschild (1999, p. 98 in *American Dream in 21<sup>st</sup> Century*) argues that women believe in the Dream as much as men do, sometimes perhaps even more, even though they have less opportunities to realize it. Hochschild (1999) suggests that this belief perhaps functions as

motivation. Men also think of the American Dream in a more materialistic way compared to women. Women are more likely to question the inequality of the Dream and to speculate about their chances of realizing the Dream than men (Whose Dream? Gender and the American Dream in American Dream in 21<sup>st</sup> Century, p. 96)

The American Dream is largely a story about omissions, Jim Cullen (2012, p. 119) concludes, and perhaps the most obvious of omissions is the position of women in society. According to Cullen (2012, p. 119) the American Dream has been mostly a male dream and even though the conditions for women have changed to some extent in the last few decades, the American Dream still remains problematic.

#### **4.2 Racial Minorities and the American Dream**

The American Dream has been for ethnic groups a dream continuously postponed, Diana Știuliuc (2011, p. 368) claims. As Joanna Schneider Zangrando and Robert L. Zangrando (1970, p. 144) say, it is clear that African Americans, along with Asian Americans, Indian Americans and Spanish speaking Americans have never been allowed to take part in the American Dream.

After the Second World War it was clear that the American Dream still remained a myth due to the still ongoing racial problem in the United States, as Lawrence Samuel (2012, p. 49) points out. Jim Cullen (2012, p. 119-120) points out that black women were historically perhaps the most disadvantaged group when it comes to fulfilling their American Dream. However they played a very important role in legitimating the Dream by spreading it across the gender and racial lines. Cullen (2012, p. 120) suggests that perhaps the most significant role they played in making the American Dream more obvious was at the start of the civil rights movement; namely Rosa Parks who refused to give up her seat to a white man.

As Știuliuc (2011, p. 368) reports, since the nineteen sixties and the civil rights movement African Americans started to define their identity in contrast with the white middle class values. Quoting Hochschild (1995, p. 132), saying that for many blacks the American Dream became an idea closely related to black submission and white dominance due to the mainstream values



associated with the American Dream such as acceding to authority, saving money and having good results in school.

With the election of Barack Obama the majority of Americans were convinced that race relations in the United States would improve during and because of his presidency and half of the African American population believed that positive change happened only by Obama being elected, as James W. Loewen (2011, p. 71) suggests. However, even though Obama won the election, racism still persists. As Loewen (2011, p. 71) points out “*racism is not an aberration in our [American] society but a central part of it*”. African American families still have to deal with special obstacles and setbacks when trying to achieve their American Dream.

Nowadays, some believe that the American Dream is a dream of a white America. Eldar Sarajlic (2016) analyzes the work of Ta-Nehisi Coates. In his book *Between the World and Me*, which is written as letter to his son, the author suggests that the American Dream is built upon the bodies of African American slaves and that its purpose is to control and exploit them. Coates (2015, p. 66) suggests that the American Dream is a concept created by historians and perpetuated by Hollywood and American literature. Pfaff-Shalmyev and Miossec-Backer (2014, p. 6) add, that it would be a positive change for the world to reinterpret the American Dream from a different perspective than that of a white male.

As Samuel Huntington (2004, p. 41 in *Can the American Dream Survive the New Multiethnic America?*, 2011) proposes “*There is no Americano dream. There is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society*” and suggests that the recent immigration from Latin America and particularly Mexico poses a great challenge to the traditional American identity. Mara A. Cohen-Marks and Christopher Stout (2011, p. 825) argue that if that is true the increase in non white population may cause a great decrease in people’s attachment to the American Dream. Cohen-Marks and Stout (2011, p. 825) suggest that if diversity threatens the Dream’s ideology then that means that the society which was built upon that ideology is threatened as well. Nevertheless Cohen-Marks and Stout (2011, p. 843) are convinced that the American Dream cannot be destroyed neither by immigration nor racial diversity for these forces are not strong enough.

Știuliuc (2011, p. 369) remains optimistic claiming that despite the racial issues the American Dream is still alive and “*has made American identity able to coexist with an almost unbounded range of cultural traditions and expressions of ethnic diversity.*” According to Știuliuc (2011, p. 369) the American experience has given a significance to the immigrant experience, even though it has produced both dreams and nightmares.

## **Summary**

Throughout the modern history women and racial minorities have always been in some ways oppressed which of course had an impact on the American Dream as well. Those people never had quite the same opportunities as white men but despite that it never discouraged them from trying to fulfil their Dream, quite the opposite. It inspired great social movements and motivated people.

## 5 American Dream in American Literature

According to Frederic I. Carpenter (1955, p.3) American literature is very distinctive and different from English literature; the difference being that American literature is heavily influenced by the omnipresent American Dream. As Carpenter (1955, p.3) explains, the influence of the Dream has been mostly hidden and indirect since the concept has not been defined yet. As Știuliuc (2011, p. 363) suggests, the American Dream is the foundation for American literature and culture.

*“Events, beliefs, and figures of speech connected with religious dissent mark the origins of important features of American literature”* states Justin Quinn (2011, p. 16) and adds that the modern interpretation of these features is most commonly known as the American Dream. As Carpenter (1955, p. 10) comments in his book *American Literature and the Dream*, different attitudes towards the American Dream mark different periods in the American literature. For example in transcendentalist literature the Dream was fully embraced and celebrated, as it were in the works of the twentieth century writers such as Thomas Wolfe or John Steinbeck. Melville or Hawthorne on the other hand rejected the American Dream in their novels and so did the twentieth century poets.

Carpenter (1955, p.10) adds that the American Dream and all of that it has inspired has given importance to American literature. Sam Tanenhaus, editor for the New York Times Book Review, concludes in an interview for BBC (2011) that *“in literary terms it [the American Dream] is probably the single great American story”*. Similarly Christopher Bollen (2015) argues that the American Dream is basically the subject of every American novel.

### 5.1 Influential American Dream Novels

The following subchapters will examine selected famous American novels that were greatly influenced by the American Dream or featured the idea in a significant way.

### 5.1.1 *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain

As John Izaguirre (2014, p. 29) claims, no other novel in the history of American literature is better at portraying the struggle the American Dream had to overcome in the nineteenth century - the era of slavery and racial discrimination - than *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Ernest Hemingway had famously written that “*All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn...There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since*”.

Izaguirre (2014, p. 30) argues that in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* Twain has the main characters, Huck and Jim, reveal all the obstacles that some individuals have in achieving their American Dream because of the colour of their skin. Mary McAleer Balkun (2009, p. 71) agrees suggesting that the two characters enabled Twain to explore the contradictions in the American ideology, mainly slavery and commodity culture. The author then goes on to explain that the fact that every one of Huck’s attempts at freeing himself seem to be destined to fail reveal the counterfeit nature of the American Dream, especially the feature that everyone has the chance to reinvent themselves.

Elaine Mensh and Harry Mensh (2013, p. 117) suggest that the novel identifies with the Americans in a very unique way. The authors suggest that Huck’s dream is similar to those of immigrants but the difference is that while many immigrants and their children did not act on their dreams Huck definitely did so. As Elaine Mensh and Harry Mensh (2013, p. 117) say, Huck fulfils his dream, which is something people can relate to since the desire to realize one’s dream is universal.

According to Maechem (2012), Twain understood that the American Dream is not only about freedom and prosperity but also about reinvention and escape. As Izaguirre (2014, p. 43-44) concludes *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is still to this day a model of all the racial ambiguities and obstacles that there are to realizing the American Dream.

### 5.1.2 *The Great Gatsby* by Francis Scott Fitzgerald

As Roger L. Pearson (1970, p. 638) claims F. S. Fitzgerald is associated with the concept of the American Dream more than any other American writer. Pearson (1970, p. 638) also adds that Fitzgerald's American Dream is distinctive in the sense that it lacks the optimism that was present in the works of his predecessors. Ruth Prigozy et al (2000, p. 4) argues that when reading Fitzgerald's novels one gets the sense that he is the master of the American Dream. According to the author, Fitzgerald was most intrigued by the tension between the reality and the ideal of the American Dream.

In *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald portrays neither an uncritical celebration nor a harsh critique of the American Dream, James Phelan (2013, p. 115) suggests. As Linda C. Pelzer (2000, p. 77) says Gatsby's dream is the American Dream. Izaguirre (2014, p. 46) agrees that Gatsby represents the Dream, specifically the disillusionment with it. Gatsby's story is more than a story of an individual person; Pelzer (2000, p. 77) suggests that it is the story of America and both the success and failures of Gatsby's are America's as well. "*The promise of a dream lies at the heart of Fitzgerald's American classic, but it is a dream corrupted by money and betrayed by carelessness*" Pelzer (2000, p. 77) claims.

As Izaguirre (2014, p. 45) points out, the twenties became an era in which the American Dream started to be most described in terms of social status and money and in *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald introduced a critique of such society.

The final goal in Gatsby's Dream is Daisy, Pearson (1970, p. 642) claims. According to Izaguirre (2014, p. 54) Daisy, along with her husband, also represents the decay of the American Dream. The green light from the Buchanan's house is another symbol of the American Dream in the novel; it stands for all of Gatsby's unfulfilled dreams.

Pearson (1970, p. 645) concludes that Gatsby's American Dream tragically fails him. In the end Gatsby is a victim of his own twisted ideals and false values. The American Dream exists only in the minds of men like Gatsby who nevertheless get destroyed in their pursuit of it. "*The American dream is, in reality, a nightmare*" Pearson (1970, p. 645) concludes.

### **5.1.3 *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck**

The American Dream, mainly the elusiveness of it, is the major theme in Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* as Claudia Durst Johnson (1997, p. 139) claims. The American Dream also means independence and the freedom that comes with owning one's own land, thus making every character in the novel, except for the two ranch owners, people that were failed by the American Dream, Johnson (1997, p. 140) says.

As Johnson (1997, p. 139) suggests, it is always those that are in some way disadvantaged that are denied the American Dream. In *Of Mice and Men* it is Lenny who is mentally handicapped, Candy who is physically handicapped and lastly Crooks who is discriminated because of his race. Nevertheless, all of these characters at some point in the novel dreamed of the American Dream.

As Michael J. Meyer (2009, p. 119) proposes, Lennie's and George's dream of owning a house, a place of their own with the outcasts Candy and Crooks, is straight out of the American Dream. It is a vision of their future that they always cling to and give themselves hope with. This image is again, of course, a version of the American Dream as Jennifer McClinton-Temple (2011) agrees but adds that to George the Dream is more than just owning a property; his version includes freedom and companionship as well.

According to Quinn (2011, p. 233), in the end, George does not only kill his friend Lennie but his American Dream as well. Steinbeck's characters fail in achieving their American Dream. McClinton-Temple (2011) suggests that the novel is not that largely concerned with the failure of the American Dream but rather points out the need for a new definition of the Dream.

### **5.1.4 *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac**

As Pierre Anctil (2014, p. 185) suggests, *On the Road* can be understood as a novel about the two main characters, Sal Paradise (Kerouac's alter ego) and Dean Moriarty, going on a quest to find out whether or not the American Dream is real, mainly its promise of unlimited opportunity and freedom.

According to Jeff Williams (2009, p. 162) the main characters travel through the USA and to Mexico searching for an unattainable “IT”. This “IT” could mean various desires or wishes and as Jeff Williams (2009, p. 162) notes in his essay *Alternative Routes along the Road: Kerouac and the Multifaceted American Dream* (in Bloom’s Literary Themes), it is very reminiscent of the American Dream.

The novel has a very clear anti middle class stance, McClinton-Temple (2011, p. 644) notes, portrayed mainly in the character of Dean Moriarty. McClinton-Temple (2011, p. 644) suggests that if the fulfilment of the American Dream is attaining wealth, then Dean is the anti American Dream; his goal is to be happy through the denial of materialism.

Williams (2009, p. 168) suggests that the novel is groundbreaking because of its portrayal of people from different minorities and their American Dreams differing from the traditional version of it. It does not represent the capitalist version of the Dream or Adams’ version. *“Their idea of the American Dream is simply the ability to survive from day to day, but they are happy and content with their life”* Williams (2009, p. 168) says.

McClinton-Temple (2011, p. 644) thinks that in the novel Kerouac suggests that the American Dream is not static and is constantly changing, and that everyone can make it in the end because we all define our own dreams. To some extent the American Dream will always be unattainable.

## **Summary**

Because of the ideology of the American Dream American literature has its very distinctive features and the idea can be found in the majority of great American novels. Each author portrays the ideology differently, some celebrate it, some describe the journey leading to the achievement of the Dream and some focus on the unattainability of it. What they all have in common though, is their fascination with the American Dream.

## Practical part

In the second part of this thesis two plays, namely *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, are analysed. The focus is of course on the portrayal of the American Dream in these works; how the American Dream differs based on each important character and how are other topics influenced by the ideology.

These two plays were chosen specifically for the great difference in characters they provide. *Death of a Salesman* is a play featuring a Caucasian family and the focus is on the father-son relationship. A significant theme in the play is their dream of homeownership, which is also an important topic in *A Raisin in the Sun*, in this play however, the reader follows a story of an African American family and the focus is on a mother-son relationship. Essentially, both of these plays deal with very similar topics but from very different perspectives.

Both of the plays take place in the United States in the forties or fifties. An era that was heavily influenced by the Second World War and Americans were very clearly abandoning the spiritual version of the American Dream and the version that had its goal in the improvement and betterment of the whole nation. Materialism and consumerism were beginning to gain importance and the image of the American Dream became a white middle class family living in suburbia in a nice house with a white picket fence. Both Miller and Hansberry commented on this development in their plays.



## 6 *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller

*“He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong. He never knew who he was.”*  
(*Death of a Salesman*, p. 56)

Arthur Miller was (along with Tennessee Williams) the most prominent playwright in post war America. He was interested in exploring social issues, particularly the consequences of industrial capitalism and the ambiguity of the American Dream (*Contemporary American Drama*, p. 59). As Heiney (1958, p. 400) notes, Miller is a realist and writes his books about ordinary people living normal American life.

The play premiered in 1949 at the Morosco Theater in New York. It received very positive reviews and won a great amount of awards including the Pulitzer Prize for drama, Abbotson (2000, p. 19) notes. As Roudane (in Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, 2008, p. 41) says *“the play captures something truthful about contemporary American experience—particularly in its display of American linguistic cadence, focus on the family (dis)unity, versions of the American dream myth, [perspective on] the relation between business and one’s self-validation, [and] questions of representation and gender”*.

*Death of a Salesman* is a play of two acts and a requiem. The two acts follow the last day in the life of Willy Loman which is interspersed with dream sequences. Willy is an unsuccessful delusional salesman who is destroyed by his unachievable version of the American Dream.

The American Dream is definitely one of the most prominent themes in this play; if not the most prominent one. As Enoch Brater (2010, p. 36) argues, there is always some hidden force which the characters cannot escape from and which haunts them in Arthur Miller’s works; in the case of this play, the American Dream. This haunting atmosphere is already present in the introductory part of the first act. During the description of the salesman’s house the reader’s attention is drawn to the fact that the house is very fragile looking and dream like:

An air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality. (*Death of a Salesman*, p. 20)

The hopes and ideals of the American Dream of the main characters intertwine with the harsh reality of the Dream's elusiveness throughout the whole play. In a way, Arthur Miller used this play to comment on the American society of that era; its obsession with status and wealth while simultaneously criticizing and rethinking the American Dream.

As Sterling (2008, p. 38) proposes, Miller preserves the Dream while exposing its flaws, mainly the materialism that had always limited Americans' understanding of the American Dream. Arthur Miller also draws attention to the problematic part of the American Dream that is very concerned with superficial values rather than freedom and opportunity as Saddik (2007, p. 83) argues.

## **6.1 Willy and his American Dream**

The main character of the play, Willy Loman, is a perfect example of an all-American man. A white, middle aged, middle class married man with two children. He is a salesman which is a typically American job; what he sells is never mentioned which only adds to him representing the common American man the majority of Americans can relate to.

Willy Loman is definitely a man that believes in the American Dream. He believes that he can make it in the business and provide for his family. However, his version of the American Dream is very materialistic. As Alan Downer (1961, p. 41) suggests, Willy's American Dream is corrupted by the materialist American society. Additionally, for Willy, the most significant part of his American Dream is not that much concerned about being successful, but rather being well liked. This delusion of Willy's; that it is more important to be liked than to work hard and make good decisions influences a lot of his actions in the play. In the begging, during a flashback in which Willy tells his sons Happy and Biff that someday he will own his own business he says:

WILLY: Don't say? Tell you a secret, boys. Don't breathe it to a soul. Someday I'll have my own business, and I'll never have to leave home any more.

HAPPY: Like Uncle Charley, heh?

WILLY: Bigger than Uncle Charley! Because Charley is not—liked. He's liked, but he's not—well liked. (Death of a Salesman, p. 31)

This is where Willy's inaccurate view of the journey to success lies. Willy suggests that his business will be bigger than that of his neighbour's based on the fact that Charley is not as liked as Willy. Willy is convinced that success and likeability are deeply connected and inseparable; a very old fashioned belief. Willy also claims that his business will be bigger than Charley's since Charley is only liked, not well liked. Therefore Willy most likely believes himself to be a well liked person. That also turns out to be a not very accurate assumption. When talking about his own funeral Willy is convinced that a large number of people will attend saying:

WILLY: ... Ben, that funeral will be massive! They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange license plates—that boy will be thunderstruck, Ben, because he never realized—I am known! Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey—I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all. (Death of a Salesman, p. 89)

In the end however, only his family and Charley are in attendance. The idea that Willy is a popular and well liked person in the business was again one of his delusions. Willy was betrayed by his own version of the American Dream, the Dream was unattainable for him because the version he had dreamt up was skewed. Moreover, he feels guilty for failing and disappointing his family, all due to his unrealistic version of the American Dream. Willy made himself believe that charm can get him success, essentially setting himself up for failure, since that is not how business is done in a capitalist society.

Additionally, Willy's version of success and the American Dream was very superficial. Not only does he value likeability above hard work, he considers looks to be of great importance in achieving success. Willy tells his sons:

WILLY: ... Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I think Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. (Death of a Salesman, p. 32)

Even though Bernard is a considerably more hardworking and ambitious man than his sons, it is of little significance to Willy. Willy is sure his sons will be more successful because they are better looking and muscular. Nevertheless, when it comes to Willy himself he is very insecure about his appearance and his wife Linda must again and again assure him that she finds him handsome. His insecurity is also probably the reason why he has a mistress; it makes him feel like a desirable man.

Willy also constantly seems to compare himself to other male characters in the play. He is very jealous of his brother Ben, who in his eyes fulfilled the mythical rags to riches version of the American Dream. He feels inadequate compared to him and always felt like his brother was the more successful of the two of them. He is also jealous of his neighbour Charley; he borrows money from him and pretends to Linda that it is the money he earned while at the same being too proud to accept a job offer from Charley; even though his neighbour is more successful he sees this opportunity as below him. Lastly Willy is also in conflict with his boss Howard who fired him due to his incompetence which Willy does not see because of his warped view of himself. Howard sees right through Willy's false statements when he tries to talk him into giving him a desk job. His 'charm' fails him once again:

WILLY: ... Now pay attention. Your father—in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions.

HOWARD [impatiently]: Now, Willy, you never averaged— (Death of a Salesman, p. 61)

As Annette Saddik (2007, p. 77) suggests, Howard represents the "*impersonality of a changing industrial technological world*". He is not at all concerned with personal relationships in business or Willy's history with his father, he only cares about the profit and Willy provides none.

Willy's version of the American Dream is also very materialistic. He interprets it as a very materialist success which he hopes to achieve through minimal work. He rather hopes to make it through connections and looks than being the best and most hard working man in the business.

Moreover, Willy represents the very masculine American Dream of the post-war era in the United States. His dream was to provide for the family, to secure them a house and a future and when he cannot do that he sees it as his failure as a man. Men at that time were supposed to be the sole providers for the family.

One of the typical characteristics of Willy is that he never gives up on his American Dream, no matter how bad things get. In the end he kills himself but not because he lost all hope for achieving the American Dream but because he feels like at that point it is the only way in which he can secure the American Dream for his family since he is sure they will receive the insurance money if he makes his suicide look like an accident. Some authors (Lois Tyson, 1994; Fredrik Artan, 2014) suggest that the reason for Willy's refusal to abandon his American Dream comes from the fact that he is a very narcissist person. He believes himself to be a man of great importance who is well liked and charming and he cannot admit his failures because that would also mean admitting that he is none of those characteristics.

## **6.2 Biff and his Dream**

Biff's American Dream is quite different from his father's. While Willy's American Dream is very materialistic his is more focused on freedom and being able to live his life in his own way. Biff tells Happy that he is the happiest when he can be outdoors herding cattle but understands that that is not the way he can build a future for himself and also, that is not the life his father wants him to have. Even though Biff holds a lot of resentment against his father he still wants to make him happy. Mostly because he knows that if his father is happy, it will make his mother happy as well and that is what he truly cares about.

In the end of the play Biff realizes how twisted his father's Dream was. At the funeral he says:

BIFF: He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong.

HAPPY [almost ready to fight BIFF]: Don't say that!

BIFF: He never knew who he was. (Death of a Salesman, p. 96)

His brother Happy disagrees with him adamantly; he was never disappointed by his father as Biff was. Willy also never put as much faith in Happy as he did in Biff. Willy counted on Biff to realize his American Dream and he saw great potential in him as Biff was (or at least Willy thought) well liked and also good looking, all the superficial features of the Dream Willy deemed important.

HAPPY: All right, boy. I'm gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have—to come out number-one man. He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win it for him. (Death of a Salesman, p. 96)

Happy is ready to follow in his father's footsteps while Biff knows by now that his ideals were unrealistic and hopeless. Moreover, Biff is right when he says that his father did not know who he was. Willy puts on a mask for everybody; he thinks himself to be a great and successful salesman when he is not, a great husband which he is not either and lastly a well liked and popular person which, as we find out at the funeral, he was not either.

The main reason Biff was able to see through his father's pretence and finally realise how phoney he was, unlike Happy, was because he knew about his father's mistress. From this knowledge comes most of his hatred for his father. His whole life he had a role model in his father but that all fell apart when he discovered his father's affair. Biff was so disillusioned by the realization of his father's infidelity that he essentially gave up his future. Biff failed math but still could have went to summer school to finish the subject. He was actually going to do that or at least have his father convince the teacher to give him the points he needed. However, he decided not to, following his visit to his father in Boston where he caught him with his mistress. In the final conflict with his father Biff says:

BIFF: And I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody! That's whose fault it is! (Death of a Salesman, p. 92)

Biff puts the blame on his father; claiming that he never achieved anything because Willy has been putting too much faith in him, talking him up constantly to the point where Biff felt too confident in himself and could not obey someone else. As Peter H. High (1986, p. 230) says,

Willy filled Biff's head with false dreams of success. Biff was also very obviously Willy's favourite son.

In the end Biff realizes that he can blame only himself for his failures and redeems himself in that way. Unlike Willy, he realizes that he had all the wrong dreams and was willingly fooling himself to save his face. At the funeral he says to Happy:

BIFF: I know who I am, kid. (*Death of a Salesman*, p. 96)

C. W. E. Bigsby (2000, p. 100) also suggests that Biff redeems himself in the end by realizing the false nature of his father's values. He no longer has to feel guilty for not being the man his father wanted him to be. Bigsby (2000, p. 100) also claims that while distancing himself from his father's version of the American Dream he creates a new one for himself; an agrarian dream. He seeks space which for him means freedom.

### **6.3 Linda and her Dream**

Linda Loman is one of the only two female characters in *Death of a Salesman*. Throughout the play, Linda is mostly depicted as a loyal and supportive wife as well as mother. She stands by Willy no matter the circumstances and always remains positive and appreciative of all that Willy does. She has faith in her sons and similarly to Willy she believes that they are capable of great things; something that is perhaps universal for all mothers. While Willy is supposed to represent the common man, Linda perfectly represents the common woman.

Linda is a very stereotypical female character; she possesses all the characteristics that are usually associated with women such as being caring and emphatic. On the other hand some stereotypically feminine traits are also represented by Willy, such as being insecure and too concerned about one's appearance. The second female character in the play did not even get a name; she is simply referred to as 'the woman', probably because of who she is; her story is not important. Her sole purpose in the story is to play the role of the main character's mistress; she is just a sexual object, she is not developed beyond that point.

Linda is very much the embodiment of the American Dream for women after the Second World War. She is a housewife with a working husband and two children; she is very submissive. She is essentially the family's accountant, always reminding Willy what bills and loans need to be paid that month.

However, Lois Tyson (1994, p. 67) points out that the fact that Linda never lets Willy see or admit his failures and constantly keeps him in his delusions of his greatness could be interpreted differently than that she is just a very supportive and loyal wife. One explanation of course could be that she cares about Willy too deeply and knows that it would be catastrophic for him if he realized the depth of his issues. On the other hand Linda might just be thinking of herself and what it would mean for her should Willy face his psychological problems.

However, throughout the play Linda is usually in the background, only there to reassure Willy of his importance. Willy mistreats her greatly; apart from the fact that he is unfaithful to her he also does not treat her as an equal partner to him in conversation. He constantly interrupts her, not listening to what she has to say, making it clear who is in charge in the household.

BIFF: Don't yell at her, Pop, will ya?

WILLY [angrily]: I was talking, wasn't I?

BIFF: I don't like you yelling at her all the time, and I'm tellin' you, that's all.

WILLY: What're you, takin' over this house? (Death of a Salesman, p. 52)

Biff is the only one that stands up for his mother and calls his father out for treating her poorly, while Happy always starts defending his father.

BIFF: Stop making excuses for him! He always, always wiped the floor with you. Never had an ounce of respect for you.

HAPPY: He's always had respect for—

BIFF: What the hell do you know about it? (Death of a Salesman, p. 46)

This comes from the fact that Biff, unlike Happy, is aware of their father's affair. Happy never experienced that turning point that Biff did. He never cared to look below the surface of his father's facade.



It is easy for the reader to like and sympathize with Linda; she is depicted with basically no flaws. She is immensely supportive of her husband and sons. She is the perfect housewife and wife. It seems that she has no dreams or aspirations of her own; at least some that would not be directly connected to the men in her life. Her role in the play is essentially to keep the family together. As Kay Stanton (2010, p. 120) suggests, the American Dream in *Death of a Salesman* is very male-oriented.

One part of the American Dream that Linda is definitely striving for is to own a house. However, she has no means to achieve this Dream besides supporting her husband since she earns no money of her own.

#### **6.4 The Lomans' Dream of Homeownership**

Homeownership is an integral part of the American Dream, especially in post-war America. The ideal family in the sixties consists of a man as the head of the family with his housewife, two kids and a house in the suburbs with white picket fence. The post-war Dream was in general very materialistic. It is another American Dream that the Loman family, specifically Willy, could not achieve. They have been paying instalments for the house for years.

LINDA: ...But that includes the last payment on the mortgage. After this payment, Willy, the house belongs to us.

WILLY: It's twenty-five years!

LINDA: Biff was nine years old when we bought it.

WILLY: Well, that's a great thing. To weather a twenty-five-year mortgage is—

LINDA: It's an accomplishment. (*Death of a Salesman*, p. 56)

While Linda sees it as an achievement that they will be able to redeem the mortgage after all those years, Willy sees it as a failure because given his (imagined) abilities and success he should have been able to redeem the mortgage years ago. They finally got to own the house and pay off the mortgage only after Willy's death.

Miller's critique of capitalism and the materialism in American culture can be also seen in the play when the home appliances in the Loman household keep breaking.

WILLY: ...Once in my life I would like to own something outright before it's broken! I'm always in a race with the junkyard! I just finished paying for the car and it's on its last legs. The refrigerator consumes belts like a goddam maniac. They time those things. They time them so when you finally paid for them, they're used up. (Death of a Salesman, p. 56)

The family is trapped in a never ending cycle. Before they have enough money to pay off the refrigerator and many other things they are already broken and the final cost is many times bigger. Miller criticizes the way poor people are stuck in a system that keeps them poor forever. Poor people cannot afford quality products because of their cost so they are forced to buy cheaper ones which are also of poorer quality. Those had to be repaired sooner and more often resulting in poor people being forced to actually spend more money on low-quality appliances.

## **Summary**

The American Dream is an omnipresent ideology in *Death of a Salesman*. It is something that influences every member of the Loman family and it is a driving force behind most of their important decisions in life. It is the cause of Willy's death and his sons suffering but there is still hope for them, at least for Biff, because he realized that the American Dream has a dark side as well.

## 7 *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry

*“Seem like God didn’t see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams—but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worth while.”*

(*A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 29)

Lorraine Hansberry was an African American playwright, the first black playwright to ever win the New York Drama Critics’ Circles Award. She was also an advocate for the rights of African Americans. According to Quinn (2011, p. 244) Lorraine Hansberry (along with Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller) provided in her plays *“an exploration of the human costs of postwar industrial capitalism and the contradictory nature of the American dream.”*

As Annette Saddik (2007, p. 90) points out, *A Raisin in the Sun* was the very first play written by an African American woman that was performed at Broadway. As Bigsby (2000, p. 277) remarks, the play started a new direction for American theatre. According to Babacar M’Baye (2009, p. 171) the play initially received mixed reactions, some critics believed that the only way a young black female playwright could win over famous names such Eugene O’Neill or Tennessee Williams was because of liberal bias. However, since the eighties the drama has been universally praised.

*A Raisin in the Sun* was published in 1959 and it is a play of three acts which follows a family, the Youngers, and their fight for realizing their own American Dream. The family is about to receive ten thousand dollars of insurance money. They all have different dreams of how they would like to spend the money; whether it is to invest it or to buy a house with it. The play discusses many topics including racism, of course, but also feminism, assimilation and housing segregation.

The title of the play comes from Langston Hughes’ poem *Harlem*. The poem consists of a collection of rhetorical questions: *“What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?”* The poem deals with the topic of equality and justice in America and the fact that it has been denied to the African American citizens for years; it deals with the future of the African American dream (The American Dream, 2009, p. 174)

## 7.1 Mama's Dream

Lena Younger, in the play simply referred to as Mama, is the mother of Walter and Beneatha and basically the head of the family. She is very caring and what she always cares about the most is the well being of the family. She hopes that her children will have better lives than her generation did and that they will achieve their American Dream while still alive, unlike her husband.

The insurance money that Mama receives is essentially the result of her husband's fight for his American Dream. He worked hard his whole life although only in jobs which were below him. As Frazier (in Bloom's Literary Themes, 2009, p. 176) explains, "*in the north the black worker was confined to domestic and personal service*".

MAMA (...) My husband always said being any kind of a servant wasn't a fit thing for a man to have to be. He always said a man's hands was made to make things, or to turn the earth with—not to drive nobody's car for 'em... (A Raisin in the Sun, p. 58)

The promise of the American Dream is that if you work hard enough you should be rewarded but Mama's husband never was; he was excluded from the Dream, because he was African American.

Mama is in charge of the household and always gets the last word; the other family members might not always agree with her but respect her greatly, even though she sometimes gets quite violent. She is the matriarch. Her dream is simply for the family to live in a better place. Her dream has always been for the family to live in a nice house and that is why she buys one with the insurance money, without even consulting anyone else in the family. She knows they would disagree with her choosing a white neighbourhood. Nevertheless, she is prepared to face the consequences of her decision and refuses to submit to the fears; she would do anything to secure a better future for her children.

Mama wants nothing more than for her children to realize their American Dream. That is why she uses part of the money to buy a house and the rest for Beneatha's education and Walter's

investment, even though she was originally against the latter. She does not want to be like the rest of the world, denying Walter opportunities for the achievement of the Dream.

MAMA Listen to me, now. I say I been wrong, son. That I been doing to you what the rest of the world been doing to you. (...) There ain't nothing as precious to me ... There ain't nothing worth holding on to, money, dreams, nothing else—if it means—if it means it's going to destroy my boy. (...) I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be. (A Raisin in the Sun, p. 60)

And even after Walter loses all the money Mama gave him, she still supports him and does not give up on him, unlike his sister. She keeps the family together and they all try to be the best versions of themselves to make her proud.

## 7.2 Walter's Dream

Walter is a thirty five years old chauffeur who is very dissatisfied with his job and the conditions he and his family are living in. He has been denied the American Dream his whole life which made him a very frustrated and bitter man.

Walter definitely strives for the American Dream of success and he truly believes that he can achieve it. He spends most of the play preoccupied with finances and how he can improve the social standing of the family. Walter is quite obsessed with money and the superficial version of the American Dream.

MAMA Son—how come you talk so much 'bout money?

WALTER (With immense passion) Because it is life, Mama! (A Raisin in the Sun, p. 44)

For Walter, the way to achieve the American Dream is to get rich without much work. He wants to invest the insurance money from his father in a liquor store. When he tells his wife about the idea she remains sceptical since she is not fond of the people Walter wants to invest with and she, as well as Beneatha, wants to let Mama decide what to do with the money since it belongs to her. Walter gets really upset that Ruth never supports him in his dreams saying:

WALTER (Straightening up from her and looking off) That's it. There you are. Man say to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs. (A Raisin in the Sun, p. 23)

Similarly when Mama buys a house with the insurance money Walter says to her:

WALTER So you butchered up a dream of mine—you—who always talking 'bout your children's dreams ... (A Raisin in the Sun, p. 54)

Walter seems to be permanently angry and it takes very little for him to lash out at somebody. His frustration seems to come from his inability to realize his dreams and he is furious with his family for not allowing him to go after them. Part of his frustration is quite understandable because as a black man his opportunities in life have been significantly restricted. African Americans in the fifties could only get inferior jobs because of their lack of education which was a result of strong racial prejudice and segregation. Walter can never be satisfied while working as a driver; he sees it as a humiliating and emasculating job to serve other (especially white) people.

Walter's relationships with the rest of the family are suffering because of his outburst of anger and frustration. Especially his relationship with his wife, Ruth, is deteriorating, but he has a conflict at some point with every character in the play, except for his son.

Walter is quite a selfish character. He disregards everyone else's dreams and deems his dream as the only one that is good. He is especially critical of Beneatha's dream to attend medical school. In the first scene of the first act he says to her:

WALTER Who the hell told you you had to be a doctor? If you so crazy 'bout messing 'round with sick people—then go be a nurse like other women—or just get married and be quiet ... (A Raisin in the Sun, p. 25)

He is constantly reminding her about the cost of the school while completely ignoring the fact that it is a great achievement for an African American woman to study at a collage and to have the ability to become a doctor.

Sexism is definitely also at play. Walter cannot stand the fact that he is held back by the women in the family and as Margaret B. Wilkerson (1986, p. 447) explains, he fears that his manhood is at stake. What Walter seeks is the version of the American Dream in which he is the sole provider, an independent man and the head of the family. Walter and Beneatha have a difficult relationship in general since their dreams, opinions and personalities are vastly different.

The breaking point for Walter is when his investment falls through and he not only loses all of the money Mama gave him but also the part that he was supposed to put in the bank for Beneatha to use later. He was ready to give up and accept the money from Mr. Lindner but eventually decided against it; he refused to give in to the white man, even if it meant not getting the easy money from him. That was something that Walter early in the play would not have done.

According to Bloom (2009, p.33) Walter's character represents broken masculinity typical for African American men in the fifties who were broken by their inability to achieve the American Dream because of racial oppression. Similarly to Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* the fact that Walter cannot provide enough for his family destroys him, but unlike Willy, Walter's situation gets better at the end of play and he, as Babacar m'Baye (2009, p. 182) proposes, "*now understands that life is not about having a dream, but doing your best in order to achieve it.*" In the end, Walter found his pride again and prioritized his dignity over money.

### **7.3 Beneatha's Dream**

Beneatha wants to take a completely different route when achieving the American Dream and that is through education. Beneatha is studying to become a doctor, which was not a usual choice for a woman in the fifties, let alone an African American woman. She is supported in this decision by everyone in the family except for Walter, who still has the sexist attitude that she should be a nurse, a typically female job, or just marry someone and have no aspirations of her own. Walter is perhaps also scared of Beneatha having a better job than him, because it would make him feel incompetent in comparison with his sister; a woman. He despises the fact that he is not the stereotypically dominant and providing male figure in the household.

Throughout the whole play Beneatha is searching her own identity as an African woman. Influenced by Asagai, who is from Nigeria, she decides to embrace her ancestry. One of her most radical acts is when she cuts her hair and wears it naturally. George Murchison, one of her suitors and a rich black college student, calls Beneatha's hair eccentric to which she replies:

BENEATHA How can something that's natural be eccentric? (A Raisin in the Sun, p. 47)

Black women in the fifties were not supposed to wear their hair natural because it was (and sometimes still is) seen as unprofessional and unruly. In a sense, by wearing her hair natural, Beneatha is fighting the white oppression and also stops to try to 'fit in' with the white population. In reply to Ruth who asks her why she has to make an argument of it Beneatha goes on to say:

BENEATHA Because I hate assimilationist Negroes!

...

RUTH Well, what does it mean?

BENEATHA (Cutting GEORGE off and staring at him as she replies to RUTH) It means someone who is willing to give up his own culture and submerge himself completely in the dominant, and in this case oppressive culture! (A Raisin in the Sun, p. 47)

Beneatha hates the fact that her family is becoming very American and has no connection with their African past whatsoever. In a way, this can be perceived as them giving in to the oppression of white America and the erasure of their own identities. However, Beneatha romanticizes and idealizes Africa a lot.

Wilkerson (2001, p. 32) claims Beneatha represents a young woman of the so called 'silent generation' of the fifties. She is on the verge of new and never before felt freedom. Beneatha refuses to accept the typical racial and gender roles. Fighting gender roles and gender stereotypes can be seen in Beneatha's refusal to be satisfied purely by finding the right man and getting married. She wants more.



ASAGAI (Shaking his head negatively but gently) No. Between a man and a woman there need be only one kind of feeling. I have that for you ... Now even ... right this moment ...

BENEATHA I know—and by itself—it won't do. I can find that anywhere.

ASAGAI: For a woman it should be enough.

BENEATHA I know—because that's what it says in all the novels that men write. But it isn't. Go ahead and laugh—but I'm not interested in being someone's little episode in America... (A Raisin in the Sun, p. 38)

Similarly, she refuses to marry George Murchinson, who is quite a condescending character. He mocks Beneatha for her interest in her African roots and her intelligence. He says that she should be satisfied with her good looks and that no man is interested in her thoughts. Beneatha very clearly despises that. Her dream lies in her building herself up without any man's help; she is not interested in shortcuts either.

Moreover, Beneatha questions her faith in God, because she dislikes the idea that someone else should get credit for her own achievements.

MAMA (Kindly) 'Course you going to be a doctor, honey, God willing.

BENEATHA (Drily) God hasn't got a thing to do with it.

....

BENEATHA I mean it! I'm just tired of hearing about God all the time. What has He got to do with anything? Does he pay tuition? (A Raisin in the Sun, p. 32)

Beneatha is sceptical about God and wants to be the only person in charge of her destiny. Overall Beneatha is a very complex character that is ahead of her time due to her feminist ideas and her never submitting to her family and the white society's ideas what a young black woman should be like.

#### 7.4 The Youngers' Dream of Homeownership

Homeownership is a fundamental part of the American Dream and a crucial theme in *A Raisin in the Sun*. It was in *Death of a Salesman* as well, but the Lomans' struggle was only financial, the Youngers must battle not only that but also rampant racism.

When Mama reveals that the house she bought is in a white only neighbourhood she left the family in shock.

RUTH Clybourne Park? Mama, there ain't no colored people living in Clybourne Park.

MAMA (Almost idiotically) Well, I guess there's going to be some now.

WALTER (Bitterly) So that's the peace and comfort you went out and bought for us today! (*A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 53)

It was not a common practice in the fifties for blacks and whites to live next to each other. As Leonard Dinnerstein (in *In Search of Equality*, 2015) says, African Americans were living in the worst parts of the city and most of the time owners preferred to rent flats to white citizens. It was not uncommon for black Americans to face violence when they moved to a white neighbourhood.

Lorraine Hansberry based this part of the play on her own experience. In 1938 her father bought their family a house in a white neighbourhood in Chicago. He did so to intentionally fight against the racial segregation in housing. The family was met with a strong resistance and even violence from the white citizens. The Hansberrys went with their case before the US Supreme Court and won but only because of a technicality, it was not until 1948 when racial segregation was ruled unconstitutional (*Women and the Civil Rights Movement*, 2009 and *Representing Segregation*, 2010).

The Youngers were also met with disdain and resistance from the white neighbourhood they were about to move into. They get a visit from Karl Lindner, a white man and a member of Clybourne Park (the neighbourhood they bought the house in) Improvement Association, who tells them that:

LINDNER But you've got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way. And at the moment the overwhelming majority of our people out there feel that people get along better, take more of a common interest in the life of the community, when they share a common background. I want you to believe me when I tell you that race prejudice simply doesn't enter into it. It is a matter of the people of Clybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities. (*A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 65)

Race prejudice obviously did play the most important role. Lindner gave the family a choice, either the neighbourhood can buy out the house from the Youngers at a generous price or they will have to move into an unwelcoming neighbourhood. Walter thought about accepting his offer because his deal fell through and they needed that money. The rest of the family disagrees with him greatly:

MAMA Son—I come from five generations of people who was slaves and sharecroppers—but ain't nobody in my family never let nobody pay 'em no money that was a way of telling us we wasn't fit to walk the earth. We ain't never been that poor. (Raising her eyes and looking at him) We ain't never been that—dead inside. (*A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 78)

In the end Walter refuses the offer to not only keep his dignity but also to set an example for his son that they, as black people, will not succumb to the white people's tyranny.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note how the white Americans reacted to the Youngers' struggles for homeownership. Some writers (e.g. Robert Nemiroff) argue that the Youngers' struggle for a house in suburbia helped popularize the play among the white population of the United States, because it is something they could relate to. African Americans strive for the American Dream as much as white Americans do. As Stecopoulos (2011, p. 210) concludes, for the majority of white people the play represented a black confirmation of the American Dream.

## 7.5 The African American Dream

In the first act Lena Younger is upset with Walter because he is preoccupied with money and what the family has is not enough for him. Mama's priorities are quite different because she lived in an era that was significantly more difficult for African Americans. An era in which African Americans were denied basic human rights, dignity and were generally hardly perceived as human beings with the same hopes and dreams the white population had.

MAMA: No ... something has changed. (She looks at him) You something new, boy. In my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity too ... Now here come you and Beneatha—talking 'bout things we ain't never even thought about hardly, me and your daddy. You ain't satisfied or proud of nothing we done. (*A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 44)

Even though the situation of African Americans was improving, the United States in the fifties was still a deeply racist country. Mama is concerned by Walter and Beneatha not appreciating what her generation has done so they could have their (relatively) good lives. She cannot comprehend that money means more to Walter than freedom.

By including another black family in the play, notably a rich one, Hansberry brought attention to the fact that even if they lived in a very racist country black people could attain material success but that is not what the American Dream is all about though.

As Lloyd W. Brown (1974, p. 242) points out, by including the Murchinson family (a rich black family) Hansberry points out the fact that even black Americans tend to confuse material success with the total promise of the American Dream. In the post-war era the spiritual version of the Dream which includes freedom, equality and self-realization was very much overshadowed by the materialist version. Hansberry similarly to Miller criticizes the materialist version of the American Dream and as Brown (1974, p. 240) notes, the author still believes in the Dream even though she is aware of how it has been corrupted.

It is interesting to point out that even African Americans eventually exchanged the spiritual version of the American Dream, meaning the longing for freedom and justice, for the materialist

version of the Dream. In the post-war USA materialism was so prevalent that even those whose main goal used to be freedom fell for it.

### **Summary**

*A Raisin in the Sun* is a play about a black family and their struggle to improve their lives and get out of the ghetto they are living in. The family's dreams have always been largely unattainable because as African Americans they were denied the American Dream for a very long time. However, things are looking up for them and they finally have a chance to improve their lives despite the white oppression and resistance.

## 8 Comparison of *Death of a Salesman* and *A Raisin in the Sun*

In a sense, these two American plays are very similar. They both follow a family that is struggling to achieve the American Dream, specifically the dream of homeownership, which is a significant part of the Dream in post-war United States.

The Lomans already live in a relatively nice house; however they do not own it yet. The Youngers live in a ghetto in Chicago in less than satisfactory conditions. However, they just received ten thousand dollars which can buy them a nice house. Money is something that the Lomans also desperately need but with Willy being fired and his sons' inability to strike a deal they are in a hopeless situation. Both authors definitely criticized in their plays Americans' obsession with money and the overall materialism and consumerism in the post-war era.

Obviously, the two families are not in as similar of a position as it seems at first glance. The fact that one is a Caucasian family and the other is an African American family plays a huge role. Hansberry's aim with her play was to point out the struggles African Americans had to face when it came to housing segregation. The Lomans obviously did not have such a problem but they struggled in their own way. Black or white, anyone can get disappointed and disillusioned by the American Dream.

In *A Raisin in the Sun* more emancipated female characters are present and there is also more of them, very likely because the author is a woman. In Miller's play there is only one main female character and she possesses very stereotypically feminine traits; she is also very much defined by the males in her life. The other female character's role is basically reduced to just being the mistress. On the other hand in Hansberry's play there is Beneatha, who signifies the change that started happening for (black) women in the post-war era. She strives for an education and does not want to give up her aspirations and dreams for a man. Ruth is also a greatly developed character who makes decisions for herself and does not just blindly follow her husband's dreams.

Walter, being the main male character in *Raisin*, is similar to Willy in some aspects. Both of them believe in the American Dream and believe that they can achieve it and in the end, both of them are broken by the Dream. That is where those similarities end because while Willy commits suicide because of his inability to achieve the Dream, Walter learns from the experience

and his disillusionment with the Dream actually makes him a better man and gives him back his dignity.

*A Raisin in the Sun* in general offers an optimistic ending and a promise of better days. In the end the Youngers do move out of the ghetto and they do fight against the housing segregation by moving into a white neighbourhood. It is up to the reader to wonder what happens with the family next, but the play definitely ends on a positive note. *Death of a Salesman* on the other hand ends with a funeral and the Lomans will receive insurance money only if Willy's death is ruled as an accident which does not seem all that likely. There is perhaps only hope for Biff, who was the only one to realize the false nature of his father's values.

Both of these plays are very popular to this day, because the issues they explore are still relevant nowadays. Both materialism and consumerism are still prevalent ideologies in the United States. Housing segregation has been unconstitutional for a long time but still occurs. Racism seems to be a never ending issue in America that racial minorities have been fighting against for centuries. But what all Americans in today's USA can relate to in these plays is the faith that things can get better and that the American Dream is something that all of them can try to achieve.

## **9 American Dream and Drama in English Classes**

The American Dream is such an enormous part of American culture that the students could really benefit from getting acquainted with it. The lesson plans are meant to be used at upper secondary schools but the plays analyzed have a fairly simple language and could be used even with students in the ninth grade at a lower secondary school.

It can be very beneficial to use drama in English classes. Role playing is a great tool to activate students in the lesson and the extracts from the plays or different parts of the plays can be performed by the students in some of the following lessons. The students can gain confidence not only in English but in public speaking as well. The students can experience using an authentic language and greatly expand their vocabulary (Drama Techniques for Teaching English, 2004).

These lesson plans are meant to be used together in two consecutive lessons. In the first lesson the students will learn what the phrase American Dream means and a little bit about the ideology. In the second lesson the students will work with extracts from the plays analyzed in this thesis. All materials necessary are attached in the appendices and were created by the author of this thesis.

### **9.1 First lesson**

Topic: the American Dream

Time: 45 minute lesson

Aims:

Students will be able to:

- Define the American Dream
- Describe the ideology
- Work with text
- Discuss the concept with their classmates
- Use new vocabulary

Methods: discussion, individual work, making associations



Activities:

1) Introduction (3 minutes)

- the teacher tells the students the aim of the lesson; that they will talk about the American Dream in the next two lessons.

2) Associations (7 minutes)

- the aim of the first activity is to find what the students already know about the American Dream and if they have any preconceptions. The teacher writes the term American Dream on the board and the students' task is to come up the board and write associations.

3) Worksheet (20 minutes)

- afterwards the teacher will hand out a worksheet (see appendix 1 and 2) about the American Dream which the students will individually work on.

4) Checking and discussion (15 minutes)

- the teacher goes through the questions in the worksheet with the students, discussion about the students answers follows and students also reflect on their earlier associations and how they perception of the American Dream changed

## 9.2 Second Lesson

Topic: Drama and the American Dream

Time: 45 minutes

Aims:

Students will be able to:

- Retell a part of a play
- Analyze a part of a play
- Discuss racial issues

- Cooperate with neighbour

Methods: pair work, individual work, discussion

Activities:

1) Introduction (5 minutes)

- in the beginning of the lesson students revise with the teacher what they had learned about the American Dream in the previous lesson and discuss the reason why some people had it harder to achieve the Dream

2) Pre-reading activity (5 minutes)

- the teacher shortly introduces the two analyzed plays, *Death of a Salesman* and *A Raisin in the Sun*, to the students, giving them an overview of the plot
- the teacher asks the students how they think the American Dream is featured in these plays

3) Reading (15 minutes)

- the teacher hands out the extracts (appendix 3 and 4), always giving one person at each desk an extract from *Death of a Salesman* and to the other student extract from *A Raisin in the Sun*
- each student silently reads their extract

4) After-reading activity (10 minutes)

- in pairs each student tells their neighbour a summary of the extract they have read
- together they fill in the worksheet (appendix 5) that they will be given by the teacher after they finished retelling

5) Class discussion

- the students discuss together with the teacher how the situation is different for the Lomans and the Youngers, focusing on racial issues

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to define the American Dream, describe the most influential figures which helped mold the Dream throughout the centuries and point out the differences in achievability for different groups of people. The aim of the practical part was to analyze two contemporary plays in relation to the American Dream and suggest an employment of the findings in English lessons.

In the beginning of this thesis the author of the phrase American Dream is discussed, there are many potential authors but historian James Truslow Adams seems as the most probable one. Afterwards the phrase American Dream is explained; even though it is a widely known concept there is not one universally acknowledged definition. The most widespread one though, could be that if a person works hard enough and follows the rules of the society they should be rewarded with success.

In the next chapter the history of the idea is described. The first time the idea became more concrete was with the Declaration of Independence, however it existed in the minds of Americans long before that. A few Founding Fathers are discussed as well as some influential authors. In the twentieth century the ideology of the Dream inspired many social movements, such as the civil rights movement or the feminist movement. In the post-war era the Dream changed drastically and became very materialistic, leaving most of its spiritual features behind. The nineties were a time when an important aspect of the Dream, homeownership, became achievable for the majority of Americans.

In the following chapter the American Dream's influence in the twenty first century is analyzed. The last three presidents are discussed because the American Dream is an ideology that essentially all American presidents use during their campaigns and presidencies. Afterwards the attitudes of Americans toward the Dream are discussed. In general Americans are quite pessimistic about the Dream's achievability in the twenty first century but they do not apply the same pessimism to their own lives; the majority of Americans think they are living the Dream or they expect they will.

The next chapter focused on the American Dream in American literature. It could be said that essentially every great American novel was influenced by the American Dream. This diploma thesis briefly focused on four of them; *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Of Mice and Men* and *On the Road*. In each of these novels the characters are heavily influenced by the American Dream and in some of them they are actually destroyed by the ideology.

In the practical part two famous contemporary plays are analyzed. The first play, *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, is about Willy Loman who is ruined by his skewed version of the American Dream. He thinks that charm and being liked can make him a successful man; he values those traits above hard work and intelligence. This, of course, results in his demise. Willy's son Biff and his wife Linda are also described, they each are affected by Willy's Dream but they also have their own. Biff has kind of an agrarian dream while his mother mostly longs for the dream of homeownership, which is an important feature of the American Dream and this play as well.

The second analyzed play is *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry. The story is about an African American family, the Youngers, who have always been denied the American Dream but now that they inherited a large sum of money could turn their lives around and finally realize their dream of homeownership. However, each character in the play has their own unique dream as well. Beneatha wants to achieve success by becoming a doctor, Walter wants to quickly get rich by investing money and Mama longs for her children to finally be able to reach the American Dream.

In the following chapter the two analyzed plays are briefly compared. The plays are very similar in some aspects; they both deal with the topic of homeownership. However, they show the struggles to achieving the American Dream from two completely different perspectives; Caucasian (in a sense, mainstream) and African American.

The last chapter focused on the employment of this thesis' findings in lessons of English. Two lesson plans were created, the first lesson plan aims to introduce the topic of American Dream to the students, after the lesson they should be able to define the American Dream and describe its basic characteristics and explain why some groups were unable to achieve the American Dream

up until recently. The second lesson plan includes the two analyzed plays; the students will read extracts and subsequently discuss the similarities and differences between these two plays.

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## Appendices

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## Appendix 1

### - American Dream handout

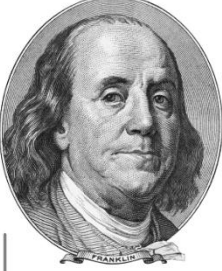


# THE AMERICAN DREAM

“the ideal that every US citizen should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative”

## WHAT IS IT?


The American Dream is an ideology that is very important in American culture and it helped to make the United States the country that it is today. We can find the influence of the idea in many types of art, from music to literature to films. The majority of people see the American Dream as a belief that if a person works hard and follows the rules of the society they should be rewarded with success and prosperity. It should not matter what background the person comes from; in America everyone has an equal opportunity. However, there is not just one definition, each person sees the American Dream a little differently. The American Dream and its promise is one of the reasons why so many people in the past and even nowadays move to the United States. The belief is that the USA is a country of opportunity and an American citizen can realize his or her dreams because the USA is a free country where a person can build themselves up from nothing.



The roots of the idea can be traced back to the Declaration of Independence, the document in which the American colonies announced that they are independent from the British rule. In the Declaration it says: *“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.”*

## DOES EVERYONE HAVE THE SAME CHANCE?

Unfortunately not, in history many groups of people did not have the same opportunities. Especially women and African Americans were not able to achieve the American Dream; even in recent history. Nevertheless, the idea inspired many people and even important social movements such as feminism or the civil right movement, in which African Americans fought against segregation and racism.



Since the sixties the Dream became very material and for the majority of people the achievement meant getting married, having kids and owning a house in suburbia with a white picket fence.

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**Appendix 2**

**- American Dream worksheet**



1. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE AMERICAN DREAM IN YOUR OWN WORDS?

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2. WHERE COULD YOU FIND THE ROOTS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM?

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.....

3. WHY DO YOU THINK IT HAS BEEN HARDER TO ACHIEVE THE AMERICAN DREAM FOR CERTAIN GROUPS OF PEOPLE?

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.....  
.....

4. WHAT OBSTACLES DO YOU THINK IMMIGRANTS FACE WHEN THEY MOVE TO A FOREIGN COUNTRY?

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.....  
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5. IF THERE WAS SUCH A THING AS A CZECH DREAM, HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE IT? WHAT BINDS US AS A NATION?

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.....  
.....  
.....



### Appendix 3

#### - Extract 1, *Death of a Salesman* (edited)

Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller

LINDA: And you got one more payment on the refrigerator . . .

WILLY: But it just broke again!

LINDA: Well, it's old, dear.

WILLY: I told you we should've bought a well-advertised machine. Charley bought a General Electric and it's twenty years old and it's still good.

LINDA: But, Willy—

WILLY: Whoever heard of a Hastings refrigerator? Once in my life I would like to own something outright before it's broken! I'm always in a race with the junkyard! I just finished paying for the car and it's on its last legs. The refrigerator consumes belts like a goddam maniac. They time those things. They time them so when you finally paid for them, they're used up.

LINDA [buttoning up his jacket as he unbuttons it]: All told, about two hundred dollars would carry us, dear. But that includes the last payment on the mortgage. After this payment, Willy, the house belongs to us.

WILLY: It's twenty-five years!

LINDA: Biff was nine years old when we bought it.

WILLY: Well, that's a great thing. To weather a twenty-five-year mortgage is—

LINDA: It's an accomplishment.

WILLY: All the cement, the lumber, the reconstruction I put in this house! There ain't a crack to be found in it any more.

LINDA: Well, it served its purpose.

WILLY: What purpose? Some stranger'll come along, move in, and that's that. If only Biff would take this house, and raise a family . . . [He starts to go.]

Good-bye, I'm late.

## Appendix 4

### - Extract 2, *A Raisin in the Sun* (edited)

A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry

RUTH When we moving?

MAMA (Smiling at her) First of the month.

RUTH (Throwing back her head with jubilation) Praise God!

MAMA (Tentatively, still looking at her son's back turned against her and RUTH) It's—it's a nice house too Three bedrooms—nice big one for you and Ruth... Me and Beneatha still have to share our room, but Travis have one of his own—and I figure if the—new baby—is a boy, we could get one of them double-decker outfits ... And there's a yard with a little patch of dirt where I could maybe get to grow me a few flowers ... And a nice big basement ...

MAMA (Still to his back, fingering things on the table) 'Course I don't want to make it sound fancier than it is ... It's just a plain little old house—but it's made good and solid—and it will be ours. Walter Lee—it makes a difference in a man when he can walk on floors that belong to him ...

RUTH Where is it?

MAMA (Frightened at this telling) Well—well—it's out there in Clybourne Park— (RUTH'S radiance fades abruptly, and WALTER finally turns slowly to face his mother with incredulity and hostility)

RUTH Where?

MAMA (Matter-of-factly) Four o six Clybourne Street, Clybourne Park.

RUTH Clybourne Park? Mama, there ain't no colored people living in Clybourne Park.

MAMA (Almost idiotically) Well, I guess there's going to be some now.

WALTER (Bitterly) So that's the peace and comfort you went out and bought for us today!

MAMA (Raising her eyes to meet his finally) Son—I just tried to find the nicest place for the least amount of money for my family.

RUTH (Trying to recover from the shock) Well—well—'course I ain't one never been 'fraid of no crackers, mind you—but—well, wasn't there no other houses nowhere?

MAMA Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out all seem to cost twice as much as other houses. I did the best I could.

## Appendix 5

### - Comparison of plays worksheet

Fill in this worksheet with your neighbour:

1. Describe each family in three adjectives:

The Lomans (DoaS) : \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

The Youngers (ARitS): \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

2. What do the Lomans and Youngers have in common?

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3. How do these families differ from each other?

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4. Do you think these families always had equal opportunities?

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## Résumé

Tato diplomová práce je zaměřená na americký sen; jedná se o ideologii, která je všudypřítomná v americké kultuře, literatuře, hudbě i filmech. V teoretické části je rozebrána historie amerického snu, od Deklarace nezávislosti až po současnost; tato ideologie provází USA již po staletí. Americký sen byl a stále je slib, který není rovnocenně dostupný pro všechny Američany a tato práce se zabývá také tímto problémem. V praktické části jsou rozebrány dvě americké hry a to Smrt obchodního cestujícího (*Death of a Salesman*) a Jako hrozen v parném slunci (*A Raisin in the Sun*), konkrétně jak jsou jednotlivé postavy ovlivněny americkým snem. Na závěr jsou navrženy dvě přípravy na hodinu, jedna o americkém snu obecně a jedna o rozebraných hrách.

## Anotace

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<b>Název práce</b>	Americký sen v současném americkém dramatu
<b>Název v angličtině</b>	The Concept of American Dream in Contemporary American Drama
<b>Anotace práce</b>	Diplomová práce se zabývá zobrazením amerického snu ve dvou současných amerických hrách. V teoretické části je popsána samotná ideologie a její historie. Dále je rozebráno, jak americký sen ovlivnil obyvatele USA a to hlavně utlačované skupiny. V praktické části jsou rozebrány dvě hry a to <i>Smrt obchodního cestujícího</i> od Arthura Millera a <i>Jako hrozen v parném slunci</i> od Lorraine Hansberry. V praktické části jsou zpracovány i dvě přípravy na hodinu na téma americký sen a drama.
<b>Klíčová slova</b>	Americký sen, Arthur Miller, <i>Smrt obchodního cestujícího</i> , Lorraine Hansberry, <i>Jako hrozen v parném slunci</i> , americká literatura, americká historie
<b>Anotace v angličtině</b>	This diploma thesis deals with the portrayal of the American Dream in two contemporary American plays. In the theoretical part the ideology is explained and its history is traced. The influence it had on Americans and especially on marginalized groups is described as well. In the practical part two plays, <i>Death of a Salesman</i> by Arthur Miller and <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> by Lorraine Hansberry, are thoroughly analyzed. Two lesson plans dealing with the topic of American Dream and drama are also included.

<b>Klíčová slova v angličtině</b>	American Dream, Arthur Miller, <i>Death of a Salesman</i> , Lorraine Hansberry, <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> , American literature, American history
<b>Přílohy vázané v práci</b>	5 příloh
<b>Rozsah práce</b>	88 stran
<b>Jazyk</b>	Angličtina