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Bakalářská práce nejprve definuje pojem 'American Narrative' a následně jej zasadí do literárního, kulturního a historického kontextu. Jádrem práce bude komparativní analýza vybraných snímků americké kinematografie – *Citizen Kane* (O. Welles, 1941); *Easy Rider* (D. Hopper, 1969); *Scarface* (B. De Palma, 1983) - se zaměřením na vyobrazení amerického narativu v těchto dílech.

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor's thesis focuses on the concept of "the American narrative" and its representation in the films "Scarface," "Citizen Kane," and "Easy Rider." The theoretical part deals with many interpretations of the American narrative throughout the history of the United States. It addresses various social, political, and cultural aspects that have contributed to the formation of the American narrative. The analytical part then analyses and compares the mentioned films and shows their portrayals of the American narrative and ideals.

KEY WORDS

American narrative, American ideals, Scarface, Citizen Kane, Easy Rider

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se věnuje konceptu „americký narativ“ a jeho zobrazení ve filmech „Zjizvená tvář,“ „Občan Kane“ a „Bezstarostná jízda.“ Teoretická část se věnuje mnoha interpretacím amerického narativu v průběhu historie Spojených Států Amerických. Zabývá se různými sociálními, politickými a kulturními aspekty, které americký narativ napomáhaly tvořit. Analytická část poté analyzuje a porovnává zmiňované filmy a ukazuje vyobrazení amerického narativu a ideálů.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

americký narativ, americké ideály, Zjizvená tvář, Občan Kane, Bezstarostná jízda

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Introduction

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, “a narrative is a way of presenting or understanding a situation or series of events that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values.” The dictionary provides an example by Michael Grunwald:

The rise of the Tea Party and the weakness of the Obama economy have fuelled a Republican narrative about Big Government as a threat to liberty.¹

This definition suggests that narratives serve as a means of presenting and comprehending events with the goal of promoting specific perspectives and values. This is exemplified by Michael Grunwald's statement, in which he discusses how the Tea Party's rise and the perceived weakness of the Obama economy have contributed to the Republican narrative that sees big government as a threat to liberty. It is important to note, however, that this is not necessarily the only interpretation of the events in question. Other perspectives and narratives with different interpretations and values may exist. Thus, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of a situation or events, it is critical to consider multiple perspectives and narratives. Is it, however, the sole definition of a narrative?

In his work, "Narrative Theory: A Critical Introduction," Kent Puckett identifies three distinct narrative forms. The first form encompasses the various interactions between individuals and multiple forms of media, such as books, movies, news, and rumours. This type of narrative refers to an individual's interpretation of a story, including aspects such as its pace and the credibility of the characters. The second form of a narrative pertains to analysing and evaluating stories by professional authors, critics, and academics. For example, a film critic may provide a rating and justification for a movie, while a literary critic may examine how historical ideals shaped a narrative. The final form of the narrative highlights the relationship between two components, namely “the events, the actions, the agents, and the objects that make up the stuff of a given narrative” and then “the shape that those events, actions, agents, and objects take when they are selected, arranged, and represented in one or another medium.”²

In addition, Puckett emphasizes the importance of these three narrative strands in comprehending and appreciating the complex structure of storytelling. He claims that

¹ “Narrative Definition & Meaning”, Merriam-Webster Dictionary, last modified March 3, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/narrative>.

² Kent Puckett, *Narrative Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1–2.

understanding how a person's personal experiences and biases affect their interpretation of a story requires an appreciation of the first type of narrative. The second type of narrative is crucial to comprehending the evaluation and critical analysis of stories, as well as the function of experts in influencing public perceptions of a narrative. The third type of narrative clarifies the influence of the medium used to tell a story and how it affects the narrative as a whole.³ Puckett's division of a narrative into three categories offers a thorough foundation for understanding the complexity of storytelling. One can develop a greater appreciation and knowledge of narratives in diverse media by recognizing the influence of personal experiences, expert analysis, and the medium of depiction.

Munoz contends in his article that a national narrative is tales that have profoundly impacted a nation's collective consciousness throughout its history. Themes like the battle between the Old and New Worlds or the ideals of capitalism and wealth could be essential to this story. Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), which portray the ideals of capitalism and "rugged individualism," as well as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), which depicts Gatsby as a self-made man and a representation of the American ideal of individualism, lend support to Munoz's argument.⁴

In the initial chapter, the bachelor thesis offers distinct definitions of the American narrative as provided by various authors and compares them. Following subchapters examine the evolution of the United States of America from its founding to the present, as well as the factors that have contributed to shaping the nation's complex narratives. The second chapter of the thesis analyses and compares the films *Scarface* and *Citizen Kane*, focusing on how each film portrays the American narrative and its associated ideals, such as the American Dream or the self-made man. Finally, the film *Easy Rider* is analysed, with a focus on the depiction of the counter-culture and independence in the 1960s.

³ Puckett. *Narrative Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 1–2.

⁴"Can you explain the term "American National Narrative"? Provide some examples based on American culture and ideology," Thanh Munoz, eNotes Editorial, December 2019, <https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/can-you-explain-term-american-national-narrative-1291569>.

1 The Narratives of the Promised Land

In the context of this thesis, the terms "American Narrative" and "American Myth" (Mythos) are used interchangeably and are employed to refer to the underlying American national narrative. According to Jay Parini in his article: "The American Mythos," the American narrative can be considered as a shared set of ideals, convictions, presumptions, and experiences that have been passed down through American ancestors. Myths, such as "the land of the free and the home of brave", are thought by Parini to have there are helping to form the national identity and have been influenced by the various waves of immigrants who have helped shape the country's history. The arrival of the Puritans at Plymouth Rock is one of many legends that make up the American Myth.⁵

William Chafe proposes a different interpretation of the American Narrative, claiming that it can be divided into two opposing paradigms. The first, which he associates with the Puritan era, sees the United States as a community-oriented society in which individuals fulfil their roles and responsibilities to contribute to the community's overall well-being. The second paradigm, on the other hand, is more individualistic in nature, emphasizing individual liberty and viewing America as a land of opportunity in which each individual is responsible for their own fate. According to Chafe, these two paradigms have been in conflict throughout American history and have influenced the politics, economy, and cultural values of the country. He argues that the interaction and play between these two diametrically opposed viewpoints have contributed to the development of a complex and dynamic American Narrative that is constantly evolving over time. Understanding the complexities of American society and the difficulties it will encounter in the future requires close consideration of these two paradigms and how they affect the American Narrative.⁶

According to Spengemann and Lundquist, the concept of a cultural myth, such as the American myth, is problematic due to the dynamic nature of cultural values. These values are shaped by the stories and experiences that are passed down and incorporated within a society, resulting in an ongoing process of development. As such, it may be challenging to establish

⁵ Jay Parini, "The American Mythos," *Daedalus* 141, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 52–53.

⁶ William H. Chafe, "The American Narrative: Is There One & What Is It?," *Daedalus* 141, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 11–12.

a clear and static definition of a cultural myth.⁷ This claim is supported by Heinz Ickstasdt who wrote in his essay: “America in motion! One might well ask: When was it not in motion?” Josef Jařab explains his words, adding that the question is self-answered as the country's history has consistently been characterized by constant movement and progression.⁸

Regardless of the exact definition, 'The American narrative' or 'The American myth', has been influenced by several aspects of American society, such as racial and ethnic variety, political and social change, or historical occurrences. The many historical events, examined in this thesis, have profoundly shaped the country's growth and identity. Besides, the creation of the American narrative has been influenced by cultural factors such as art, literature, and music. The direction and development of the nation have further been significantly influenced by political and social policies. Overall, a complex interaction of historical, cultural, political, and social values has produced the American narrative, such as the country's diverse experiences, its immigrant communities, American exceptionalism, or the country's history of slavery, segregation, and discrimination.

⁷ Spengemann, William C., L. R. Lundquist, “Autobiography and the American Myth,” *American Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (Autumn, 1965): 502.

⁸ Arbeit, M., Roman Truřník, *America in Motion* (Olomouc: Palacký University, 2010), 11.

1.1 Early Narrative: Communal vs Individualist Values

The Pilgrims and the Puritans, who aspired to flee the persecution of the Old World, settled in New England in the first half of the 17th century. Pilgrims settled at Plymouth Rock and built a lasting settlement, where they could forge independence and self-rule. Escape from the limitations of the Old World and the desire to build a better future for themselves and their offspring were the driving forces behind the process of building a new, autonomous community. Jay Parini claims that one of the most famous stories about the arrival of the Mayflower in 1620 and the creation of a new community in the New World gained its popularity only after the discovery of William Bradford's journal later in the 19th century.⁹ The discovery of his journal most likely allowed historians and the general public to obtain a better understanding of the Mayflower passengers' experiences and challenges and also helped them appreciate the significance of Plymouth Colony as a founding event in American history. The Puritans later arrived in the Promised Land to avoid the jurisdiction of the Church of England and to seek religious freedom. Led by John Winthrop, they aimed to create a community that the rest of the world would admire:

“We must delight in each other, make others conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body.”¹⁰

According to Paul Heike, both parties stood for ideas such as “religiosity, idealism, sacrifice, and a theologically based utopian vision”. They identified as religious refugees and did not desire to pursue material claims. These groups later contributed to the American value of exceptionalism because scholars frequently believe that they were the “first Americans.”¹¹

William Chafe states that the Puritan vision soon became threatened by individuals who started to pursue their ambitions. They preferred their well-being instead of contributing to the common good. The prices of goods began to differ, thus, the idea of “just price” (matched by moral and religious values) disappeared. The value of Christianity altered, as it became

⁹ Parini, “The American Mythos,” 53.

¹⁰ “John Winthrop Quote,” Goodreads, accessed December 10, 2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/558595-we-must-delight-in-each-other-make-others-conditions-our>.

¹¹ Paul Heike, “Pilgrims and Puritans and the Myth of the Promised Land,” in *The Myths That Made America: An Introduction to American Studies*, (Transcript Verlag, 2014), 137.

a once-a-week ritual. It did, in fact, remained a powerful influence on the everyday lives of the population.¹²

The American Revolution and the creation of a new nation made the 18th century an important stage in American history. Key values, such as the pursuit of independence, constitutional government, and the prosperity of the common people, with a focus on equality, were established during this period. These principles had a long-lasting influence on the growth of the United States and still help to define its character today. The Continental Congress's adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, had a significant impact on the nation and continues to shape its history to this day. Discussions of democracy, nationalism, and human rights commonly refer to the Declaration, a key document in American history. The Declaration's primary author, Thomas Jefferson, placed tremendous stress on the pursuit of happiness as well as other unalienable human rights, including equality and the pursuit of happiness that have come to be known as the American Dream:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.¹³

The document's principles have been fundamental to the development of the United States as a nation, serving as a model for other nations seeking to establish their own democratic principles.

According to Gordon S. Wood's work, "The American Revolution: A History," the American Revolution was regarded as a struggle for freedom against British rule, as well as a quest to establish an independent nation based on these key ideals. Wood's analysis emphasizes the 18th century's significance in shaping the American nation and its enduring commitment to liberty and justice for all:

The changes were remarkable, and they gave the American people as grand a vision of their future as any people have ever had. Americans saw their new nation not only leading a world revolution on behalf of republicanism and liberty but also becoming the place where the best of all the arts and sciences would flourish. What began as a colonial rebellion on the very edges of the civilized world was transformed into an earth-shaking event – an event that promised, as one clergyman declared, to create

¹² Chafe, "The American Narrative", 12.

¹³ "Declaration of Independence," National Archives, accessed December 15, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

out of the “perishing World ... a new World, a young world, a World of countless Millions, all in the fair Bloom of Piety.”¹⁴

It is evident that America underwent important and dramatic transformations throughout its early years. The country was no longer just a colonial uprising; rather, it was a symbol of hope for republicanism, liberty, and the advancement of the humanities. The American people were inspired by this magnificent new vision of the future and began to feel confident that their nation could build a prosperous and morally upright new world. It should be mentioned, however, that the American Revolution contributed to the American people's continued belief in their nation's exceptionalism, as was discussed earlier in this chapter. The potential consequences of this value are further examined in the following chapter. Overall, the American Revolution brought about some truly impressive changes that still influence the country to this day.

¹⁴ Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution: A History*, (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 13–14.

1.2 Reimagining American Identity in the 19th Century

In the 19th century, The United States experienced significant expansion in size due to the expansion of stock and productive land, as well as an influx of immigrants from Europe. This increase in population also led to a growth in the number of people moving westward within the country.

In what way did it affect the nation's narrative? The settlement of the West played a significant role in shaping the national narrative of the United States, as it was seen as a key part of the country's "manifest destiny."¹⁵ The idea of "Manifest Destiny" was prevalent in the United States in the 19th century. It claimed that American settlers were destined or divinely chosen to colonize all of North America, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. This ideology served as justification for the conquest of regions including Texas, California, and a large portion of the American Southwest as well as for the exploitation of Native Americans. The term "Manifest Destiny" was first coined by journalist John L. O'Sullivan in 1845:¹⁶

The American people having derived their origin from many other nations, and the Declaration of National Independence being entirely based on the great principle of human equality, these facts demonstrate at once our disconnected position as regards any other nation; that we have, in reality, but little connection with the past history of any of them, and still less with all antiquity, its glories, or its crimes. [...] Besides, the truthful annals of any nation furnish abundant evidence, that its happiness, its greatness, its duration, were always proportionate to the democratic equality in its system of government. . .¹⁷

O'Sullivan's statement emphasizes the United States' unique status as a nation established on the principles of human equality and derived from several different nations. This concept illustrates the country's diversity and cultural richness. The argument that the United States has minimal relation to other nations' former histories is debatable, as the country's history is intertwined with that of many other nations through trade, diplomacy, and war. The statement's emphasis on the uniqueness of American history and political principles has the potential to foster a sense

¹⁵ Frederick Merk, Lois B. Merk, "Manifest Destiny," in *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (Harvard University Press, 1995), 24.

¹⁶ Frederick Merk, Lois B. Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (Harvard University Press, 1995), 27.

¹⁷ John L. O'Sullivan, "The Great Nation of Futurity," *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 6, no. 23 (November 1839): 426.

of exceptionalism among its citizens. Such an approach may have both beneficial and negative consequences for the nation's relationships with other countries and its citizens' attitudes toward other cultures. Nonetheless, the country's fundamental principles set it apart from many other nations with more uniform cultural and ethnic heritage.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the American concept of exceptionalism was reinforced by historian Frederick Jackson Turner's influential work, "The Frontier in American History." Turner's paper highlighted the vital part played by the westward expansion of the American frontier in forging a distinct and exceptional American identity:

The fact is, that here is a new product that is American. At first, the frontier was the Atlantic coast. It was the frontier of Europe in a very real sense. Moving westward the frontier becomes more and more American... Thus, the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines."¹⁸

The statement emphasizes the fact that America was founded from a European frontier, yet as the country expanded westward, the frontier transformed into an American one. This progress may signify the growth of independence, self-reliance, and the formation of a distinctly American culture.

Similarly, the American Civil War took place in the 19th century. The United States underwent a significant transition; Slavery was abolished in the nation due to the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which was one of this conflict's most important outcomes. With the passage of this amendment, which had the support of President Abraham Lincoln, both slavery and involuntary servitude were outlawed in the United States. African Americans who had previously been held in servitude were now granted freedom and legal equality due to the 13th Amendment, which marked a significant increase in civil rights in the nation.¹⁹ As a result, it contributed to the national myth that the United States is a land full of liberty and equality.

In addition to the concept of manifest destiny a philosophical and literary movement, known as transcendentalism, first appeared in the United States in the early 19th century. Belief in the inherent goodness and perfection of people, as well as the notion that people may discover divine or higher truths via their own experiences and insights as opposed to conventional religious or social systems, were characteristics of this movement. According to Perry Miller,

¹⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1920), 49.

¹⁹ Patrick Sowle, "The Abolition of Slavery," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (September 1968): 240.

a leading scholar on Transcendentalism, the underlying concept of the movement was to challenge the prevalent rational conservatism at the time. Rational conservatism emphasized reason, tradition, and order while opposing any changes or progress.²⁰

Joel Myerson claims that Transcendentalists, on the other hand, looked to the future, rejecting the Calvinist past in favour of individualism, intuition, and the search for spiritual truth beyond material reality. The belief in one's intuition was considered critical in enabling an individual to independently interpret religious texts, as opposed to the previously dominant viewpoint influenced by John Locke that all knowledge must be verified through the senses. This marked a significant turning point in American thought and sensibility.²¹ According to Robert Penn Warren, a renowned critic of American culture, transcendentalism had a significant impact on the development of the American narrative. He saw the movement as a reflection of a significant shift in the nation's beliefs and attitudes:

Transcendentalism represented a complex response to the democratization of American life, to the rise of science and the new technology, and to the new industrialism--to the whole question of the redefinition of the relation of man to nature and to other men.²²

Ralph Waldo Emerson, a prominent member of the transcendentalist movement, claimed in his book "Self-Reliance" that the secret to greatness is to think independently rather than merely copying others. He argues that instead of relying on the advice of others, one should trust in their own skills and judgment. This notion is crucial to the transcendentalist view of the individual's inherent goodness and perfection as well as the value of personal experience and understanding.²³

²⁰ Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, and R.W.B. Lewis, "Introduction" in *Romanticism: Critical Essays in American Literature*, ed. James Barbour and Thomas Quirk (New York: Garland, 1986), 3–26.

²¹ John Myerson, *“Transcendentalism: A Reader”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 26–27.

²² Warren, *“Introduction”*, 3–26.

²³ Ralph W. Emerson, *Self-Reliance* (USA: Lulu.com, 2019), 10–13.

1.3 A Century of Changes

The American narrative changed significantly in the 20th century as the United States underwent notable social, political, and economic changes. World War I was a defining moment in American history, both in terms of the nation's position in world affairs and its impact on American identity and ideals. The relatively brief period of American involvement in the conflict, both in terms of troop deployment and active combat, contributed to a post-war perception of American exceptionalism and superiority. This sense of exceptionalism was reinforced by the fact that the United States remained relatively undamaged from the conflict, in direct contrast to the devastation experienced by European nations.²⁴ According to Thomas Reeves' interpretation, the unanticipated and sudden demobilization following the end of the conflict led to a rise in inflation and unemployment rates, resulting in a growth of protests and social unrest.²⁵

This perception of American exceptionalism was further strengthened by the events of the Second World War, which brought considerable social changes to American society. From 1939 to 1945, this event brought people together for a common cause as they rallied to support the war effort and defend their country against foreign aggression. The shared experiences of adversity, sacrifice, and loss helped to foster a sense of solidarity and social stability, uniting people from all walks of life for a common cause. Furthermore, the war left a lasting mark on the nation's collective consciousness, shaping the nation's identity and defining the values and ideals that would come to define modern society. Thus, the Second World War was a transformative event for the nation, helping to shape its future and foster a sense of national pride and unity. According to Geoffrey Perret, the Second World War had a profound impact on the entire nation, uniting and strengthening the bonds between individuals within society:

At home, the effects of the war exfoliated into the fissures of a divided, insecure nation and bound it together as nothing else could. The war experience was a social cement that created an America that haunts our dreams.”²⁶

²⁴ Bernard Rostker, “The World War,” in *Providing for the Casualties of War: The American Experience Through World War II* (RAND Corporation, 2013), 127.

²⁵ Thomas Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America: A Brief History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 81.

²⁶ Neil A. Wynn, “The ‘Good War’: The Second World War and Postwar American Society,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 3 (July 1996): 464.

The Red Scare, also known as McCarthyism, was a period in the United States following World War II during which Senator Joseph R. McCarthy wielded his influence to warn Americans about the perceived threat of communism. According to Don E. Carleton, McCarthy often spread exaggerated and false information about communist ideology, which had a widespread impact on society for about a decade. McCarthy alleged the presence of communist spies operating within the US government in a speech delivered in Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1950:

I have here in my hand a list of 205 – a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department.²⁷

The senator's statement contains a significant accusation of communist infiltration into the US government. However, the credibility of his allegations, along with the accuracy of the amount he stated, has been questioned.²⁸ McCarthy's mention of "spies" and the suggestion of a financial motive suggests that he believed there was a deliberate attempt to damage American interests. This kind of discourse may have contributed significantly to the anxiety and paranoia surrounding the Cold War era, as well as the general assumption that communist infiltration posed a major threat to American democracy. Overall, the Red Scare was characterized by widespread fear and mistrust of communism, as well as a series of investigations and prosecutions of suspected communists by the government. It had a significant impact on the American narrative and shaped public opinion about communism and its perceived threat to the country.²⁹

Another crucial element in forming the American narrative in the 20th century was The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion, and sex and had a profound impact on the development of American history. The focus was shifted from a limited idea of American identity based on race and gender to a more inclusive vision of equality and opportunity for all due to this act, which helped to extend the definition of what it means to be an American.³⁰ The Civil Rights Act played a crucial role in advancing

²⁷ "Address to the League of Women Voters, Wheeling, West Virginia," Teaching American History, accessed March 10, 2023, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/address-to-the-league-of-women-voters-wheeling-west-virginia-2>.

²⁸ "McCarthyism," Britannica, last modified December 5, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/McCarthyism>.

²⁹ Don E. Carleton, "McCARTHYISM WAS MORE THAN McCARTHY": DOCUMENTING THE RED SCARE AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVEL," *The Midwestern Archivist* 12, no. 1 (1987): 13–14.

³⁰ Harvard Law Review, "The Civil Rights Act of 1964," *Harvard Law Review* 78, no. 3 (1965): 684–685.

social justice and civil rights, making it possible to create a more inclusive and equitable society for all Americans, including African Americans.

Chiefly, the 20th century was a time of significant change and transformation in the United States, and these changes had a profound impact on the American narrative.

1.4 Reinventing the Mythos in Recent Years

Recent years accounted for significant changes in the United States that had an impact on the American narrative.

Political polarization in the US has significantly increased during the last few decades. Several factors, including the media, social issues, and the influence of political interest groups, may have contributed to this trend. As a result, the Democrats and the Republicans have emerged as the two main political parties inside the political system.³¹ People's perspectives on politics and their place in the national narrative have been affected by the growing polarization of the political system, which could have resulted in frustration and despair among many Americans.

According to William Chafe, recent years encountered a rise in a “conservative narrative that celebrates individualism over collective action and criticizes government activity on behalf of the common good.”³² This raises an important question of whether the government should intervene in people’s lives and by what amount. Libertarians, for example, argue that the government should not force people to “serve the overall good or society, or even their own personal good” and they “endorse strong rights to individual liberty and private property.”³³ It is important to emphasize, however, that this conservative narrative is not the only one in political discourse. There are also alternative narratives that emphasize the value of collective action, social welfare, and the common good. These viewpoints often suggest that government intervention is required to address issues such as poverty, inequality, or environmental changes.

For instance, climate change, the long-term warming of the Earth's surface and the atmosphere, has gained a lot of attention in recent years. While some contend that it is a product of human activity and that it may be controlled, others believe that human influence cannot have an impact on it. Jody Freeman and Andrew Guzman contend that the United States needs to become more proactive in addressing climate change because it is already warming the continent and harming the economy.³⁴

³¹ “Political Polarization in the American Public”, Pew Research Center, last modified June 12, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>.

³² Chafe, “*The American Narrative*”, 12.

³³ “Libertarianism,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed March 18, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/libertarianism/>.

³⁴ Jody Freeman, Andrew Guzman, “Climate Change and U.S. Interests,” *Columbia Law Review* 109, no. 6 (October 2009): 1531–1532.

The argument over climate change has widened societal gaps in America and reshaped its narrative. It has inspired several discussions regarding the function of the state in combating climate change, the significance of sustainability, and the necessity of intergovernmental cooperation in solving this global issue. As a result, it has significantly altered how people view the environment and their role in the narrative of the nation.

Overall, recent years have seen several significant events and trends that have had a major impact on the American narrative and the way that people think about the United States and their place in it.

2 Chasing Dollars and Dreams

The American Dream, a deeply rooted concept in American culture, embodies the aspirations, hopes, and aspirations of the American people and represents the unique opportunities and freedoms available in the United States. Since the country's founding, the American Dream has served as a source of inspiration and motivation, encouraging people to strive for success, prosperity, and happiness. Nonetheless, the concept of the American Dream has been the subject of much debate and criticism, as its viability and relevance in a rapidly changing and complex world are being questioned. Many authors state that the term “American Dream” was first coined by James Truslow Adams in his book “Epic of America”. Adams defines the term as follows:

The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain 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.³⁵

The statement emphasizes the concept of the American Dream, which claims that every individual, regardless of social background, has an equal opportunity for achievement and prosperity through hard work, ability, and determination. Adams claims that the American Dream is not only limited to materialistic ambitions such as high wages and luxury cars but also includes the desire for a just social order in which individuals can fulfil their full potential and be recognized for their natural qualities. James Truslow Adams emphasizes the European upper classes' struggle in interpreting the American Dream, as well as the weariness and mistrust many Americans have in this concept. This observation shows that the American Dream remains a disputed concept, with structural and ideological elements preventing its fulfilment.

Further subchapters examine the portrayal of the American Dream in the films *Scarface* (1983) and *Citizen Kane* (1941). *Citizen Kane*, directed by Orson Welles and released in 1941, is a classic film that, in terms of portraying the American narrative, can be compared to *Scarface*. Both films examine themes of ambition, power, and the American Dream, as well as the corrupting influence of wealth and status. The focus on the rise and fall of a central character is

³⁵ “James Truslow Adams Quote,” Goodreads, accessed December 22, 2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/235517-the-american-dream-is-that-dream-of-a-land-in>.

one of the most striking similarities between the two films. The story of Scarface follows Tony Montana, a Cuban immigrant who rises to become a powerful drug lord in Miami, only to suffer the consequences of his actions. Similarly, Citizen Kane follows the life of Charles Foster Kane, a wealthy newspaper magnate whose pursuit of power eventually leads to his downfall.

Both films deal with the theme of the American Dream, with characters driven by ambition and a desire for success. However, both films critically comment on the narrative's limitations, highlighting the dark side of pursuing wealth and power. Furthermore, Citizen Kane and Scarface both reflect the cultural values of their respective eras. Citizen Kane was released during the Great Depression, a period of economic and social unrest in the United States. The film's depiction of wealth's corrupting influence speaks to the concerns of the time. Similarly, Scarface was released in the 1980s, a time of political and social upheaval in the United States. The film's depiction of Miami as a drug-infested city reflects the fears and anxieties of the era. In conclusion, even though Citizen Kane and Scarface were made in different periods and have different plotlines, both films offer insightful critiques of the American narrative.

2.1 Scarface

The film *Scarface*, directed by Brian De Palma, received a mixed reception from critics upon its initial release. Certain critics, including Carlos E. Cortés, expressed displeasure with the film's content, citing the excessive depiction of violence and the disrespectful portrayal of Cuban Americans. Cortés' evaluation of *Scarface* reflects the film's complex reception and the controversies that surround it:

But a funny thing happened on the way to the movie theatre. While continuing with their obsession for gangs and violence, some Italian American and even Italian filmmakers have expanded their spectrum to include other ethnic groups. It may be coincidental, but between 1983 and 1985 Italian-descent directors made three major movies about non-Italian gangs.

Predictably and justifiably, Cuban-Americans protested, but with little effect ... except, of course, a cloned Godfather-style film-ending disclaimer that "the characters do not represent the Cuban American community and it would be erroneous and unfair to suggest that they do."³⁶

The review implicitly criticizes some filmmakers' tendency to perpetuate negative stereotypes and use sensationalist subjects in order to attract audiences. This approach, according to the author, is misguided and potentially dangerous, as it can foster prejudice and promote societal divisions. The film in fact received an X rating for "excessive and cumulative violence and for language."³⁷ Another reviewer, David Chute, asserts that *Scarface* is grounded in a historical and political context, specifically the tensions between the United States and Cuba during the 1980s:

In Brian De Palma's new *Scarface*, a bloated re-make of the 1932 Howard Hawks classic, we see what happened to the refuse Castro swept away: It washed up on the beach at Miami, and took root and flourished there. De Palma supplies an historical epigraph: In 1980, Castro opened the Port of Mariel and invited exiled Cuban refugees to sail in and collect their relatives: "They cannot adapt to the spirit of our revolution,..."³⁸

Upon his arrival in the United States, the main character, Tony Montana, identifies himself as a political refugee rather than an immigrant. This distinction implies a sense of shame or a desire to discard his origins and reinvent himself. He expresses his contempt for communism as well as his belief in the importance of personal freedom and individualism. He defines communism as a

³⁶ Carlos E. Cortés, "Italian-Americans in Film: From Immigrants to Icons," *MELUS* 14, no. 3/4 (Autumn – Winter 1987): 122.

³⁷ Jason Bailey, "Revisiting the Controversy Surrounding *Scarface*," *Vulture*, April 20, 2018.

³⁸ David Chute, "'Scarface,'" *Film Comment* 20, no. 1 (January – February 1984): 66.

system that forces individuals to conform to a particular way of thinking and living, with no regard for their personal desires or ambitions:

“You a communist? Huh? How’d you like it? They tell you all the time what to do, what to think, what to feel. Do you wanna be like a sheep? Like all those other people? Baa. Baa. (...) You wanna work eight, ten fucking hours? You own nothing, you got nothing! Do you want a *chivato* on every corner looking after you? Watching everything you do? Everything you say, man?”³⁹

His willingness to use violence in order to obtain a green card demonstrates his deep distaste for communism.: “I kill a communist for fun, but for a green card, I gonna carve him up real nice.”⁴⁰ In the film, it is evident that Tony Montana values his personal liberty and the freedom to use his time as he sees fit. He expresses a clear refusal to let anyone, or anything deprive him of these fundamental values. Montana believes that he is fated for a more significant and fulfilling role in life and, as such, does not find fulfilment in a job that is both labour-intensive and underpaid:

“Your big shot friend better come up with something soon. I didn’t come to the United States to break my fuckin’ back, mijo.”⁴¹

This quote emphasizes the universal desire for upward mobility and success that drives many people to migrate in search of better opportunities. It highlights the frustration that many immigrants may feel when they come to a new country with high hopes and expectations, only to face disappointment and struggle.

After being presented with the opportunity to participate in drug-related activities, namely purchasing cocaine, Tony successfully completes the assigned task and then approaches drug lord Frank Lopez with both money and the drug, a gesture that is gratefully received:

“Don’t think I don’t appreciate the gesture. You’re gonna find, you stay loyal in this business, you’re gonna move up. You’re gonna move up fast.”⁴²

Frank employs Tony and instructs him on the inner workings of the drug industry: “Lesson number one – Don’t underestimate the other guy’s greed!”⁴³ That statement emphasizes the greed of competing drug lords, however, it can also reflect American society in general, specifically the capitalist ethos, which promotes values such as self-interest, competition, and wealth accumulation. As a result, the quote may serve as a reminder of the importance

³⁹ Brian DePalma, *Scarface* (New York City: Universal Pictures, 1983), 6:17 – 6:37.

⁴⁰ DePalma, *Scarface*, 10:47 – 10:53.

⁴¹ DePalma, *Scarface*, 14:15 – 14:21.

⁴² DePalma, *Scarface*, 32:00 – 32:05.

⁴³ DePalma, *Scarface*, 36:29 – 36:31.

of balancing ambition and self-interest with empathy, cooperation, and ethical behaviour not only in the drug trade but in all aspects of society.

Tony and his friend Manny highlight their opposing attitudes toward ambition and contentment. Tony's expressed desire for greater success and power reflects his dissatisfaction with his current situation. Manny, on the other hand, advocates contentment with one's lot in life:

Manny: "Don't fuckin' go crazy on me, okay? Just remember, last year at this time we were in a fucking cage, okay?" Tony: "You remember. I'd like to forget that."
Manny: "I say be happy with what you got." "You be happy. Me, I want what's coming to me." "Well, what's coming to you, Tony?" "The world, Chico. And everything in it."⁴⁴

The conversation between Manny and Tony illustrates the contrasting attitudes and values that can shape one's approach to life and success and highlights the potential risks and rewards of both perspectives.

When Tony returns home after a five-year absence, he places one thousand dollars on the table. Tony's mother expresses her displeasure with his actions, expressing concern about the immorality of his source of income:

"It's Cubans like you who are giving a bad name to our people. People who come here and work hard and make a good name for themselves."⁴⁵

"You suddenly show up here and throw some money around and think you can get my respect. You think you can buy me with jewelry?! You think you can come into my house with your hotshot clothes and your jail manners and make fun of us?" (...) "I don't need your money. Gracias. I work for my living."⁴⁶

It is obvious that she is frustrated and disappointed with what her own son has become, as she feels he is giving a bad reputation to the Cuban Americans by flaunting wealth and behaving disrespectfully. There is a visible generation gap: While the mother's vision of success is based on hard effort and respect for one's community, Tony's vision is oriented on material possessions and the status he brings. The conversation may also emphasize the significance of family and community in developing cultural identity. Despite their differences, the mother and son have a deep connection to their Cuban history and a desire to protect their community's values and traditions.

⁴⁴ DePalma, *Scarface*, 42:37 – 43:08.

⁴⁵ DePalma, *Scarface*, 55:09 – 55:16.

⁴⁶ DePalma, *Scarface*, 55:18 – 56:12.

During a conversation with Manny about talking to women, Tony expresses his personal ideology and emphasizes his desire to acquire wealth and power, which he perceives as a method of achieving his desired lifestyle:

“This country, you gotta make the money first. Then when you get the money, you get the power. Then when you get the power, then you get the women. That’s why you gotta make your own moves.”⁴⁷

Due to this attitude, Tony conducted independent operations without Frank's knowledge, including negotiations with Alejandro Sosa in Bolivia about the transport of cocaine to the United States. When Frank discovered Tony's actions, he reminded him of his earlier comment, which implied that people seeking material wealth and extravagant lifestyles are unlikely to succeed in that field:

“Hey, Tony. Remember I told you when you started... the guys who last in this business... are the guys who fly straight. Low-key, quiet. And the guys who want it all, chicas, champagne, flash, they don’t last.”⁴⁸

The quote also foreshadows the end of the movie since it implies that Tony's drive for wealth and status may lead to his downfall.

In the film, a symbolic sign "The world is yours", which appears on an airship may signify Tony Montana's intense desire for financial success and increased social position. This motif aims to remind Tony's unwavering resolve to express his power and achieve the pinnacle of success. Yet, the sight of the sign on a statue at Tony's mansion near the end of the film embodies it with ironic significance. Despite Tony's persistent pursuit of power and fortune, the sign now serves as a reminder of his catastrophic downfall.



Figure 1

⁴⁷ DePalma, *Scarface*, 46:30 – 46:43.

⁴⁸ DePalma, *Scarface*, 1:12:14 – 1:12:37.



Figure 2

Tony is thriving, opening businesses, buying a luxurious mansion, and marrying Frank's former wife, Elvira. However, his refusal to accept Frank's advice, along with his involvement in the drug trade, causes him to become increasingly violent and paranoid. Tony's growing paranoia and mistrust extend to his closest associates, including those who have been with him since his arrival in the United States:

“Who put this thing together? Me! That’s who! Who do I trust? Me!” (...) “I don’t need him and I don’t need her. Fuck ‘em. I don’t need nobody.”⁴⁹

The film's depiction of Tony's paranoia and mistrust may relate to broader themes of power, corruption, and the fate of those who seek ultimate success at any cost. This aspect of the film is vital since it can emphasize the harmful implications of pursuing the American Dream without consideration for one's own or others' well-being. Tony's mistrust of his associates could also highlight the fragility of human connections in the presence of ambition and wealth. Tony's life is slowly collapsing as he is pursued by the police, Elvira has left him, and his business empire is crumbling. The loss of his lover Elvira and his closest allies may serve as a harsh reminder of the ultimate cost of pursuing the American Dream without regard for personal relationships and well-being. Tony's recent losses appear to have reduced his concern for the opinions of others. Because of that, Tony expresses his thoughts and opinions aloud in a restaurant:

⁴⁹ DePalma, *Scarface*, 1:56:55 – 1:57:15.

“You don’t have the guts to be what you wanna be. You need people like me. You need people like me so you can point your fuckin’ fingers and say ‘That’s the bad guy.’ So, what that make you? Good? You’re not good. You just know how to hide, how to lie. Me, I don’t have that problem. Me, I always tell the truth. Even when I lie.”⁵⁰

This quote could serve as an emphasis on the complexities of morality and the idea that the boundary between good and wrong can be indistinct. Tony Montana is essentially suggesting that while everyone is able to do harm, some people are more willing to accept their darker impulses than others. Tony argues that individuals who criticize him for his behaviour are not necessarily any better than he is, since they're merely disguising their own flaws and weaknesses behind a moral facade. He implies that he is being more genuine about his own motivations and desires, even if it means admitting his inclination to do vile things to accomplish what he wants. At the same time, the statement emphasizes how individuals can be complicit in the acts of others even when they are not directly involved. Tony claims that those who criticize him and "point fingers at him" gain from his acts by providing them with a scapegoat for their own shortcomings. Overall, the quotation raises important questions regarding the nature of morality, the importance of self-awareness in ethical decision-making, and how one can be both a victim and enforcer of immorality.

A pivotal moment in the film happens when Tony and his associates are tasked with assassinating a political target. Tony notices the target's wife and children in the car with him as they prepare for the hit. Tony expresses his displeasure with the situation and eventually refuses to carry out the assassination, claiming that he will not harm innocent people. This decision demonstrates not only Tony's personal moral code but also his leadership abilities and capacity for making critical decisions. Tony endangers his own safety and reputation by refusing to continue with the task, potentially putting at risk his position within the criminal organization for which he works. It may reflect his personal moral code and the standards, he holds himself to. Tony is involved in a highly illegal and violent industry, but he has a boundary he would not cross. This scene contrasts with earlier scenes in the film where Tony is shown to be willing to engage in violent and illegal activities without hesitation. Despite his criminal involvement, he is shown to have a conscience and empathy for innocent bystanders who may be affected by his actions.

⁵⁰ DePalma, *Scarface*, 2:12:32 – 2:13:22.

Tony's cocaine addiction is a recurring theme throughout the film, and it ultimately contributes to his downfall. Tony becomes increasingly dependent on drugs as his power and wealth grow, which fuels his erratic behaviour and violent tendencies. Montana's search for his sister, Gina, is one of the driving forces behind his drug use. His rage and jealousy boil over when he discovers she is living with his best friend and right-hand man, Manny. Tony murders Manny in a moment of extreme emotional turmoil, cementing his descent into darkness and violence. Tony is unable to cope with the loss of his sister, who is killed in a violent shootout and retreats into a world of drug-induced fantasy, where he continues to speak to Gina as if she were alive. This tragic outcome raises awareness about the dangers of greed, power, and addiction. Tony's rise and fall are testaments to the destructive nature of these vices, as well as a reminder of the importance of remaining moral in the face of temptation and adversity.

In conclusion, *Scarface*, a film that was initially criticized for its excessive violence and insulting portrayal of Cuban Americans, has received renewed attention for its exploration of immigrant identity and the American dream. The film raises important questions about the ethics of upward mobility and the pursuit of personal freedom by depicting the struggles of Tony Montana, an ambitious and violent Cuban immigrant. While the film does not steer away from depicting the criminal activities of its main character and his associates, it also emphasizes the societal and political motives that encourage people to engage in illegal activities. As such, *Scarface* serves as a vivid reminder of the complexities of immigration, identity, and power in contemporary American society.

2.2 Citizen Kane

Citizen Kane has been recognized as a ground-breaking film by numerous critics, including Time magazine, for its unconventional approach to storytelling and camera techniques. In contrast to Scarface, it was well-received since its premiere, however, both films are now considered a classic of American cinema:

So sharply does Citizen Kane veer from cinema cliché, it hardly seems like a movie. There are some extraordinary technical novelties through which Welles and wiry, experienced little Photographer Gregg Toland have given the camera a new eloquence — for example, the “stolen” newsreels, the aged and streaked documentary shots. When Susan makes her disastrous operatic debut, the camera tells the story by climbing high up among the flies to find two stagehands — one with his hand pinching his nose in disgust.⁵¹

This review provides Citizen Kane with a positive score for its departure from established filmmaking norms and the technological advances used by Orson Welles and cinematographer Gregg Toland. The critic cites specific examples of the film's innovative camera work, such as the "stolen" newsreels and the overhead picture of the stagehands during Susan's operatic debut, as examples of the way it effectively enhances the narrative.

Citizen Kane is a story about the investigation done by a newspaperman Mr. Thompson to find out about Charles Foster Kane's last words: “Rosebud.” In contrast to Scarface's linear and straightforward storyline, Citizen Kane employs a non-linear and complex storytelling approach to depict the life of Charles Foster Kane, integrating flashbacks and multiple perspectives. In contrast to Scarface's depiction of communism as a serious threat to American values, Citizen Kane provides a more nuanced portrayal. Individuals who disagree with Charles Foster Kane's principles or who may harbour feelings of jealousy toward him have labelled him a communist or, in certain cases, a fascist:

“Mr. Charles Foster Kane, in every essence of his social beliefs and by the dangerous manner in which he has persistently attacked the American traditions of private property, initiative, and opportunity for advancement is, in fact, nothing more or less than a communist.”⁵²

“The words ‘Charles Foster Kane’ are a menace to every workingman in this land. He is today what he has always been. And always will be. A fascist.”⁵³

⁵¹ Lily Rotham, “Citizen Kane at 75: Time's Original Review,” Time, April 28, 2016.

⁵² Orson Welles, *Citizen Kane* (New York City: RKO Radio Pictures, 1941), 07:20 – 07:35.

⁵³ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 07:38 – 07:49.

However, Kane suggests that he regards his American identity as a fundamental aspect of his personality, one that is unwavering and integral to his being: “I am, have been, and will be only one thing – an American.” – Charles Foster Kane⁵⁴

Kane was raised in a wealthy environment despite being separated from his family at a young age, in contrast to Tony Montana, who immigrated to the United States without any formal education or financial means. While Kane had the opportunity to further his education, he was expelled from a number of prestigious institutions: “Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Cornell, Switzerland. He was thrown out of a lot of colleges.”⁵⁵ Kane's singular interest is *The Inquirer* newspaper, despite possessing little knowledge of its operational management: “I don’t know how to run a newspaper. I try everything I can think of.”⁵⁶ However, he gradually developed a sense of responsibility and obligation as a result of his role as publisher of *The Inquirer*. Furthermore, he expresses concern for the well-being of society's underprivileged members, as well as an awareness of the potential consequences of disregarding their needs:

“I am the publisher of the *Inquirer*. As such it’s my duty and I’ll let you in on a little secret. It’s also my pleasure to see that the decent hard-working people of this community aren’t robbed blind by a pack of money-mad pirates, just because they have anybody to look after their interests. (...) I think I’m the man to do it. You see, I have money and property. If I don’t look after the interests of the underprivileged, maybe somebody else will.”⁵⁷

The ambition of Charles Foster Kane is to raise the *Inquirer* newspaper to a prominent position within the city, thereby creating a reliance on the publication among its citizens. While his determination may reflect the American ideal of self-made success, it also possesses the possibility of putting personal ambitions in front of the common good:

“I’ve got to make the New York *Inquirer* as important to New York as the gas in that light.”⁵⁸

Kane, in fact, authored the "Declaration of Principles," a document considered by his friend Jedediah to be as important as the renowned Declaration of Independence or The Constitution of the United States:

⁵⁴ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 07:53.

⁵⁵ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 32:36 – 32:42.

⁵⁶ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 24:51.

⁵⁷ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 26:17 – 26:43.

⁵⁸ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 38:02 – 38:06.

“I’ll provide the people of this city with a daily paper that will tell all the news honestly. I will also provide them with a fighting and tireless champion of their rights as citizens and as human beings.”⁵⁹

The promise to provide accurate news and to advocate for citizens' rights is especially significant even in the contemporary world, as media sources are frequently accused of bias and misinformation.⁶⁰ It demonstrates a commitment to informing the public and advocating for their interests. Nonetheless, Kane's newspaper gradually developed into an instrument for public opinion manipulation, contradicting his earlier pledge of being a "tireless champion of people's rights." Kane's claim that he can dictate what people think may suggest an arrogant conviction in his own power and influence, as well as a willingness to manipulate public opinion for his personal profit:

“Really, Charles, people will think...” “What I tell them to think.”⁶¹

“You talk about the people as though you owned them. As though they belong to you. Goodness. As long as I can remember, you’ve talked about giving the people their rights as if you could make them a present of liberty as a reward for services rendered.”⁶²

The exertion of power and influence on others is a characteristic that is shared between the characters of Charles Foster Kane in "Citizen Kane" and Tony Montana in "Scarface". Both characters retain assurance in their ability to influence the attitudes and actions of those around them. While Kane avoids physical violence, Montana frequently uses it to maintain his authority and control over other people. This fundamental distinction in their attitudes shows the differences between their characters and the divergent paths they take in their pursuit of power and influence. Charles Foster Kane's friend Jedediah Leland shares this viewpoint, claiming that Kane's deeds were often severe, even if his personal attitude was not: “Not that Charlie was ever brutal. He just did brutal things.”⁶³ Kane's life, according to Leland's portrayal, was focused on individual aspirations and material gain, possibly leading to an unfulfilling outcome due to a lack of purpose and dedication to the greater good:

⁵⁹ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 38:24 – 38:50.

⁶⁰ “Media Bias Chart,” University of Central Oklahoma, last modified February 27, 2023, <https://library.uco.edu/misinformation/mediabias>.

⁶¹ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 53:45 – 53:48.

⁶² Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 1:12:41 – 1:12:58.

⁶³ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 49:51 – 49:58.

“But he never believed in anything except Charlie Kane. He never had a conviction except Charlie Kane in his life. I suppose he died without one.”⁶⁴

In the film, Charles Foster Kane is portrayed as a man driven by a desire for material wealth and power. Reports from Kane's associates, on the contrary, show that his motivations were more complex and multifaceted. Kane's personal life was also marked by unsuccessful relationships and marriages, indicating a desire for emotional connection and intimacy. Varying accounts are presented in the context of *Citizen Kane* on the primary motivating causes that led to Charles Foster Kane's acts and behaviours. Mr. Bernstein, Kane's employee, provides one such perspective, claiming that Kane was not primarily driven by the pursuit of wealth. Another of Kane's acquaintances, his friend Leland, provides an alternative viewpoint, claiming that Kane was motivated by a deep desire for love and affection, which he may have lost since he was taken from his family at a young age:

Mr. Bernstein: “Well, it’s no trick to make a lot of money if all you want is to make a lot of money. You take Mr. Kane. It wasn’t money he wanted. Thatcher never did figure him out. Sometimes even I couldn’t.”⁶⁵

Leland: “Love. That’s why he did everything. That’s why he went to politics. It seems we weren’t enough. He wanted all the voters to love him too. As all he really wanted out of life was love. That’s Charlie’s story. How he lost it. You see, he just didn’t have any to give. Oh, he loved Charlie Kane, of course. Very dearly. And his mother, I guess he always loved her.”⁶⁶

In the finale of "*Citizen Kane*," Charles Foster Kane builds the luxurious Xanadu mansion, where he remains until his last days. Kane gathered a broad and varied collection of art, antiquities, and exotic items throughout his extensive travels across the world, which are stored in the residence. While Kane's desire for wealth and status drove his decision to build Xanadu, it also served as an attempt to establish an insulated realm that would protect him from the agony and loneliness of his personal life. Furthermore, the mansion could represent Kane's desire to take control over his surroundings and shape them to his liking, as well as his ambition to leave a lasting legacy:

Leland: “I guess he was pretty lonely down there in that coliseum all those years. He hadn’t finished it when she (Susan, his 2nd wife) left him. He never finished anything except my notice. Of course he built the joint for her.” Thompson: “That must have

⁶⁴ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 50:28 – 50:53.

⁶⁵ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 32:05 – 32:27.

⁶⁶ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 54:12 – 54:40.

been love.” “I don’t know. He was disappointed in the world, so he built one of his own, an absolute monarchy.”⁶⁷

The majestic Xanadu mansion is inhabited by Charles Foster Kane and his wife Susan Alexander. However, Susan is clearly dissatisfied with their relationship, as she expresses emotions of neglect and insignificance in Kane's life, despite his considerable wealth and lavish gifts. Susan's argument with Kane emphasizes the emptiness in their relationship and her desire for emotional connection and meaningful gestures from him. Her statement suggests an absence of emotional intimacy and a focus on material possessions:

“You never give me anything I really care about.”⁶⁸

“What’s the difference between giving me a bracelet or giving somebody else \$100,000 for a statue you’ll keep crated up and never look at? It’s just money. It doesn’t mean anything. You never really gave me anything that belongs to you that you care about.”⁶⁹

Susan departs from Kane shortly after uttering the aforementioned words, leaving him to occupy his mansion in complete loneliness. Mr. Thompson, the journalist, eventually does not uncover the meaning of Charles Foster Kane's final words, "Rosebud," despite Mr. Bernstein's subtle hint in the film:

“You know, Mr. Thompson, I was thinking, this Rosebud you’re trying to find out about... (...) Maybe that was something he lost. Mr. Kane was a man who lost almost everything he had.”⁷⁰

Robert L. Carringer adds that Kane's focus on material belongings and wealth has deluded him of the importance of human relationships and other fundamental values. This insight offers a compelling interpretation of the film's core themes, emphasizing the damaging impact of unrestrained ambition and materialism on one's personal life and relationships:

"Rosebud" becomes the symbol of his youthful innocence, lost when he was adopted into a family of bankers. Money and the pursuit of wealth have robbed him of his humanity and left him isolated and lonely, vainly seeking happiness in an endless acquisition of gimcracks. He has concentrated on material values to the exclusion of such fundamentals as human relationships.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 1:24:02 – 1:24:21.

⁶⁸ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 1:41:41.

⁶⁹ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 1:42:37 – 1:42:50.

⁷⁰ Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 48:13 – 48:32.

⁷¹ Robert L. Carringer, “Rosebud, Dead or Alive: Narrative and Symbolic Structure in *Citizen Kane*,” *PMLA* 91, no. 2 (March 1976): 185.

In conclusion, both *Scarface* and *Citizen Kane* depict characters who rise to great success through their own efforts, becoming self-made men in the process. The two films, however, show how the pursuit of wealth and power can lead to one's demise. In *Scarface*, Tony Montana rises from being a Cuban refugee to becoming a powerful drug lord in Miami. His ambition to achieve the American dream of success motivates him, but his pursuit of power and money eventually leads to his demise. He is consumed by his own greed and paranoia, alienating those around him and eventually dying alone. Similarly, in *Citizen Kane*, Charles Foster Kane builds a media empire and rises to become one of the wealthiest and most influential figures in American society. He is motivated by a desire to accomplish something novel and significant, but his pursuit of personal ambition and willingness to prioritize his own desires over the common good lead to his downfall. He becomes increasingly isolated and frustrated, losing touch with his values and the people around him, and passes away alone and unfulfilled.

Both films suggest that the pursuit of wealth and power, while essential to the American narrative, can be dangerous and ultimately unfulfilling. The characters' success and self-made status are portrayed as a double-edged sword, highlighting the potential drawbacks of unchecked ambition and the corrupting influence of wealth and power. Finally, the films may caution against pursuing these objectives at any cost, emphasizing the importance of values such as honesty, integrity, and human connection in achieving true fulfillment and success.

3 The Independence Issue

This chapter examines the widely acclaimed film *Easy Rider*, directed by Dennis Hopper, and its portrayal of the 1960s counterculture movement in the United States. The chapter delves into the film's themes of self-sufficiency and independence, particularly through the characters of Wyatt and Billy, who set off on a motorcycle journey from Los Angeles to New Orleans in search of personal freedom and self-expression.

As reported by Harriet R. Polt, *Easy Rider* is possibly the first film to accurately portray the differences between the new “hippie” culture and its opposite, the conservative group.⁷² In the beginning, the two protagonists purchase and then consequently sell cocaine. The gained income gives them a temporary feeling of freedom as they travel on motorcycles from the western border to the East. Joe B. Lawrence hints, that the journey could be an allegory to the westward movement.⁷³

The auditory component of *Easy Rider* is essential in the entire cinematic experience and ought to be acknowledged. Steppenwolf's song "Born to be Wild" contains a thematic resonance with the film in question, focused on the ideas of independence, rebellion against established notions, and the pursuit of an unconventional lifestyle. The musical composition is featured at the beginning of the film and functions as an anthem for the characters' struggle for personal freedom. The lyrics of "Born to be Wild" express a desire for adventure, the open road, and a rejection of ordinary life. This concept is repeated in the film, as Wyatt and Billy embark on a motorcycle adventure across America, rejecting mainstream society and establishing their own path:

Get your motor runnin'
Head out on the highway
Looking for adventure
In whatever comes our way
(...)
Like a true nature's child
We were born
Born to be wild
We can climb so high
I never wanna die
Born to be wild

⁷² Harriet R. Polt, “Easy Rider,” *Film Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (Autumn 1969): 22.

⁷³ Joe B. Lawrence, “The Allegory of ‘Easy Rider,’” *The English Journal* 59, no. 5 (Autumn 1970): 665.

Born to be wild⁷⁴

Similarly, The Byrds' song "Wasn't Born to Follow" expresses a desire for a life free of constraints and limitations, as expressed in the following lines:

No I'd rather go and journey
Where the diamond crescent's glowing
And run across the valley
Beneath the sacred mountain
And wander through the forest
Where the trees have leaves of prisms⁷⁵

This excerpt echoes the journey of Wyatt and Billy, the two protagonists in the film, as they seek to gain independence from the restrictions of mainstream America and embark on a journey of self-discovery and personal freedom. They commence their journey in Los Angeles and travel across the entire country until they reach their final destination in New Orleans. During their journey, Billy and Wyatt stop at a farm, where they are fed and provided with lodging.



Figure 3

⁷⁴ Steppenwolf, *Born to Be Wild*, Geffen Records, 1980.

⁷⁵ The Byrds, *Wasn't Born to Follow*, Dunhill, 1969.

This scene, in which Billy and Wyatt are repairing a motorcycle while the farmer is replacing a horseshoe, may serve as a metaphor for America's contrasting rural and urban lifestyles in the 1960s. The farmer, who represents agricultural America's conventional beliefs, may seem perplexed, and probably even frightened of the two protagonists' countercultural attitudes. In contrast, as they struggle with the mechanical nuances of the motorcycle, Billy and Wyatt encounter the practical challenges associated with their unconventional lifestyle. Despite their differences, the farmer shows them kindness by offering them assistance. Wyatt praises the farmer's land and lifestyle, emphasizing the personal freedom it provides him:

“Well, you sure got a nice spread here.” Farmer: “I sure got a lot of ‘em. My wife is Catholic, you know.” (...) “No, I mean it. You’ve got a nice place. It’s not every man that can live off the land, you know. Do your own thing in your own time. You should be proud.”⁷⁶

This exchange highlights the contrast between Wyatt’s and Billy's countercultural beliefs, which reject the mainstream American way of life, and the traditional values of the country farmer. Despite their opposing worldviews, Wyatt and the farmer are able to find common ground and admire each other's way of life. The story's two central characters set out unaccompanied until they come upon a hitchhiker, whom they pick up. During their journey, they stop at a gas station, where Billy shows a distinct anxiety as the stranger approaches the concealed money within the gas tank:

“Hey, man, everything that we ever dreamed of is in that teardrop gas tank and you got a stranger over there pouring gasoline all over it. Man, all he’s got to do is turn and look over into it, man, and he can see that...” Wyatt: “He won’t know what it is, man. He won’t know what it is. Don’t worry, Billy. Everything’s all right.” “All right man. All right. I don’t know, man.” “I do. Everything’s fine, Billy.”⁷⁷

It can emphasize the risks and uncertainties inherent in the protagonists' unorthodox lifestyle, as they encounter potential threats to their financial security and personal safety while pursuing their aspirations of freedom and self-expression. Billy's nervousness is also noticeable as he anticipates their arrival at Mardi Gras, a New Orleans carnival. His enthusiasm to be there may highlight the significance of Mardi Gras as a symbol of independence and liberation for the characters, who have set their sights on this event as a destination that promises self-discovery:

⁷⁶ Dennis Hopper, *Easy Rider* (New York City: Columbia Pictures, 1969), 15:38 - 16:13.

⁷⁷ Hopper, *Easy Rider*, 19:01 – 19:21.

Billy: "How much further we gotta go, man?" Wyatt: "I don't know." Stranger: "Not much further." "That's what you said this mornin'." "I sometimes say it all day." "Really? You say it all day, eh?" "We don't have much longer. We'll be there soon." "We gotta get to Mardi Gras, man. We're going to Mardi Gras." "Your little heart is set on that, huh?"⁷⁸

While he struggles to adjust to urban life and seeks a sense of detachment from prevailing social norms, the hitchhiker's aspirations may reflect those of Billy and Wyatt. The open roads might represent escape from the confines of city life for him:

Billy: "Where you from, man?" Stranger: "Hard to say." "It's hard to say? Where you from, man?" "Well, it's hard to say because it's a very long world, you know?" "I just want to know where you're from, man." "A city." "From a city." "Doesn't make any difference what city. All cities are alike. That's why I'm out here now." "That's why you're out here now?" "Yeah." "Why?" "Cause I'm from the city, a long way from the city, and that's where I want to be right now."⁷⁹

When Wyatt and Billy arrive at their next destination, they find themselves in a hippie commune that the hitchhiker had directed them to. Despite the commune's impression of independence from the outside world, it swiftly becomes apparent that this is not an ideal setting. The environment is one of uncertainty and disillusionment, emphasizing the difficulties and constraints that those who pursue alternative lifestyles outside of mainstream society may encounter.

Despite the fact that the farmland they are using is not ideal, the residents of the community are attempting to produce their own food. Billy sees the issue seriously, whilst Wyatt's view is optimistic:

Billy: "This is nothin' but sand. They ain't gonna make it. Ain't gonna grow anything here." Wyatt: "They're gonna make it. Dig, man" (33:02 – 33:09)⁸⁰

Joe B. Lawrence shares Billy's view, adding that the hippie commune illustrates the flaws inherent in an overly idealistic and impractical worldview, similar to Don Quixote's own misguided quest for chivalry:

The idealism and naiveté of Don Quixote is shown in the situation at the hippie commune. Freedom exists in the commune as it did at the ranch, but the commune is obviously unprepared to deal with the realities of existence. Their pitiful attempts to raise food are doomed, and the change in the film stock color from the usual lush and gorgeous to the sickly pale during the community prayer for good crops visually

⁷⁸ Hopper, *Easy Rider*, 23:10 – 23:36.

⁷⁹ Hopper, *Easy Rider*, 24:56 – 25:35.

⁸⁰ Hopper, *Easy Rider*, 33:02 – 33:09.

foretells the disaster that lies ahead. The commune will fail because its hope and idealism have outstripped reality.⁸¹

Billy's discomfort with the communal environment may indicate that it does not correspond to his desired level of independence:

“Man, look. I gotta get outta here, man. I mean, we... we got things we want to do, man, like... I gotta get outta here, man”⁸²

Following their departure from the community, Billy and Wyatt embark on a solitary journey. Nevertheless, when they reach a city, they are arrested for "parading without a permit." During their detention, they encounter George Hanson, who informs them on the country's restriction on long hair and other countercultural ideals:

“You boys don’t look like you’re from this part of the country. You’re lucky I’m here to see that you don’t get into anything.” Wyatt: “Anything?” “Well, they got this here, see, uh, ‘scissor-happy, beautify America’ thing going on around here. They’re trying to make everybody look like Yul Brynner. They used rusty razor blades on the last two longhairs that they brought in here and I wasn’t here to protect them.”⁸³

The quoted dialogue between George Hanson and Billy and Wyatt highlights the cultural gap that exists between the two countercultural individuals and mainstream culture. George's remark that they do not appear to be from the area suggests that the locals may regard them with mistrust, if not hatred, which foreshadows the continuation of the film. The mentioned "scissor-happy, beautify America" campaign may seek to impose conventional cultural ideals by even violent means. Joe Lawrence weighs in on George's decision to accompany Billy and Wyatt on their journey:

“Covered by an old football helmet and wrapped in a letterman's sweater from Ole Miss, George wears some of the outward symbols of social "respectability" and repression; but these trappings are not protection enough.”⁸⁴

The author's suggestion may seem to be that, despite adjusting his clothes, George is still vulnerable to discrimination and prejudice, similar to what Billy and Wyatt encounter on their journey. After experimenting with marijuana for the first time in his life, Hanson initiates a debate about alien beings:

“Well, they are people just like us from within our own solar system except that their society is more highly evolved. I mean they don’t have no wars. They got no monetary system. They don’t have any leaders, because, I mean, each man is a

⁸¹ Lawrence, “The Allegory of ‘Easy Rider’”, 665–666.

⁸² Hopper, *Easy Rider*, 38:44 – 38:52.

⁸³ Hopper, *Easy Rider*, 48:24 – 48:51.

⁸⁴ Lawrence, “The Allegory of ‘Easy Rider’”, 666.

leader. I mean, each man... Because of their technology they are able to feed, clothe, house, and transport themselves equally and with no effort.”⁸⁵

“Now, I mean, we still have leaders upon whom we rely for the release of this information. These leaders have decided to repress this information because of the tremendous shock that it would cause to our antiquated systems.”⁸⁶

George's endorsement of an egalitarian and communal society in which everyone is a leader may reflect the counterculture emphasis on individual liberty and community unity. The rejection of war and monetary systems may as well express a countercultural rejection of repressive and corrupt capitalism and militarism. Furthermore, Hanson's claim that leaders are suppressing information about these developed people echoes the countercultural scepticism of mainstream authority figures, who were perceived as untrustworthy and dishonest.

In the film, the sequence in which Billy and Wyatt arrive at a restaurant serves as a poignant portrayal of the stark cultural difference that divides the two countercultural motorcyclists from mainstream culture. The formerly calm and cheerful attitude rapidly shifts into one of unease and distrust upon entering the restaurant. The other customers gaze at Billy and Wyatt's unusual appearance, which includes nonconformist clothing and long hair, evoking a strong sense of displacement:

Man: “Check that joker with the long hair.” Sheriff: “I checked him already. Look like we might have to bring ‘em up to the Hilton before it’s all over with.” “Ha! I think she’s cute.” “Isn’t she though? I guess we put ‘em in a woman’s cell, don’t you reckon?” “Oh, I think we oughta put ‘em in a cage and charge a little admission to see ‘em.”⁸⁷

The exchange emphasizes the hatred for the central characters. The idea that Billy and Wyatt be placed in a "woman's cell" and displayed as a kind of public spectacle could seem unsettling since it reduces the two men to mere objects of curiosity and amusement rather than humans deserving of fundamental human dignity and respect. Furthermore, the Sheriff's use of the term "before it's all over with" implies that Billy and Wyatt will be punished regardless of whether or not they have committed any crimes. This implies a deep prejudice against countercultural individuals, who are regarded as inherently dangerous and subversive simply by being nonconformists. The local girls' affection for Billy and Wyatt serves to intensify the residents' already-existing feelings of resentment and envy.

⁸⁵ Hopper, *Easy Rider*, 59:01 – 59:30.

⁸⁶ Hopper, *Easy Rider*, 1:00:08 – 1:00:26.

⁸⁷ Hopper, *Easy Rider*, 1:06:11 – 1:06:27.

They are forced to stay in a nearby forest and argue about why they are treated differently.

“Oh, they’re not scared of you. They scared of what you represent to ‘em.” “Hey, man, all we represent to them, man, is somebody who needs a haircut.” “Oh, no. What you represent to them is freedom.” “What the hell’s wrong with freedom, man? That’s what it’s all about.” “Oh, yeah, that’s right. That’s what it’s all about, all right. But talkin’ about it and bein’ it... that’s two different things. I mean, it’s real hard to be free when you are bought and sold in the marketplace. Course, don’t ever tell anybody that they’re not free ‘cause then they gonna get real busy killin’ and maimin’ to prove to you that they are. Oh, yeah, they gonna talk to you and talk to you and talk to you about individual freedom. But they see a free individual, it’s gonna scare ‘em.”⁸⁸

This dialogue captures a major theme in the film: the conflict between countercultural principles of freedom and individuality and mainstream society conventions that seek to restrict and suppress those values. *Easy Rider's* themes and tensions may be relevant to contemporary American society as well. Despite the fact that the film is set in the 1960s, there is still a fundamental conflict between individualism and conformity, along with between alternative lifestyles and mainstream society. The film's investigation of countercultural individuals' efforts to retain their values and lifestyles in the face of societal pressures and conventions may still be relevant to many people today, particularly those who feel marginalized or outside of the mainstream.

A violent and tragic event happens, in which the main characters are assaulted, and George is murdered, which may serve as a powerful commentary on the time period's deep-rooted cultural issues. It emphasizes the harsh reality that those who embrace countercultural principles and ways of life are frequently confronted with hostility, if not violence, from mainstream culture. The attack's severity also reflects the fear and mistrust that existed amongst various groups in America during the 1960s. The death of George, a nonconformist but essentially harmless character, in the attack emphasizes the danger and unpredictability that accompanied the countercultural movement.

The arrival of Billy and Wyatt at the Mardi Gras carnival can be considered the film's high point. Being accompanied by an unpleasant LSD-induced experience, this pivotal moment ultimately leads to their downfall. According to Lawrence, the Mardi Gras festival, with its unrestrained and excessive behaviour, can be interpreted as a symbol of the struggle for

⁸⁸ Hopper, *Easy Rider*, 1:10:00 – 1:11:20.

liberation and the desire to escape society's restrictions. Nonetheless, excessive drug use and the desire for private satisfaction can have self-destructive consequences:

The trip to Mardi Gras symbolizes the twentieth century's stifling of individual freedom and the resultant search for something to replace the lost freedom. The direction this quest is taking, the allegory states, is toward self-indulgence and self-destruction.⁸⁹

By pursuing financial success, Billy and Wyatt may have lost sight of their original principles, revealing the emptiness of their accomplishment:

Billy: "We're rich, Wyatt. Yeah, man. Yeah. Hey, we did it, man. We did it. We did it. We're rich, man. We're retired in Florida now, mister." "You know, Billy, we blew it." "What? That's what it's all about, man. I mean, like, you know. I mean, you go for the big money, man, and then you're free. You dig?" "We blew it." (1:29:17 – 1:30:02)

Billy's joyful exclamation, "We're rich, man!" may indicate the accomplishment of their purpose, the accumulation of wealth, and the related freedom. Wyatt's sober comment, "We blew it," could be seen as a highlight of the painful reality that their pursuit of material success has come at the expense of their fundamental principles and goals. Wyatt's statement, according to J. B. Lawrence, speaks for an entire generation of men, capturing the disillusionment and sense of loss that many experienced in the aftermath of the countercultural movement and the failure of the hippie dream.⁹⁰

To conclude, *Easy Rider* is a breakthrough film that depicts the tension between counterculture and traditional values in 1960s America. The film portrays the essence of a generation seeking independence and an escape from mainstream society through the use of powerful musical compositions and a narrative that examines the journey of two protagonists seeking personal freedom. The main character Wyatt is portrayed in the film as a countercultural figure who rejects mainstream American values and pursues independence and self-sufficiency by travelling cross-country on his motorcycle with his companion Billy. In contrast, the protagonists of the previously analysed films, *Scarface* and *Citizen Kane*, Tony Montana, and Charles Foster Kane, seek material wealth and power through their engagement in the drug trade, newspaper business, and political ambitions, respectively. It should be noted, however, that

⁸⁹ Lawrence, "The Allegory of 'Easy Rider'", 666.

⁹⁰ Lawrence, "The Allegory of 'Easy Rider'", 666.

Citizen Kane delves into issues other than the desire for material prosperity, such as the essence of power, the definition of success, and the nature of humans.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of a narrative is multifaceted, with various definitions and interpretations existing. Narratives serve as a tool for presenting and understanding events while promoting specific perspectives and values. However, it is important to acknowledge that different narratives and interpretations may exist. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of a situation or events requires considering multiple perspectives and narratives. Kent Puckett's three distinct narrative forms highlight the complexity of storytelling, with the first form emphasizing personal experiences, the second form—critical analysis, and the third form the influence of the medium.

The concept of the American Narrative or American Myth as a shared set of ideals and experiences that shape the national identity is a complex and dynamic phenomenon. While some scholars see it as a single narrative, others argue that it can be divided into two opposing paradigms: a community-oriented society and an individualistic one. This dynamic nature of cultural values makes it challenging to establish a clear and static definition of a cultural myth. The American narrative has been shaped by various waves of immigration and has evolved over time, reflecting the country's constant movement and progression. To fully understand the complexities of American society, it is crucial to consider the interplay between these opposing paradigms and how they influence the country's politics, economy, and cultural values.

The Pilgrims and the Puritans arrived in New England in the 17th century with the goal of creating a new, autonomous community and pursuing religious freedom. Their values and beliefs, including idealism, sacrifice, and a theologically based utopian vision, contributed to the development of American exceptionalism. However, these values were later challenged as individuals pursued their own ambitions and the idea of a common good began to diminish. The 18th century, marked by the American Revolution and the establishment of key values such as independence, constitutional government, and equality, was a critical period in American history.

The adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 continues to influence discussions of democracy, nationalism, and human rights in the present day, and its emphasis on the pursuit of happiness and unalienable human rights has come to define the American Dream. The legacy of these historical events and values continues to shape the character of the United States and its place in the world. The idea of Manifest Destiny helped to fuel the settlement of the West and the expansion of the United States. It became a central theme in the country's

narrative and was used to justify a wide range of actions, including the forced relocation of Native Americans and the annexation of new territories. Despite these challenges, the idea of Manifest Destiny continues to be a part of the American narrative, and the settlement of the West remains an important part of the country's history. It represents a significant period of growth and expansion in the United States, but also highlights the ongoing struggles to balance progress with social and environmental responsibility.

The world wars had a significant impact on the American narrative, shaping its values, ideals, and national identity. World War I, which the United States joined in 1917, was a defining moment in American history, both in terms of the nation's position in world affairs and its impact on American identity and ideals. The relatively brief period of American involvement in the conflict contributed to a post-war perception of American exceptionalism and superiority, which was further strengthened by the events of the Second World War. However, the aftermath of the world wars was not without its challenges. The Red Scare, also known as McCarthyism, was a period in the United States following World War II during which Senator Joseph R. McCarthy wielded his influence to warn Americans about the perceived threat of communism. According to Don E. Carleton, McCarthy often spread exaggerated and false information about communist ideology, which had a widespread impact on society for about a decade.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a transformative moment in American history, as it marked a shift towards a more inclusive and equitable society. The act not only outlawed discrimination but also challenged the prevailing ideas about race and gender and paved the way for further legislation and social movements that sought to promote equal rights and social justice. The impact of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 can still be felt today, as it helped to extend the definition of what it means to be an American and created a more diverse and inclusive national identity. This act serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for civil rights and the importance of promoting equality and justice for all.

The American narrative is depicted in the analysed films "Scarface", "Citizen Kane" and "Easy Rider". "Citizen Kane," directed by Orson Welles, portrays the life of a wealthy newspaper magnate, Charles Foster Kane, who is consumed by his quest for power and success. The film depicts how Kane's excessive ambition ultimately leads to his isolation and unhappiness, despite his vast wealth and influence.

Similarly, "Scarface" also portrays a character, Tony Montana, who is driven by his desire for success and wealth in America. Montana's rise to power and eventual downfall are a result of his obsession with money and power, just like Kane's fall from grace in "Citizen Kane." In both films, the pursuit of the American Dream is portrayed as a double-edged sword, offering opportunities for success, but also posing the risk of excessive ambition and the loss of important relationships. Both films explore the themes of power, greed, and the cost of success.

Unlike the other two films, "Easy Rider" depicts the lives of two bikers, Wyatt, and Billy, who embark on a road trip from Los Angeles to New Orleans in search of freedom, adventure, and the American Dream. The film explores the counterculture movement of the 1960s and the dissatisfaction of young people with mainstream society, which they view as oppressive and restrictive. In contrast to the characters in "Scarface" and "Citizen Kane," who seek power, wealth, and success through conventional means, Wyatt and Billy reject their current status and seek to live life on their own terms. Their journey across America is a symbol of their quest for freedom and self-expression but also highlights the limitations and prejudices of the society they live in. Moreover, "Easy Rider" explores the theme of generational conflict, as the older generation perceives the counterculture movement as a threat to traditional values and the American way of life.

Thus, while "Scarface" and "Citizen Kane" explore themes related to ambition and the cost of success, "Easy Rider" provides a different perspective on the American narrative, emphasizing individualism, freedom, and the rejection of mainstream values.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se věnuje konceptu „americký narativ“ a jeho mnoha interpretacím v průběhu historie Spojených Států Amerických. Zabývá se různými sociálními, politickými a kulturními aspekty, které americký narativ napomáhaly vytvořit. Konkrétně se zabývá ideály jako „americký sen“, „self-made man“ nebo „osobní svoboda.“ Jádrem práce je poté komparativní analýza filmů „Scarface“, „Občan Kane“ a „Bezstarostná jízda“ a jejich vyobrazení zmíněných amerických ideálů a amerického příběhu. Bakalářská práce je rozdělena do tří hlavních kapitol, z nichž první je teoretická a další dvě analytické.

Celkově lze říct, že americký příběh (narativ) může být považován za komplikovaný, ale dynamický, tudíž ovlivněný různými paradigmaty a hodnotami, které se neustále vyvíjejí. Narativ je podpořený různými mýty a zkušenostmi, které jsou předávány od generace ke generaci. Někteří autoři, jako Jay Parini, vidí mýty jako klíčové pro vytváření americké identity, zatímco jiní, jako Spengemann a Lundquist, zdůrazňují problematickou povahu konceptu kulturních mýtů. Podle nich jsou dynamické a pod neustálým vývojem, tudíž nelze určit přesnou definici amerického narativu. Bez ohledu na tyto názory je však jasné, že porozumění americkému příběhu a mýtům vyžaduje hloubkové zkoumání různých paradigmat a hodnot, které ovlivňují americkou společnost.

První kapitola dále popisuje první obyvatele Spojených států, otce poutníky a později puritány, kteří připluli do „nového světa“ v 17. století začít nový život. Avšak, puritánská vize života v komunitě byla brzy ohrožena těmi, kteří upřednostňovali svůj osobní zisk před společným blahem. Je poukázáno na fakt, že tito první osadníci byli dlouho považováni za „první Američany,“ což značně přispělo k ideálu americké výjimečnosti. Událost, která bezesporu dále přispěla k vytváření amerického narativu je americká revoluce, díky které Spojené státy již nebyly závislé na Velké Británii. Revoluce přispěla k vytvoření základů amerických ideálů, například rovnocennosti nebo demokracii, zmíněných v Deklaraci nezávislosti Spojených států amerických. V 19. století vznikla myšlenka „manifest destiny,“ neboli zjevné předurčení kolonizovat celou Severní Ameriku. V důsledku této myšlenky se obyvatelé USA hromadně začali stěhovat na západ. V 19. století se také odehrála občanská válka ve Spojených státech, která měla za důsledek, mimo jiné, zrušení otroctví. Tato významná událost přispěla k americkým mýtům svobody a rovnocennosti. Dále je poukázáno na nové filozofické hnutí, zvané transcendentalismus, které vzniklo v tomto století ve Spojených státech a jeho hlavní

myšlenky jsou svoboda jednotlivce a nezávislost. Transcendentalismus významně posílil americké ideály nezávislosti a intuice. Ve 20. století se udály významné politické i sociální změny, zejména dvě světové války. Relativně krátká doba, ve které byla země zapojena v první světové válce, stačila k posílení amerického ideálu výjimečnosti a nadřazenosti, s ohledem na fakt, že Spojené státy vyvázly z konfliktu bez značné škody, s porovnáním se zeměmi Evropy. Dále je ukázáno, jak důsledky druhé světové války podpořily pocit národní hrdosti a zdůraznily sílu kolektivní solidarity. Po druhé světové válce došlo k tzv. rudé panice, kdy senátor Joseph McCarthy vyjádřil obavu z ohrožení amerických zájmů, když bezdůkazně obvinil některé členy vlády z hájení komunistických ideálů. 20. století zaznamenalo také výrazný posun v lidských právech. Byl přijat zákon o občanských právech (Civil Rights Act), který zakázal diskriminaci na základě rasy, barvy pleti, náboženství nebo pohlaví. Posledně kapitola poukazuje na vyvíjení amerického narativu v průběhu posledních dekad. Je naznačen trend politické polarizace, v důsledku které se v USA staly hlavními politickými stranami demokraté a republikáni. Poté je nastíněna myšlenka, zda, a případně jakým dílem, by vláda měla zasahovat do života běžných lidí, s argumenty pro a proti.

Druhá kapitola nejprve zkoumá původ a definuje pojem „americký sen,“ který poprvé ve své knize použil James Truslow Adams. Dále je analyzován film „Zjizvená tvář“ od režiséra Briana DePalma. Jsou uvedeny dobové recenze, které film kritizují za urážlivé vyobrazení Kubánců, ale i kladně hodnocené zobrazení roku 1980, kdy do USA připlulo mnoho kubánských imigrantů. Jeden z uprchlíků je i protagonistou filmu Tony Montana, který jakožto „politický uprchlík,“ jak sám sebe nazývá, připluje do Ameriky začít nový život. Je zřejmé, že si Tony váží svého času i svobody, proto hledá i jiné cesty, jak se stát bohatým než být zaměstnaný jako jeho rodina. Touha stát se úspěšným ho zavede do světa drog a násilí, pomocí kterého postupně vybuduje vlastní drogové impérium. Kvůli rostoucímu egu a paranoie Montana nakonec ztratí vše co získal, včetně jeho ženy, sestry a nejlepšího přítele. Podobný osud má Charles Foster Kane ve filmu „Občan Kane.“ Na rozdíl od „Zjizvené tváře“ byl Občan Kane přijat jako zlomový snímek z hlediska nové techniky vyprávění a kamery. Film je vyprávěn pomocí retrospektivy, zatímco „Zjizvená tvář“ vypráví lineární příběh. Oba filmy ale slouží k vyobrazení kladných i stinných stránek amerického snu. Charles Kane je adoptován do bohaté rodiny, díky čemuž získá vysoké postavení ve společnosti a bohatství. I tak ho to nečiní šťastným a kvůli jeho touze po moci posléze ztrácí veškeré známé i svoji ženu. Nakonec umírá sám ve svém sídle a

pronese poslední slovo: „Rosebud“ (poupě), které je po celý film zkoumáno pro jeho význam. Robert L. Carringer naznačuje, že může jít o jistou nevinnost, o kterou kvůli adopci přišel. Kane se celý život soustředil jen na materiální záležitosti a tím omezil všechno ostatní, včetně mezilidských vztahů. Lze zobecnit, že filmy „Zjizvená tvář“ a „Občan Kane“ vyobrazují možná nebezpečí amerického snu. Posedlostí materialismem a touhou po bezmezné moci, bez ohledu na následky, může člověk ztratit úplně vše.

Třetí kapitola ukazuje jinou možnost pojetí amerického narativu, zejména ideálů osobní svobody a kontrakultury šedesátých let minulého století v USA. Ve filmu „Bezstarostná jízda“, od režiséra Dennise Hoppera, dva protagonisté, Billy a Wyatt, cestují napříč Amerikou, což může být podle J. B. Lawrence alegorie na expanzi na západ v 19. století. Hlavní hrdinové ale cestují opačným směrem, z Los Angeles do New Orleans na festival Mardi Gras, který je pro ně symbolem svobody. Čím blíže se ale přibližují svému cíli, tím více nepřátelsky jsou vnímáni kvůli svým odlišnostem, například dlouhými vlasy. Zde je zmíněný strach, kteří lidé mohou mít z absolutní svobody. Konfrontace s ní může mít za následek jejich nenávistné chování, v „Bezstarostné jízdě“ projevené vůči Billymu a Wyattovi. Film zobrazuje konflikt mezi zastánci kontrakultury, kteří se snažili uprchnout z většinové společnosti, a tradičními hodnotami v šedesátých letech.

Jednotlivá díla zobrazují různá pojetí amerického narativu. Zatímco „Zjizvená tvář“ a „Občan Kane“ zkoumají možné negativní dopady touhy po úspěchu bez ohledu na důsledky, „Bezstarostná jízda“ poukazuje na americký narativ z jiných úhlů, zejména na přístupu k osobní svobodě a odmítnutí tradičních hodnot.

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