



Universidad de Valladolid

FACULTAD de FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS
DEPARTAMENTO de FILOLOGÍA INGLESA
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THE AMERICAN DREAM: WAS OBAMA THE STARTING
POINT OF A NEW REACHABLE DREAM OR JUST THE
REMAINS OF THAT DREAM?

LAURA ANTÓN FERNÁNDEZ

Tutor: María Pilar Garcés García

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ABSTRACT

The American dream is a recurrent object of study due to its great impact in the United States and also in the rest of the world. Even though the American Dream concept has changed along history, it still remains as one of the fundamental pillars of American culture. For this reason, this paper is going to analyze the American dream from three different approaches: historical, literary- focusing in the 1920s- and political. Through this study, we will see how political leaders have used this concept to lead the American society to a so-desired economical progress since the arrival of Puritans to the New World. The main goal of this project is to see how one of the most important figures of our time, Barack Obama, has handled the American Dream concept during his reign. Finally, this essay will also see if the American Dream is a realistic aspiration.

Keywords: The American Dream, American History, The Great Gatsby, Political Discourse, Ideology, Barack Obama.

RESUMEN

El sueño americano es un objeto recurrente de estudio dado su gran impacto social no solo dentro de los Estados Unidos sino también en el resto del mundo. A pesar de que es un concepto abstracto que ha ido variando a lo largo de la historia, sigue siendo uno de los principales pilares de la cultura estadounidense. Por esta razón, vamos a analizar el sueño americano desde tres enfoques diferentes, el histórico, literario (centrándonos en el periodo de los Locos Años Veinte), y por último, el enfoque político. A través de este estudio veremos cómo los líderes políticos americanos han usado el sueño americano para conducir a los Estados Unidos hacia ese progreso económico tan deseado desde la llegada de los puritanos a Nueva Inglaterra. El propósito principal de este proyecto es descubrir qué hay detrás de ese concepto tan impreciso y ver cómo una de las figuras más importantes de nuestros tiempos, Barack Obama, ha utilizado el concepto del sueño americano durante su mandato. Por último veremos si el Sueño Americano es un sueño alcanzable o no.

Palabras clave: El sueño americano, La historia de los Estados Unidos, El Gran Gatsby, El discurso político, Ideología, Barack Obama.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The man who moved millions of people around the world, the man who changed the way of thinking of many, the man who broke with the traditional social classes ties, the man who motivated a whole society to take part again in politics to change the mistakes of the past, the man who made them believe again in them as individuals but also in the nation, in the United States, that man is Barack Obama. He is the first black American president and he was not only elected by black communities but also by the whites. This event was seen by the entirely world as a great change. Therefore, the crucial issue in this paper is, was Obama getting close to the dreams of the first settlers? At least, we could say he reached the American Dream; others may not have the same opportunities.

Needless to say that Obama, as every candidate to the presidency in the United States, based his speeches on the American Dream. The dream that proclaims that ‘all men and women are created equal’ (The Charters of Freedom) regardless of social classes, that everyone is free and also has the right to fight for their goals because the United States is *a country full of opportunities*. When Obama presented himself to the presidency, he promised to attempt to achieve those ideals that the American settlers brought with them when they arrived to New England; ideals like the right to freedom, the pursuit of their dreams, the promised land, etc. However, what has happened once he reached the power? Is he trying to achieve the American Dream, being a new starting point which leads to that dream or just the remains of that dream English founders carried with them? Even though the American Dream is a recurrent topic of study, we are going to study it from an outside but objective perspective as we are not Americans, providing reliable data.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This paper is divided into the following 3 sections: first, the analysis of the American Dream from a historical approach; the longest part of the project as it is the most relevant one so as to understand the concept of the American Dream and to know when, where, why, and how, it was created. Second, the analysis of how the dream is portrayed in the literature of the 1920's by carrying out an insightful review of one of the most emblematic novels of the recognized writer J. Scott Fitzgerald; and last but not least, the American Dream will be analysed from a political angle, focusing on the Afro-Americans, especially on how Barack Obama has used that concept. Therefore, the aim of this essay is to study how this concept has varied through the different periods of American history, and how it has become the leading tenet of all Americans.

In conclusion, this paper attempts to provide logical and solid arguments that will help us determine whether the American Dream is not as successful as it was expected or, in contrast, if it is still a source of vitality and motivation for Americans with its a consistent basis. In other words, this research project attempts to discover what there is behind the elusive concept of the American Dream that the Americans have promoted to mankind.

The *American Dream* term was first coined by the freelance journalist James Truslow Adams, in his book *The Epic of America* (1932), who defined it 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” (Adams 1932: 404).

Since then, this term has been used to depict the dreams of America as a nation, and also, the dream of American as an individual. However, is it true that only through the hard work can one prosper economically and socially? We will see along the paper that may not all individuals in American have had the same opportunities.

3. THE ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

By studying American history and literature, one can understand what the American Dream actually is. Even though many denied the origin of the American Dream, it clearly starts as European in nature since all that surrounded Christopher Columbus and his voyages reinforced the ideology of this concept. The first purpose he had in mind when he embarked to discover a new land was to get economically profit through trade, spices and gold. Wealth is the driving force that impulses adventurous people to discover new places, and it was also a constant and main motivating factor for future excursions to the recently discovered continent, America. Therefore, wealth is one of the major reasons for achieving the American Dream. Sir Walter Raleigh, English seaman, pirate, corsair, writer and politician, was aware of the incentive a new land was to create a tailor-made paradise for those who wanted to start afresh. He believed that America was the Paradise with a perfect society, ultimately, a dream come true.

Therefore, American history was formed with the myths of the new Eden. Hence, we could say that American history is a history of the second chance of humanity to live in the promised land. Americans decided to make use of the traditional mythology about Christopher Columbus's discovery in 1492 of what now is South America. "One means which America has unified itself is through an imagined communal mythology that all could share and that provide a cluster of beliefs through which the nation could be articulated, both to itself and to the world" (Campbell and Kean 2012: 27). Therefore, the first settlers arrived in the United States with the idea of creating a new world, a paradise where they could create their own history, obliterating the mistakes of the past and reconstructing a new world, a new identity. As it was previously said, the American Dream started as European in nature but the American Dream has its truly origins with the first settlers that arrived to New England and the dreams they carried with them. English Puritans were full of hopes for rewriting the past and restarting again.

3.1 The first settlements

Firstly, it is necessary to explain the historical context to understand why English Puritans decided to leave their land and homes in order to start a new life in that recently discovered country.

Jamestown was the first permanent settlement in the United States. The colony was founded by English settlers in 1607. They went there seeking gold as a consequence of a great crisis in Europe for which the Monarchs needed money to pay what they had borrowed from the Jews. Gold, silver and precious gems were the *Dream* of travellers. The conception of the American Dream was forming itself little by little.

We need to go back to the reign of Henry VIII (1491- 1547) when the first differences between the Anglican Church and other religions took place. Henry VIII reinforced Anglicanism in England. Puritans' philosophy was much stricter than Anglicanism and even Calvinism. In the 17th century, the Puritans decided to leave England to put into practise their religion in a new place. In 6 September 1620, the *Mayflower*, the name of the boat that transported the so called Pilgrims from England to New England, left from Plymouth, England, and arrived to the West coast, of what is known today as the United States, in 11 November of the same year. They were the first settlers to firmly establish in the Massachusetts coast, creating the colony of Plymouth. The crew was called the Pilgrims as they were escaping from death in their native England; they were on a Pilgrimage, suffering banishment and rejection, and looking for a haven to rest their souls. These Pilgrims desired to afresh in a land where they could carry out their purposes, where they could be free.

But it is in 1630, when four ships crowded by English Puritans sailed the Atlantic Ocean seeking a new place where to develop their religion and ideals since in the Old World they were not allowed to. Those Puritans were led by John Winthrop, an exceptional person, lawyer, magistrate, and a very religious man. They were men and women that escaped from the persecutions they suffered in England because of Queen

Elisabeth continued the religious controversy by restoring the English Prayer Book¹. Her successor Jacob I and his son Charles I did not only appeased this social problem; instead, they favoured the Anglican Church, imposing very hard rules by which every person who did not practise the Anglican faith would be persecuted and even sentenced to death. Puritans lost their religious and political power since they were expelled from the British Parliament.

It is in 1629 with the dissolution of the Parliament, when Winthrop decided to create his enterprise after considering all advantages and disadvantages. He had prepared a manifest titled: 'Reasons to be considered for justifying the undertakers of the suggested Plantation in New England and for encouraging those hearts God shall move to join with it' (Un Modelo de Caridad Cristiana, 1997: 11-12). With this manifest, Winthrop encouraged all Puritans to set out on a journey to the New England in order to spread their faith and economic system. Therefore, they started their journey with a fleet led by *Arbella*, the boat Winthrop was in, seeking the Salem² colony, whose capital would be established in Boston. Boston became the metropolis of the colony, quickly spreading thanks to Winthrop's effort and capacity to govern.

During the voyage, Winthrop addressed to his crew with a sermon titled *A Model of Christian Charity* by which he encouraged them to adapt a new way of life more austere. Such was the value of this document that it became the foundational one of the colony. It is written in this document the Winthrop's sermon displayed and meant a milestone in history. This sermon was the starting point of the American history.

Moreover, Winthrop had got a document signed by the king by which the colony would almost have absolute freedom of self-government. Thanks to the qualities of Winthrop, a great statesman, the colony progressed. Although it was not exempt of dangers such as hard-life conditions, the cold winters, the lack of food, they also suffered infectious diseases and were not prepared for the hard work ahead of them, and, to make things worse, they found that the Indians were far from kind, guileless

¹ Queen Elisabeth restored again the *English Prayer Book* by which priests from all religious branches were forced to dress with floor-length clothes during liturgies. Puritans and Calvinists were against this law. This book contained other rules that hampered the spreading of other religious different to Anglicanism.

² Salem was the name of an American colony. Its name comes from Jerusalem.

creatures. All these circumstances caused the deaths of many Winthrop's brothers and sisters.

As it was previously explained, the American Dream started to be formed with the arrival to New England of English settlers and continued with the belief of both economic and spiritual progress; the belief in opportunities; the belief in the possibility of change in the social stratum through hard work; the belief in themselves to pursue their dreams; the belief in being better persons; the belief in their own new country; the belief of creating a new world in which everybody could be happy; in conclusion, the belief in America.

The history of America was created through Biblical myths. It is highly surprising how Americans settlers made use of the myth of the Promised Land, to justify acts like conquering or civilizing illiterate populations of natives to promote the idea of creating a New World. After escaping from cruel persecution because there was no freedom, they paradoxically perpetuated the same mistake by forcing a naive population to come to terms with the ideals they brought with them. While they were looking for freedom they imposed their points of view, turning themselves from persecuted to persecutors. However, all the chaos and disaster they caused to get the 'divined American's progress' was omitted, has been out of their mainstream history, but thanks to many ethnic writings the cruel and terrible truth was revealed. Now, we will turn to how the slavery was introduced in the United States.

3.2 Slavery

As we have previously said, American history counts with many testimonies of Blacks who lived in plantations and thanks to their stories and writings, we know the conditions they lived under. Later, we will show some short fragments written by Frederick Douglas.

Since the English Puritans arrived to the New World and created different colonies, more settlers from different empires arrived too, and these empires also formed settlements there. However, it needs to be remarked that all those empires already had colonies in Africa, where they had conquered and colonized the indigenous

population through slavery. Settlers enslaved millions of Africans as they were not considered persons because of the colour of their skin. Black was just a synonym of labour.

The North American continent was colonized, however, the land was uncultivated and vast, it was a hard work and by that time there was a severe shortage of labour due to the diseases settlers suffered and the lack of food. Also, Indian natives knew how to hide in their territories in order to escape from the European settlers, and not to work in plantations under bad conditions as settlers wanted them to do. Even though a great deal of people like white servants, prisoners, etc. from European countries signed a document for which they agreed to go to North America and work there, that was not enough; there was still a huge lack of labour and, hence, without workers the land could not prosper.

It is in 1619 when, for the very first time, Dutch decided to introduce in Jamestown, the English colony of Virginia, some captured Africans, giving place to the beginning of slavery system in America. Nonetheless, it was not only practiced in the colony of Virginia, but also, in all Southern American colonies such as: Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Delaware during the 17th and 18th centuries. Those colonies together with Virginia were called “The 13 colonies” the ones where the African-American slaves were forced to help to build the economic foundations of the New World, a capitalist economy. However, after some years, slavery was spread all over the country not only limited to the South.

African slaves were brought to the South of the country in Dutch ships to aid in plantations but also to produce raw materials like sugar, tobacco and cotton in order to export those materials back to Europe. “This combination of an archaic labour system and the capitalist profit drive helped to define chattel slavery in the Americas”. (International Socialist Review). The agriculture was proper of the South and as they required cheap labour, the slavery trade was a good solution to carry out the *divined American progress*.

Moreover, as they were not English they were not under the British Common Law, therefore, they were considered workers without rights. Even though they were in the land of opportunities, they did not have the option to live like free people until their emancipation, as we will see later on.

Slavery was first legalized in Massachusetts colony, North America, in 1641. The colonies were prospering, exportations were successful and then settlers realized that slaves were essential to prosper; so they rejected the idea of redeeming them. Furthermore, such was the great impact of slavery on the American economy that King Charles II decided to reinvent the Royal African Company³ in 1672 to transport Africans from Africa to America. Therefore, slaves had to work until death with their white masters.

In 1793 the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney⁴ granted a great economical advance for the country. This discovery helped in the process of legalization of slavery in the South since it was used as a justification for plantation owners to keep using slaves and spread this practice throughout the east of the country; the West was unconquered by then.

Slaves, before the civil war, constituted about one-third of the population in the South and they usually lived on large farms or plantations. Slaves were prohibited from learning to write and read; they were not allowed to express themselves. As settlers arrived to the United States supposedly by *divine right*, many masters believed that they could do what they wanted with their slaves, for example, taking sexual liberties with slave women. From those terrible acts many mestizos were born. Mestizos were not recognized by their respective white fathers and were usually treated like slaves.

In order to have slaves under control, masters rewarded those who obeyed them with some favours, while those who revolted were brutally punished; sometimes, they were sentenced to death. Further, there were ranges amongst slaves 'from privileged

³ *The Royal African Company* was originally called The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading to Africa created in 1660. It was used to trade only with West Africa. Nonetheless, in 1672, Charles II decided to re-emerged it with a new charter and renamed it as The Royal African Company and turned to transport Africans slaves to the New World.

⁴ Eli Whitney patented a new machine to produce cotton. This new invention revolutionized the industry of the cotton production and was the excuse used in the South to legalize slavery even though there was a great opposition in the North.

house slaves and skilled artisans down to lowly field hands' (The History Channel). This hierarchy provoked that they were divided and not organized, and, as a consequence, many hostilities took place amongst them. Masters promoted slave marriage simply to have more labour; hence, slave families were very large; however, masters did not hesitate to separate families in the public slave auctions. We see this depicted in the following text authored by Frederick Douglas' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*:

“By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant. I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. (..) the white children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege. [Furthermore, he was neither] allowed to make any inquires of [his] master concerning it” (1845: 14).

Frederick Douglas was born in a plantation, son of slave mother and, probably, of white father. He became a statesman after escaping from slavery. Once he became a free man he wrote a novel describing his childhood in the plantation and how he escaped of it. In the previous fragment we can see that slaves did not have any privilege. They were not even allowed to know their age, only white children could. But this is not all, Douglas tells us the following:

“The opinion was ... whispered that my master was my father; but of the correctness of this opinion I know nothing.... My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant.... It [was] common custom, in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to part children from their mothers at a very early age. I do not recollect ever seeing my mother by the light of day. ... She would lie down with me, and get me to sleep, but long before I awaked she was gone” (1845: 15).

Here, we can see Douglas' belief that his father was probably his mother's master. Consequently, his mother would have been raped, what was very common in that moment. Douglas being sold when he was just a child and after passing for different owners, he eventually escaped away to the North, where he started a new life as a free man.

3.3 The Seven Years' War

The New World was divided into colonies as European settlers arrived. The biggest colonies belonged to Spain, France and Britain, but also countries like Portugal and Netherlands had colonies there. Finally, during the 18th century due to the wars between these countries, most of the colonies belonged to the English and French Empires; others lost all their power within New England like Spain and Portugal.

Furthermore, problems between the American colonies and Europe rose up since the colonies wanted to be independent from the Old World. In New England, some wars took place between European powers. Each country wanted to dominate as many territories as possible.

From 1754 to 1763, there was a worldwide war named Seven Years' War or the French and Indian War. This war was fought by France and Great Britain in North America, and it was put up by British-American colonies and New France⁵. However, these countries did not fight alone; they counted with American natives and other countries as allies. Even though this war had at the beginning a regional nature, it became international with the participation of powerful empires and spreading the conflict to the region of Canada.

After many battles, Britain became gradually victorious. Finally, Britain completely defeated France and expelled all French soldiers from New England. Spain that had supported Britain got French territories such as Cuba, Louisiana, including New Orleans.

Due to the war many slaves had escaped from their owners, others were used as soldiers by the empires. But when the war was seen as a very long process, northerner settlers valued the possibility of granting them the freedom as slaves were a fundamental pillar of the economy system of both North and South, and the war supplies depended on them.

This war meant an enormous change for all nations. It changed the all possible relations: political, economic, governmental and social; between the three main and

⁵ New France was all territories colonized by France in New England in 1534. France lost all its power in America losing New France with the cession of its colonies to England and Spain in 1763.

already mentioned European powers (Britain, France, and Spain) and the people of their colonies. This war not only devastated both Britain and France countries but also Indian natives. As a result, all empires suffered economical loss due to the war, economical consequences that would last many years later. However, Britain gained power and control over France.

3.4 The War of Independence

Slavery was legalized within the 13 colonies at the beginning of the America's War of Independence. As Britain nation was terribly economically indebted, the crown attempted to find different ways to pay off the debt. The English government decided to impose additional taxes on their American colonies. American-Indians tired of paying the tough taxes imposed by the British Empire started to revolt. In 1773, Indians, but also some settlers, destroyed a whole shipment of tea that had been sent by the East India Company⁶ as a result of the Tea Act approved by Britain in May 10, 1773. This event would be later known as the *Boston Tea Party*, as it took place in Boston. Indians decided to throw all tea to the sea, as it was very valued in Britain. The reprisals Britain took against them were terrible. However, the *Boston Tea Party* became an iconic event of the history of America as it symbolizes freedom and, as we already known, freedom is one of the objectives of the American Dream.

The armies had to perform their duties and force the settlers and natives, to pay more, and cruelty by the British soldiers increased dramatically. All this led to the beginning of the American Revolutionary War⁷ from 1778 to 1783. Americans desired to break the relationship with their Britain 'cousins' and to pursuit it, they counted with the support of France. At the beginning, the war was only between the 13 colonies and Britain but it ended up involving Spain, France, the Netherlands, and the Kingdom of

⁶ *East India Company* previously named as the Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading into the East Indies. The company mainly traded with these following raw materials: cotton, silk, indigo dye, salt, saltpeter, tea and opium not only with New England but also with India, China amongst others.

⁷ *American Revolutionary War* also known as American War of Independence.

Mysore⁸. Finally, Americans won the war; however, they would not have won the war without the help of France.

3.5 The Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence is one of the most important documents written in American history. It was both completed and signed in July 4, 1776, a year after the Independence War started. By that time, New England wanted to break its ties with Europe, especially with Old England what nowadays is called Great Britain. American colonies desired to be an independent nation, stop being colonies to become states with their own trade and government. That way, the Declaration entailed the official separation between the 13 colonies, those located in the Massachusetts Bay, and Britain. Furthermore, this document covers the fundamental rights of all Americans and proclaims that: “all men are created equal [and that they are] endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights [including] Life, Liberty and pursuit of Happiness”. After the Declaration of Independence, New England became the United States of America.

The Declaration of Independence was written by Thomas Jefferson, third President of the United States and considered one of the American Founding Fathers⁹. All founding Fathers were deeply involved with the American cause and, in the case of Jefferson, he firmly believed in the ideas of the Enlightenment Period, what turned the Declaration of Independence into a milestone in the American history, and put the political ideas of the 18th century into practice.

During the 1700s, the British Parliament approved several laws that limited the freedom of many English settlers in America. ‘These limitations resulted in the forming of the first Continental Congress in 1774. Settlers sent a list of complaints to King

⁸ *The Kingdom of Mysore* a kingdom located in the South of India between Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal.

⁹ *The Founding Fathers of the United States of America* were statesmen that participated and led the American. Furthermore, ‘they were leaders in their communities and hailed from good education and means. They were the men who installed the first ideals into the American Society. After having successfully fought the Revolutionary War, they signed the declaration of Independence and drafted the Constitution of United States’ (Maps of World, 2012). Some of the founding fathers of the United States of America are John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and James Madison.

George III but it was ignored. Nonetheless, they did not lose hopes and after the second meeting of the Continental Congress and another ignored letter, settlers realized that they would not have to depend on any country, they were able enough to rule the colonies by themselves, they thus declared their independence. They consider that rebellion was the only option after the King had ignored their letters. Jefferson helped by other 62 members wrote and signed the declaration, their main goal was freedom.

After signing the declaration of independence in 1776, Americans had an identity crisis. The Articles of the Confederation formed the first written American Constitution that would be ratified in 1781. With this articles, states remain independent with their own particular political bodies. Furthermore, the Constitution reinforced the rights of the whites inhabitants, black were not taken into consideration. The power of the Congress was quite limited as it did not have the authority to impose their requirements to the states such as asking them for money.

To sum up, once Americans had reached the independence from the European empires, they felt a bit lost as they did not belong to any country. For this reason, they decided to create the Constitution that together with the Declaration of Independence provided them of a new identity. Therefore, we can see that Americans needed to believe in something so as to create a new identity and, in that way, progress economically and politically.

3.6 Rise of the Abolition Movement, the Manifest Destiny and the Civil War

The living conditions under slaves lived went beyond morality and slaves were starting to fight for their rights. By that time, there were many revolts; however, very few successes. Slaves were not organized and either had appropriate weapons, they were small groups uprising without any profitable results.

There were several internal problems among the new states. There was a great division between the North and the South due to slavery. As a result of this division, the North and the South had different Governments with two different presidents. But, before explaining the division of the country, we are going to focus on what happened

due to the extremely and immoral laws the Government of the South decided to impose to the slaves of that area.

As it was said previously, slavery was not so spread in the Northern because the economy was not based on plantations and some slaves had reached freedom. Still, a big part of the population was African-slaves. Nonetheless, these free blacks fought for slaves' rights. An illustration of this, is Frederick Douglas' story who became a social reformer. Free blacks had started to helping fugitive slaves that escaped out from the South. Therefore, we could say that the American Dream for blacks was the North, to be able to reach the North in order to be free men with the same rights as whites.

These series of revolts ended up in the riot of the slaves with the consequent *abolition movement* from the 1830s to the 1860s. This movement had more supporters in the Northern of United States rather than in the South. One of the most known revolts that terrified slaveholders was the one led by Nat Turner. This revolt was in Southampton County, Virginia, in August 1831 and slaves killed over 60 whites in just two days. However, they were defeated with the arrival of the American militia. Moreover, the slave codes were reinforced, and repression increased even more and slaves were totally deprived from their limited liberties.

Since, in the South, the oppressive laws had been reinforced to put an end to the revolts carried out by African slaves, the situation had become unstable. These policies carried out by the Government of the South would only fan the flames of their desire of changing the social situation of that moment. Therefore, this situation allowed African slaves to gather and upraise. As we will see later, slavery was the key point that would cause the American Civil War in 1861 to 1865.

The Abolition Movement was a movement to prohibit slavery in America that gained strength mainly in the Northern of the country but also in the South. Moreover, there were two groups within the Northerner abolitionists. One group was formed by those who believed that slavery was a sin and so God would punish them for that cruel attitude. On the contrary, others defended a non-religious argument against slavery. They saw slavery as an immoral, depraved and humiliating attitude towards the human being and without profitable results. These abolitionists believed in a different dream,

the dream of liberty for everyone, regardless the race. This idea was not shared by slaveholders, who believed in the economical progress of the United States that was based on slavery.

This movement was led by free blacks of the North such as Frederick Douglass and white supporters such as William Lloyd Garrison and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Lloyd was the founder of the radical newspaper *The Liberator* which appealed for liberty for all men, whites and blacks. Beecher published an antislavery novel named *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 that became a bestseller. Free blacks and antislavery Northerners had started to be organized and, in that way, helping slaves that had escaped from the plantations of the South to the North through a safe network of houses during the 1780s. This practice would be called later the Underground Railroad and, although the exact number is unknown, it is believed that from 40.000 to 100.000 slaves finally reached freedom. This practice gave rise to increasingly Abolitionist feelings in the North whereas pro-slavery owners of the South saw the triumph of the Underground Railroad as a determinant attitude of Northerners to defeat the economical system that sustained them.

As a consequence of this tense situation, the country was divided into The Union and the Confederate States of America. The Union claimed for the abolition of slavery, whereas the South wanted to maintain it. The former consisted of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Kansas, California, Nevada, and Oregon. The latter was formed by eleven states that decided to separate from the North with the ascent of Abraham Lincoln to the power in 1860. These states were: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas.

In 1861, The Confederate States of America was the government of the South founded once the South secedes from the North, giving place to the outbreak of the Civil War. In 1863, Lincoln announces the Emancipation Proclamation of slaves in the Northern and advice to the confederate states to do the same by appealing 'that all persons held as slaves in the confederate states are, and henceforward shall be free'.

In 1863, the sixteenth American President Lincoln, advised by his party, had issued the Emancipation Proclamation declaring: ‘all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free’. However, the Emancipation Proclamation did not put an end to slavery in the nation. Abraham Lincoln pointed out that this Proclamation ‘should have to be followed by a constitutional amendment in order to guarantee the abolishment of slavery’ (13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Abolition of Slavery in 1865).

In 1865, the abolition of slavery took place through the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. ‘Abraham Lincoln approved the Joint Resolution of Congress submitting proposed amendment to the state legislatures’. The 13th amendment to the United States explains that “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction (13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Abolition of Slavery in 1865).

Thanks to the 13th and 14th amendments, the United States reached a final constitutional solution for the cruel issue of slavery. Moreover, the United States not only ended with slavery but also expanded the civil right of all Americans, whites and blacks. Therefore, we could say that Americans were a step closer to get, the so valued, American Dream, by recognizing that all Americans were equal. Lincoln would be assassinated after the end of the civil war in 1865.

3.7 The West Expansion

The victory of the War of Independence reaffirms their spirit of nationalism and they demanded more land. The Westward expansion was seen as something normal, they not only could, but also had the divine right to do it and nobody could preclude it.

In 1803, following with the American Dream of progress, the President Thomas Jefferson bought the territory of Louisiana to France for 15 millions of dollars. Louisiana was a key purchase for the Westward expansion as it includes all territories

up to the Rocky Mountains and from New Orleans to Canada. Therefore, this purchase doubled the size of the United States.

To accomplish their dream of creating their own identity, they made use of the later-named *Manifest Destiny*, that was first used in an article published by John O'Sullivan, an American newspaper editor, in 1845. Hence, he was the first person who coined the term. This idea was used as: 'A term for the attitude prevalent during the 19th century period of American expansion that the United States not only could, but was destined to, stretch from coast to coast' (The History Channel, 2014). Columbus' and Puritans' assumptions were added to it as arguments that supported their intentions of conquering the West of the United States.

Later, in the Manifest Destiny it was written that American settlers were destined to stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific, to continue with the progress of liberty, providing them economical opportunities as individuals. According to the historian Frederick Merk a truly supporter of The Manifest Destiny, he believed that The Manifest Destiny was a sort of divine mission to recreate the Old World obliterating the mistakes of the past so as to build a new heaven. As always the coin has two sides and there are historians in favour, others against it. Nonetheless, it was an ideology that encouraged American settlers to keep conquering without any regret as it was divinely ordered.

The efforts of the South to add more territories to its own territories provoked an armed conflict between the South of the United States and the nation of Mexico, called Mexican-American War or War of the United States against Mexico that went from 1846 to 1848. Before the war, the area of Mexico comprised Texas, Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, California, and a small part of Colorado. The aftermaths of the war were the loss of most of the territories by Mexico and the victory of the United States that incorporated new territories. Later on, the United States purchased California for 15 millions of dollars to Mexico. The new shifting of territories carried a migration process within the country from the West to the South.

This migration increased even more when gold was colonization of California by 1848; a greater number of inhabitants from the East decided to cross the frontier and

migrate to the West. As it was commented on the first pages of the paper, gold has always been a predominant factor for adventurous explorers to decide to travel to new undiscovered lands. And of course, Americans, as part of their American Dream of economical progress, valued the expansion as a way of enrich themselves.

The following piece of text is a letter wrote by William E. Channing¹⁰ to Henry Clay¹¹ in 1837, in which is evident the support towards the Manifest Destiny ideal:

"Texas has been absorbed into the Union in the inevitable fulfilment of the general law which is rolling our population Westward.... It was disintegrated from Mexico in the natural course of events, by a process perfectly legitimate on its own part, blameless on ours.... (its) incorporation into the Union was not only inevitable, but the most natural, right and proper thing in the world.... California will, probably, next fall away from...Mexico.... Imbecile and distracted, Mexico never can exert any real governmental authority over such a country.... The Anglo-Saxon foot is already on its borders. Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon it armed with the plow and the rifle, and markings its trail with schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meeting houses. A population will soon be in actual occupation of California, over which it will be idle for Mexico to dream of dominion... All this without agency of our government, without responsibility of our people- -in natural flow of events, the spontaneous working of principles, and the adaptation of the tendencies and wants of the human race to the elemental circumstances in the midst of which they find themselves placed." (Blum, 1985: 277)

As we can see in this letter, Americans had the belief that the west of the country also belonged to them, and that no one could face them, as they had the divine right to conquer it. In other words, it is clearly noted how they manipulated the original ideals of the first settlers into what they wanted to make society believed that they were destined to it, and thus they would join the cause. They made use of a religious argument to support their no so honourable planes. We have to emphasize that the original concept of the America Dream was pretty different to what had become in that moment.

¹⁰ William E. Channing was one of the most relevant transcendentalist in the United States as he was a Unitarian minister in the early 19th century.

¹¹ Henry Clay, an American Senator and orator, was called the "Great Pacificator" or the "Great Compromiser" since he firmly opposed to the Mexican-American war and to the Manifest Destiny's westward expansion, which made him lose the elections to President of the United States.

3.8 The Civil war

The hostility between northerners and southerners had reached its peak and a year later after the secession of South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas from The Union in 1860, The Confederate States opened fire in South Carolina; the Civil War had started.

The main goal of Abraham Lincoln, president of the Northern colonies, was to keep the United States as a whole nation. Therefore, he desired to achieve one of the main points of the American Dream, to be a unified country. While, the Confederate States of America fought for maintaining this division. This war had its bases on political, economical and social reasons; however, one of the most important motives that led to this war was slavery.

As it was previously said, blacks in the north had been granted the emancipation and in the 1865 they became free men and women. Meanwhile, in the south, the colonies refused to give blacks freedom thus they continued being slaves. Finally, the civil war ended up with the victory of The Union in 1865, after four years of a fateful war. The costs of the war were tremendous, not only because it was the war that brought more American deaths than any other, but also because billions of dollars were spent in it. The civil war meant the end of slavery and gradually, in the southern colonies, blacks became free men and women. Despite the abolition of slavery, in the southern states there were still slaveholders that had slaves in their plantations.

In conclusion, what we have found after looking back at the American history is that to support their own progress not only economic and political but also social, the Americans have manipulated the vague concept of American Dream serving their own purpose. One of the bases of the American Dream is equality as Puritans had in mind to create an equal society in the new country. Nonetheless, they wanted to create their own identity, but they excluded others, such as Afro-Americans and Native Americans: they created a constitution to determine their identity and reinforce the right of whites, but not of the rest. The belief of *equality* was never *equally* applied to everyone. It is necessary to wait until the Civil war to see the first laws in favour of black rights.

As it was commented before, in history, there were and there will always be economic interests. We truly believe that what is behind that tedious concept is the economic factor. As explained above, money is the driving force of everything and Americans' main goal was to enrich themselves, and to that purpose, they used the ideology of the American Dream. To sum up, economical progress prioritized upon equality. We are not asserting that the American Dream is a failure; we recognize that it is a way to make people believe in themselves, but a dangerous weapon as well.

4. THE AMERICAN DREAM FROM A LITERARY PERSPECTIVE

Moving now onto a different approach, we are going to focus on how the American Dream is represented in the American literature by reviewing a very important novel: *The Great Gatsby* authored by F. Scott Fitzgerald. His life and writings are a lively, tragic example of the both sides of the American Dream: the young dreamer man who struggles for success and, eventually, after many years, achieves fame and recognition, and also, the excesses and problems of living in the Jazz Age based on materialism and consumerism, that normally led to a tragic end, in the case of Fitzgerald, that way of life led him to alcoholism. Still, there are a large amount of novels written by American authors of different historical periods demystifying the American Dream concept; novels such as *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison or *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller. Barack Obama in his novel, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, advocates for recovering the original values of the American.

4.1 The Roaring Twenties

The great *Gatsby* was written by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925 during the Modernist Period which had started a few years before and the optimism and vitality of America reached its peak in this time. Moreover, it is the time of Jazz Music, glamour and gangsters, luxury was available nationwide and opportunities were breathed in the air. American modern life seemed radically different from traditional life, it was more scientific, faster, more technological, and more mechanized; Americans finally had the

possibility of enjoying their long-awaited material prosperity. This historical period of economic progress would be later called the Roaring Twenties.

By that time, the United States was the only superpower in the world; it experienced a great economic progress thanks to the overwhelming evolution of Wall Street. This progress would be afterwards hindered by the Great Depression in 1929, when the United States sunk into a great crisis that would destabilize the American society of that time and consequently, the principles of the American Dream. But before and even after the Crash, many authors, not only American but also from different countries, have exalted the ideas of the American Dream in their writings. They saw themselves unstoppable, powerful, with the world in their hands, as they had become the most important and respected nation; those ideas were also reflected in the American literature. However, the coin always has two sides and there were other authors that were against these ideas, and opted for ridiculing and satirizing that society, depicting another very different reality: a blind faith in materialism and consumerism as the bases of a new society. Their novels were a critique to what they have become, losing their original values and replacing them for money.

Further, the reality of the 1920's was a very different one, over a 60% of Americans could not enjoy this decade of luxury as they were living just below the poverty line; minorities such as African-American, women and farmers were included in this percentage. This makes us wonder the effectiveness of the American Dream. However, this way of perceiving the reality was not shared by most of the authors of that time.

4.2 The Great Gatsby

Going back to Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby* is located in New York and in Long Island, the East coast, during the summer of 1925. This masterpiece revolves around the fictional, main character Jay Gatsby, who represents the new rich people of the west, while Tom Buchanan, an extremely rich man, represents the traditional aristocracy from the east. As opposition to these characters is Nick Carraway, a moral man that belongs to the middle class and who attempts to understand this upper class

that spends money just for fun. F. Scott Fitzgerald shows how Americans have replaced the original ideals of American Dream by materialism; a decay of social and moral values including a loss of humanity.

Jay Gatsby is depicted from the first chapter as an enigmatic, interesting, powerful thirty-year-old man. Gatsby causes a great impact and curiosity on the reader, as very little is known about this cryptic character, only the ludicrous rumours that Nick Carraway, the novel narrator, has listened to reliable people, or maybe not so, about him. Fitzgerald does want to cause this impact on the reader, and he does by not providing the necessary information at the beginning of the novel, which begins with Nick recalling a piece of advice that his father gave him when a child: 'Whenever you feel like criticizing any one (...) just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had' (2012: 3). With this first sentence, Fitzgerald is breaking with one of the bases of the American Dream: America is a land of opportunities for everyone.

The very first time Nick sees Gatsby is when Gatsby is in his jetty and he is trying to catch something from the distance, a green light. The green light of the lighthouse is the leitmotif of the novel, as it represents Gatsby's hopes and dreams- to be with Daisy again. One of the flashbacks of the novel reveals that 5 years earlier, Gatsby, a dreamer, ambitious, seventeen-year-old boy, met Daisy, a young girl of wealthy family, and that they immediately fell in love. Nonetheless, they could not be together as Gatsby was not rich. Now, 5 years later, when Gatsby is mysteriously rich enough, struggles to be with her again; however, she is Tom's wife now, a very recognized, wealthy ex-football player. The figure of Gatsby is surrounded by a series of non-reliable rumours that he himself had handled to spread, in order nobody to discover the origins of his fortune, and in conclusion, of his persona.

As the novel progresses, we can see that the possibility of repeating the past theme is a very recurrent one that reaches its peak when Gatsby and Nick are talking about all the things Gatsby has done so as to be good enough to recover Daisy. Nick says:

"You can't repeat the past"

"Can't repeat the past?" Gatsby cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!" he looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand. "I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before," he said, nodding determinedly. "She'll see."

(Fitzgerald, 2012: 118)

Gatsby, as we have seen, is a naïve character that still thinks he can be with Daisy as they were five years ago; however, he can only recall old memories, he is hooked to the past and does not understand that people change as the world does. Even though, he did his best to change his identity, he was still the same ambitious seventeen-year-old guy who only dreamed with a better future full of opportunities. Gatsby looked for wealth since childhood and he saw Daisy as an object of wealth and property, perhaps even not aware of it. As the novel progresses, Fitzgerald figures out the mystery past of Gatsby, Jay Gatsby is not his real name, his name is James Gatz, and he became rich by joining the mafia, not through hard work as he pretended. This fact shows the decline of the American Dream in the figure of Jay Gatsby as Americans had lost their humanity. The novel depicts a blind faith in the American Dream as Nick had in Gatsby, without rationally questioning whether is true or not what they have been told.

In the last lines of the novel, Nick ends up by returning to the most important theme of the novel, the possibility of changing the past represented by the green light of the lighthouse. Fitzgerald uses this simile to demonstrate that the green light is an intangible material that cannot be caught in the same way as the past cannot be captured. In other words, the struggles of the human beings to achieve their goals by recreating the past, prevent them from moving forward into the future. Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean point out in their book the following: "Fitzgerald is aware of both the power of American dreams and the problems of seeking them out in lived experience" (2012: 28).

"Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther.... And one fine morning—So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past"

(Fitzgerald, 2012: 193).

Fitzgerald's message in this novel is that modern values have destroyed the pure concept that the American Dream was long time ago. There is a feeling of hopelessness when Gatsby realizes that he cannot repeat the past as Gatsby notices for the very first time, even though he had seen her before, the presence of Daisy's daughter, crashing all his hopes. However, Fitzgerald intentionally leaves the door open to hope ("tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning—So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past") (Fitzgerald 1912: 193); Nick deeply believes that sooner or later the American Dream will be achieved, it is just a matter of time.

In conclusion, the main ideals we can see represented in the novel are: the firm belief in American endless progress, the possibility of self-creation, and the ultimate success through hard work. These ideals are played out in the figure of Jay Gatsby who truly believed that he had reinvented himself. He represents the innocence of the American Dream: equal justice for everyone, no boundaries, possibility of recovering the past, the ability of reinventing oneself. In other words, Fitzgerald is making a parallelism between American culture and Gatsby: America is supposed to be reinventing itself through the effort of the first settlers that arrived to the United States.

However, before the arrival of those Puritans, the United States needed a history of their own, in a certain way, we could understand that Americans would have faked their history so as to become into what they desired to be; consequently, they would have created their own identity upon nothing really consistent. Similarly, Gatsby faked his own identity as he had not identity, or at least, it was not good enough to ascend within the social scale; hence, he reinvented himself changing his name, breaking with his past, and creating a new identity. However, in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald ends up showing the attainability of the American Dream as Gatsby cannot achieve his main goal- to recover Daisy. In other words, it is not possible recovering the lost origins, nor going back to the beginning. In sum up, this novel is the representation of the dehumanized American society of that time and the disillusionment of the dramatic splendor of the Jazz Age.

5. THE AMERICAN DREAM FROM A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Moving now onto the last approach, we are going to analyse the American Dream from a political approach. It is necessary to briefly focus on some American Presidents and politicians before focusing to the current President of the United States, Barack Obama. After reviewing what Obama has done during his almost 6 years in the presidency, we will determine whether he is a good illustration of the original concept of the American Dream or, in contrast, his profile is closer to the one we have seen in Jay Gatsby.

Throughout the American history there have been forty four Presidents in the Government of the United States. The first President was George Washington in the 18th century followed by John Adams, both considered two of the Founding Fathers above mentioned. They were the first political leaders in writing the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the ideas of the American Dream. It is necessary to say that since George Washington made use of the ideals of the American Dream in his speeches, subsequently every president of the United States has followed that philosophy, by clamming that America is the land of freedom, equality, and possibilities to prosper through hard work and perseverance, rather than by the social class or birthplace.

Abraham Lincoln, a frontier man, formed the Republican Party within The Union. This party became a strong national organization. As it was mentioned before, when he became President of the United States and following the principles of the Declaration of Independence, he granted freedom to the Northern slaves. Always trying to achieve the American Dream, he did not doubt to use the force in order to defend the confederacy, triggering the American Civil War. All his efforts to unify a divided nation make him a fundamental pillar of the United States.

We will move on to the next American President, John F. Kennedy, who made an extensive use of the concept of the American Dream to lead his nation. Kennedy had fulfilled enormous achievements such as the biggest economical progress since the World War II and planned to take measures to reduce poverty and privatization; however, he was killed before he could implement the necessary policies. Furthermore,

Kennedy is a very important figure in the history of America as he called a new civil rights legislation so as to refresh what, by then, was already obsolete.

Moreover, this President is a very representative figure of the modern American Dream as he attempted to accomplish those ideals by promoting equality among American society regardless race and birthplace. John F. Kennedy advocated for recovering the original meaning of the American Dream- same opportunities and justice for everyone- due to the high discrimination rates against minorities in that time.

Therefore, the presence of the American Dream is constant in every speech given since George Washington gave his. In relation to the black citizens, even though blacks were free since Lincoln signed the 13th and 14th amendments, as we have already seen, the racial discrimination was very deep in the American roots and it was greatly increasing. This is why Martin Luther King is a very important figure of the American culture as he was one of the many that claimed for black rights, and also, for minorities'.

5.1 Martin Luther King

Before going any further, it is necessary to talk about Martin Luther King, a benchmark in the history of America. He was an American pastor that became a totally involved activist, humanitarian and leader of several protests against racial discrimination and society segregation. He would afterwards be assassinated when going to lead a protest in 1968.

Martin Luther King also struggled in a different but pacifist way to recover the old ideals of the Puritans. His most famous speech, and also, considered one of the best speeches ever given, titled 'I have a Dream', inspired the whole nation, marking a before and an after in the American history. This speech was given from Abraham Lincoln's memorial, which clearly reflects how patriotic Americans are. In that moment, the whole nation was petrified waiting for the speech.

The speech can be divided into two parts. In the first one, Luther King portrays racial discrimination that had been occurring since the arrival of the first African slaves to the country; despite it was written in the Declaration of Independence and in the

Constitution that all men were created equal. This speech is a call of attention to the American society as it was the right moment to change their attitude towards Afro-Americans. This can be appreciated in the following fragment:

“When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked insufficient funds.” (Martin Luther King, 1963).

The most famous part of the speech is found in the second half, when Martin Luther King made a big impact on the audience by repeating the words “I have a dream” at the beginning of several phrases. That way, Luther King wanted to emphasize that he truly believed that the original concept of the American Dream could be achieved if they changed.

In conclusion, Martin Luther King claims for justice and freedom in the whole nation and for all inhabitants, and finishes the sermon encouraging them not to give up when achieving their dreams: “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.” (Luther King, 1963).

5.2 Barack Obama

In the 1960s it was unimaginable that a black man could be elected President of the United States. Nonetheless, in the presidential elections on 4 November 2008, Barack Hussein Obama eventually became the first Afro-American President in the history of the United States of America. He was elected President with the Democratic party and after leaving his only eight-year post of senator in Illinois. When Obama stood as a candidate to the presidency by the Democratic Party in 2007, many saw in him the new Martin Luther King as they shared many similarities: both were Afro-Americans and they inspired, with their brilliant oratories and their proximity to the

masses, not only the American society but also the whole world. Son of Kenyan father, a self-made man, a brilliant mind, and educated in the best Universities of the United States, Obama was seen as a kind of saviour by millions of Americans and meant a new hope for minorities such as: Asians, Latinos, and Africans; that saw a new change, the American Dream would rise up again with his famous affirmation: ‘Yes, we can’.

Barack Obama in his presidential acceptance discourse based his speech ‘Yes, we can’ on the ‘I have a Dream’ of Martin Luther King, recovering the dreams of King. All presidents have portrayed America as the best country in the world and with the right to continue progressing economically and geographically. However, Obama claimed for the values of the past:

“This is our chance to answer that call. This is our moment. This is our time – to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American Dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth – that out of many, we are one; that while we breathe, we hope, and where we are met with cynicism, and doubt, and those who tell us that we can’t, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes We Can. Thank you, God bless you, and may God Bless the United States of America.” (Obama, 2008).

Many were who praised Obama before becoming President, saying that he was a very intellectual man of modern ideals and with faith to change the American society. Now, the feedbacks given about him have turned into more negative critics, and Obama’s optimistic words that breathed life into the nation have been disappearing over his almost 6 years as President due to the economical and financial world crisis, and the endless Iraq and Afghanistan wars that shook his term office. Also, he is receiving bad critics because, according to what many economists, politicians and intellectuals say, he is not leading well the Government due to his limited experience. Obama is usually depicted as a scholar that enjoys listening and learning but also as a cold, arrogant person, with good qualities to be a scholar but not to be a President. As always the coin has two sides and there are supporters and opponents. The fact is that the number of opponents increases every single day.

Obama was aware of the impossibility of reaching the American Dream as it is focused on the past, and he claimed that the nation had to look at the future if they

wanted to prosper. For that reason, Obama presented a series of different goals that will be discussed later. With his ascend to the presidency, many saw that equality would be finally established in the American society; however, racial discrimination has not decreased, an illustration of this, is the increased opposition from the Tea Party Movement¹² since Obama arrived to the White House.

As the authors Campbell and Kean say: “The presidential discourse of America is a tried and tested mythological system that attempts to speak of renewal and invoke new beginnings as an appeal that harmonizes with the world, not as it is, but as it want to create itself” (Campbell and Kean, 2012: 35). An illustration of this, it is the following fragment of George W. Bush’s discourse:

“The story of America is the story of expanding liberty: an ever-widening circle, constantly growing to reach further and include more... In our world, and here at home, we will extend the frontiers of freedom... like generations before us, we have a calling from beyond the stars to stand for freedom. This is the everlasting dream of America and tonight, in this place, that dream is renewed” (Bush, 2004).

5.3 Barack Obama’s policies

Furthermore, Obama inherited from his predecessor George W. Bush the worst crisis since the Wall Street Crash in 1929. As a result, he has had to overcome many difficulties. Even though Obama attempted to do several but necessary reforms in the American system, he has not succeeded. Obama tried to change the health system and transform it into a public one, this reform was precluded as it is not possible because of the social and economical structures of the United States.

The other challenge Obama had to face was a very deep reform of the banking system. He took very unpopular measures to save the world from the enormous crisis, since according to many economists; the world was on the brink of meltdown. Obama was concerned with employment as one of the main solutions to overcome this crisis,

¹² *Tea Party Movement* is an American political movement very conservative that struggles for a policy economically conservative based on the Originalism, the recovering of the ideals written in the American Constitution.

and he has approved several policies to promote employment and, that way, gradually reduce the so high unemployment rate.

Another of his goals, which he presented when he was a candidate to the presidency, was to withdraw troops and not participate in armed conflicts. In contrast to this, he increased the number of soldiers on the front line. It is remarkable to say that when he was a candidate to the presidency he based his speeches on 'anti-war arguments'. Not only that, the assassination of the most wanted person in the world, Osama bin Laden, took place during Obama's reign. What is very paradoxical is that Obama, after a year as President and with his participation in those wars, was granted the Nobel Prize.

In response to the main question of this paper, if Obama was the starting point of a new reachable dream or just the remains of that dream, we have to say that Barack Obama, during his presidency, has attempted to orient the American society towards more human values rejecting the pursuit of material goods and comfort, and also, he has promoted policies to give the same rights to the minorities of the country in order everyone to have the same opportunities. Nonetheless, we refuse the idea of Obama as a new precursor to accomplish the American Dream of nowadays, a more human one, as this vague American Dream just covers the principles of democracy, and all countries with this political system seek to fulfil those ideals of equality for everyone, great rates of employment and education, economical and social progress.

Barack Obama has got to carry out significant reforms such as the health one or increase taxes to upper classes among others within the United States, a country which is particularly individual; as a consequence, he has lost part of his so commented popularity. Still, he continues being a model of a great change that is taking place nowadays in the American society. This can be seen at Universities, now they accepted a wider range of black students than 6 years ago, and also, at companies, schools, etc. Minorities such as Asian-American, African-American and Latinos are making them heard and being accepted in the American society, and they have got power to take decisions and participated in a culture of which they are part.

In conclusion, Obama as the president of the United States is responsible for leading the nation the best he can. He has become the symbol of future for minorities as they see in him the fulfil of the American Dream and this motivates them to pursuit it as well. Those who were set out of society for their race or family cast, now believe in same opportunities regardless race, and dream with a better future. However, this does not mean that Obama has got the American Dream since he has had opportunities that others did not have. He had the chance to attend to very good schools and universities receiving an excellent education. We admit that Obama has had to struggle to become President of the United States but he did not start from the same point as others.

5.4 Questioning the land of possibilities

The study carried out by Miles Corak, American Professor of Economics, revealed that the United States was one of the countries with more difficulty to ascend economically or socially behind Peru and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, a very recognized American economist called Jason Long stated that all Americans still believe that the United States has exceptional mobility, which is completely false. In other words, it is believed that any American citizen can easily ascend within the social stratum. Long called "vexing" that "lots of people could be systematically mistaken about verifiable, factual information." (Hargreaves, 2013). This idea of the United States' great mobility comes from the nineteenth and twentieth century when the country experienced great economical progress together with a bigger mobility.

Nonetheless, economists from different countries are not totally aware of why some countries have more mobility than others; however, some similarities have been observed, such as: 1). More inequality today. In other words, while bigger inequality, the more possibilities of a child to stay in the same social class, and the United States is a country with a great inequality among social stratum. 2). Social policies approved and applied by the Governments. Countries in which rich people assume greater taxes than poor people usually experiments a greater mobility. 3) Families and education. having a stable home life together with a good education are crucial in order to get a good job and ascend within the social stratum, and the United States increasingly has great rates of divorce and single-parent homes than many other countries.

To sum up, Corak's study determined that the United States does not have great mobility in comparison with most of the developed countries. Therefore, the idea of the United States as a land full of opportunities is not true and one needs something more than hard work to ascend within the social stratum. Americans believe in an elusive concept that it is not true. The American Dream concept covers many ideals, but the idea of ascending within the social classes through hard work, up to now, is not as common as Americans believe.

3. CONCLUSION

The American Dream could be depicted as the beam that has guided Americans throughout their history, the leitmotiv of American writers who depict the hope and disappointment of this elusive ideal in their novels, the topic idea of American presidents, as we have seen here represented by the brief history of America's growth, F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel and President Barack Obama. Further, Barack Obama was both in the United States and in the rest of the world the projection of the dreams, hopes, desires of many for having a better and a more just world.

The firm belief that Americans have had in the American Dream during the whole history of the United States, and how they have promoted it indoors and even outdoors is very startling, as it has always been manipulated for economical and political reasons, and even the Puritans made the same mistakes they declared to reject from the European empires. As Martin Luther King said in one of his speeches: '(...) Americans have processed very well the principles of democracy and established the democracy as a political system, [However] they have practised the antithesis to the principles of equality and freedom established by the Founding Fathers in both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, which is a paradox founded on the main principle of the American Dream', [that all men are created equal] (Luther King, 1963). The paradox is that the American Dream has its bases in moral principles or inalienable rights- the right to happiness, freedom, life, and the capacity of achievement according to his or her ability, not to his or her background- and Puritans already unfulfilled these inalienable rights by introducing slavery in the country.

In conclusion, the American Dream is an elusive, vague concept that has been used to unified a separate population and to encourage them to keep working so that the United States could become the most powerful nation in the world. However, nowadays many are not allowed to pursuit their goals, and even though with Obama as the head of the country, many changes have taken place thanks to the policies promoted by him; still, there is a long way to go. The American Dream as ideology is truly effective, as the American population believe that America is the land of opportunities for everyone and although reality shows the real facts, people need ideals to continue living and believing in their own destiny.

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