UNIVERSITY OF PARDUBICE
FACULTY OF ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY

BACHELOR THESIS

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University of Pardubice

Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

The Depiction of American Pastoral according to Philip Roth

Bachelor Thesis

2023 Lucie Bucháčková

Univerzita Pardubice
Fakulta filozofická
Akademický rok: 2020/2021

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení:	**Lucie Bucháčková**
Osobní číslo:	**H19163**
Studijní program:	**B0231A090018 Anglický jazyk**
Specializace:	**Anglický jazyk pro odbornou praxi**
Téma práce:	**Americká idyla podle Philipa Rotha**
Zadávající katedra:	**Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky**

Zásady pro vypracování

Bakalářská práce se bude věnovat rozboru románu *American Pastoral* Philipa Rotha, konkrétně se zaměří na reflexi společensko-politicko-kulturních událostí a fenoménů 60. let a jejich dopadů na život amerického everymana.

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:
Rozsah grafických prací:
Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

Seznam doporučené literatury:

Taylor, Joseph E. "American Pastoral." Environmental History 12, no. 2 (2007): 378-80. Accessed March 16, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25473099.
Sigrist-Sutton, Clare. "Mistaking Merry: Tearing off the Veil in American Pastoral." Philip Roth Studies 6, no. 1 (2010): 47-68. Accessed March 16, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5703/philrothstud.6.1.47.
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SÝKORA, Michal: Když se nepředstavitelné stane skutečným. Rothovo Spiknutí proti Americe a román po 11. září 2001. [Též Philip Roth "Americká idyla".] Host, 23, 2007, č. 9, s. 76-80.

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Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **1. května 2021**
Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **2. května 2022**

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V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the supervisor of this bachelor thesis Mgr. Michal Kleprlík, Ph.D., for all the advice, guidance, and counseling that was provided to me. I would also like to thank my family and friends who supported me during the writing of this paper.

ANNOTATION

The bachelor thesis analyzes Philip Roth's novel *American Pastoral* and his portrayal of the American dream. It focuses on the reflection of the societal, political, and cultural events and phenomena of the 1960s in the United States and their impact on the American everyman depicted in Roth's book.

KEYWORDS

American Pastoral, Philip Roth, American dream, the 1960s

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce analyzuje román Philipa Rotha *Americká idyla* a jeho zobrazení amerického snu. Zaměřuje se na reflexi společenských, politických a kulturních událostí a fenoménů 60. let ve Spojených státech a jejich dopad na průměrného Američana, kterého Roth ve své knize zobrazuje.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Americká idyla, Philip Roth, americký sen, 60. léta 20. století

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INTRODUCTION

The American dream and pastorality have been omnipresent terms in the American psyche since the foundation of the United States of America. However, the dream has undergone many changes throughout the centuries. Some even argued that the American dream has died.

As a third-generation American, Roth was naturally interested in the dream's reinvention and depicted it in his novel *American Pastoral*. He scrutinizes the clash of the pastoral with its antithesis that was born in the turmoil of the 1960s. This thesis is trying to find the answer to the preservation of the American dream from the perspective of the novel's protagonist Seymour Levov.

The thesis is divided into two parts – theoretical and practical. The first three chapters are theoretical, and the remaining two contain an analysis of Roth's novel.

The first chapter deals with Philip Roth, his life, and his work. It focuses on Roth's work in the appropriate literary context and analyses the events that influenced Roth. As Roth's work is considered to be partly autobiographic, the chapter presents some of Roth's books with autobiographical elements together with Roth's own viewpoints. It contains a summary of the *American Pastoral* and further analysis of historical events that directly influenced this particular book.

A collocation *the turmoil of the 1960s* is used quite frequently in this thesis; therefore, the second chapter defines its meaning. It analyzes the public mood at the time and the changes American society had to undergo in the context of historical events. The focus is placed on the Vietnam war, a consequence of the fear of the spread of communism and the Cold War. The chapter discusses the stance of the general public that changed over the years and the war's impact on the Americans. The chapter then observes the Civil Rights Movement and its repercussions for Newark which plays a crucial role in Roth's book, and the Weathermen – a left-wing terrorist organization that has its roots in the Civil Rights Movement but resorts to violence in hopes of destroying American imperialism. Lastly, this chapter describes Jainism, a religion that opposes all forms of violence, that also appears in the *American Pastoral*.

The third chapter offers insight into the development of the American dream. It follows the dream's evolution from its roots dating back to the Declaration of Independence and westward expansion to its reinvention in the 1960s. The chapter then studies pastorality in American culture and its connection to the American dream.

The fourth chapter contains a description of Seymour Levov's American dream. It analyzes Seymour's relationship with America and his pursuit of becoming an American. The focus is placed on Seymour's assumptions about the dream and America itself.

In the last chapter, the shattered pastoral is thoroughly examined. The thesis focuses on Seymour's dream viewed in the historical context and compares it to Merry's dream, which was born in the turmoil of the 1960s. Merry functions as the antithesis of Seymour's dream, and the chapter tries to connect Merry's actions and stances with historical events.

1. PHILIP ROTH

Philip Roth is the author of many novels and stories and was awarded numerous awards e.g., the National Book Award, the National Book Critics' Circle Award, the PEN/Faulkner Award, or the Pulitzer Prize.[1]

1.1. Biography

Philip Milton Roth was born on March 19, 1933, in Newark, New Jersey. He was from a Jewish family. His father Herman Roth was a salesman for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company whose parents came to America from Austria-Hungary.[2] Roth grew up in a lower-middle-class neighborhood and experienced anti-Semitism from his early childhood.[3] He attended Weequahic High School from which he graduated in 1950 and then continued with his studies at Bucknell University and the University of Chicago.[4] After receiving his master's degree in English, Roth began writing his stories and published *Goodbye Columbus* in 1959.[5] At that time, he was already married to Margaret Martinson Williams, however, they separated after few years and his wife was later killed in a car accident.[6] Despite the marriage being unhappy, Martinson inspired Roth while writing several female characters.[7] Having Jewish ancestors from Europe, Roth became interested in the Czech-German writer Franz Kafka, and visited Prague for the first time in 1973 and returned there multiple times to meet with dissident writers.[8] Roth remarried in 1990 the actress Claire Bloom. The marriage lasted only until 1995, and after their divorce, Bloom published a memoir in which she shared details that were quite unflattering to Roth.[9] In 2012, Roth announced retiring from writing. In 2018, Roth died from congestive heart failure aged 85.[10]

[1] Timothy Parrish, *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.
[2] Martin Green, "Philip Roth," *Ploughshares* 4, no. 3 (1978): 158.
[3] "Philip Roth," Freedom From Religion Foundation, accessed March 19, 2023, https://ffrf.org/ftod-cr/item/32489-philip-roth.
[4] John King Roth, *American Diversity, American Identity: The Lives and Works of 145 Writers Who Define American Experience* (New York: Holt, 1995), 185, https://archive.org/details/americandiversit0000john/page/185/mode/2up.
[5] "Philip Roth."
[6] Roth, *American Diversity, American Identity*, 185.
[7] Freedom From Religion Foundation, "Philip Roth."
[8] Chris Johnstone, "Philip Roth's crusade to help Czechoslovak dissident writers under Communism," *Radio Prague International*, May 23, 2018.
[9] Freedom From Religion Foundation, "Philip Roth."
[10] "Philip Roth."

1.2. American-Jewish Literature

American-Jewish literature is closely connected with the experience of Jewish immigrants. It can be perceived as "both the product of and a reaction to American culture."[11] The frequently used themes include the immigrant life, pursuit of stability, alienation, assimilation, and Jewish tradition.[12]

In its beginnings in the early 20th century, it revolved mainly around trying to fit into America, the land of promise. In Abraham Cahan's novel *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), which is labeled the most important novel written by a Jewish immigrant, David Levinsky is thrilled to begin a new life in America:

> The United States lured me not merely as a land of milk and honey, but also, perhaps chiefly, as one of mystery, of fantastic experiences, of marvelous transformation. To leave my native place and to seek my fortune in that distant, weird world seemed to be just the kind of sensational adventure my heart was hankering for.[13]

Although Levinsky is successful, he feels alienated and feels like his life is meaningless. The early works also dealt with losing the connection to the Jewish heritage, including the Yiddish language. "To the traditional parent figure the loss of Yiddish was something to be mourned. Yiddish meant the home and family; English the streets of the New World."[14]

The experience of immigrants was later replaced by the experience of the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. The stories with immigrant survivors as the protagonists appeared in the 1950s to express post-war awareness. The United States was not seen only as a land of freedom but a place where the survivors could rebuild their lives and restore the Jewish tradition.

> The immigrant, whether or not he is a survivor, can be seen as the embodiment of the history and tradition of European Jew. The immigrant-survivor of the Holocaust is further imbued with the moral power and the will to preserve and transmit in the American Diaspora that Jewish heritage that was tragically destroyed in Europe.[15]

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[11] Alan L. Berger, "American Jewish Fiction," *Modern Judaism* 10, no. 3 (October 1990): 221.
[12] "Jewish American Literature," My Jewish Learning, accessed March 19, 2023, https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-american-literature/.
[13] Abraham Cahan, *The rise of David Levinsky* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 61, https://archive.org/details/lccn_060901233/page/60/mode/2up.
[14] Lewis Fried, Gene Brown, Jules Chametzky, and Louis Harap, *Handbook of American-Jewish Literature: An Analytical Guide to Topics, Themes, and Sources* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 16, https://archive.org/details/handbookofameric00frie/page/16/mode/2up.
[15] Dorothy S. Bilik, *Immigrant-Survivors: Post-Holocaust Consciousness in Recent Jewish American Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), 4, https://archive.org/details/immigrantsurvivo0000seid/page/4/mode/2up.

One of the authors writing about the Holocaust was Philip Roth's contemporary Saul Bellow, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1976.[16] In his famous novel *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), the protagonist Arthur Sammler who "embodies the century's intellectual history enriched by traditional thought -Western and Eastern, Christian and Jewish,"[17] is a Polish Holocaust survivor who deals with the feeling of alienation. Jewish writer Joseph Heller wrote a satire on war *Catch-22* (1961) using a different approach examining the absurdity of the war instead of depicting a Jewish survivor.

However, American-Jewish literature cannot be reduced to being written only about immigration and surviving the Nazi regime. Speaking about the American-Jewish authors, Philip Rahv points out that

> the homogenization resulting from speaking of them as if they comprised some kind of literary faction or school is bad critical practice in that it is based on simplistic assumptions concerning the literary process as a whole as well as the nature of American Jewry, which, all appearances to the contrary, is very far from constituting a unitary group in its cultural manifestation.[18]

American Jewish authors introduced many themes in their books, both relating and not relating to being Jewish. For example, Bellow's novel *Herzog* (1964) follows the path of Moses E. Herzog, his struggles in life, and troubled relationships. Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, and Bernard Malamud, the author of *The Assistant* (1957) are considered to be the best American Jewish writers. In *Pictures of Malamud*, Roth remarked that

> it was the need to consider long and seriously every last demand of an overtaxed, overtaxing conscience torturously exacerbated by the pathos of human need unabated. That was a theme of his (Malamud) that he couldn't hide entirely from anyone who thought at all about where the man who could have passed himself off as your insurance agent was joined to the ferocious moralist of the claustrophobic stories about 'things you can't get past'.[19]

The variety of themes presented in the works of American Jewish authors is immeasurable, and the writers cannot be seen as a group with a uniform mindset. Each author of Jewish origin has their style and themes they are working with, which may overlap with the themes of another author or could develop in an entirely different way.

[16] My Jewish Learning, "Jewish American Literature."
[17] Bilik, *Immigrant-Survivors*, 136.
[18] Fried et al., *Handbook of American-Jewish Literature*, 61.
[19] Philip Roth, "Pictures of Malamud," *The New York Times*, April 20, 1986.

1.3.Philip Roth's Work

Roth's work is believed to be partly autobiographic and heavily influenced by his own experiences. The characters from his books are influenced by his perception of the world and are Roth's reflection.[20] He even created alter-egos – writers that tell the stories instead of Roth – Nathan Zuckerman and Peter Tarnopol from *My Life as a Man*. Zuckerman appeared in many of Roth's novels, including *My Life as a Man* where Zuckerman was created by Peter Tarnopol, making Zuckerman an alter-ego of an alter-ego. Zuckerman then was a protagonist of *The Ghost Writer* (1979), *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983), *The Prague Orgy* (1985), and *Exit Ghost* (2007). Roth also uses Zuckerman as a narrator in his novels *The Counterlife* (1986), *American Pastoral* (1997), *I Married a Communist* (1998), and *The Human Stain* (2000). However, in the very beginning of his book *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography*, which is compiled from letters to and from Zuckerman, Roth himself says that

> for me, as for the most novelists, every genuine event begins down there, with facts, with the specific, and not with the philosophical, the ideological, or the abstract. Yet, to my surprise, I now appear to have gone about writing a book absolutely backward, taking what I have already imagined and, as it were, desiccating it, so as to restore my experience to the original, prefictionalized factuality. Why? To prove that there is a significant gap between the autobiographical writer that I am thought to be and the autobiographical writer that I am? To prove that the information that I drew from my life was, in the fiction, incomplete?[21]

To the question of what features of the characters he introduces are fictional and what is the real Philip Roth, he answered that "I don't read or perceive books in that way. I'm interested in the object, the thing, the story, the aesthetic jolt you get from being inside this thing. Am I Roth or Zuckerman? It's all me. You know? That's what I normally say. It's all me. Nothing is me."[22]

The themes that Roth is working with are repetitive, and their common denominator is being Jewish. He talks about Jewish assimilation, the rejection of the religion, or about finding of its roots. However, as Jařab states, Roth presents the few themes over again but looks at them from different angles as he grows older, gains new life experiences, and changes his opinions.[23] Roth claimed that he was not religious. He said: "I'm exactly the opposite of religious. I'm anti-religious. I find religious people hideous. I hate the religious lies. It's all a big lie." Critics and

[20] Josef Jařab, "Rothův nezkrácený druhý tvůrčí dech," *Tvar* 8 no. 20 (November 1997): 14.
[21] Philip Roth, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 3, https://archive.org/details/factsnovelists00roth/page/n9/mode/2up.
[22] Martin Krasnik, "Philip Roth: 'It no longer feels a great injustice that I have to die'," *The Guardian*, December 14, 2005.
[23] Jařab, "Rothův nezkrácený druhý," 14.

Roth agreed that "his career has largely been constructed out of his creative and cultural conflict with his Jewish audience."[24]

Roth draws his inspiration from the past and historical events. He uses it as a background for his stories (e.g., in *American Pastoral*) and sometimes alternates it. In *The Plot Against America* (2004), for example, Roth changes the result of the presidential election of 1940. Charles Lindbergh, who was known for his antisemitic remarks and even accused the Jewish of being war agitators, becomes the president instead of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The protagonist is the seven-year-old Philip Roth himself, and the story revolves around the Roth family. In his essay *The Story Behind 'The Plot Against America,'* Roth said that "to alter the historical reality by making Lindbergh America's 33rd president while keeping everything else as close to factual truth as I could – that was the job as I saw it. I wanted to make the atmosphere of the times genuine…"[25] Roth achieves that by merging facts with fiction.[26] Family is also one of the key motifs of Roth's books. In *American Pastoral*, Zuckerman – Roth's alter ego – sees himself as someone who "writes about fathers, about sons…"[27] As was mentioned above, Roth portrayed his own family in one of his books, although the family members were fictionalized, and tells stories of many families in his novels. *American Pastoral* deals with a troubled father-daughter relationship, *I Married a Communist* recounts a failed marriage, *When She Was Good*, the only Roth's novel with a female protagonist, follows the story of Lucy, whose life was affected by her childhood with her alcoholic father. In his novels, Roth also explicitly explores sexuality e.g., in *Portnoy's Complaint*, *The Professor of Desire*, *The Prague Orgy, The Breast*, or *The Humbling.* The sexual motifs that Roth presents, which can be perceived as shocking caused mixed reactions. William Skidelsky wrote that

> Roth has always had a tendency to veer off into realms of extravagant silliness; the most egregious example of this was his 1972 novella *The Breast*, which reworked Kafka's *Metamorphosis* so that the hero wakes up not as an insect but as a giant mammary gland. *The Humbling* belongs to the same dubious company. Brief to a fault at 140 generously spaced pages, it can hardly be called a novel at all; it is more an old man's sexual fantasy dressed up in the garb of literature.[28]

Portnoy's Complaint was labeled as "one of the dirtiest books ever published"[29]; however, it was the controversy and the "extravagant silliness" of *Portnoy's Complaint* that made Roth a

[24] Parrish, *The Cambridge Companion,* 2.
[25] Philip Roth, "The Story Behind 'The Plot Against America'," *The New York Times*, September 19, 2004.
[26] Michal Sýkora, "Když se nepředstavitelné stane skutečným," *Host* 23, no. 9 (November 2007): 77.
[27] Philip Roth, *American Pastoral* (London: Vintage Classics, 2019), 82.
[28] William Skidelsky, "The Humbling by Philip Roth," *The Guardian*, October 25, 2009.
[29] Chris Cox, "Portnoy's Complaint – still shocking at 40," *The Guardian*, September 7, 2009.

best-selling author. “Some critics deemed it obscene and anti-Semitic, others lauded it as a moving an uproarious tour-de-force.”[30]

The themes that Roth presents intertwine; therefore, the reader will probably find more than just a single one present in the story. His stories are often tragic, and Roth himself stated that a lot of people in his books do not find happiness because he does not believe in happily ever after.[31] On the other hand, Roth manages to balance out the tragedy with comedic elements.[32] These abilities combined with his intelligence and the gripping stories that he writes earned him the label of one of the most gifted novelists of the 20th and 21st century.[33]

1.4. American Pastoral

American Pastoral was first published in 1997 and was awarded a Pulitzer Prize. It is the first book of the American Trilogy, followed by *I Married a Communist* and *The Human Stain*.

The book in which Roth’s alter-ego – Nathan Zuckerman – appears once again tells a story of the family of Seymour Levov. What seems idyllic at first quickly takes a turn and becomes a tragedy.

Zuckerman is the narrator of the story as he recollects his memories of Seymour and hears about Seymour’s life from various sources.

He firstly recalls Seymour as being a very popular, athletic, talented and pretty young boy who happened to be an older brother of Zuckerman’s friend Jerry. Seymour’s good looks, blond hair, and blue eyes earned him the nickname “the Swede”. The Swede Levov was a very talented basketball player, but he turned down the opportunity to become a professional so he could continue his studies at university. There he met his future wife, beautiful Dawn, who won miss New Jersey. Their relationship was even approved by the Swede’s father, who was skeptical at first because Dawn was a Roman Catholic whereas the Swede was Jewish. Based on a few brief encounters that Zuckerman and the Swede had much later, Zuckerman assumes that the Swede truly lived his American Dream as he was expected to. After meeting Jerry at a high school reunion, Zuckerman learns the truth about the Swede and his not-so-idyllic life. Jerry tells him

[30] Philip Roth, “Portnoy's Complaint,” review of *The Dirtiest Book Ever Published?*, by Book Marks, *Literary Hub*, January 12, 2021.
[31] CBS Sunday Morning, “From 2010: A rare look at author Philip Roth,” posted May 24, 2018, YouTube video, 8:13, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzIMxcqwXvg.
[32] Jařab, “Rothův nezkrácený druhý,” 14.
[33] Green, “Philip Roth,” 156.

that his brother passed away and that he was battling prostate cancer which turned out to be terminal.

Zuckerman discovers that the Swede did live his American Dream for some time. He married the former beauty queen and had a sweet daughter Meredith nicknamed Merry. He took over his father's glove factory and led a successful business. He purchased his dream home in a remote area, where he built a farm together with Dawn. The only thing that stained the family's perfect idyll was Merry's stuttering.

That was until Merry learned about the horrors of the Vietnam War and was determined to stop it by all means. Her devotion to stopping the war ended tragically when she planted a bomb in a post office and killed an innocent citizen. After the horrendous crime, she ran away and started hiding from the authorities, leaving her parents heartbroken. The Swede's life turned upside down, and he became obsessed with finding Merry. Dawn's mental health declined dramatically, resulting in her hospitalization. She then refused to think about Merry and was focused on making a new home and starting a new life. Eventually, Seymour did find Merry, but was left in complete shock when he learned about more bombings and murders that she had committed, multiple sexual assaults that she had had to endure, and her new religion – Jainism – which would eventually result in her starving to death.

However, Seymour manages to recover from the past trauma, moving forward with a new wife with whom he has two sons, and is able to regain his American dream.

American Pastoral, like many of Roth's novels, is based on true events and the case of Kathy Boudin. Boudin's life inspired Roth to write about the destroyed idyll because he knew her family and said she "couldn't have had a more terrific childhood."[34] Roth may have used *American Pastoral* to vent his own feelings and attitude to the Vietnam war since he supposedly told Claudia Pierpont that he was so frustrated with the war he was ready to set off a bomb himself.[35]

[34] Claudia Roth Pierpont, *Roth Unbound: A Writer and His Books* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 207, https://archive.org/details/rothunboundwrite0000pier/page/207/mode/2up.
[35] Pierpont, *Roth Unbound*, 207.

2. THE 1960s

The dawning of the 1960s was marked with optimism and a promise of change. This change was indicated by the presidential election of 1960, held on November 8. It resulted in the winning of the democratic senator John F. Kennedy. He defeated the Republican candidate Richard Nixon by 118 thousand votes out of 68 million votes, making it the closest presidential race.[36] Ambitious Kennedy became the first Roman Catholic president and the youngest president to be elected.

> For I stand here tonight facing west on what was once the last frontier. From the lands that stretch three thousand miles behind us, the pioneers gave up their safety, their comfort, and sometimes their lives to build our new West. They were determined to make the new world strong and free – an example to the world, to overcome its hazards and its hardships, to conquer enemies that threatened from within and without.[37]

This is a part of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's acceptance speech delivered on 15 July 1960. After praising those who helped build America as we know it today, he continued by talking about new challenges that are set for the country:

> Some would say that those struggles are all over, that all the horizons have been explored, that all the battles have been won, that there is no longer an American frontier. But I trust that no one in this assemblage would agree with that sentiment; for the problems are not all solved, and the battles are not all won; and we stand today on the edge of a New Frontier – the frontier of the 1960s, the frontier of unknown opportunities and perils, the frontier of unfilled hopes and unfilled threats.[38]

Kennedy embodied the hope that people felt at the beginning of the decade. Nevertheless, his speech about the New Frontier can be perceived as a dark foreshadowing of what would happen later during the sixties.

The ideals that Kennedy epitomized were soon crushed. Kennedy wanted to use the growing popularity that he gained thanks to his optimism, intelligence, and the abilities he proved during his presidency to run for president again in the 1964 elections. He began his presidential campaign a year earlier and centered his strategy around Texas, which had twenty-four electoral votes.[39] It was decided that Kennedy would visit Texas in November 1963, and he would deliver

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[36] George Brown Tindall, *Dějiny Spojených států amerických* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1996), 689.
[37] Kansaspolitics, "1960 John F. Kennedy Democratic Convention Acceptance Speech," posted April 26, 2016, YouTube video, 22:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TVtaVuSyug&t=23s.
[38] Kansaspolitics, "1960 John F. Kennedy."
[39] Goode Stephen, *Assassination!: Kennedy, King, Kennedy* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1979), 6, https://archive.org/details/assassinationken0000good/page/6/mode/2up.

speeches in four cities: San Antonio, Houston, Fort Worth, and Dallas. In each city, Kennedy was supposed to ride in a motorcade so that he could be closer to the Texans.[40] On November 21, president and the first lady of the United States, Jacqueline Kennedy, arrived in Texas and were surprised that the crowds were warm and enthusiastic despite the expectations.[41] However, the atmosphere in Dallas was different the following morning. Kennedy was called a traitor, a Communist, and leaflets that stated "Wanted for Treason" were handed out.[42] Moments before the presidential motorcade reached its final destination, Kennedy was shot in the head and in the neck and was pronounced dead in the hospital later on 22 November, 1963.[43]

On the same day, the police arrested Lee Harvey Oswald, the main suspect in the president's murder. Oswald spent several years in the Soviet Union and visited Cuba. Before he could be convicted of murder, Oswald was fatally shot and died without giving an explanation.[44]

President's sudden death left the Americans shocked and traumatized, as Kennedy was seen as the embodiment of success and the American dream.[45] The years of hope ended, and the nation was on the threshold of a new violent era.

Even though it was stated that the beginning of the 1960s was full of optimism, there was a growing tension between the United States and the Soviet Union. The conflict called the Cold War, between the western democratic world and the communist regime, began with the division of spheres of influence after the liberation of Europe from the Nazi regime. When Kennedy was elected, the Cold War had already been raging.

There was never an actual armed conflict between those two great powers, but a persistent threat of nuclear war and psychological pressure. It was a war between two ideologies, and the United States, in fear of communism, tried desperately to stop it from spreading. The CIA tried to control the situation with a series of assassinations, controlling the foreign political situation or espionage. Even though the US and the Soviet Union never fought directly against each other, they supported conflicts in third-world countries where they wanted to expand their sphere of influence. Psychological warfare was the main weapon both sides used, leading the world to the edge of a nuclear conflict.

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[40] Stephen, *Assassination!*, 6–7.
[41] Stephen, *Assassination!*, 7.
[42] Stuart A. Kallen, *The Kennedy Assassination* (Farmington Hills: Lucent Books, 2003), 17, https://archive.org/details/kennedyassassina0000kall/page/16/mode/2up.
[43] Goode Stephen, *Assassination!,* 15.
[44] Tindall, *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*, 697.
[45] Tindall, *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*, 697.

Kennedy began his presidency with a disappointing operation in the Bay of Pigs on April 19, 1961, which was supposed to be an invasion to Cuba, that was ruled by Fidel Castro who was supported by the Soviet Union.[46] The America was chagrined with the results of the operation, as the failure damaged its reputation which played an important role during the Cold War.

As was previously mentioned, psychological warfare was of great significance, and one of its means was the space race. The Soviet Union managed to put the first man in orbit in the early 1960s.[47] Part of Kennedy's speech from September 12, 1962, in which he promised the US would conquer moon, can be seen as a parallel to the Vietnam war and the public mood at the beginning of the decade.

> We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too.[48]

The optimistic tone sums up the feelings about the US and its future. The Americans believed they were destined to win, not only the space race but against communism itself. War in Vietnam was one of the other challenges that America intended to win.

2.1. The Vietnam War

America entering the Vietnam war and supporting South Vietnam was the consequence of the Cold war.

Vietnam was a part of French Indochina, which was under colonial rule until the mid-1950. The war in Vietnam began with resistance against the French and developed into a conflict between the communist North, supported by the Soviet Union and China, and the South, controlled by a Roman-Catholic anti-Communist Ngo Dinh Diem.[49] The United States supported France and its involvement in the Vietnam politics in hope to stop the spread of communism in Vietnam. The USA helped with the funding of the French army, and when France ultimately lost after the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, and Vietnam was officially divided into the Democratic

[46] Tindall, *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*, 694.
[47] Alonzo L. Hamby, *Outline of U. S. History* (Washington: United States Department of State, 2005), 285.
[48] Rice University, ""Why go to the moon?" - John F. Kennedy at Rice University," posted September 12, 2018, YouTube video, 21:22, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXqlziZV63k.
[49] Hamby, *Outline*, 284.

Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and the State of Vietnam (South Vietnam), the CIA tried to weaken the position of the communist party using propaganda and sabotage.[50]

During Kennedy's presidency, American military advisors were sent to Vietnam.[51] By 1963, there were 16,000 American soldiers.[52] By 1968, there were half a million of both volunteers and draftees.[53]

In 1956, Kennedy, while being a senator, gave a speech at the Conference on Vietnam Luncheon, remarking that Vietnam

> is our offspring – we cannot abandon it, we cannot ignore its needs. And if it falls victim to any of the perils that threaten its existence – Communism, political anarchy, poverty and the rest – then the United States, with some justification, will be held responsible; and our prestige in Asia will sink to a new low.[54]

This became a widely held axiom, and although not many Americans were aware of what was happening in Southeast Asia, the fear of communism was widespread.[55] Young Americans, influenced by Kennedy's inaugural speech, "ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country,"[56] were eager to join the Peace Corps to help in undeveloped countries.[57] Still, in 1964, when the conflict in Vietnam was escalating, two-thirds of the Americans "said they had paid little or no attention to developments in South Vietnam."[58] In general, people believed that their government had control over the situation in Vietnam and supported the government's decisions.[59] Additionally, more than two-thirds of Americans believed that the United States should intervene in international politics.[60] The Vietnam war was the first war in the United States that was shown in television and is often called the *living room war*. Television had a huge impact on the perception of the war, and was the reason for

[50] Marc Frey, *Dějiny vietnamské války: tragédie v Asii a konec amerického snu* (Praha: Paseka, 2003), 35.
[51] Hamby, *Outline*, 284.
[52] Tindall, *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*, 696.
[53] Hamby, *Outline*, 288.
[54] "Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy at the Conference on Vietnam Luncheon in the Hotel Willard," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed March 19, 2023, https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/vietnam-conference-washington-dc-19560601.
[55] Frey, *Dějiny vietnamské války*, 51.
[56] CBS, "JFK 's Famous Inaugural Address Passage," posted January 16, 2011, YouTube video, 2:26, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxa4HDgfWFs.
[57] Frey, *Dějiny vietnamské války*, 64.
[58] Lloyd A. Free, Hadley Cantril, *The Political Beliefs of Americans: A Study of Public Opinion* (New Brunswick: Retgers University Press, 1967), 60, https://archive.org/details/politicalbeliefs00free/page/60/mode/2up.
[59] William L. Lunch, Peter W. Sperlich, "American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," *The Western Political Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (March 1979): 23.
[60] Free, Cantril, *The Political Beliefs*, 64.

the public support of the American involvement in Vietnam, since the American army was portrayed as successful and victorious.[61]

Nevertheless, events that were happening in South Vietnam during the rule of Ngo Dinh Diem, who had the support of the United States and who was considered to be a dictator, shocked the whole world. The Buddhist majority was prosecuted and massacred during demonstrations. To protest against the discrimination, a Buddhist monk Quang Duc burned himself alive in the middle of a Saigon street on June 11, 1963.[62] Photographs portraying the self-immolation appeared on the front pages of newspapers worldwide, and Ellen Hammer described the impact they had as follows: "To foreigners knowing little of Vietnam, the death of this old monk evoked dark images of persecution and horror corresponding to a profoundly Asian reality that passed the understanding of Westerners."[63] More cases of self-immolation of the Vietnamese occurred. In 1967, a Buddhist nun Nhat Chi Mai burned herself to death.[64] Her sacrifice was accompanied by a letter to the U.S. government in which she said: "I offer my body as a torch to dissipate the dark, to waken love among men, to give peace to Vietnam, the one who burns herself for peace."[65] Self-immolation occurred even on American land. Eight Americans decided to burn themselves alive as a form of protest during the war.[66] Norman Morrison, who poured kerosene on himself and set himself on fire in front of the Pentagon, was one of them.[67] He brought his 1-year-old daughter, who remained unharmed, with him as a "powerful symbol of the children we were killing with our bombs and napalm. Who didn't have parents to hold them in their arms."[68]

The first signs that public opinion was changing and people were not as supportive of the government's Vietnam politics appeared in 1965.[69] The war was opposed mainly by students, who began protesting. The first big anti-war protest took place in Washington in April 1965.[70] However, the young did not protest only against the war but also against bureaucracy, the army,

[61] Frey, *Dějiny vietnamské války*, 120.
[62] Frey, *Dějiny vietnamské války*, 74.
[63] Ellen J. Hammer, *A Death in November: America in Vietnam, 1963* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1987), 144, https://archive.org/details/deathinnovembera0000hamm/page/144/mode/2up.
[64] Sallie B. King, "They Who Burned Themselves for Peace: Quaker and Buddhist Self-Immolators during the Vietnam War," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 20 no.1 (2000): 128.
[65] King, "They Who Burned Themselves," 2.
[66] King, "They Who Burned Themselves," 3.
[67] Joyce Hollyday, "Grace Like a Balm," *Sojourners,* July-August, 1995, https://sojo.net/magazine/july-august-1995/grace-balm?action=magazine.article&issue=soj9507&article=950752.
[68] Hollyday, "Grace Like a Balm."
[69] Lunch, Sperlich, "American Public Opinion," 3.
[70] Frey, *Dějiny vietnamské války*, 121.

or consumerism, and the protest had various forms, including the hippies culture, drug abuse, or joining cults and new religions.[71]

The turning point came with the Tet Offensive in 1968, an extensive military operation during which North Vietnam, inter alia, attacked and occupied the South's capital Huế and the American embassy in Saigon.[72] The American public that was watching the horrific scenes from Vietnam on their televisions was confronted with the reality of the war for the first time. Until then, the Americans were convinced that the end of the war was near and that the American victory was almost certain.

After the Tet Offensive, the American army undertook many military operations to weaken the Viet Cong forces by finding and killing the guerillas.[73] On March 16, 1968, soldiers from Charlie Company headed towards the My Lai village. They expected the enemy to be hiding there, but it soon turned out there were only unarmed civilians, mainly old men, women, and children. The soldiers did not stop the attack on the village, but instead, they raped both women and children and mercilessly killed everyone they encountered, with the massacre having around 400 victims.[74] This incident that the public learned about more than a year later, strengthened the antiwar attitudes and the committed atrocities caused shock and disbelief.[75]

Additionally, the United States was spending billions on the war while trying to maintain a good economic situation back home. The war was presumed to be short, so the government thought that "the American economy could absorb the costs of a growing war and thereby escape overheating and the inflationary price increases that could result."[76] The increasing military expenditures resulted in rising inflation and interest rates, and the American economy became vulnerable.[77] The public was concerned with the budget deficit of twenty billion dollars and feared that the government would increase taxes, which led to the rejection of the American involvement in Vietnam.[78]

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[71] Frey, *Dějiny vietnamské války,* 124.
[72] Tindall, *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*, 707.
[73] Frey, *Dějiny vietnamské války,* 139.
[74] James Olson, Randy Roberts, *My Lai: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998),20–23, https://archive.org/details/mylaibriefhistor0000olso/page/23/mode/2up.
[75] Olson, Roberts, *My Lai*, 174–176.
[76] Hubert Y. Schandler, *America in Vietnam: The War That Couldn't Be Won* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 134, https://archive.org/details/americainvietnam0000scha_j7x4/page/134/mode/2up.
[77] Schandler, *America in* Vietnam, 135–136.
[78] Frey, *Dějiny vietnamské války*, 137.

2.2. The Civil Rights Movement

Racial segregation was present in every aspect of the African Americans' lives. It was not an exclusivity of the South; conversely, as the African Americans tried to escape the discrimination they were facing in the South and moved to the cities in the North, they were also separated by laws that were being passed, were living in black-only neighborhoods and had menial jobs.[79]

The black community was tired of centuries of persecution. Things began moving in mid-1950s when a black woman refused to give up her seat on a bus so a white man could sit.[80] Activists then began to boycott the bus system, and Martin Luther King became one of the movement's leaders.[81] In 1960, federal law banned segregation in public transport. Nevertheless, segregation continued, so an interracial group called Freedom Riders was created to make the government enforce the law. Freedom Riders were brutally attacked by the white supremacists several times; however, they refused to turn to violence. The Civil Rights Movement gained support from the public. Many people lost their lives during the fight for equality, and it did not matter whether they were black protesters or white supporters.

The movement peaked on August 28, 1963, when 200 thousand demonstrators marched through Washington, and Martin Luther King gave his famous speech *I Have a Dream*. The violence, however, continued, and even though the movement was supported by John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert Kennedy, the United States Attorney General, and later by president Johnson, conservatives still opposed the equality of races.[82] President Johnson banned all forms of discrimination notwithstanding race, ethnicity, gender or religion on July 2, 1964.[83]

Nonviolence counseled by King was not adopted by all protesters, and the movement began to split into more groups. Malcolm X became one of the leaders who wanted to implement everything that could help with the cause, including violence and believed in the superiority of the blacks, and his beliefs were shared by more activists, which led to the rise of *black power*.[84]

With this shift in the psyche, and the discontent of the black still segregated in slums in big cities, riots broke out in 1966 and 1967. These riots were viewed as a "new stage in the

[79] Lydia Bjornlund, *The Civil Rights Movement* (San Diego: ReferencePoint Press, 2013), 29, https://archive.org/details/civilrightsmovem0000bjor/page/29/mode/2up.
[80] Bjornlund, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 36.
[81] Tindall, *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*, 690.
[82] Tindall, *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*, 690–693.
[83] Deborah Kent, *The Freedom Riders* (Chicago: Childrens Press, 1993), 25, https://archive.org/details/freedomriders00kent/page/24/mode/2up.
[84] Bjornlund, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 64–65.

development of Negro protest against racism, and as a logical outgrowth of the failure of the whole society to support racial equality."[85]

On July 12, 1967, a black taxi driver John Smith was arrested and allegedly brutally attacked by two police officers in Newark. His arrest started the devastating Newark riots that lasted from July 12 to July 17. The African Americans, who were dissatisfied with many aspects of the situation in Newark, such as their involvement in politics or education, came together to get what they felt was owed to them, whether it was a payback in the form of civil disobedience or just things they could steal from mostly white-owned stores.[86] Besides causing many injuries and damage of property, the Newark riots cost lives of twenty-four black and two white people.

Martin Luther King, who was given the Nobel prize for peace, was assassinated on April 4, 1968, during his stay in Memphis. The death of the man, who inspired thousands to fight peacefully for their rights, was the end of an era of optimism and innocence.

2.3. The Weathermen and Kathy Boudin

The Weathermen was a radical left-wing terrorist organization founded in the late 1960s, rooting in the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-war campaigns. Its members were mainly white men and women who received a college education and came from a wealthy background.[87] They were "the spoiled and pampered progeny of the upper class who disavowed laws and regulations and embraced anarchy and terrorism to destroy the American political process and capitalism."[88] Their goal was destroying American imperialism, which they blamed for exploitation and poverty that occurred all around the world, and creating a classless society by implementing communism.[89] While trying to bring the war home, the Weathermen set off more than 4,000 bombs between 1969 and 1970.[90]

Kathy Boudin was a member of the Weathermen who participated in an armed robbery in Nyack in 1981 while trying to raise money for the organization. Three police officers were killed, and others were injured.[91] Kathy came from a relatively wealthy family that was seemingly perfect

[85] Tom Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark: Official Violence and Ghetto Response* (New York: Random House, 1967), 3, https://archive.org/details/rebellioninnewar00hayd/page/n13/mode/2up.
[86] Hayden, *Rebellion*, 30–33.
[87] Jay Robert Nash, *Terrorism in the 20th Century: A Narrative Encyclopedia from the Anarchists, through the Weathermen, to the Unabomber* (New York: M. Evans & Co., 1998), 181, https://archive.org/details/terrorismin20thc0000nash/page/n9/mode/2up.
[88] Nash, *Terrorism*, 181.
[89] Stuart Daniels, "The Weathermen," *Government and Opposition* 9, no. 4 (Autumn 1974): 437.
[90] Nash, *Terrorism*, 181.
[91] Susan Braudy, *Family Circle: The Boudins and the Aristocracy of the Left* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 294–302, https://archive.org/details/familycircleboud0000brau/mode/2up.

and "was not an unloved or rejected child"[92] and was not mentally ill. However, Ellen Frankfort argues that Kathy, a very intelligent woman grew up "watching her father deified by all sorts of people, his peers, beautiful young professional women"[93] while her mother's role was reduced to being a wife, which is why Kathy turned to violence. During the 1960s, Kathy protested against the war in Vietnam by various means, including, e.g., butyric acid bombs.

2.4.Jainism

Jainism is an ancient Indian religion. Its name comes from the word jina which means

> a perfect human being who has attained a pure soul state associated with the four primary qualities namely infinite perception-knowledge-energy and bliss. He is an ordinary human being at the time of birth but through his strenuous spiritual purification efforts, he attaints this state.[94]

Jains believe that since humans are capable of developed thinking, and therefore are responsible for spreading harmony and peace, and "no living being is to be harmed, injured, oppressed, enslaved, or killed – including microorganism, plants, insects, animals, and humans."[95]

Jainism focuses more on one's spirituality than on god worshipping. The soul is the core value, and the Jains believe that "a soul in its pure form (a soul without any anger, ego, deceit, and greed, or without karma attached to it) possesses infinite knowledge, infinite perception, infinite energy and power, unobstructed bliss, and no physical body."[96] The essential ideals of a Jain include nonviolence, equality, respecting all living beings, refusal of egoism, and the philosophy of non-absolutism.[97] The Jain philosophy of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) inspired Mahatma Gandhi, whose approach later inspired Martin Luther King himself.[98]

The Jains started emigrating to the United States in the late 1960s after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was passed and the restrictions on immigration were lifted.[99] However,

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[92] Ellen Frankfort, *Kathy Boudin and the Dance of Death* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983), 181, https://archive.org/details/kathyboudindance0000fran/page/181/mode/1up?view=theater.
[93] Frankfort, *Kathy Boudin*, 181.
[94] Shugan C. Jain, Prakash C. Jain, *Social Consciousness in Jainism* (New Delhi: International School for Jain Studies & New Bharatiya Book Corp., 2014), 2, https://archive.org/details/socialconsciousn0000unse/mode/2up.
[95] Benjamin Jerome Hubbard, *An Educator's Classroom Guide to America's Religious Beliefs and Practices* (Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited), 122, https://archive.org/details/educatorsclassro0000hubb/mode/2up.
[96] Harold Rabinowitz, Greg Tobin, and Jane I. Smith, *Religion in America: A Comprehensive Guide to Faith, History, and Tradition* (New York: Sterling, 2011), 618, https://archive.org/details/religioninameric0000unse/mode/2up.
[97] Rabinowitz et al., *Religion in America*, 618.
[98] "How Martin Luther King Jr. Took Inspiration From Gandhi on Nonviolence," Biography, last modified January 19, 2021, https://www.biography.com/activists/martin-luther-king-jr-gandhi-nonviolence-inspiration.
[99] "Jain Immigration," The Pluralism Project, accessed on May 15, 2022, https://pluralism.org/jain-immigration.

American Jainism existed since the end of the 19th century and was born with the arrival of the Jain Virchand Gandhi who attended Chicago's Parliament of World Religions conference and later continued to promote the idea of nonviolence. In 1965, the Jain Center of America was established in New York.[100]

The spread of Jainism in the United States during the 1960s is logical, given the historical context. It is a reaction to the high level of violence that was present in that era, whether it was the Vietnam war, the assassinations of leading figures, or terrorist attacks. It partly corresponds with the hippie culture that was born in the 1960s as a reaction to the war. Hippies opposed violence and rejected bourgeois values.[101] However, the Jains believe in asceticism and the renunciation of the secular life, while the hippies endorsed free love and sexual liberation, and drug abuse.

[100] Rabinowitz et al., *Religion in America*, 615–616
[101] Rabinowitz et al., *Religion in America*, 621.

3. THE AMERICAN DREAM

The American dream is a well-known concept that shaped the nation. Jim Powell claims that the American dream was invented by Benjamin Franklin, one of the signees of the Declaration of Independence.[102] Franklin "embodied the virtues of shrewd practicality and the optimistic belief in self-improvement often associated with America itself."[103] Self-made man and an opportunity for class growth are American ideals that lured people to the New World in the hope of better life gained by hard work. Even though it has changed over the decades, the American dream is rooted in the Declaration of Independence itself: "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."[104] The term American dream is omnipresent in American history and culture; however, the meaning of it is contemporary.[105] In his book, The American Dream, Jim Cullen states that throughout the times, the American dream was: upward mobility, land ownership, equality or personal fulfillment.[106]

However, it was not named until 1931 when James Truslow Adams concretized the dream.[107] Adams describes it as

> that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his 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 a 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.[108]

As the land of promise, America distinguished itself from Europe and its social system, which was almost unchangeable, by class growth that was not limited by "inherited social and

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[102] Jim Powell, "Benjamin Franklin: The Man Who Invented the American Dream," *Foundation for Economic Education,* April 1, 1997. https://fee.org/articles/benjamin-franklin-the-man-who-invented-the-american-dream/.
[103] Hamby, *Outline*, 43.
[104] "Declaration of Independence: A Transcription," The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, accessed March 19, 2023, https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript.
[105] Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 15, https://uerjundergradslit.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/jim-cullen-the-american-dream-a-short-history.pdf
[106] Cullen, *The American Dream*, 19
[107] John Izaguirre, "The American Dream and Literature: How the Themes of Self-Reliance and Individualism in American Literature Are Relevant in Preserving Both the Aesthetics and the Ideals of the American Dream (Master's thesis, DePaul University, 2014), 1. https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1169&context=etd.
[108] James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1932), 404, https://archive.org/details/epicofamerica1931adam/page/n7/mode/2up.

financial status".[109] Self-improvement and self-sufficiency are connected to the very beginning of independent America.

For many people, the American "royal family" of the Kennedys embodies the ideals of the American dream and the self-made man. Joseph Patrick Kennedy was born in 1888 as a son of Irish immigrants. His father was quite a successful businessman as well and was one of the founders of the East Boston Bank.[110] He did not let his origin determine his future and graduated from Harvard University.[111] At age 25, he became a president of the already mentioned East Boston Bank. By the age of 30, he was a millionaire; by age 40, he was a multimillionaire. When his wealth was secured already, he turned to politics, being appointed a chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission by Franklin Delano Roosevelt.[112]

3.1. Evolution of the American Dream

Firstly, it was connected to the westward expansion and closing of the frontier.[113] As the name Manifest Destiny suggests, the Americans believed they were destined to gain new territories, and "Go West, young man!" became the nation's watchword.[114] In 1837, Francis J. Grund wrote that:

> It appears, then, that the universal disposition of Americans to emigrate to the western wilderness, in order to enlarge their dominion over inanimate nature, is the actual result of an expansive power, which is inherent in them, and which, by continually agitating all classes of society, is constantly throwing a large portion of the whole population on the extreme confines of the state, in order to gain space for its development.[115]

Gaining new land represented new opportunities for people of all classes and origins but was mainly a job opportunity for the working class. The society at the time was mainly agricultural, and land ownership was quite easy to obtain. After the Homestead Act of 1862, the land could

[109] Heike Paul, *The Myths That Made America: An Introduction to American Studies* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014), 367. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1wxsdq.
[110] David Nasaw, *The Patriarch: The Remarkable Life and Turbulent Times of Joseph P. Kennedy* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 22, https://archive.org/details/patriarchremarka0000nasa/page/n21/mode/2up.
[111] "Joseph P. Kennedy," Biography, last modified April 8, 2021, https://www.biography.com/political-figure/joseph-p-kennedy.
[112] "Joseph P. Kennedy Sr.: Family Patriarch," National Park Service, accessed March 19, 2023, https://www.nps.gov/people/joseph-p-kennedy-patriarch-of-the-kennedys.htm.
[113] Reeve Vanneman, Lynn Weber Cannon, *The American Perception of Class* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 260, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv941wv0.
[114] Thomas Fuller, ""Go West, young man!"—An Elusive Slogan," *Indiana Magazine of Histor*y 100, no. 3 (September 2004): 231.
[115] Francis Joseph Grund, *The Americans, in Their Moral, Social, and Political Relations* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, 1837), 19, https://archive.org/details/americansinthei02grungoog/page/n6/mode/2up.

be "claimed by merely occupying it and improving it".[116] Therefore, the number of farmers proliferated. Since the frontier was full of dangers, self-sufficiency was crucial. Thomas Jefferson, who is closely tied to the Declaration of Independence, was supportive of agricultural society and was supported by the farmers and workers in return.[117] After being elected the president of the United States of America, in his inauguration speech, he promised a government, that would leave the citizens "free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement." [118]

However, when the frontier was officially closed in 1890, there was nowhere to expand further, so "the opportunity to move up replaced the opportunity to move West."[119] The nation became more industrialized after the civil war the reconstruction of the agricultural south. With this transformation, the USA was powered by steel, coal, and steam power and became connected by railroads.[120] Even though agriculture still remained an important part of the whole, manual labor was substituted with machines.[121] The American dream took a turn from the idealized rural life, and people started to look for business success. The Americans were aware of the growing greatness of their self-sufficient and powerful nation.[122] However, the differences between the social classes started to grow, and William Graham Sumner noted that "if 'great inequalities of property' and plutocratic influences deriving from monopolistic corporations are allowed to prevail, destructive class war is certain."[123]

3.2. The American dream in the 1960s

> I would like to discuss some of the problems that we confront in the world today, and some of the problems that we confront in our own nation by using as a subject The American Dream. I choose this subject because America is essentially a dream. It is a dream of a land where men of all races, of all nationalities, and of all creeds, can live together as brothers [...]. Now, we notice in the very beginning that at the center of this dream is an amazing universalism. It does not say some men, but it says all men. It does not say all white men, but it says all men, which includes black

[116] Hamby, *Outline*, 124.
[117] Hamby, *Outline*, 83.
[118] "Thomas Jefferson First Inaugural Address," Lillian Goldman Law Library, accessed March 19, 2023, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/jefinau1.asp.
[119] Vanneman, Cannon, *The American Perception of Class*, 260.
[120] Hamby, *Outline*, 89.
[121] Hamby, *Outline*, 160.
[122] Tindall, *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*, 387.
[123] Bruce Curtis, "William Graham Sumner "On the Concentration of Wealth"," *The Journal of American History* 55, no. 4 (March 1969): 827.

> men. It does not say all Gentiles, but it says all men, which includes Jews. It does not say all Protestants, but it says all men, which includes Catholics.[124]

This is the beginning of Martin Luther King's speech from 4th July 1965. Even after the abolition of slavery in 1865, racial segregation was still a burning issue in American society. Many people were not truly free as they were stripped of their rights. Jim Crow laws were practiced until the 1950s, and the sixties were marked by the discontent of the discriminated people. The American dream of the time was equality. The focus of the American dream shifted from the individual to the nation and the greater good. With the Vietnam war raging and young men being drafted into the army, many people began to dream about peace. To achieve those goals, great sacrifices were made. Fighting for his rights, Martin Luther King was assassinated on 4th April 1968, and MacArthur claims that his assassination meant the end of the American dream.[125]

The turmoil of the sixties certainly meant a crisis for the American dream. Despite the changes it underwent during the decade, it is imperishable; it is a concept connected with America itself from the very beginning. The dream lives in American society, and even though it can be changed, it cannot disappear. Rather than being destroyed, the American dream "morphed to include peace and greater freedom in the United States, rather than the suburban house with the perfect family."[126]

3.3. Pastoral Idyll in American Culture

As was mentioned above, agriculture was and still to this day remains an important industry. A rural way of life is closely connected to the American dream and its values of freedom and self-sufficiency. Land ownership is one of the components of the American dream. Jim Cullen states that thanks to the frontier, the land was more valuable for the Americans than cash for a long period of their history.[127] Because of the connection of farming, home ownership, and the admiration of the life in the countryside, these motifs became inextricably connected to the American literature.

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[124] ""The American Dream" July 4th Speech Transcript – Martin Luther King, Jr.," Rev, accessed March 19, 2023, https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/the-american-dream-july-4th-speech-transcript-martin-luther-king-jr.
[125] Kathleen L. MacArthur, "Shattering the American Pastoral: Philip Roth's Vision of Trauma and the American Dream," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 23 (2004): 15.
[126] "AMERICAN DREAM OF THE 1960'S," The Transformation of the American Dream, accessed March 19, 2023, https://transformationoftheamericandream.weebly.com/1960s.html.
[127] Cullen, *The American Dream*, 137.

Pastoral themes have a long tradition in literature. These themes include the celebration and idolization of nature and rural life. Being referred to as *pastoral, idyll, eclogue*, or *bucolic* pastoral poems were born in ancient Greece between 750 and 650 BCE.[128] One of the pioneers of the pastoral tradition is the Roman poet Virgil, who wrote *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, dealing with rural life and farming.[129] Virgil was also an inspiration to the 14th-century Italian renaissance poets Francesco Petrarch or Dante Alighieri and many more, who wrote pastoral lyrics which described the beauty and innocence of the country.[130] During the period of renaissance, the pagan religions presented in the Greek poems were replaced by Christian motifs. Martha Hale Shackford says that "the Good Shepherd has been for twenty centuries, in the Christian church, a tender symbol of Divine Care; and in literature the pastoral has never really faded away, but has come back again and again with persistent appeal."[131]

An admiration of nature and rural life has been a re-emerging theme in literature worldwide. The beauties of nature and the evils of industrialized cities can be particularly seen in the Romantic movement represented, for example, by American authors Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. There is also an American literary and philosophical movement born in New England, inspired partly by Romanticism and its ideals – Transcendentalism – represented by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Henry David Thoreau. Their ideals included self-improvement and self-reliance, individualism, and respect for nature. In his book *Walden or, Life in the Woods*, Thoreau describes his decision to live independently in the solitude surrounded by nature on the shore of Walden Pond. Firstly he talks about the way of life in society – that even farmers are just slaves of the economic cycle, not being connected to nature.

> I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labor in.[132]

Thoreau then proceeds to describe the idyllic setting of his new home. "I have been as sincere a worshipper of Aurora as the Greeks. I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise; and one of the best things which I did."[133] The language he uses to portray his

[128] "Pastoral," Academy of American Poets, accessed March 19, 2023, https://poets.org/glossary/pastoral.
[129] "The Georgics – Vergil – Ancient Rome – Classical Literature," Classical Literature, accessed March 19, 2023, https://www.ancient-literature.com/rome_vergil_georgics.html.
[130] "Pastoral."
[131] Martha Hale Shackford, "A Definition of the Pastoral Idyll," *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 19, no. 4 (1904): 583.
[132] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (New York: Library of America, 1985), 7, https://azeitao.files.wordpress.com/2007/05/walden.pdf.
[133] Thoreau, *Walden*, 67.

experience makes it look almost sacred, as if he created his personal Eden by living in harmony with nature.

In *American Pastoral*, Philip Roth gives a detailed description of Seymour's idyllic home that he built together with his wife. His ideals are linked to the beginning of the American dream mentioned earlier. *American Pastoral* also presents the dangers of the city as Seymour is worried about his daughter visiting dangerous New York: "There are drugs, there are violent people, it is a dangerous city. Merry, you can wind up in a lot of trouble. You can wind up getting raped."[134] Seymour and Dawn perceive the rural lifestyle as ideal. This perception has already been described in many literary classics: Betty MacDonald describes her life on a chicken ranch in her semi-autobiographic novel *The Egg and I* and mentions that this way of life has been her husband's dream. In John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, both main characters, George and Lenny, dream of making enough money to buy a small farmhouse with land big enough to keep a few animals so that they could be self-sufficient: "We'll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we'll just say the hell with goin' to work, and we'll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an' listen to the rain comin' down on the roof…"[135] The land-ownership often found in works presenting pastoral themes is once again connected to the idea of the American dream.

Based on the presented evidence, it is safe to say that pastoral idyll is deeply rooted in the American culture, and in *American Pastoral*, Roth presents both the traditional dream based on land ownership and living in harmony with nature and the new dream that was born during the turmoil of the 1960s.

[134] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 11.
[135] John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1947), 30, https://ia801505.us.archive.org/26/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.507266/2015.507266.Of-Mice.pdf.

4. PARADISE REMEMBERED

Seymour Levov is the embodiment of the mainstream American dream discussed in the previous chapter, the same way that Kennedy was. He has a successful business, a beautiful wife with whom he has a nearly flawless daughter, an idyllic home in a rural setting, and everything about him seems perfect.

His dream revolves around simple and, at least for someone as privileged as Seymour, achievable goals such as land-ownership, a successful business, and a happy family. But America and being American was the uppermost in Seymour's mind: "The loneliness he would feel as a man without all his American feelings. The longing he would feel if he had to live in another country. Yes, everything that have meaning to his accomplishments had been American. Everything he loved was here."[136]

Seymour foregrounds living in a rural area probably because he is of immigrant descent, and this pastoral idyll he dreams of seems purely American. Land ownership is one of the pillars of the American dream and is something that the whole American identity was built on; therefore, Seymour feels that it is a way of finding his own American identity.

Owning an ordinary house is insufficient for Seymour and his fantasies of the American way of life. He already experienced owning a house in Newark while living with his Jewish family, and moving out of the city was another base to reach. The trend of young Jews moving from the city to the suburbs has been evident since the mid-1940s. As J. Fishman states, they began to leave their urban residences, settling in places where the Jews had never lived before.[137] As someone who grew up in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood, Seymour feels that moving to the area that is inhabited mainly by white protestant Catholics is his personal Manifest Destiny:

> But the Swede, rather like some frontiersman of old, would not be turned back. What was impractical and ill-advised to his father was an act of bravery to him. Next to marrying Dawn Dwyer, buying that house and the hundred acres and moving out to Old Rimrock was the most daring thing he had ever done. What was Mars to his father was America to him – he was settling Revolutionary New Jersey as if for the first time. Out in Old Rimrock, all of America laid at their door.[138]

Seymour is a Jewish pioneer leaving the land already colonized and conquering an old hostile WASP territory that used to be a hotbed for the white supremacy symbolized by the Ku Klux

[136] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 213.
[137] Joshua A. Fishman, "Moving to the Suburbs: Its Possible Impact on the Role of the Jewish Minority in American Community Life," *Phylon (1960-)* 24, no. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1963): 150.
[138] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 310.

Klan. His bravery in stepping out of Jewish Newark's safety parallels the old settlers gaining new territories. The westward expansion of the 19th century that is connected to the roots of the American dream was associated with economic opportunities, but for Seymour, the "expansion" to Old Rimrock means a connection to the roots of the American dream itself:

> Commuting every morning down to Central Avenue from his home some thirty-odd miles west of Newark, out past the suburbs – a short-range pioneer living on a hundred-acre farm on a back road in the sparsely habitated hills beyond Morristown, in wealthy, rural Old Rimrock, New Jersey, a long way from the tannery floor where Grandfather Levov had begun in America, paring away from the true skin the rubbery flesh that had ghoulishly swelled twice to its thickness in the great lime vats.[139]

In Old Rimrock, the Levovs live their pastoral idyll, and even the address of the house, *Arcady Hill Road*, subtly insinuates that the place is a rustic paradise. Land ownership does not suffice to fulfill their aspirations, and agriculture and self-sufficiency play a crucial role in their perception of Americanism. Seymour lives in a utopian version of America where being in touch with nature and away from the rotten society and its problems seems to be the key to leading a happy life without involvement in the horrors of that time. He is amazed by the smallest things, like his wife taking care of their cows or waking up their daughter in the morning, while he places little importance on the public affairs happening far from their Arcadia. The description of pleasant bucolic scenes that Seymour witnesses in Old Rimrock is virtually transcendental:

> Past the white pasture fences he loved, the rolling hay fields he loved, the corn fields, the turnip fields, the barns, the horses, the cows, the ponds, the streams, the springs, the falls, the watercress, the scouring rushes, the meadows, the acres and acres of woods he loves with all of a new country dweller's puppy love for nature, until he reached the century-old maple trees he loved and the substantial old stone house he loved.[140]

Seymour was genuinely happy he was able to reach this dream of his and was able to provide his family with the freedom that the rustic house represented. "That this is a place where I want to be, I knew the moment I laid eyes on it. Why shouldn't I be where I want to be? Why shouldn't I be with who I want to be? Isn't that what this country's all about?"[141]

Self-sufficiency is noticeable in more aspects of their lives. What is apparent is Seymour's independence and his ability to provide for his family while also sponsoring Dawn's cattle breeding farm, which fulfills Dawn's childhood dreams:

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[139] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 14.
[140] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 318.
[141] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 315.

> Dawn, as a small child, loved to visit the cows, and when she was about six or seven, she was taught by one of her cousins how to milk them, and that thrill – squirting the milk out of those udders, the animals just standing there eating hay and letting her tug to her heart's content – she never forgot,[142]

and is also a means of proving she is capable of more than being just a pretty face or a "slavish mom to half a dozen kids."[143]Apart from her initial financial dependency on her husband, Dawn is able to take care of the farm by herself as "she wouldn't need the manpower to milk and she could run the operation almost entirely by herself."[144] Seymour feels that he succeeded in life when seeing the beauty and innocence of the pastoral scenes: "I'm with you, I'm with the baby, I'm at the factory during the day, the rest of the time I'm out here, and that's everywhere I in this world I *ever* want to be. We own a piece of America, Dawn. I couldn't be happier if I tried. I did it darling, I did it – I did what I set out to do!"[145]

Living with the third-generation Jewish immigrant experience while being aware of his father's and grandfather's experiences greatly impacted Seymour and his way of thinking. He believes that with each generation, the family blends in, becomes more American, and is perfected:

> As a family, they still flew the flight of the immigrant rocket, the upward, unbroken immigrant trajectory from slave-driven great-grandfather to self-driven grandfather to self-confident, accomplished, independent father to the highest high flier of them all, the fourth-generation child for whom America was to be heaven itself.[146]

Seymour knows how different his life is thanks to being more Americanized than the previous generation, and that is why assimilation plays a big part in Seymour's American dream. He becomes an icon enshrined by the Newark Jewry that admires "the Jewishness that he wore so lightly" and his "oneness with America."[147] Seymour's effortless Americanization roots in his theory of the Americanized generations. While his father still cherished being Jewish more than being American, he was more American than Seymour's grandfather in many aspects, e.g., being self-made, self-sufficient or owning property. Zuckerman describes this gradual process as Seymour being "only another of our neighborhood Seymours whose forebears had been Solomons and Sauls and who would themselves beget Stephens and Shawns,"[148] with each generation being more assimilated than the previous one. However, the difference between the neighborhood Seymours and Seymour Levov is *the Swede* – a nickname that was given to him,

[142] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 198.
[143] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 194.
[144] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 198.
[145] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 315.
[146] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 122.
[147] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 20.
[148] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 20.

> a name that made him mythic in a way that Seymour would never have done, mythic not only during his school years, but to his schoolmates, in memory, for the rest of their days. He carried it with him like an invisible passport, all the while wandering deeper and deeper into an American's life, forthrightly evolving into a large, smooth optimistic American.[149]

Seymour's successful assimilation and his pride in being American are evident in his stance on American involvement in World War II. The general public, which was still dealing with the aftermath of World War I, refused to join another European conflict that had nothing to do with the United States and its citizens. The public mood shifted after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Resulting in more than three thousand casualties and leaving a deep wound in the hearts of the Americans who had lost their sense of untouchability, the attack on the naval base induced a united response from the Americans and resulted in entering the war. Seymour decided to take part in the offensive that was meant to restore the national pride "just after Pearl Harbor,"[150] like a true patriot. American Jewry faced hard times before the 7th of December 1941 due to the spread of anti-Semitism in America. However, after Pearl Harbor, the divisions dissipated, and "American Jews believed that they had at last become fully American and that the relationship between their Jewish and American identities was to be one of symbiosis and not conflict."[151] Nevertheless, the anti-Semitic attitudes persisted in the military, notably in the Marine Corps that Seymour joined despite his parent's disapproval.

Against the odds, Seymour surmounted the prejudices and thrived in the army even though he did not join any fights as the war ended before he could finish his training. He became a "recreation specialist"[152] utilizing his sports experiences from high school. It seems that he was well-liked by everyone, contrary to the initial belief that he would be a target of religious discrimination. Later in life, Seymour recollects his experience in the army and describes it as being a cultural and ethical melting pot:

> Great, great experience for a kid from Keer Avenue. Guys I would never have met in my life. Accents from all over the place. The Midwest. New England. Some farm boys from Texas and the Deep South I couldn't even understand… Irish guys, Italian guys, Slovaks, Poles, tough little bastards from Pennsylvania, kids who'd run away from fathers who worked in the mines and beat them with belt buckles and with their fists – these were the guys I lived with and ate with and slept alongside.[153]

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[149] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 207.
[150] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 14.
[151] Edward S. Shapiro, "World War II and American Jewish Identity," *Modern Judaism* 10, no. 1 (February 1990): 65.
[152] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 14.
[153] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 211–212.

Having this opportunity made Seymour fall in love with being American even more. He saw that anyone from various backgrounds could become American and that the core meaning of the American persona was equality. This was of great importance for Seymour as he was well aware of his differences, and before joining the army, he only had experience from high school in a Jewish neighborhood where he could not meet different cultures. Weequahic high school was preponderantly Jewish, and this was Seymour's first real opportunity to meet cultural and religious pluralism; thus, he subconsciously connected Americanism with cultural syncretism – a true American is free of religious or cultural bias, he is simply American.

All of these virtues can be found in the persona of Seymour's idol Johnny Appleseed. Johnny Appleseed is a personage of American folklore and links the individual parts of Seymour's dream together. The story depicting Johnny Appleseed as an American hero that one can relate to became an important element of the merging of cultures as "the vision of Johnny Appleseed as a unifying figure, beloved by both Indians and whites, continued to grow in its importance as Johnny Appleseed became a central part of the American origin myth."[154] Seymour, trying to suppress his Jewish identity in order to acquire his American one, found himself in the concept of a man who "wasn't a Jew, wasn't an Irish Catholic, wasn't a Protestant Christian – nope, Johnny Appleseed was just a happy American."[155] Through Johnny Appleseed, Seymour could ascend from being an immigrant to an American.

Being American is being free and liberated of the patterns that one was to follow. Seymour experiences this freedom by being able to marry Dawn Dwyer – an Irish Catholic. He does not care if they have their differences religion-wise; it is the freedom of choice that he considers important. Their matrimony pledges allegiance to the principles of the American dream, which are liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness. Seymour's devotion to Dawn symbolized his devotion to America. He could have had any girl that he would like, and as his father stated, there were "hundreds and thousands of lovely Jewish girls,"[156] but Seymour chooses his own path by marrying a shiksa – a Gentile girl. He wants the same for his progeny.[157] By letting them be free to choose whom they want to be, he would beget another generation of America's children who would have boundless opportunities their whole life.

[154] William Kerrigan, "The Invention of Johnny Appleseed," *The Antioch Review* 70, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 616–617.
[155] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 316.
[156] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 85.
[157] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 399.

As mentioned above, Seymour is privileged. The opportunities that he has derived from his upbringing in an already privileged family. His family is quite wealthy and already Americanized as they belong among the Keer Avenue Jews who are seen as the local elite "laying claim like audacious pioneers to the normalizing American amenities. And at the vanguard of vanguard were the Levovs, who had bestowed upon us our very own Swede, a boy as close to a goy as we were going to get."[158] Goy is a Yiddish term used for a Gentile person; hence Seymour is described as a signifier of successful assimilation that he partially achieved because of his family's accomplishments.

Seymour's salient feature that helped him succeed is his good looks. It is mentioned throughout his story that he is extremely good-looking, and he himself recognizes the importance of attractiveness. According to research conducted in the United States in 1978, conventional beauty affects one's life from getting a better education to subsequently resulting in better job opportunities because an attractive individual is favored from an early age, making them more confident and therefore more likely to be successful.[159] Seymour is described as blue-eyed steep-jawed Aryan, and based on Zuckerman's recollections, he was treated differently, with more respect. By adding his athletic achievements in purely American sports of baseball, basketball, and football, Seymour becomes an archetype of a predetermined success. With Dawn Dwyer by his side, a girl who competed in Miss America, their life is fated to be idyllic. When asked about Dawn and why he chose her, Seymour replies that he is in love with her, defying his father and celebrating the epitome of America – freedom. Together they are a visual representation of typical masculinity and femininity, with Seymour being "the earthy human specimen, the very image of unrestricted virility"[160] and Dawn stripped down to a pretty housewife and regarded as "purely, blissfully his."[161] Despite the stereotypical portrayal of their relationship, they lead a happy life trying to perfect every detail of their existence to match the image they built for themselves.

As already emphasized, self-reliance is one of the pillars of the American dream. Undoubtedly, it plays a crucial role in Seymour's dream as well. Although it was mentioned that his family is rich, their wealth was not ever-present. Seymour's father, Lou Levov, is self-made in every way. He started as an uneducated son of an immigrant who worked as a tanner and followed

[158] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 10.
[159] Debra Umberson, Michael Hughes, "The Impact of Physical Attractiveness on Achievement and Psychological Well-Being," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (September 1987): 230–232.
[160] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 318.
[161] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 318.

his father's footsteps. At fourteen, he became an apprentice and endured hours of hard manual labor to climb to the top. In his twenties, he founded his first company, which did not survive the Great Depression. After that, Newark Maid was established. Lou Levov became successful owing to his determination, unquestionable talent, and business sense. However, without the attribution of Seymour's renown, Lou probably would not break into the leather gloves market since he met someone with connections who "came over to congratulate him on his boy's selection by the *Newark Times* as an all-county center in basketball,"[162] and "by the end of the war, Newark Maid had established itself – in no small part because of Swede Levov's athletic achievement – as one of the most respected names in ladies' gloves south of Gloversville, New York."[163] Seymour was not handed the reins right after getting his degree. He is self-made in his own way. He had to learn everything just like his father as if he was not the son of the boss, and he "learned this business in the old-fashioned way. From the ground up. My father started me literally sweeping the floors. Went through every single department, getting a feel for each operation and why it was being done."[164]

Seymour's dream comprises of the American ideals that are the pillars of the American identity. Seymour suppresses his own Jewish identity, and his assimilation manifests itself during the quintessential American holiday, on the

> neutral, dereligionized ground of Thanksgiving, when everybody gets to eat the same thing, nobody sneaking off to eat funny stuff – no kugel, no gefilte fish, no bitter herbs, just one colossal turkey for two hundred and fifty million people – one colossal turkey feeds all.[…] It is the American pastoral par excellence and it lasts twenty-four hours.[165]

[162] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 13.
[163] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 13.
[164] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 127.
[165] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 402.

5. PARADISE LOST

As Zuckerman shares his memories of Seymour, he remembers a book called *The Kid from Tomkinsville*, Seymour's favorite that Zuckerman saw while visiting the Levovs. Being obsessed with *the Swede* psyche – just like everybody else – he read the book too, to feel closer to his role model, but it was beyond his awareness that the rather sad story of a young pitcher whose "each triumph is rewarded with a punishing disappointment or a crushing incident,"[166] was a foreshadowing of Seymour's own tragic fate.

Zuckerman slowly unravels the arcane details of Seymour's life, finding out the *earthy human specimen*, who used to be the synonym of physical strength, died of cancer. Moreover, he divorced his perfect Dawn, and his pastoral idyl was crushed to pieces when his little daughter planted a bomb in a local post office, killing an innocent citizen and fleeing Old Rimrock, and became "the daughter who transports him out of the longed-for American pastoral and into everything that is its antithesis and its enemy, into the fury, the violence, and the desperation of the counterpastoral – into the indigenous American berserk."[167]

Seymour's dream is built upon the old-fashioned and quintessentially American ideals, but growing up in the turmoil of the sixties, Merry's dream evolves into something larger than American pastoral. Merry is given everything she could possibly want; thus, for her, "her father's life remains incomprehensible because she has not known the struggle toward 'the good life'."[168] She dreams of peace and equality, but her upbringing caused a fatal distortion of those concepts. The conflict of the father's and daughter's perceptions is inevitable.

The first signs of the clash date back to when Merry was little. The *nearly perfect* daughter is, in fact, far from perfect for Seymour and Dawn as they long for literal perfection in every aspect of their idyll. Merry is a stutter, and her mother and father have a hard time dealing with it and tend to put an enormous pressure on the little girl that is constantly overestimated by her pretentious parents: "She's somethin', our precious daughter. This girl is going to Harvard,"[169] Seymour insists on Merry's prodigious intellect based on every little comment she makes. Merry would have been perfect had she not stuttered, at least in the eyes of the Levovs, and living in "a highly pressured perfectionist family where they tend to place an unrealistically

[166] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 8.
[167] Roth, *American Pastoral*, 86.
[168] Clare Sigrist-Sutton, "Mistaking Merry: Tearing off the Veil in *American Pastoral*," *Philip Roth Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 54.
[169] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 248.

high value on her every utterance,"[170] Merry is somehow reduced to being an accessory of the pretty successful parents, and her real personality is not seen for quite some time. Her stuttering is an ever-present stain that they desperately try to get rid of. They try to do so by putting Merry in therapy. Meeting her therapist, who suggests his theories on why Merry might enjoy her stuttering, and that she uses it as a device of manipulation as

> her parental good fortune was just too much for Merry, and so, to withdraw from the competition with her mother, to get her mother to hover over and focus on her and eventually climb the walls – and, in addition, to win the father away from the beautiful mother – she chose to stigmatize herself with a severe stutter, thereby manipulating everyone from a point of seeming weakness,[171]

Seymour's shallowness starts to reveal itself. He immediately dismisses and refuses any of the therapist's ideas solely because of the way the therapist looks, "he hates me, thought the Swede. It's all because of the way I look. Hates me because of the way Dawn looks. He's obsessed with our looks. That's why he hates us – we're not short and ugly like him!"[172] In fact, it is Seymour who is obsessed with looks. Even the foundations of his relationship with Dawn were built on physical attraction as, in fact, he was not in love with her; as he told his father, he was struck by "the authority of beauty," which is a "very irrational thing."[173] According to Marshal Bruce Gentry, Seymour's superficial relationship towards women can be attributed to American misogyny, as he never truly loves, but he wishes to manufacture women like he manufactures gloves with the ambition to achieve perfection.[174] Seymour seems unable to comprehend the social changes of the 1960s with women gaining more power and independence, and is stuck with the stereotype of the 1950s housewife. He reduces Dawn to a beauty and nothing else, although Dawn herself hates being labeled the former beauty queen and wants to prove that she is much more than that and wants to show off her abilities. Seymour never mentions falling for her personality; it was her being "tiny and exquisite"[175] that he fetishized and he was thrilled by the idea that he might be the suitor of the future Miss America. This raises a question of happiness in such a relationship. However, without Merry, the marriage probably would have been happy because of Dawn's own vanity, which she desperately tries to hide. After the detonation, she ends up in a mental hospital, suffering from depression and suicidal thoughts.

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[170] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 97.
[171] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 96.
[172] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 96.
[173] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 385.
[174] Marshall Bruce Gentry, "Newark Maid Feminism in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*," *Shofar* 19, no. 1 (Fall 2000): 79.
[175] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 191.

Depression functions as the antithesis of the happiness the Levovs once possessed and concurrently serves as a reminder of the imperfection that entered their perfect lives.

> I never wanted to be Miss America! I never wanted to marry *anyone*! But you wouldn't let me *breathe* – you wouldn't let me out of your *sight*. All I ever wanted was my college education and that job. I should never have left Elizabeth! Never! Do you know what Miss New Jersey did for my life? It ruined it,[176]

Dawn is hypocritical, blaming Seymour and the beauty pageant for the way her life turned out, being in denial about her daughter's heinous crime, and that she might be at fault as well. While claiming that she refuses the superficiality of conventional attractiveness and adamantly denying that she participated in the pageants for other reasons than winning a scholarship that was offered, Dawn finds her salvation in plastic surgeries: "*It is quite wonderful, dear doctor. It is as though I have been given a new life. Both form within and from the outside."*[177] In a household this vain, Merry is subjected to overly high expectations and judgment:

> We're talking about the humiliation of a daughter by her beauty-queen mother. We're talking about a mother who completely colonized her daughter's self-image. We're talking about a mother who didn't have an inch of feeling for her daughter – who has about as much depth as those gloves you make. A whole family and all you really fucking care about is skin. Ectoderm. Surface. But what's underneath, you don't have a clue.[178]

Merry starts to deprecate her parent's values, and her refusal is manifested in her physical deterioration when she "all at once shot up, broke out, grew stout – she thickened across the back and the neck, stopped brushing her teeth and combing her hair,"[179] which is the first rebellion against the American pastoral. Eventually, Seymour christens her "the ugliest daughter to ever born of two attractive parents,"[180] once again proving he lacks depth as well as showing his despair over the gradual disintegration of both his family and his American dream. Merry's stance is similar to the one of Kathy Boudin, who rejected gender stereotypes, and her resistance manifested itself in violence.

Seymour, as a worshiper of the American dream and all of its constituents, gives Merry seemingly boundless freedom, letting her explore whatever she wants in order to develop her personality. He was an indulgent "liberal sweetheart of a father" who "brought her up with all the modern ideas of being rational with your children. Everything permissible, everything forgivable, and she hated it."[181] She is not a Jew nor a Catholic. She is just a happy American

[176] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 178.
[177] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 366.
[178] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 136–137.
[179] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 100.
[180] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 243.
[181] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 69.

kid of two happily assimilated American parents. She was supposed to be given the freedom of choice regarding whom she wanted to be. However, her freedom was *seemingly boundless.* In reality, it feels that she was just a device to fulfill her parents' desire for cultural syncretism – what she was supposed to be was an American born of a conjunction of her parents' cultures. Seymour never wanted Merry to practice his faith, but he did not want her to practice Dawn's faith either. Her Catholic phase that she entered while trying to find herself disturbed Seymour gradually more with each step that Merry took, closer to the God that he did not believe in, and tried to persuade her that this, in fact, is not the path that she should choose:

> The statue was what led him to sit her down and ask if she would be willing to take the pictures and the palm frond off the wall and put them away in her closet, along with the statue and the Eternal Candle, when Granma and Grandpa Levov came to visit. Quietly he explained that though her room was her room and she had the right to hang anything there she wanted, Granma and Grandpa Levov were Jews, and so, of course, was he, and rightly or wrongly, Jews don't, etc., etc. And because she was a sweet girl who wanted to please people, and to please her daddy most of all, she was careful to be sure that nothing Grandma Dwyer had given her was anywhere to be seen when next the Swede's parents visited Old Rimrock.[182]

Seymour treats Merry as his puppet, manipulating her to get his way, which is the complete opposite of his stance on Merry's intelligence and maturity; furthermore it contradicts his proclamation of liberty and independence. Interestingly, while Seymour disapproves of Merry's interest in other religions than his own, he does not mind the Weathermen's motto hanging in Merry's room because "even though he hadn't liked it one bit, he did not believe it was his right […], because out of regard for her property and her personal freedom – he couldn't even pull off an awful poster, because he was not capable of even that much righteous violence,"[183] showing how hypocritical Seymour is, blinded by his commitment to America and its freedom so much that he cannot see a potential threat but also forbidding something utterly insignificant. For Dawn, having a daughter practicing her husband's faith as unacceptable as Merry being a Catholic is for Seymour: "But to raise a Jew? That's a whole other bag of tricks,"[184] Rita Cohen, Merry's emissary, explains how Dawn feels, derogating the idea of free will that Dawn once was so adamant about. Ultimately, Merry's free will is completely forgotten and refused when Seymour denies that she could in any way be responsible for the bombing, convincing himself that she was forced to do it and blaming the Weathermen for being the ones who "roped her

[182] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 94.
[183] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 252.
[184] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 138.

into this too!"[185] Clare Sigrist-Sutton suggest that while questioning his daughter volition, Seymour, blinded by his yearning for assimilation, is controlled by the societal decorum.[186]

Merry and Seymour are a representation of duality. He is beautiful; she, conventionally, is not. He is an athlete; her body fails her due to her speech impediment. He is heard; she is not. Aliki Varvogli draws an analogy with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Seymour, a decent citizen, is represented by Dr. Jekyll. The terrorist Merry embodies the rage of Mr. Hyde, but as Varvogli states, she also, in a way, embodies the values of the American dream: self-reliance and freedom of expression as she was a so-called "homegrown terrorist", a terrorist with the American identity, that basically causes a discrepancy of the Jekyll-Hyde extent.[187] Merry's actions are not a violation of the American dream, as Seymour sees it, they are pointing on the reality of the turbulent time of Merry's growing up, to which Seymour is oblivious:

> You wanted Miss America? Well, you've got her with a vengeance – she's your daughter! You wanted to be a real American jock, a real American marine, a real American hotshot with a beautiful Gentile babe on your arm? You longed to be like everybody else to the United States of America? Well, you do know, big boy, thanks to your daughter.[188]

Seymour's brother Jerry's monologue is "suggesting that Merry's behavior is culturally and historically coherent."[189]

Many Americans were affected by the Vietnam war. Young people were drafted, and many were killed or suffered from PTSD after returning home. The Levovs, however, were spared of direct involvement on the battlefield, but as the horrors of the war were televised, the war fought its way into Old Rimrock anyway. Merry's actions add a new dimension to the term *living room war.* The living room is exactly where Merry's antiwar posture formed. She saw a self-immolation of a Buddhist monk, a protester against religious oppression whose sacrifice shocked the unprepared Americans. Seymour notes that this occasion left Merry "terrified for weeks afterward, crying about what had appeared on television that night, talking about it, awakened from her sleep by dreaming about it."[190] While Merry was immediately engaged, constantly thinking about the Vietnamese and wanting to know more, Seymour was not even able to explain the self-immolation simply because he did not care. He understood Merry's

[185] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 149.
[186] Sigrist-Sutton, "Mistaking," 61–62.
[187] Aliki Varvogli, "The Inscription of Terrorism: Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*," *Philip Roth Studies* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 104–105.
[188] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 277.
[189] Varvogli, "The Inscription," 110.
[190] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 152.

consternation, but he did not know the circumstances because his perception of the war was altered by the television. Additionally, Seymour's idyl was (seemingly) not threatened by the Vietnam war, so Seymour did not feel apprehension about it. Gradually, Merry's shock was replaced by some sort of morbid curiosity when she could not resist watching as more self-immolations were happening. Even though Seymour understood that these horrendous scenes could possibly negatively influence Merry, he could not find a way to stop her, and forbidding her to watch it probably seemed like a violation of his own American principles.

Merry, nicknamed Ho Chi Levov after the communist leader of North Vietnam, becomes obsessed with the war. Her mourning for the Vietnamese when she wondered "does anybody care? Does anybody have a conscience? Doesn't anybody in this w-world have a conscience left?"[191] when she opposed the senseless violence, turns into anger. Her stance is coherent with the evolution of the 1960s. The support for the war vanished and was replaced by antiwar protests. There is also a parallel with the development of the human rights movement – peaceful efforts were replaced by radical branches of the movement – which corresponds with Merry's reinvention. She transforms her stuttering, which initially restrained her from expressing her thoughts and opinions, into her weapon, "the machete with which to mow all the bastard liars down."[192] She embraces her imperfection, something that is unthinkable in the perfectionist family of the Levovs. The acceptance of her disability is the first thing that brings the war closer to Seymour as she states that she is "not going to spend my whole life wrestling day and night with a fucking stutter when kids are b-b-b-eing b-b-b-b-b-bu-bu-bu roasted alive by Lyndon B-b-b-baines b-b-b-bu-bu-burn-'em-up Johnson!" Seymour's and Dawn's vanity prevents them from ruminating about Merry's concerns; they only care about is how degrading her rather aggressive manner is: "I cannot *recognize* her. I thought she was smart. She's not smart at all. She's become *stupid*, Seymour; she gets more and more stupid each time we talk."[193] Additionally, Dawn worries about being unable to control Merry, and she seems quite unaffectionate and detached from her daughter. Dawn's mindset is similar to Seymour's perception of women, and Merry, as the representation of the new order and the 1960s turmoil is somehow destined to destroy her parents' quaint American dream.

Contrary to Seymour, Merry acts. Seymour is a member of the New Jersey Businessmen Against the War, ostensibly because he opposed the war. However, he actually "would not have

[191] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 154.
[192] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 100.
[193] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 102.

joined this one and volunteered for the steering committee and paid a thousand dollars toward their protest ad in the *Newark News* had he not hoped his conspicuous involvement might deflect a little of her anger away from him."[194] But it was Seymour himself who advised Merry to "bring the war home,"[195] not thoroughly thinking about the consequences it could have since Merry was brought up with the idea that everything is possible, and with ever-present violence showed in television transmissions. So Merry listened to her father and "stayed at home, and after turning their living room into a battlefield, after turning Morristown High into a battlefield, she went out one day and blew up the post office,"[196] reminiscent of the human torch Norman Morrison, who brought the atrocities of war in front of Pentagon. Like Morrison, who brought his little daughter to witness his self-immolation, Merry also takes her family hostage by bombing their pastoral idyll and placing them in "the real American crazy shit. America amok! America amuck!"[197]

Merry is able to recognize the American neocolonialism that torments the innocent Vietnamese, but Seymour, as A. Pozorski implies, sees the violent Vietnam expansion as spreading the seeds of democracy.[198] Seymour accuses Merry of not understanding what being an American really means stating that:

> For her, being an American was loathing America, but loving America was something he could not let go of any more that he could have let go of loving his father and his mother, any more than he could have let go of his decency. How could she "hate" this country when she had no *conception* of this country?[199]

But he fails to realize that it is not America that Merry hates; it is American imperialism and the injustice connected to it. His accusation of having no conception of the country also proves that it is Seymour who is mistaken; his perception of America lacks depth and history.[200]

Clare Sigrist-Sutton suggests an equivalency between Seymour and middle-class Anglo-America and between Merry and the third world. She sees Merry as the voice of the oppressed – the ones that were not as lucky as Seymour and who failed at achieving the American dream.[201] Not only is she vocalization of the maltreated minorities, she feels "responsible when America b-blows up Vietnamese villages, […] responsible when America is b-blowing little b-

[194] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 100.
[195] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 112.
[196] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 113.
[197] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 277.
[198] Aimee Pozorski, "*American Pastoral* and the Traumatic Ideals of Democracy," *Philip Roth Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 81–82.
[199] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 213.
[200] Varvogli, "The Inscription," 108.
[201] Sigrist-Sutton, "Mistaking," 49–50.

babies to b-b-b-b-bits."[202] In New York, she meets with people who feel the same way because Seymour does not and "neither does Mother,"[203] as they are imprisoned in their own world, and the suffering of those afflicted by the war is too far away to affect them. Merry herself cannot escape the oppression from her own parents as Dawn is convinced that she has the right to control Merry: "I can tell you what to do and I *will* tell you what to do,"[204] and Seymour's intrusive questioning drives Merry crazy. Seymour is adamant that he is trying to *understand* her, even though she begs him to stop being a sensible parent because she does not want to be understood, "I want to be f-f-f-free!"[205] she exclaims.

Seymour, a man who is thriving in the age of American imperialism, is appalled when he discovers that Merry gravitates toward communism. With the omnipresent threat of the Cold war, it is unimaginable that *his* daughter believes in the things written in *The Communist Manifesto* – she owns a copy that contains lines that "weren't just diatribes against the war – they were written by people wanting to overthrow capitalism and the U.S. government, people screaming for violence and revolution"[206]. Being a communist is a logical and expected growth as Merry rejected her family's bourgeois values and middle-class identity. For Seymour, there appears to be a similitude with the allure of Catholicism that, fortunately, did not last very long:

> In a couple of years saints and prayer had disappeared from Merry's life; she stopped wearing the Miraculous Medal, with the impression on it of the Blessed Virgin, which she had sworn to Grandma Dwyer to wear 'perpetually' without even taking it off to bathe. She outgrew the saint just as she would have outgrown the Communism. And she *would* have outgrown in – Merry outgrew everything.[207]

Merry (and Rita Cohen) see Seymour as an exploiter and the embodiment of social injustices induced by capitalism as he comes from a privileged background and accumulates wealth at the expense of his hard-working employees.[208] While being the self-made man par excellence, living the dream of wealth and property, it is often hinted that Seymour is a modern-day slaveholder. Rita Cohen even explicitly labels him as one calling him "Mr. Legree,"[209] a plantation owner and the antagonist of the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* While desperately endeavoring to break free of the Jewish stereotypes and trying to live the WASP life in Old Rimrock while having his successful company in the city, Seymour unintentionally confirms

[202] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 107.
[203] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 107.
[204] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 102.
[205] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 107.
[206] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 158.
[207] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 159.
[208] Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, "Mourning the "Greatest Generation": Myth and History in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 51, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 3.
[209] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 135.

the cliché of Jews being exploiters yet strangers at the same time.[210] Marshall Bruce Gentry suggests that Seymour succumbs to the capitalistic injustices, while Merry wants him to fight against them, but Seymour's only concern is the profit.[211] Even though Seymour gets very defensive when being confronted by Rita, her accusations are eventually proven to be true when he admits that he fled the city after the Newark riots because he was "unable to stop the erosion of the workmanship, which had deteriorated steadily,"[212] leaving his loyal employees behind. He even confesses that he stayed in Newark solely because of Merry's imputations of exploitation and that

> he wouldn't have hesitated – and wouldn't still – to pick up and move were it not for his fear that, if he should join the exodus of businesses not yet burned down, Merry would at last have her airtight case against him. *Victimizing black people and the working class and the poor solely for self-gain, out of filthy greed!*[213]

It seems that Seymour is trying to reconcile his American dream with Merry's American dream. He does not want to be perceived as a capitalist tyrant or a modern slaveholder, but he concedes that this standpoint is correct when deeming his life ravaged by the Weathermen:

> They were delirious with joy, delighted having destroyed his once-pampered daughter and ruined his privileged life, shepherding him at long last to their truth, to the truth as they knew it to be for every Vietnamese man, woman, child and tot, for every colonized black in America, for everyone everywhere who had been fucked over by the capitalists and their insatiable greed.[214]

But is there anything more American than the quintessence of Americanism, the aspect of history that shaped the whole nation and eventually led to the birth of the dream of equality? Nevertheless, Seymour rejects all of that, even if it means rejecting his own dream, and eventually, he himself finds a sort of comfort in communism, ultimately betraying his American identity.

Having imaginary conversations with Angela Davis, a black communist professor who, as he is convinced, is connected to his daughter, he seeks consolation. To his fictitious Angela, he talks about a

> vision that he is one of two white trustees (this is not true – the father of a friend is the trustee) of an antipoverty organization that meets regularly in Newark to promote the city's comeback, which (also not true – how could it be?) he still believes in. […] He is trying everything he can for the liberation of her people. He reminds himself to repeat these words to her every night: the liberation of the

[210] Fishman, "Moving," 151.
[211] Gentry, "Newark," 78.
[212] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 24.
[213] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 162.
[214] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 257.

> people, America's black colonies, the inhumanity of society, embattled humanity.[215]

It seems that in light of the Newark riots and the human rights movement, Seymour is starting to adopt a new dream – a dream of equality. But while talking about equality with Angela, he listens to his Jewish father's racist discourse about African Americans:

> I'm by the pool and my wonderful friends look up from the paper and they tell me they ought to take the schvartzes and line 'em up and shoot 'em, and I'm the only one who has to remind them that's what Hitler did to the Jews. […] when I'm arguing with them, *I am arguing against what I should be arguing for!*[216]

And Seymour's hypocrisy is showing once again, with his dream of equality being as shallow as all his other values, but he does not see it. In fact, this statement is Lou Levov's own confession of hypocrisy – it was he who told Merry she forgot "what Hitler did to Jews,"[217] when she insisted there was no difference between Johnson and Hitler and between the suffering of the Vietnamese and the Jews. Furthermore, Lou paraphrases Merry's words saying, "where is *theirs*, the schvartzes' conscience?" but unlike Merry (and like Seymour), he only cares about his profit. Seymour fails to see the disparity between his words and his actions, and he sees himself as the savior and revolutionary, a man who employs black people, even though his business suffers because of it, but it does not matter because he adopted new noble values. He opens a new factory in Czechoslovakia, a part of the Soviet Union, the ultimate enemy of American democracy, and in Puerto Rico, an island that has been subjected to economic exploitation by the United States for decades, and Seymour can continue using the Puerto Ricans for his own profit.

When Seymour finally finds Merry, he is horrified to learn that she has become a Jain. She repels all forms of violence, and

> she wore the veil to do no harm to the microscopic organisms that dwell in the air we breathe. She did not bathe because she revered all life, including the vermin. She did bit wash, she said, so as 'to do no harm to the water.' She did not walk about after dark, even in her own room, for fear of crushing some living object beneath her feet.[218]

Merry's new path contradicts her previous actions. She shows the opposite side of the spectrum of extremes that Seymour vehemently avoids by living a decent life and never showing disquietedness or expressing anger only with cautiously calculated words. He refuses her religion, disparaging her sagacity, while not realizing the influence that he had on her since her

[215] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 165.
[216] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 164.
[217] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 288.
[218] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 232.

early childhood: Johnny Appleseed, the archetype of the ideal man that she grew up with, was "never known to hurt any animal or to give any living thing pain – not even a snake."[219] She does not eat and wants to perfect her soul by starving herself to death – a death that she perceives as a ritual. Merry is willing to die for her cause the same way as the Buddhistic monks while being the same person that was willing to kill others for her cause. Seymour discovers a horrible truth of her life on the run when she admits to killing Fred Conlon in Old Rimrock – something that Seymour refused to believe - and to killing three more people in other bombings. Now, retransformed as a Jain, she talks about *ahimsa*, nonviolence, that inspired Mahatma Gandhi and

> Mahatma Gandhi, in his nonviolence, is the core of truth that created Martin Luther King. And Martin Luther King is the core of truth that created the civil rights movement. And, at the end of his life, when he was moving beyond the civil rights movement to a larger vision, when he was opposing the war in Vietnam,[220]

and she closes the circle by moving from obeying the bellicose Malcolm X to following the nonviolent path of Martin Luther King, from bringing the war home to bringing peace.

However, she makes Seymour realize how atrocious the war that Merry has been fighting against is when she tells him that she was raped on multiple occasions. Rape is the worst violation of personal freedom that Seymour cherishes, and he cannot stop thinking of "the particulars of the rapists fucking his daughter."[221] The explicit language indicates Seymour's shock, while the lack of Merry's thoughts makes her seem desensitized to it. That might be Seymour's fault, and he realizes it when remembering a *kiss* that he gave an eleven-year-old Merry:

> And at just the moment when he had understood that the summer's mutual, seemingly harmless playacting – the two of them nibbling at an intimacy too enjoyable to swear off and yet not in any way to be taken seriously, to be much concerned with, to be given an excessive significance, something utterly uncarnal that would fade away once the vacation was over and she was in school all day and he had returned to work, nothing that they couldn't easily find their way back from – just when he had come to understand that the summer romance required some readjusting all around, he lost his vaunted sense of proportion, drew her to him with one arm, and kissed her stammering mouth with the passion that she had been asking him for all month long while knowing only obscurely what she was asking for.[222]

[219] Kerrigan, "The Invention,"614.
[220] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 246.
[221] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 359.
[222] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 91.

Seymour used his position of power, and instead of explaining the situation of Merry and setting boundaries, he decided to overstep them. Merry, as a minor, could not give her consent, and Seymour used her unawareness to manipulate her because he made fun of her stuttering before the kiss, and this was his way of controlling her and her feelings. The only sign of Merry's trauma is when she tells Seymour that "girls wind up getting raped whether they listen to their daddies or not. Sometimes the daddies do the raping."[223] Perhaps the bomb was a climax, and the kiss was a threshold of Merry's desensitization to violence. Either way, Merry's confessions bring the war closer to Seymour than ever before. Her being a murderer and a sexual assault victim at the same time is Seymour's personal My Lai massacre that he cannot recuperate from.

Ultimately, it is alienation that Seymour reaches. He alienates from his daughter, who was supposed to be the perfected fourth generation of the Levov family, but she failed to follow her vocation because "killing people was as far as you could get from all that had been given to the Levovs to do."[224] He cannot syncretize their different religions nor their dreams, and realizes that it is his fault and as because of his liberal upbringing derived from his fondness for the archetypal American freedom, "they raised a child who was neither Catholic nor Jew, who instead was first a stutterer, then a killer, then a Jain."[225] Merry's actions have many repercussions for the Levov family, one of them being Seymour's estrangement from his wife Dawn who is having an affair with Orcutt – a man that is a true WASP, who, unlike Seymour, did not have to become an American, he was born an American. Orcutt helps Seymour comprehend that being American is irreversibly connected with colonialism, A. Pozorski corroborates this assumption by allegorizing Dawn, representing a colony, and Orcutt, representing America.[226] But Dawn is not the only one who cheated, Seymour himself had a lover – Merry's therapist Sheila. Cheating (and the subsequent divorce) contradicts Seymour's desire for an idyllic life and a happy family that coheres with the longed-for perfection. He suffers alienation from his faith, feeling that "I go into those synagogues and it's all foreign to me,"[227] demonstrating that his determination to become a bias-free American resulted in Seymour's isolation from his roots. As David Brauner states, while attempting to achieve

[223] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 111.
[224] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 264.
[225] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 386.
[226] Pozorski, "*American Pastoral,"* 83.
[227] Roth, *American Pastoral,* 315.

assimilation, Seymour fails to appropriate the American life, but while trying to do so, he estranges from his family, and his sense of Jewish self is deracinated.[228]

[228] David Brauner, "American Anti-Pastoral: Incontinence and Impurity in *American Pastoral* and *The Human Stain*," *Studies in American Jewish Literature (1981-)* 23, (2004): 69.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to analyze Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* and his portrayal of the American dream and the reflection of the societal, political, and cultural events and phenomena of the 1960s. The main goal was to determine the impact of the turbulent decade on the life of the American everyman represented by Seymour Levov.

By analyzing the individual events and their impact on the Levovs, this thesis has shown that the American dream was subjected to immense changes during the 1960s due to the clash of divergent ideologies. The question of whether the American dream survived the decade was raised. However, this thesis proved that the American dream is a national ethos that has been present since the foundation of the United States, shaped the nation, and is an intrinsic element of the American identity. Thus, the American dream cannot die. Seymour's dream suffered a lot of damage, but in the end, Seymour was able to recover and follow his dream again, which is proven by the fact that he had a new family after losing both Merry and Dawn. By analyzing Merry and her actions, the dream of the 1960s was determined as one of peace (although Merry had a distorted conception of peace and violence), freedom, and equality. On the other hand, Seymour's dream corresponds with the values that have been present since the birth of the American dream, with the emphasis placed on land ownership, wealth, and successful assimilation. Merry was able to reveal the shallowness of Seymour's ideals.

Events that heavily influenced Seymour were mainly the Vietnam war and the Civil Rights Movement. The thesis has shown that the war had a huge impact on the generality of the people regardless of their engagement. Seymour nor his family were not directly involved in Vietnam, but the war still affected them. The Civil Rights Movement influenced Merry and her way of thinking, while Seymour failed to adapt to the new order of things. In light of the Newark riots, Seymour's pursuit of profit portrayed him as being ignorant, racist, and an exploiter. That drew a picture of the 1960s society that was torn apart, with Seymour representing the privileged and Merry being the voice of the oppressed.

Based on the provided evidence, it is evident that being a third-generation Jew plays a crucial role in Seymour's life and affects his perception of the American dream as well. Seymour sees America as a land of promise and endless possibilities, but his concept of America lacks depth and condones all that is wrong with the country. He is trying to achieve assimilation, rejecting his Jewish self, but is left feeling alienated and experiences deracination from his roots instead. While the analysis of Roth's book clearly illustrates the importance of Seymour's Jewish

descent, it raises a question of the overall importance of assimilation for the American dream and the American dream of someone who is not an immigrant. This question, however, remains unanswered as the author himself is of Jewish origin, and his books are partly autobiographic, influenced by Roth's personal experiences; thus, he cannot provide an insight into the American dream of a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na reflexi společenských, politických a kulturních událostí 60. let a jejich dopadů na život průměrného Američana, kterého Philip Roth zobrazuje ve své knize *Americká idyla*. Jejím cílem je nalézt odpověď na otázku, zda americký sen, který je ústředním motivem knihy, přežil bouřlivá 60. léta 20. století.

První kapitola se zabývá samotným autorem, držitelem Pulitzerovy ceny, Philipem Rothem a jeho dílem. Rothova tvorba patří do americké židovské literatury, kterou je ale obtížné vymezit, jelikož obsahuje široké spektrum témat. Můžeme zde ovšem najít opakující se motivy jako imigrace, asimilace, židovská tradice či odcizení, v období po druhé světové válce pak přichází i téma holokaustu. Rothovy knihy jsou částečně autobiografické a čerpají inspiraci v Rothově zážitcích, přičemž postavy jsou autorovým obrazem. Roth sám uvedl, že neexistuje jasná hranice mezi jím samotným a postavami, které vytvořil a často vystupují jako jeho alter-ega. Roth běžně používá témata, která souvisejí s židovstvím, ať už se jedná o již zmíněnou asimilaci, nebo naopak odmítnutí náboženství. Roth také ve svých příbězích pracuje se skutečnými historickými událostmi, ale často historii upravuje. Příkladem takovéto alternace historie je román *Spiknutí proti Americe*, ve kterém změní výsledek prezidentských voleb z roku 1940 a místo F. D. Roosevelta zvítězí Charles Lindbergh, známý antisemita. Roth často vypráví příběhy rodin a jinak tomu není ani v *Americké idyle*. Nathan Zuckerman vzpomíná na svého dětského hrdinu Seymoura Levova, který byl ztělesněním úspěchu, a se zděšením zjišťuje, že jeho život nebyl až tak idylický, jak se na první pohled mohlo zdát. Za rozpad jeho amerického snu může Merry, Seymourova dcera. Merryiny snahy o zastavení války ve Vietnamu totiž skončí tragédií – poté, co jí otec poradí, aby přenesla válku domů, Merry nastraží bombu, která zabije nevinného člověka. Po výbuchu Merry uprchne a Seymour skončí zdrcený ztrátou dcery, přičemž se marně snaží přijít na to, co Merryin radikalismus způsobilo. Nakonec se s Merry znovu shledá, ale sotva ji poznává a zjišťuje, že Merry přijala nové náboženství – džinismus. I *Americká idyla* byla inspirována skutečnými událostmi a je možné, že Roth příběh napsal, aby ventiloval své vlastní protiválečné postoje.

Druhá kapitola se věnuje 60. letům 20. století. Na začátku dekády převládala ve společnosti pozitivní nálada; Američané věřili, že je jejich údělem šířit demokracii i za hranicemi jejich země, i kdyby to znamenalo pokořit Měsíc v rámci vesmírného závodu se Sovětským svazem. Prezidentem byl zvolen J. F. Kennedy, první římský katolík, který kdy tuto funkci zastával.

Dobrá nálada ovšem netrvala dlouho a 60. léta byla brzy poznamenána Studenou válkou a hrozbou jaderného konfliktu. USA soupeřilo se Sověty nejen v tom, kdo první stane na Měsíci, ale také v rozšiřování sfér vlivu. Američané se zoufale snažili zastavit šíření komunismu, což vedlo až k zapojení ve vietnamské válce. Z počátku byla účast ve válce většinově podporována a operace byly vyobrazovány jako úspěšné a vítězné. Hrůzy války ale nezůstaly skryty dlouho, a tak se americká veřejnost dozvěděla například o perzekuci budhistických mnichů, kteří se na protest upalovali před objektivy amerických fotografů, nebo o ofenzívě Tet – vojenské operaci Severního Vietnamu, kterému se podařilo dobýt americké velvyslanectví v Saigonu, a tím rozdrtit představy Američanů o rychle se blížícím vítězství. V rámci odvety vtrhli američtí vojáci 16. března 1968 do vesnice My Lai, kde se podle nich měli skrývat partyzáni. Našli však pouze bezbranné civilisty. Vojáci útok neodvolali, místo toho začali znásilňovat ženy i děti a zabili každého, koho potkali. Masakr v My Lai si vyžádal okolo čtyř set obětí a americkou veřejnost šokoval. Válka navíc poškodila ekonomiku Spojených států, protože se očekávalo, že nebude mít dlouhého trvání, ale výdaje neustále rostly a společnost se začala obávat o ekonomickou stabilitu.

Od poloviny 50. let bojovali Afroameričané proti rasové segregaci a jejich snahy vyvrcholily právě v 60. letech, kdy hnutí za občanská práva dosáhlo svého vrcholu v čele s Martinem Lutherem Kingem. V srpnu roku 1963 se dvě stě tisíc demonstrantů zúčastnilo pochodu na Washington, kde King pronesl svou slavnou řeč *Mám sen*. Vzhledem k tomu, že diskriminace kvůli barvě pleti stále přetrvávala, staly se z pokojných protestů výtržnosti plné násilí, které během července 1967 probíhali i v Newarku a vyžádali si oběti na životech. Sám King byl zavražděn v roce 1968 a mírumilovné hnutí bylo nahrazeno násilným hnutím The Weathermen, levicovou teroristickou organizací, která si kladla za cíl svržení amerického kapitalismu.

Kapitola se dále věnuje džinismu, náboženství, které se do Spojených států dostalo v průběhu 60. let a odmítalo jakékoliv formy násilí, na čemkoliv živém.

Třetí kapitola definuje pojem americký sen, který formoval společnost a je zmíněn i v Deklaraci nezávislosti, která uvádí, že jsou si všichni rovni a každý má právo na život, svobodu a sledování osobního štěstí. V průběhu let se americký sen vyvíjel a v počátku byl propojen s expanzí na západ. Američané věřili, že osidlování nových území je jejich údělem a vlastnictví půdy, které nebylo obtížné nabýt, se stalo americkým snem. Kolonizace západu představovala příležitost pro kohokoliv, zejména pak pro dělnickou třídu. Když byla Amerika osídlena prakticky celá, začal být americký sen spojován s možností třídního vzestupu, kterého mohl dosáhnout takřka kdokoliv, kdo tvrdě pracoval. Na rozdíl od Evropy nebyla Amerika

poznamenána rigidním sociálním systémem a stala se tak zemí příležitostí. V 60. letech 20. století byl pak americký sen především snem o rovnosti.

Americký sen se často objevuje i v americké kultuře, zejména pastorální motivy a vlastnictví půdy. Jako příklady lze zmínit například transcendentalisty Emersona či Thoreaua, kteří zobrazovali přírodu téměř zbožně, nebo *O myších a lidech*, kde hlavní hrdinové sní o vlastnictví malé soběstačné farmy. V *Americké idyle* Roth kombinuje pastorální výjevy a vlastnictví.

Čtvrtá kapitola obsahuje popis amerického snu Seymoura Levova. Seymour je úspěšný, má vlastní farmu na venkově, výdělečnou firmu a krásnou rodinu. Přestože je židovského původu, dokáže se odpoutat od svých kořenů a úspěšně se asimilovat. Nepovažuje se za Žida, nýbrž za Američana. Za ženu má irskou katoličku, bývalou miss New Jersey, a společně chtějí vychovat dítě, které bude vyrůstat v naprosté svobodě a bude ryze americké. Seymour vnímá Ameriku jako „tavící kotel," a je toho názoru, že Američanem se může stát každý, nehledě na původ. Jeho předci přišli do Ameriky jako chudí koželuzi, ale Seymour se dokázal vypracovat v bohatého businessmana a na první pohled je jeho život naprosto idylický.

Poslední kapitola se zabývá úpadkem Seymourova snu v kontextu událostí 60. let. Katalyzátorem Seymourova pádu je bomba, kterou Merry nastraží v místním obchůdku, a tak do Seymourovy idylické Ameriky přenese hrůzy války ve Vietnamu. Seymour se zoufale snaží najít důvod, proč se Merry uchýlila k tak radikálnímu činu. Neuvědomuje si, že Merry vyrůstala ve složité době a její americký sen rozhodně není v souladu s tím jeho. Merry sní o rovnosti a míru, ale nechává se strhnout násilím, které zná od malička. Válka ve Vietnamu ji provázela od útlého věku, kdy v televizi sledovala rituální upálení budhistického mnicha a válečná zvěrstva se jí vryla do paměti. Nedokáže pochopit nesmyslné zabíjení nevinných a bojuje proti vraždění vietnamských dětí americkým napalmem. Zatímco Merry o válce přemýšlí, Seymour ukazuje svou povrchnost. Válka ho nezajímá, jelikož je daleko a on sám jí není nijak ovlivněn. Merryiny názory shazuje, a i když dříve tvrdil, že je Merry génius, nyní ji považuje za pouhou loutku protiválečného hnutí neschopnou utvořit si vlastní názor. Nahlíží na ni jako na předmět, který může kontrolovat a tvarovat dle své libosti. Seymour není schopný držet krok se změnami, které 60. léta přinesla, což dokazuje i jeho povrchní vztah k ženám, které by nejraději viděl jako stereotypní ženy v domácnosti z 50. let. Svoboda, kterou měla Merry přislíbenou ještě před svým narozením, je zapomenuta, jakmile Merry projeví zájem o něco, co se Seymourovi samotnému nelíbí např. katolicismus. Seymour své pojetí amerického snu ohýbá podle svých potřeb, zatímco Merryin sen a chování jsou v kontextu doby koherentní.

Merry opovrhuje nejen zbytečným zabíjením, ale také americkým neokolonialismem, který Seymour přehlíží a vnímá Vietnam jako novou hranici, kam může americká demokracie expandovat. Podle Seymoura Merry nechápe, *co* Amerika je, zatímco jeho pojetí Ameriky postrádá jakoukoliv hloubku či historii. Zatímco Seymour reprezentuje privilegovanou střední vrstvu, Merry je hlasem utiskovaných. Z útisku Afroameričanů Merry, která tíhne ke komunismu, obviňuje i Seymoura a nazývá ho novodobým otrokářem. Seymour tato obvinění odmítá, ale nevědomky je potvrzuje, když kvůli zisku, který mu kvůli newarským nepokojům uniká, přesune svou továrnu do Portorika. Opouští tak své dlouholeté zaměstnance, kteří na něj spoléhali, a nachází nové lidské zdroje, které může vykořisťovat.

Navzdory násilí, které Merry napáchala, se nakonec stává džinistkou. Odmítá jakékoliv násilí a snaží se zdokonalit svou duši tím, že neublíží ničemu živému ani neživému. Přes obličej nosí závoj, aby neublížila mikroorganismům ve vzduchu, dokonce se ani nemyje, aby neublížila vodě. Mluví o *ahimse*, nenásilí, které inspirovali i Ghándího, který následně inspiroval i Martina Luthera Kinga.

Merry navíc konečně ukáže Seymourovi hrůzy války, když mu přizná, že byla několikrát znásilněna. Znásilnění je nejhorší případ porušení osobní svobody a Seymour nedokáže přestat myslet na to, čím si jeho dcera musela projít. Merryina přiznání jsou pro Seymoura jako jeho osobní masakr v My Lai.

Namísto asimilace se nakonec Seymour odcizí ode všech a ode všeho. Jeho rodina se rozpadne, Merry není perfektním americkým dítětem, jaké si vysnil, a jeho žena Dawn ho podvede s mužem, který se na rozdíl od Seymoura již jako Američan narodil. Nakonec Seymour nenachází útěchu ani ve své víře, protože zatímco se snažil stát se Američanem, zradil své židovské kořeny.

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