

**Bc. Kristýna Bularzová**  
**Black American Dream as a Clash of Principles: Black Representations of the American Dream**  
**MA Thesis**  
**Opponent's Report**

Departing from the argument that the American Dream has not been accessible to "all Americans regardless of their economic, social, or ethnic background" (8), the thesis focuses on the Dream's inaccessibility specifically to Black Americans. Although this is an excellent objective, the way in which the thesis aims to achieve it is sometimes confusing. There are clear sections, but to begin with what is difficult to understand. First, the thesis refers not only to the American Dream but also to what it calls "the Black American dream," defining it in the Introduction as "built on racial discrimination and inequality, which is an inherent part of the concept as implied already in the Declaration of Independence, followed by a number of African American intellectuals from the 18th century and onwards who called for the fulfilment of the Dream's promise and potential" (8). What, then, does "the Black American dream" mean here? A critique of the American Dream as inaccessible to Black Americans due to their suffering from ongoing racial discrimination and inequality, or a critique of the American Dream as a concept that may appeal to white people but not to Black Americans? It becomes clearer on page 45 but still, could the defense elaborate on the evolving subject of "the Black American dream" and its difference from the American Dream?

The second related issue concerns the link of (the origins of) the American Dream specifically (and more or less solely) to the *Declaration of Independence* and the view of Thomas Jefferson "as a representative of the Founding Fathers and their ideas of the Black people and slavery" (8-9). Why Jefferson? Despite a remark concerning Jefferson's ambivalence, the thesis presents him negatively and underscores his racism. There is no mention of his ideas about economic equality, his dissociation of voting rights from property (which went beyond the *Declaration's* substitution of "property" with "the pursuit of happiness") or his defense of religious freedom. When Jefferson's letter to Benjamin Banneker is cited, it is dismissed as a diplomatic gesture. This is not to deny the problematic aspects of Jefferson's life and thought but to suggest a more contradictory picture. But, leaving Jefferson aside, why the *Declaration of Independence* as a representation of the American Dream? A foundational political document undeniably—and the debates that have surrounded it, including the here-cited criticism of Lemuel Haynes, "Vox Africanorum" and Banneker, are significant—but in what other ways has the American Dream been formulated? And does the thesis consider the American Dream something positive? It seems so, if linked to equality, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but has the *Declaration of Independence* always been the touchstone? (Speaking of that, the question of what is "representative" appears relevant for the entire thesis: the subchapter 2.2 claims "to present an overview of the African American intellectual scene and the seeming evolution in their perception of the Black American dream across the American history" [23]; Frederick Douglass is presented as "a representative of the 19th-century African American intellectual tradition and the struggles faced by African Americans at the time" [41], W. E. B. Du Bois as "[a] representative of the turn of the century" [44], etc. But even the choice of Langston Hughes, Margaret Walker, Amiri Baraka and Lucille Clifton to illustrate "the representations of the concept of the American dream in Black American poetry" [5] is in my view idiosyncratic. All this is to recommend perhaps less generalizing or more contextualizing the selections.)

The subchapter on poetry is unfortunately short when compared to the preceding sections; there is also introductory material for example about the Harlem Renaissance, and the poems by Hughes, Walker, Baraka and Clifton are treated briefly. Together, they offer a new angle on the topic. Although one may ask why the thesis switches to poetry rather than continuing to work with more contemporary political theory, this seems to me like the most interesting part, worth elaborating, particularly because each of the poets created a complex, developing body of work which the thesis does not reflect. Some ideas here could be clarified too; for example, in the context of the discussion of "I, Too," it is argued: "Expanding on Du Bois' theory, it is only when the Black people in America are allowed to accept their inherent duality and embrace it fully, that the Black community can achieve an equal chance to live their American dream" (62). Was the notion of double consciousness, as presented by Du Bois, something to *embrace*? Wasn't it rather a problem, a psychic rupture emergent due to Black people's oppression in a white-dominated society? This is not to argue against double cultural belonging and hybridity, for example, but is not double consciousness (as theorized by Du Bois) different?

Although my overall impression is that the thesis attempts to cover too much, and that clarifying and developing many parts would improve it, it engages with a significant number of sources and meaningfully contributes to ongoing debates, despite the difficult circumstances in which it was finalized. I recommend it for defense, which I hope will clarify these issues, and suggest a preliminary grade "velmi dobře" (2).