



FACULTY OF ARTS Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's Report

Black American Dream as a Clash of Principles: Black Representations of the American Dream

MA thesis by Bc. Kristýna Bularzová

The thesis examines the paradoxical nature of the concept of the American Dream as perceived by selected major Black American authors from the Early Republic until the second half of the 20th century. The first part of the thesis (Chapters 2.1 and 2.2) focuses on the importance of the Declaration of Independence and the role of Thomas Jefferson in the foundation of the cultural concept of the American Dream, pointing out the problems and paradoxes present already at the roots of this concept, which is seen as crucial for the American democracy and identity, yet has remained out of reach for the Black American population. This is demonstrated in the sections examining the reflections of African American thinkers across history, from Jefferson's contemporaries (Lemuel Haynes, "Vox Africanorum," Benjamin Banneker), who reacted directly to the wording of the Declaration of Independence, through major 19th- and early 20th-century activists (Frederic Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois) to the key figures of the Civil Rights Movement (Martin Luther King, James Baldwin, Jr.).

The second part (Chapter 2.3) then offers a reading of poems by a selection of 20th-century poets representing the "Renaissance" generation (Langston Hughes and Margaret Walker) and the Black Arts Movement generation (Amiri Baraka and Lucille Clifton). This part very interestingly shows the different facets the topic of (African American) dream acquired in the process of Black cultural and artistic emancipation, pointing out the essential invariability hidden under the superficial differences.

The original project underwent certain changes in the process of writing, namely that the parts that were supposed to provide the conceptual basis (Chapters 2.1 and 2.2) for the subsequent analysis of the poems grew larger than originally planned, leaving less space for the actual reading of the poetry (in Chapter 2.3) and changing the overall balance of the argument in favor of the discussion of earlier Black American thinkers rather than later Black American



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poets. This seems to be a pity, as the readings of the poems dealing with the motif of dream are genuinely interesting and would deserve more development and more authors could be covered to offer a richer picture.

The thesis is a result of diligent work into which Kristýna invested a lot of effort and has studied the very broad and complex topic in depth using an impressive number of sources. She worked independently but was open to advice and recommendations, to which she responded in an intelligent and creative way. She felt the importance of her chosen topic and, very importantly, she largely managed to keep her focus on the main and complex argument – the continuous importance of the paradoxical concept of the Black American dream in the works and minds of Black Americans – and demonstrated its varied yet ubiquitous presence throughout the history of American culture. I particularly appreciate her ability to see connections across different eras and different genres and to follow a difficult topic diachronically, pointing out its multifaceted yet unchanging nature.

I recommend the thesis for the defence and propose the grade of “velmi dobře”.

Prague, January 29, 2024

doc. PhDr. Mariana Machová, Ph.D.