

EVOLUTION OF THE “AMERICAN DREAM” AS A VALUE SYSTEM AND ITS REPRESENTATION IN HOLLYWOOD MOVIES*

Yuliana Melkumyan <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8324-2632>

PhD in Sociology, Associate Professor, Chair for Social Work and Social Technologies, Yerevan State University (Armenia). Email:

yulianamelkumyan@ysu.am

Seda Mkrtchyan

Monitoring specialist, Public television company of Armenia.

Email: seda.mkrtchyan555@gmail.com

Abstract. *The “American dream” is a value system, which is the locomotive of the development of American society. It is one of the core elements of the American identity. The idea of the “American dream” presents the terminal values of equality, liberty, prosperity and happiness. Hard work, sacrifice, courage in the face of taking risks, diligence and the act of overcoming hardships are presented as instrumental values, which are required to achieve the terminal values mentioned above. The concept of the “American Dream” has evolved with the passage of time and faced different challenges, which resulted in a number of contradictions between the dream and the social reality. Hollywood movies are used as one of the tools to propagate the “American Dream” both inside of the United States and abroad. This article examines the representation of the terminal and instrumental values of the “American Dream” in Hollywood films (2018-2021) with anti-racist content, as well as films about family, the American Armed Forces, the US president, and the rule of law, through visual, verbal and audio means. Nevertheless, while the films communicate the same terminal and instrumental values, they also occasionally show the existing contradictions. Hard work does not always lead to achieving the “American dream”. Even though the fight for equality is going strong, inequality still exists. Along with the rule of law, there are also manifestations of corruption. At the same time, the USA continues to be presented as a safe, powerful and wealthy country.*

Keywords: “American Dream”, value system, terminal values, instrumental values, propaganda, communication, Hollywood movies

«ԱՄԵՐԻԿԱՆ ԵՐԱԶԱՆՔԻ» ԶԱՐԳԱՑՈՒՄԸ ՈՐՈՇԵՄ

* This research was funded through USA Department of State Public Affairs Section grant, and the opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the Author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Սույն հետազոտությունը ֆինանսավորվել է ԱՄՆ պետքարտուղարության Հասարակայնության հետ կապերի գրասենյակի դրամաշնորհի շրջանակներում: Այս հոդվածում արտահայտված է հեղինակների դիրքորոշումը, որի համընկնումը ԱՄՆ պետքարտուղարության դիրքորոշման հետ պարտադիր չէ:

Это исследование профинансировано грантом, предоставленным Отделом по связям с общественностью Государственного департамента США. Мнения, результаты исследования и выводы или рекомендации, изложенные в нем, принадлежат авторам и не обязательно отражают мнение Государственного департамента США.

Journal of Sociology: Bulletin of Yerevan University, Vol. 14 1(37), 2023, pp. 50-64



Received: 24.04.2023, Revised: 26.05.2023, Accepted: 05.06.2023

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

**ԱՐԺԵՀԱՄԱԿԱՐԳ ԵՎ ԴԲԱ ՆԵՐԿԱՅԱՑՈՒՄԸ ՀՈՒՎՈՒԴՑԱՆ
ՖԻԼՄԵՐՈՒՄ**

Յուլիանա Մելքումյան <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8324-2632>

Սոց. գ. թ., ԵՊՀ սոցիալական աշխատանքի և սոցիալական աշխատանքի
ամբիոնի դոցենտ: Էլ. փոստ՝ yulianamelkumyan@ysu.am

Սեդա Մկրտչյան

Սոնիթորինգի մասնագետ, Հայաստանի հանրային հեռուստաընկերություն:
Էլ. փոստ՝ seda.mkrtchyan555@gmail.com

Ամփոփում: «Ամերիկյան երազանքը» արժեհամակարգ է, որն ամերիկյան հասարակության զարգացման հիմնական շարժիչ ուժն է: Այն ամերիկյան ինքնության հիմնական տարրերից է: «Ամերիկյան երազանքի» գաղափարը ներառում է հավասարության, ազատության, բարգավաճման և երջանկության տերմինալ արժեքները: Քրտնաջան աշխատանքը, գոհաբերությունը, ռիսկի դիմելու համարձակությունը, աշխատասիրությունը և դժվարությունների հաղթահարումը այն գործիքային արժեքներն են, որոնք անհրաժեշտ են վերը նշված տերմինալ արժեքներին հասնելու համար: «Ամերիկյան երազանք» հասկացությունը ժամանակի ընթացքում զարգացել է և տարբեր մարտահրավերների բախվել, որոնք հանգեցրել են մի շարք հակասությունների երազանքի և սոցիալական իրականության միջև: Հոլիվուդյան ֆիլմերը օգտագործվում են որպես «Ամերիկյան երազանքի» քարոզչության գործիք ինչպես ԱՄՆ-ի ներսում, այնպես էլ արտերկրում: Այս հոդվածում ուսումնասիրված է հակառասիստական բովանդակությամբ, ինչպես նաև ընտանիքի, ամերիկյան զինված ուժերի, ԱՄՆ նախագահի և օրենքի գերակայությանը նվիրված հոլիվուդյան ֆիլմերում (2018-2021) վիզուալ, վերբալ և աուդիալ միջոցներով «Ամերիկյան երազանքի» տերմինալ և գործիքային արժեքների հաղորդակցությունը: Թեև ֆիլմերը հաղորդում են տերմինալ և գործիքային նույն արժեքները, դրանք երբեմն ցուցադրում են նաև առկա հակասությունները: Քրտնաջան աշխատանքը միշտ չէ, որ հանգեցնում է «ամերիկյան երազանքին» հասնելուն: Թեև հավասարության համար ակտիվ պայքար է մղվում, անհավասարությունը դեռ գոյություն ունի: Օրենքի գերակայությամբ հանդերձ՝ կան նաև կոռուպցիայի դրսևորումներ: Միաժամանակ ԱՄՆ-ը շարունակում է ներկայանալ որպես ապահով, հզոր և հարուստ երկիր:

Բանալի բառեր – *«Ամերիկյան երազանք», արժեհամակարգ, տերմինալ արժեքներ, գործիքային արժեքներ, քարոզչություն, հաղորդակցություն, հոլիվուդյան ֆիլմեր*

**ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ “АМЕРИКАНСКОЙ МЕЧТЫ” КАК СИСТЕМЫ
ЦЕННОСТЕЙ И ЕЕ РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ В ГОЛЛИВУДСКИХ
ФИЛЬМАХ**

Юлиана Мелкумян <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8324-2632>

Кандидат социологических наук, доцент кафедры Социальной работы и социальных технологий, ЕГУ. Email: yulianamelkumyan@ysu.am

Седа Мкртчян

Специалист по мониторингу, Общественная телекомпания Армении.

Email: seda.mkrtchyan555@gmail.com

Аннотация: *«Американская мечта» — это система ценностей, которая является локомотивом развития американского общества и одной из основных составляющих американской идентичности. Идея «американской мечты» включает такие терминальные ценности как равенство, свобода, благосостояние и счастье. Трудолюбие, самопожертвование, умение рисковать и преодолевать трудности выступают в роли инструментальных ценностей, необходимых для достижения упомянутых выше терминальных ценностей. «Американская мечта» эволюционировала с течением времени и сталкивалась с различными вызовами, что выявило ряд противоречий между мечтой и социальной реальностью. Голливудские фильмы используются как один из инструментов пропаганды «американской мечты» как в США, так и за рубежом. В данной статье рассматривается репрезентация терминальных и инструментальных ценностей «американской мечты» в голливудских фильмах (2018-2021 гг.) антирасистского содержания, а также фильмах о семье, американских вооруженных силах, президенте США и верховенстве права посредством визуальных, вербальных и аудиальных средств. Хотя фильмы транслируют одни и те же терминальные и инструментальные ценности, они также демонстрируют существующие противоречия. Тяжелая работа не всегда приводит к достижению «американской мечты». Несмотря на то, что борьба за равенство идет полным ходом, неравенство все еще существует. Наряду с верховенством права имеют место и проявления коррупции. При этом США продолжают представляться как безопасная, сильная и богатая страна.*

Ключевые слова: *«Американская мечта», система ценностей, терминальные ценности, инструментальные ценности, пропаганда, коммуникация, голливудские фильмы*

The concept of the American Dream

The “American dream” is a value system, which is deeply ingrained in American history, nevertheless, it still is relevant and it remains the locomotive of the development of American society. It is one of the core elements of the American identity. The first stories about the “American dream” can be traced back to English writer and sailor John Smith’s book, “The General History of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles”. When describing America, he wrote “Here every man may be master and owner of his own labour and land. ...If he has nothing but his hands, he may...by industries quickly grow rich.” (Smith, 1624). The “American dream” is also discussed in the declaration of independence of the United States: “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 (Jefferson, 2022).

The “American dream”, even though it had been discussed earlier, is usually attributed to historian James Truslow Adams, who, in 1931 coined the term “American dream” in the book “The Epic of America”; he described 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” (Adams, 2012). Adams wrote that any person is capable of achieving success if they work hard, notwithstanding who

they are and what social class they belong to. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the "American dream" is an American social ideal that stresses egalitarianism and especially material prosperity¹.

M. Hofman wrote that the "American dream" may sometimes contradict real life circumstances, but despite that, it is not an abstract dream: it embodies the values of a society, and, perhaps, chief among them is the respect for others. Society is the judge of what qualities one should be respected for, and what qualities they should be shunned for. In the old world, a one's worth was decided not by one's wealth, but by their personal qualities. In the new world, more often, one's worth is decided by looking at their bank account. To gain the respect of society one must become a "millionaire". Hofman (2013) also writes that the "American dream" is the dream of material success. For that reason, the 19th century became the time, when those in search of happiness dared to migrate from the Old world to the New world.

The prioritization of wealth acquisition, its inclusion in the list of national values, its becoming a way of measuring one's success in society would sound strange before the protestant reformation. Tawney suggests that those people, whose main goal was making money, or, in other words, those, for whom financial gross was the prime motivator, were treated with mistrust and even contempt (Tawney, 2017). After the protestant reformation, the striving for gaining wealth became an accepted and valued goal, maybe, for the first time in human history, and became the main reason of the rise of western capitalism (Weber, 2005). The new capitalist, in contrast to the entrepreneur of the Middle Ages, no longer felt guilty for striving to become rich. Exactly the exact opposite became the norm: poverty was now considered a form of punishment, while wealth became a reward for one's values and hard work. The ones who grew their wealth were seen as beacons of morality, since their position communicated that they possessed the bourgeois virtues of frugality, diligence, tirelessness, avidity and persistence. Profit was not a display of one's greed, but a result of one's professional skills. At the same time, poverty was perceived as the result of one's sloth, failure, and submission to one's vices. The poor, instead of receiving christian charity, were segregated from the rest and considered as punished (Norris & Inglehart, 2011).

Corporations and employers deliberately encouraged the association of a person with their work. The higher one's professional status, the more probable it is, that one will associate oneself with their occupation, and will be a more motivated worker and will bring more profit to the corporation. The concept of a career motivates trustworthy employees, who tirelessly work toward furthering the goals of their company without supervision. Hard work, devotion and loyalty are encouraged and rewarded (Taylor, 2005).

In 1979, Jimmy Carter, the president of the United States (years in office: 1977-1981) noted that "Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns". For many people, consumption has become a more important source of identity and status than labor². Researchers have recognized that people consume in ways that are consistent with their sense of self, they use commodities to create their

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/American%20dream>

² <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/USHistory/Making/Carter.htm>

self-identities and communicate these selves to others and to themselves (Fisher, 1987; Hart, Clarck, Micken, 2002).

The concept of the “American dream” became substantial thanks to the joint efforts of the most important and powerful social institutes: politics, business, and religion. The following values were identified as the components of the “American dream” by different researchers:

1. Liberty, that promises success and prosperity for all (Jefferson, 2022),
2. Egalitarianism (equal rights for all or prosperity as a principle of organization of public life), as opposed to elitism, which is typical of European countries (Cullen, 2003),
3. Equal rights to achieving success (in most cases this refers to material success) (Kowal, 2019),
4. The rule of law, which establishes order and the safety of the citizens (Wyman, 2015),
5. Strong families, which are a cornerstone of the sustainable development of society (Cullen, 2003),
6. The idea, that the main guarantor of the achievement of the “American dream” is the unity of the American nation (Kaufmann, 2002),
7. The exceptional role of the United States in world history and geopolitics (Smith, 2003).

The idea of the “American dream” is preached and wildly successful both inside of the United States and abroad, where it presents the terminal values of equality, liberty, prosperity and happiness. Hard work, sacrifice, courage in the face of taking risks, diligence and the act of overcoming hardships are presented as instrumental values, which are required to achieve the terminal values mentioned above. This implies that high standards of living (owning property, having high-paid jobs, multiple cars, full medical insurance) bring about not only high status in the social hierarchy and the transition to a higher social stratum, but also, more importantly, happiness. Success is directly linked to the amount of effort that was put in. Big cars and houses, quality items and accessories, the American smile, and, of course, the flag of the United States are used to communicate and signify the American lifestyle and the happiness inherent to it.

Along with all the consumption goods and symbols listed above one of the tool that makes the “American dream” very vital and tangible all around the world is English language. It has a unique role in the propagation of the “American dream”, which, thanks to globalization has become the most widespread mean of communication. In 142 countries around the world, the English language is mandatory in public schools, in 67 of these countries, English is an official language³. In many countries, as well as in Armenia, proficiency in English has become an important prerequisite for professional growth (Melkumyan & Tadevosyan, 2022). It expands a person’s opportunities in the globalized world, bringing them closer to the “American dream”. Globalization united everything, and the English language made globalization more efficient. Thanks to globalization, the English language gained worldwide power. According to statistics, English is the

³ <https://www.berlitz.com/blog/english-speaking-countries#:~:text=English%20is%20the%20official%20language.more%20than%20one%20official%20language>

most commonly used language in the world: English is used for passenger transportation and shipping, the primary language of the internet is English, most of the international political, scientific, and cultural events are organized in English.

Thanks to the repeated communication of the same ideas, the propagation of the “American dream”, it affects the lives, behavior, social mobility, and migration of people around the world. The citizen of the United States is proud that they are American and they’re proud that they live in a free and independent country. Meanwhile, foreigners dream of living in a country where everyone has a chance of living a prosperous life.

Transformation of the American Dream

The United States created an economical system, which provided a fast pace of economic growth and also raised prosperity levels. The Founding Fathers limited the right to work for the “American dream” to white property owners. It took many decades of hard work to make this right unalienable for women, financially insecure members of society, and people of color, who belonged to the communities that were enslaved in the past.

President Abraham Lincoln brought about the emancipation, Woodrow Wilson supported women’s right to vote, and Bill Clinton, along with George W. Bush advanced the dream of owning property. Barack Obama protected the legal benefits of the marriage contract, with no consideration of the couple’s sexual orientation. Obama was also a supporter of Roosevelt’s idea, that healthcare should be available for all. He softened the blow of the financial crisis for many, by increasing welfare funds and state support of students with their education loans (Gibson, 2013).

The Cold War helped solidify the concept of American Exceptionalism. The Truman doctrine established policies used to resist the USSR and its allies. Each of Truman’s successors used the lexicon and ideas of American exceptionalism to solidify the foundation of the ideological fight against communism. George Kennan’s famous work “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” (July 1947), ends with this statement: “The issue of Soviet-American relations is in essence a test of the overall worth of the United States as a nation among nations. To avoid destruction the United States need only measure up to its own best traditions and prove itself worthy of preservation as a great nation” (Kennan, 1947).

However, providing welfare while only using internal resources was quite problematic. This void was filled with exploitation of people, but, as a consequence of the abolishment of slavery, the need of finding any resources outside of the United States appeared. The United States of America filled this void by employing the following strategies:

1. creating unequal conditions in different platform of trade and economic interaction (Fajgelbaum, Amit, 2014),
2. creating and expanding global manufacturing monopolies and corporations (Hubbard, 2021),
3. regulating cash flows in the world market under the influence of the largest financial institutions, in which the USA has a dominant role (Costigan, T., Cottle, D., Keys, A., 2017),
4. suppressing weak “partners” via military, political, and economic means (Crawford, 1997),

5. bribing the elites (De Sardan, 1999),
6. attracting highly qualified professionals from around the world, to make them work for the benefit of the United States, providing it with a leading position in world economy and scientific progress (Iredale, 2008),
7. supporting the spread of the English language by simplifying it (Johnson, 2009).

These conditions are necessary in sustaining the high quality of life in the United States itself, while also reinforcing the belief in the limitless abilities of the United States government and in the exceptional role of the United States in the world.

The challenges of the American Dream

The “American dream” is a value system, which affects every single member of American society, since it endows the individual the ideas of being a productive and useful member of society. On one hand, it motivates and inspires the individual, by employing stories about people, who started from nothing and achieved unbelievable success, overcoming challenges through hard work and effort, while on the other hand it imposes that if a person has not achieved success and hasn’t gotten rich, or is generally unhappy it is mostly his fault, because he did not work hard enough to achieve his dream. This message, which is almost inseparable from the concept of the “American dream”, reduces the responsibility of the state and the society for the failures of its members. People, who are taught that their failure is directly linked to their individual qualities, are less likely to blame society. In his 2008 speech, Joe Biden emphasized, that “Failure at some point of your life is inevitable, but giving up is unforgivable” (Wingfield, 2008).

The American value system emphasizes individuality, which, in turn, is strongly based on diligence, profit, and materialism. American children are raised on the principles of individualism, and they are confident that they are autonomous individuals, who are fully responsible for the events of their lives and for their destinies⁴. Thus, the “American dream” slightly imposes the idea, that failure must be perceived as one’s own fault, and society is not to be blamed. This is where the ambivalence of the “American dream” becomes apparent.

Despite the actions taken in many states by governmental and non-governmental institutions to meet the needs of vulnerable groups and disadvantaged members of the society, it is also obvious that inequality at all levels and between all groups of people continues to exist and play a significant role in the USA today. Women still have to face unequal treatment, discrimination and prejudice, and so do racial, ethnic and religious minorities, as well as people who have a low socio-economic status, people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ community, all of whom are vulnerable members of society. The idea that, in America, everyone is born equal, is no longer true. Every single person born in the USA enters society with different levels of social, cultural, and economic capital, which greatly dictates the path their life will take and their social mobility. A class system is actively present and has a tremendous impact on the everyday lives of today’s Americans. Social mobility in the American reality is not as easy and unambiguous as it seems. The main confusion comes from the treatment of societal obstacles as personal

⁴<http://www.umsl.edu/services/intelstu/Admitted%20Students/Visitor%20Handbook/keyvalues.html>

failures. In his book “Illusions of opportunity”, John Schwarz (1997) states that “the amount of people who don’t have sufficient living conditions outweighs the population of the 100 largest American cities combined”. He states, that even though the unemployment rate in the US is low, the amount of jobs that can sustain a “bare minimum level of dignified standard of living” is severely limited and does not able to satisfy everyone who needs them. The absence of such jobs fundamentally calls into question the possibility of achieving the “American dream”. The study results show that 57% of respondents are of the opinion that “the American dream is unachievable” for most American families, more than 2/3 of the respondents are worried that their children won’t be able to live their lives like their parents. 59% of African-Americans have stated that the “American dream” is unachievable (Beder, 2018).

Levonyan-Radloff writes, that when taking into account the record amount of student loans, income stagnation, and the unemployment rate of college graduates, people start to doubt not only the value that college education provides, but also the plausibility of achieving the “American dream”. People aged 18-24 face more difficulties than their parents’ generation (Levonyan Radolff, 2013).

Furthermore, for the majority of Americans, graduating college was not a required factor in achieving the “American dream” or just living a middle class lifestyle 4-5 decades ago. After World War 2 American industry was prospering and developing supply chains for automobile manufacturing, weapons, medicine and many other goods: people were able to achieve the “American dream” straight out of highschool, by entering the job market as laborers, earning a decent living and learning all the skills they’d require right on the job (Tescher & Ehrbeck, 2018). However, in the last 30 years, American Economy, which was mostly industrial, started shifting in the direction of a more technologically advanced global service economy: an economy, where college education is a necessary part of achieving the “American dream”. It can be concluded that the instrumental values of the “American dream” are changing, hard work is no longer enough, education is also a must nowadays.

Thus, the following challenges to the viability of the “American dream” can be distinguished:

- Social inequality and the limited nature of vertical social mobility possibilities,
 - Increase of poverty and the social polarization of the rich and the poor,
 - Racism and discrimination,
 - National debt growth⁵,
 - The depreciation of instrumental values, which simultaneously challenges terminal values: there is an end, the means of achieving which are not clear, leading to a social anomaly,
 - Social epidemics of obesity, child abuse and drug addiction also endanger the “American dream”,
 - Climate change,
 - Business managed democracy, business managed culture and consumerism subordinate all other values,

⁵ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2021&locations=US&start=1960>

- US president Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again” slogan suggests that America is not as great as it used to be.

Research Methodology

This research examines the visual, verbal and audial communication of the terminal and instrumental values of the “American dream”. The purpose of the research is to identify, how are the terminal and instrumental values of the “American dream” communicated. For that reason, the method of content analysis of Hollywood films about the “American dream” was chosen for this research.

The research was conducted in 7 key steps 1) setting goals and objectives, 2) watching and studying Hollywood films, 3) definition of changes, 4) content analysis tool creation, 5) collection of information, 6) information categorization, 7) analysis and presentation of research results.

Research Sampling

The sample of the research is drawn from films released in 2018-2021, which feature the “American dream” as a value. For the study, 5 categories of films were selected: Anti-racist films, films about family, films about the US president, films about the US Armed Forces and the rule of law in the US. In films that discuss these themes, the terminal and instrumental values of the “American deram” are emphasized. Purposive sampling was carried out on the IMDb website, and a search for films according to the selected categories was carried out using keywords (*See Table 1*). Then, the films that were produced most recently, were viewed the most, were the most critically acclaimed, had the highest ratings, grossed the highest were selected as most typical and influential.

Table 1

Criteria for selecting Hollywood films for content analysis.

Category	Keywords
Family	«family», «American family», «films about American families», «movies about families pursuing the American dream»
Army	«army», «American army», «movies about American army», «American military movies»
President	«president», «American president», «US president», «president of the United States», «movies about American president», «movies about saving the American president»
Antiracist	«anti racism», «racism», «movies about racism», «American movies about racism», «Hollywood movies about racism»
Rule of law	«FBI», «movies about FBI», «American movies about FBI», «CIA», «movies about CIA», «American movies about CIA», «Hollywood movies about CIA»

The challenges of the “American dream” in Hollywood films

Lee Isaac Chung’s 2020 film “Minari” was selected to be researched from the category of Hollywood **films about family**. Stories about immigrants who achieve success in the US are very commonplace in Hollywood cinema (such as “America America” by Elia Kazan or “Green card” Peter Weir or “Spanglish” by James L. Brooks), but this film is not one of them. This film shows that nothing is as easy as it seems on the way to the “American dream”. The family depicted in the film worked

at a poultry factory during the 10 years they'd lived in the US, but it still had not achieved the success they dreamed of. In the beginning of the film, the family is seen heading to their new home in a car. The long and completely green road leading to the family's new house in this scene is meant to represent the terminal values of the "American dream", particularly, the liberty. The road is leading the family toward a new life in a free and independent country. However, the house the road leads to is nothing like the big two-story house typical of the "American dream". It is, in fact, a very humble house on wheels, which is in need of renovation. The father of the family, Jacob (played by Steven Yeun), and his 2 children are very excited and happy, while the mother of the family, Monica (played by Han Ye-ri), is disappointed. The film mainly communicates the instrumental values of the "American dream". While the new home is quite humble, the land purchased along with it is quite large and fruitful. Jacob's goal in the film is to earn good money by farming. Jacob is seen throughout the film, working the farm and growing Korean vegetables. At the same time, Jacob and Monica continue working at the poultry factory. Throughout the film, the values of hard work and overcoming challenges are communicated visually and verbally. It is noteworthy that during the 10 years that they lived in America, the family did not start to feel like a full part of American society, Monica still does not speak English well. The "American dream" is also communicated through one of the taglines of the film - "Family, Dream, Liberty": these are the 3 key values, which the immigrant family strives for in America. In "Minari", the "American dream" is presented under a critical light, attempting to show the reality, which immigrants have to face on their way to the "American dream" When the heroes of the film seem to have made some progress, a fire breaks out at the farm, burning the family's "American dream" along with it, but in the forest near it, a minari plant planted by the grandmother is seen, giving the hope that not all is lost (Chung, 2020).

Joseph Kosinski's 2022 film "Top Gun: Maverick" was studied as a film belonging to the category "**about the US Armed Forces**", which is meant to show the power of the US Air Force to the world. The film shows the heavy training that members of the Air Force have to go through in preparation for important missions. "Maverick" shows that there is no military mission, that the US Air Force can't complete, which, in turn, helps the US reinforce its image as a powerful country where dreams come true. The film is also an example of militaristic propaganda: the Pentagon donated 1.8 million dollars to the production of the film for using their devices. The US flag is almost omnipresent throughout the film, it's featured even on Maverick's (played by Tom Cruise) jacket (Kosinski, 2022).

Spike Lee's 2018 film "BlacKkKlansman", like many other films by him, is about the problem of racism in the US. This "**anti-racist**" film that was based on real events tells the story of the only black policeman of the Colorado Springs police force, Ron Stallworth (played by John David Washington), who calls the "Ku Klux Klan" organization pretending to be a white man and tells them that he wants to become a member, this results in him being invited to an interview. Stallworth's Jewish colleague goes to the interview instead of him, who manages to convince the Klan that he's not Jewish and that he hates African-Americans. The film is set in 70s America, a time when racism was widespread, the Ku Klux Klan was active, and the Black Panther Party was fighting back against it, trying to protect black rights. While

watching the film, it becomes apparent that the US of the 70s was not as egalitarian as it always presented itself to be, starting from the Declaration of Independence to presidents' speeches, films, and television. In contrast to many films about the "American Dream", where the flag of the United States is flown, here, the flag is joined by the Confederate battle flag on front porches, storefronts and even the police station. Throughout the film, Ku Klux Klan members constantly talk about differences between white people and black people, often mentioning that white people are members of the Aryan race. It never occurs to the Klan members, who spoke to the black detective on the phone, that their conversation partner is black, but they constantly mention how distinct a black person's voice and manner of speech is from a white person's. The phrase "God bless white America" creates a further divide between white Americans and people of other races. One of the leaders of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke, when speaking of national services, states that people like him are needed, "to make America great again". This phrase is a direct reference to Donald Trump's election campaign slogan "Make America Great Again": The director shows that the problem that is the differentiation of black and white people has always been present in the US and has not ceased to be. It is also noteworthy, that the black Americans shown in the film are educated, hardworking people, who are simply fighting for their rights, while some white people are criminals involved in suspicious activities, who try to limit the rights of the black people. "BlacKkKlansman" challenges all the stereotypes inherent to the representation of black persons in cinema. In many Hollywood films, black people are presented as criminals, drug dealers, athletes, or victims of poor socio-economic status (Denzin, 2005; Yuen, 2017). In contrast, this film features a black protagonist who is a member of the police forces, black people wear stylish clothing, inhabit good neighbourhoods and not ghettos. The film also ingeniously communicates the value of freedom through music, using the following tracks: Phillips Band's "Freedom ride", James Brown's "Say It Loud-I'm Black and I'm Proud", Dan Whitener's "We Are Gonna Be Okay". The closing shot of the film shows the US flag upside down, while the red and white stripes turn black and white. With this image, the film director tells us that the US flag that is meant to represent liberty, equality and justice for all, does not reflect the American reality, where racism, injustice, and inequality exist (Lee, 2018).

The film "BlacKkKlansman" was also analyzed in the "**Rule of law**" category, as that is also a theme that is apparent in the film, emphasizing the role of the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigations) and the police. In this film, Stallworth, the protagonist, is a member of the police force, whose duty is to enforce the rule of law and to protect the people. He develops a plot to fight the Ku Klux Klan from within. The film puts on display both the strengths and the shortcomings of the police. Despite the fact that the police works efficiently, there are still some shortcomings:, for example, the police still employs people with racist worldviews, who abuse the power given to them by the law. Nevertheless, there still are policemen, who, like Stallworth, that use the same power to help the people. The film shows the efficiency of the police force in dangerous conditions, when an undercover detective can be discovered anytime. Stallworth collaborates with the FBI, to receive the secret information, through which he finds out that 2 members of the Ku Klux Klan work at the Pentagon, and, in addition to that, the Ku Klux Klan is one of the prime suspects in the case of the disappearance of weapons belonging to the US Armed

Forces. Here, the efficiency of US law enforcement is shown in contrast of the existence of members of law enforcement that threaten the safety of both the government and the people. Despite the fact, that in the end, thanks to the efficient cooperation of the detective and the police the act of terror planned by the Ku Klux Klan is stopped, the criminal policeman is arrested, but in the final few scenes that are actually recordings of real events that took place in 2017, the Ku Klux Klan and other neo-nazi groups are shown to still be attacking black people and other citizens who fight for black rights (Lee, 2018).

The 2019 film “Angel has fallen” was selected to represent the category of films **“about the president”**. It tells the story of the president being under attack just before the elections. The film communicates an array of both terminal (equality, liberty, wealth, happiness, family, etc.) and instrumental (hard work, sacrifice, overcoming the difficulties) values linked to the “American dream”. Besides that, the rule of law is emphasized in the storyline that follows the investigation of the attack on the president of the FBI. The film presents Russia and the president of the Russian Federation as enemies of the US. The protagonist of the movie is successful in single-handedly defeating the antagonistic force and protecting the president. Scripts like these are typical to Hollywood films about saving the president. The US flag is prominently featured throughout the film, the United States’ capability of defeating any threat is emphasized multiple times, the FBI is shown as an efficient and operative institution, successful in keeping the president and the country itself safe and secure (Waugh, 2019).

Conclusion

The study of the Hollywood films of 2018-2021 shows, that the cinema industry is effectively used as a part of propaganda toolset, which supports the establishment of the “American dream” as a value system inside and outside of the United States. Taking into account the fact, that Hollywood is among 10 of the the most viewed movie industries throughout the world, the concept of the “American dream” spreads to and affects both US citizens and foreigners. This article examines the representation of the terminal and instrumental values of the “American Dream” in 4 films with anti-racist content, as well as films about family, the American Armed Forces, the US president, and the rule of law, through visual, verbal and audio means typical of cinematography. An interesting trend can be observed in these 4 films shot in 2018-2021 in terms of the communication of the "American dream". Compared to the idealized films made in earlier years (such as “Citizen Kane” (1941), “East of Eden” (1955), “A Raisin in the Sun” (1961), “America America” (1963), “Stay Hungry” (1976), “Ragtime” (1981), “Wall Street” (1987), “Forrest Gump” (1994), “There will be blood” (2007), and “The Social Network” (2010)), the 4 films studied in this article present a more critical approach, taking into account the current challenges of American society and the "American dream". Communicating the same terminal and instrumental values, the films nevertheless show the existing contradictions. Hard work does not always lead to the "American dream". Even though the fight for equality is going strong, inequalities still exist. Along with the rule of law, there are also manifestations of corruption. At the same time, the USA continues to be presented as a safe, powerful and wealthy country.

REFERENCES

- Adams, J. T. (2012). *The epic of America*. Transaction Publishers.
- Beder, S. (2018). Business-managed democracy. Retrieved from: <https://www.herinst.org/BusinessManagedDemocracy/culture/wealth/dream.html>.
- Beyers, J. (2014). The effect of religion on poverty. *Hery. teol. stud.* [online]. vol. 70, n.1, pp. 01-10. ISSN 2072-8050.
- Costigan, T., Cottle, D., Keys, A. (2017). The US Dollar as the Global Reserve Currency: Implications for US Hegemony. *World Review of Political Economy*, 8(1), 104–122. <https://doi.org/10.13169/worldrevipoliecon.8.1.0104>
- Countries in which English language is mandatory or an optional subject (interactive map). Retrieved on 23.02.2023 from: <https://www.berlitz.com/blog/english-speaking-countries#:~:text=English%20is%20the%20official%20language,more%20than%20one%20official%20language.>
- USA GDP, World Bank (2021). Retrieved from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2021&locations=US&start=1960>.
- Everts, J. (2010) HYPERLINK "<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14649365.2010.523840>" [Consuming and living the corner shop: belonging, remembering, socialising](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14649365.2010.523840). *Social & Cultural Geography* 11:8, pages 847-863.
- Gibson, J. M. (2013). *The American Dream: A Place of My Own, a Place to Call Home*. Florida State University Libraries, p. 42.
- Clarke III, I., Micken, K.S., and Hart H.S. (2002), "Symbols For Sale ... At Least For Now: Symbolic Consumption in Transition Economies", in *NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 29*, eds. Susan M. Broniarczyk and Kent Nakamoto, Valdosta, GA : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 25-30.
- Crawford, G. (1997). Foreign aid and political conditionality: Issues of effectiveness and consistency, *Democratization*, 4:3, 69-108, DOI: HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510349708403526>" [10.1080/13510349708403526](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510349708403526)
- Cullen, J. (2003). *American Dream. A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*. Oxford University Press.
- Denzin, N.K. (2005). Selling Images of Inequality: Hollywood Cinema and the Reproduction of Racial and Gender Stereotypes. In *The Blackwell Companion to Social Inequalities* (eds M. Romero and E. Margolis). HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996973.ch21>" <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996973.ch21>
- De Sardan, J. (1999). A moral economy of corruption in Africa? *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37(1), 25-52. doi:10.1017/S0022278X99002992
- Fajgelbaum, P. D., Amit K. K. (2014). "Measuring the Unequal Gains from Trade." Working Paper 20331. Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Fisher, J. E. (1987). *Social Class and Consumer Behavior: The Relevance of Class and Status*. *Advances in Consumer Research*, Toronto, Volume: 14
- Hofman, M. (2013). *American Dream*. Retrieved from: http://world.lib.ru/g/gofman_m/americanream.shtml.
- Hubbard, S. (2021). *Monopolies suck*. Simon & Schuster.
- Iredale, R. (2008). The Migration of Professionals: Theories and Typologies. *International Migration, IOM*, Volume 39, Issue 5, pp. 7-26.
- Jackson, P. (1999). Consumption and identity: The cultural politics of shopping, *European Planning Studies*, 7:1, 25-39, DOI: HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1080/09654319908720498>" [10.1080/09654319908720498](https://doi.org/10.1080/09654319908720498)

- Jefferson, T. (2022). "Declaration of Independence: A Transcription." America's Founding Documents. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, last modified June 8, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>
- Jimmy Carter's Malaise Speech. 1979. Retrieved from: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/USHistory/Making/Carter.htm>.
- Johnson, A. (2009). The Rise of English: The Language of Globalization in China and the European Union. *Macalester International*: Vol. 22 , Article 12.
- Kaufmann, E. (2002). Modern Formation, Ethnic Reformation: The Social Sources of the American Nation, *Geopolitics*, 7:2, 99-120, DOI: HYPERLINK "<https://doi.org/10.1080/714000934>" [10.1080/714000934](https://doi.org/10.1080/714000934)
- Kennan, G. F. (1947). The sources of soviet conduct, pp. 566-582.
- Key American Values, UMSL, 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.umsl.edu/services/intelstu/Admitted%20Students/Visitor%20Handbook/keyvalues.html>.
- Kowal, J.F. (2019). After a long period of dormancy, the campaign to ratify the ERA has sprung back to life. Are we just one state away from ratifying the Twenty-Eighth Amendment? The Equal Right's Amendment Revival: Questions for Congress, the Courts and the American People.
- Levonyan Radloff, T. D. (2013). Sociology in practice. Our prescription for living, East Strasburg University. Cognella, pp. 2-5.
- Melkumyan, Y. Tadevosyan, A. (2022). The social stratification of the Arminian society in the perspective of the formation of the new social contract, Yerevan, Archmanities, p. 78.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). American Dream. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/American%20dream>.
- Norris, P. & Inglehart, R. (2011). *Sacred and secular: Religion and politics worldwide*, 2nd end. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Petrechuk, A. I. (2017). The American Dream and American Exceptionalism. From the origins to the present, *Electronic scientific journal "Archon"* No. 3, pp. 51-64.
- Schwarz, J. E. (1997). *Illusions of Opportunity: The American Dream in Question*. 1st Edition, W W Norton & Co Inc.
- Smith, J. (1624). *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*. London.
- Smith, N. (2003). *American Empire: Rusevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tawney, R.H. (2017). *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Taylor, F. W. (2005). "The Principles of Scientific Management." In J. M. Shafritz, J. S. Ott and Y. S. Jang editors, *Classics of Organization Theory*, 6th edition, pp. 61-72. Belmont, CA: Thomson-Wadsworth. (5) (PDF) Dewey and Taylor on Scientific Management in a Democratic Society, [1916]. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228814503_Dewey_and_Taylor_on_Scientific_Management_in_a_Democratic_Society.
- Tescher, J. & Ehrbeck, T. (2018). The Vanishing American Dream: The Long Road to Financial Stability. Retrieved from: HYPERLINK "<https://nextbillion.net/vanishing-american-financial-stability/>" <https://nextbillion.net/vanishing-american-financial-stability/>.
- Weber, M. (2005). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Wingfield, B. (2008). The many hats of Joe Biden. August 28. Retrieved from: https://www.forbes.com/2008/08/28/dnc-biden-speech-biz-beltway-cx_bw_0828biden.html?sh=367a5836785d.
- Wyman, B. (2015). "The American Dream, Equal Opportunity, and Obtaining the Vote," *The Cohen Journal*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 4.
- Yuen, N.W. (2017). *Reel Inequality. Hollywood actors and racism*. Rutgers University Press.

Films

Chung, L. I. (Director). (2020). *Minari* [Film]. Plan B Entertainment, A24.

Kosinski, J. (Director). (2022). *Top Gun: Maverick* [Film]. Paramount Pictures.

Lee, S. (Director). (2018). *BlacKkKlansman* [Film]. Focus Features.

Waugh, R. R. (Director). (2019). *Angel Has Fallen* [Film]. Lionsgate.