

The Theme of the American Dream in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

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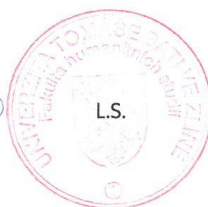
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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce analyzuje americký sen v románu Ralpa Ellisona *Neviditelný* (1952). Vychází ze členění amerického snu, které navrhl ve své knize *The American Dream: A Short History Story of an Idea That Shaped the Nation* Jim Cullen. Tyto formy amerického snu jsou pak aplikovány do románu *Neviditelný*, analyzovány příčiny a důsledky jeho nenaplnění z pohledu hlavního hrdiny. Práce dochází k závěru, že hlavní hrdina nemohl dosáhnout žádné podoby amerického snu, kvůli nerovnosti, rasismu a nadvládě bělochů ve třicátých letech 19. století v Americe.

Klíčová slova:

Americká literatura, Ralph Ellison, Jim Cullen, americký sen, černošská literatura, rasismus, identita, rasová segregace, otroctví, rovnost, deziluze, nadvláda bělochů.

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the American dream in Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* (1952). It is based on division of the American dream that Jim Cullen published in his book *The American Dream: A Short History Story of an Idea That Shaped the Nation*. These forms of the American dream are examined into the novel *Invisible Man* and the causes and consequences of failing when trying to reach the American dream are analyzed from the perspective of the main protagonist. The thesis concludes that the main character could not achieve the American dream in any form, due to inequality, racism and white supremacy in the 1930s America.

Keywords:

American literature, Ralph Ellison, Jim Cullen, American dream, African-American literature, racism, identity, racial segregation, slavery, equality, white supremacy.

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INTRODUCTION

“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.”¹ is stated in the cornerstone of American Revolution, the United States Declaration of Independence announced by Congress in 1776.

The Declaration of Independence is only one version of the American dream. Some Americans may not have ever read it, but they know this is the explanation of the American dream. If one asks what the American dream is like, they may answer it is success. If someone asks who is the representative of American dream they may say Booker T. Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Carnegie, Ursula Burns, Oprah Winfrey or Jay-Z.²

If one asks what the American dream means, they will answer: a good job, money, fancy car, villa, happy family etc.³ If somebody asks whereas everyone has the same possibilities to reach the American dream, they may not be very confident about the agreement. There has always been a racial obstacle in achieving the American dream.

However there are many versions of the American dream. The American dreams in its plural used for the first time Jim Cullen in his book *The American Dream: A Short History Story of an Idea That Shaped the Nation* and he came up with several versions of its meaning. It was not only the first mentioned but also Puritan's Dream, Dream of Upward Mobility, The Dream of Coast or Dream of Social Equality. All of them are supposed to characterize what is the American dream is. The last mentioned Dream of Social Equality is the dream that turned to be a goal for American political leaders since the Civil War.

In 1952 Ralph Ellison published his novel called *Invisible Man*, which brings readers into America in 1920s to story of young black boy who is seeking to find his own identity. The protagonist is trying to make his mark in America full of prejudice against black

¹ “The Declaration of Independence,” The Heritage Foundation, accessed April 28, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/initiatives/first-principles/primary-sources/the-declaration-of-independence>.

² Joe Mont, “10 People Living the American Dream,” The Street, April 7, 2011, accessed April 28, 2014, <http://www.thestreet.com/story/11173382/10/10-people-living-the-american-dream.html>.

³ James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 214-215.

people and white power. As much as he tries to achieve his American dream he fails right before he is able to reach it.

This thesis is going to prove that the main protagonist could not achieve the American dream in any form, due to inequality, racism and white supremacy.

1 THE AMERICAN DREAM

The term *American dream* is quite new and in different various contexts might stand for something slightly different. Firstly I would like to explain from where the phrase the American dream comes from. It was created by James Truslow Adams and written down in his book *The Epic of America*, which was published in 1931. Regardless of that the foundations of the American dream, the basis can be already found in sixteen century. Despite the fact Puritans did not call it the American dream, their attitude towards religion, family and work can be distinguished by the term. They believed in destiny for every single person as well as Founding fathers, a long time before Adams made it the American dream. James Adams was historian and writer and he affirmed 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” he stated very well the Puritans values that I will discuss in more deep bellow.⁴

However Adams supposes America is the land where people come in order to achieve happiness and success. That also means to become rich but only in case if the person himself is able to do so. Adams claims that for some people overseas this description might not be well understood. It is not only about having money to buy superficial things such as big houses and fancy cars. Based on what Adam wrote, it can be assumed that it is more likely about progress to the way up. Adams also thinks that the core of the American dream is socially focused: “it is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.”⁵

Based on this evidence we can come to the conclusion that he believes the success does not have only material character and does not emphasize only wealth, but it rather focuses on position in society and self-realization. He also emphasizes the meaning of

⁴ James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 214-215.

⁵ James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 214-215.

“frontier”; free land and its impact on American society. Adams also believes in the fundamentals Declaration of Independence “There has been also the American dream that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement.”⁶ This statement claims basically the same of the document of Founding Fathers. All the men are created equal to achieve happiness, freedom and success. The only difference in Adams statement is that he adds that it depends on the person’s capability to reach the highest peak of the American dream.

It is also interesting to point out much younger the description of American dream by Jennifer Hochschild, who is Professor of African and African American Studies at Harvard University and who is the author of a book called *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* from 1996. At the very beginning of first chapter she comments on statement by John Locke, who was an English philosopher “‘In the beginning,’ wrote John Locke, ‘all the world was America.’ Locke was referring specifically to the absence of a cash nexus in primitive society. But the sentence evokes the unsullied newness, infinite possibility, limitless resources that are commonly understood to be the essence of the ‘American dream’.”⁷ By Hochschild the American dream is known to be linked to many things such as religion, illusion or a world where great things can happen. She declares many immigrants came to American to achieve their American dream. Many of them did so, but the same half failed and was only living only in illusion. She points out that African-Americans had to come to America whether they wanted of do not and they were pressured to live the dream despite they might never wanted and did not ask for it. She claims the American dream is composed from success and following pages explaining the meaning of success and how is it connected to the American dream. Success if usually described as wealth, great job or economic safety.⁸ It is not anything that would not been already said before. However she comes up with three ideas how success can be measured. It can be absolute, relative and competitive.

⁶ James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 404.

⁷ Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation*, Princeton Studies in American Politics (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 15.

⁸ Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation*, Princeton Studies in American Politics (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 15.

Absolute means accomplishing or more precisely passing the boundaries of the dream, not necessary getting to the end and making it an amazing success, but at least becoming closer to it than before. Relative success is the point when the person becomes better than his fellows, favorite figure from book or someone from the country where the person used to live. It is kind of constantly running competition against someone else. The third success is close connected to the previous one and it is competitive, winning over somebody else. And the success is measured by failure of the other competitor. It is like direct correlation, how much he fails the success of the other raises. Competitors do not have to be always known.⁹ Hochschild believes that these three types of success are the core of the American dream.

⁹ Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation*, Princeton Studies in American Politics (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 16-17.

2 AMERICAN DREAMS

The necessary key point for analyzing the American dream in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is to find out what is the American dream. I would like to follow the structure of the book written by Jim Cullen *The American Dream: A Short History Story of an Idea That Shaped the Nation* mainly because of the fact it seems as a reliable source describing the American dream in different historical periods into which they are classified. Jim Cullen is university professor, historian and author of several books. Nowadays he is a chairman at History Department at the Fieldston School in New York City and a book review editor at the History News Network.

Jim Cullen claims that in the twenty-first century the American dream is part of national identity. This fact supports another statement that the American dream is kind of "lingua franca" a term that every American, no matter what is his occupation, is supposed to understand. There many versions and general view of the American dream, my aim is to get closer to them and find out why they are the description of the American dream. Jennifer Hochschild, the author of *Facing Up the American Dream*, brought together facts indicating that black Americans believe in the American dream "with intensity that baffles and even appalls more affluent African Americans," who consider it as "an opiate that lulls people into ignoring the structural barriers that prevent collective as well personal advancement."¹⁰

America has been considered as the land where people can get richer and their life can get fuller. Someone struggle with its meaning and therefore it is better to bring closer definition. The "better and richer" is rather defined in terms of money in present America. Nevertheless it is not the only definition. "Religious transformation, political reform, education attainment, sexual expression: the list is endless" (AD, 7). The meaning of the American dream has change over the time and it has always been defined according to certain time. Therefore it is difficult to what the American dream will mean in the next century. Its meaning changes with new history.

Bill Clinton claimed:"if you work hard and play by rules you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given ability will take you. All people are free to pursue the dream, regardless of background, with "reasonable anticipation through not the

promise, of success,”¹¹ referring to the American dream. In the other words Bill Clinton was probably trying to say that no matter whom you are you can have a successful life, but you have to play by the rules. As I mentioned earlier there are many versions of the American dream and this is just one of them. To find out what is the American dream like its necessary to go through as many forms of the American dream as we are able to.

Jim Cullen came up with his idea that America is a nation of “dreams” in the plural. He describes it very well in his book called *American Dream: A Short Story of an Idea That Shaped the Nation*, where he points out several forms of the American dream. At the beginning of the book there is an interesting picture of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald that says even more interesting sentence “The photo is a virtual compendium of American dreams: house, car, beauty, youth, talent.”¹² The quote explains the way Scott and Fitzgerald were thinking about the American dream. According to them it was materially concerned but with the necessary support of beauty, youth and talent. Before Cullen opens the theme of the Puritan’s dream and their beliefs, he is concerned with the fact that already Pilgrims were aware of the idea of the American dream. They probably did not call it American dream, but they understood the idea. Pilgrims believed in destiny and that is one of the cornerstones of the whole ideology.

2.1 Puritan’s Dream

Firstly Cullen explains the Puritan vision. Puritans are generally considered as not very pleasant people. In the twenty-first century the adjective “puritanical” is used “as a synonym for intolerance, and knowledgeable observers at home and abroad have attributed American prurience and self-righteousness (typified, to many, by the sex scandal surrounding another turn-of-the-century president) to the nation’s Puritan heritage” (AD, 12). It was not easy to live among or next to them. According to some literary critics Puritans were the ones “who massacred Indians and established the self-righteous religion and politics that determined American ideology,” argues Cullen (AD, 13). However

¹⁰ Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6. Parenthetically as AD.

¹¹ Michael Schudson “American Dreams,” *American Literary History* 16, no. 2 (2004): 566-73.

¹² Michael Schudson “American Dreams,” *American Literary History* 16, no. 2 (2004): 566-73.

Puritans had a dream and wanted to create so called “exemplary society of believers.”¹³ They believed that with a big attempt and belief they could change everything they wanted and they aimed to reform Church of England. After struggles with not accepting their suggestions for reforms by King James I. many Puritans were forced to move to Europe. English Puritans so called English Pilgrims came to North America in early 17th century and after they created Plymouth Colony. Later on many of the Puritans followed them to the North America and started to build more and more colonies. As I mentioned earlier they were strongly religious so it is evident that with their arrival they also brought their faith, especially to all colonies of north Virginia. The New England became their kingdom. They deeply influenced the American culture and religion as well as the American society. However it had also effect on economy and modern social life. They were always very hard working. Puritans were giving so much importance to education, they were modest, thrifty, and responsible and they had a strong sense of self-belief that made them to be so successful in what they wanted to achieve. The most crucial thing for them was their belief; they gave so much importance to God. Puritans were considering all people sinful and corrupted by nature and they believed only precise discipline could make them achieve good. “Each person should be constantly reformed by the grace of God to combat the ‘indwelling sin’ and do the right before God.”¹⁴

They thought hard work is a religious duty and man was duty-bound to do God’s will. For Puritans was very important to study the Bible, everyone was consider as the best priest for yourselves. Their strong character, self-discipline, individualism self-reliance, willingness to take a risk and a lot of more became a part of the American values. They believed that if they are working hard God will see it and they will be either chosen to go to heaven of hell. If they were following the rules and working hard the God will award them. It was the only way, any other was rejected. All of that had impact on today’s American society that considers rich people and material things as prove of real success and independence.¹⁵

¹³ Michael Schudson, “American Dream,” *American Literary History* 16, No. 3 (2004): 566-73
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3568068> (accessed 12 Jan. 2014).

¹⁴ Ning Kang, “Puritanism and Its Impact Upon American Values,” *Review of European Studies* 1, no. 2 (2009): 1-4.

¹⁵ Ning Kang, “Puritanism and Its Impact Upon American Values,” *Review of European Studies* 1, no. 2 (2009): 1, accessed April 28, 2014, <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal.html>. 1-4.

“The puritans were gifted or cursed with an overwhelming realization of an inexorable power at work not only in nature but in themselves, which they called God; whatever may have been the factors in their society and their experience that is so sharpened their sense of awareness, the acuteness and poignancy of the awareness are phenomena which psychology will recognize though it cannot explain, and which history must take into account” (AD, 18).

The Puritans were convinced they were chosen by God and he led them to the North America. The North America so called New World was to them the promising land of hope and it was the land they had to save people from sin. Puritans had a strong sense of mission. Although they lost their dominance in the North it adapted to the American culture and it became one of the national tell-tale signs and it shows itself in foreign policy. Americans have been considering their country as the heart or if you want a major point of the World. They think it is their task given by God to protect the World and widen democracy and liberty all around the globe. They use political powers and economic bailouts and military forces to spread their culture and values. Most of the countries carry the impact of the Americans because of the strong American values and belief in what they are doing. It brings us back to the “mission” they were given by God.¹⁶ Puritans were seeking for freedom and that we can consider as their major dream. On the other hand it was also authority. Puritans were devoted to God.

2.2 Declaration of Independence

Secondly Cullen points out the second idea of the American dream based on the Declaration of Independence. There is obvious closeness to the American dream. The document perfectly describes the idea “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.”¹⁷ The Declaration of Independence and mainly the phrase “pursuit of happiness” quite define the idea of the American dream and it is a framework of American life, despite the fact not many of its

¹⁶ Ning Kang, “Puritanism and Its Impact Upon American Values,” *Review of European Studies* 1, no. 2 (2009): 1, accessed April 28, 2014, <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal.html>. 1-4.

¹⁷ “The Declaration of Independence,” The Heritage Foundation, accessed April 28, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/initiatives/first-principles/primary-sources/the-declaration-of-independence>.

followers actually read the paper. It reflects daily life of citizen of the United States. In fact the very well-known beginning of Declaration of Independence that I mentioned above is not only including the efforts to end one of the biggest or clearly the major social problem in the United States, the end of slavery.

The phrase “pursuit of happiness” could easily stand as proper description for the American dream. Happiness in its highest level is the goal of most of Americans (AD, 39). According to Cullen American dream lost its shine recently and he points out that Founding Father, who actually created the Declaration of Independence would not be happy with the fact to what their highly-valuated words turn in to. Cullen goes for a moment back to the history and he shows the example on Civil war, when Southerners wanted to leave the Union because they were afraid that the powerful Northerners could break away their American dream, their lifestyle and freedom, which also meant to own slaves. In order to keep it they did not see any other option than to walk off (AD, 40).

It is important to point out what looked like America of Founding Fathers. It was nothing else than freedom. Just as Puritan’s dream. A dream excluded not only African-Americans but also women and yellow-coloured barbarians. The men they speak about, the ones who were created equal, were only white citizens. On the other hand Founding Fathers believed in certain equality that meaning “an ability to tell right from wrong, good from bad” (AD, 53). This description of the American dream by Republicans and was well described by one of the Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson, who said: “State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor; the former will decide it as well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules” (AD, 52). They were equal to him, but only in the matter of the ability to recognize right and wrong not in talent and success. We can show it on example: a professor came from ploughmen’s family he was defending interests of ploughmen. Professors were supposed to provide advice about policies, but ploughmen were those who were voting. That was made-up dream that never worked. Although Jefferson’s accurate opinion about slavery is not known, he was one of the few people who believed that African-Americans had moral sense and the secondariness was rather environmental. There is also, however, a further point to be considered the document was a gusty issue, without author’s much thinking or truly considering all its consequence and it was done under quite big pressure. It became an inspiration not only for attitudes but also for actions and movements. It is obvious that only words did not change the nation and never will. As a consequence why this American

dream never worked could be the fact the major keywords from Declaration of Independence had never been specified and even today we still do not know what exactly Founding Fathers meant by life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. All of its forms seem to be only a surmise. However, it is significant that the Declaration of Independence is part of the American dream.

2.3 Dream of Upward Mobility

Thirdly Cullen deals with the idea of self-made man. Through time the priorities of Puritans changed. Hard work was not anymore considered as tool for someone's destiny more likely as self-fulfilment. As could be seen there are many versions and meaning of the American dream. One of them was also commercial success and upward mobility. The perfect statue was to have a good and self-sufficiency job in fields such as politics. They also decided into slaves instead of servants because the value of slaves was rising, they weren't competition to them, they didn't have to give them any wage and most importantly trade slaves became a good business. As result we could see population of some town to turn to be half populated by slaves.

A great example of upward mobility and even more precisely of self-made man was first Republican president and the sixteenth president of the United States and a great nationalist, Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln came from very modest background. His father was a farmer, uneducated and smaller than his wife. Lincoln was very ashamed of his poor background and he would always try to avoid talking about this topic. He came to politics from nothing and it was not easy journey. Although he did not get much education he became quite literate as well as sophisticated man and he was shortly working as a lawyer. He married a girl from a good family, Mary Todd and his social status rose immediately. Lincoln was pointing out the importance of education as well as motivation and he was supporting literacy (AD, 78). He did not only step up on the social ladder because of his marriage, but he was also considered and successful young man. "Well into middle age, Lincoln had a serene confidence in the Dream of Upward Mobility, and while he was consistently in favor of expanding opportunities in every direction (including the right of women to vote), he also thought it was possible to succeed with relatively little outside intervention" (AD, 79). He was advising people to read and study them to understand better the meaning of them. "The great thing about the United States is that where there was a will, there was away" (AD, 79). That showed Lincoln's power and conviction that every

man can be successful. In 1854 it seemed that his career in politics was about to end, because he did not get the seat in congress, but he did not give up on his American dream. He was truly dedicated to it (AD, 81). When he joined the Republican Party he began slowly implementing his goals. He knew slavery was bad for the nation, but he also believed that Founding Fathers were aware of this issue and when they said slavery will vanish, he did not doubt it. It is necessary to point out that Founding Fathers also owned slaves. Constitution claimed slaves were property and property could not be taken from white citizens. White had freedom to do what they wanted with them. The problem with slavery was growing. Lincoln considered himself as anti-slavery man but it was not because he sympathized with slaves. He was only sympathizing with white and he believed if slavery was persisting it would destroy the American dream that he was dedicated to. Slavery was disrupting the American dream it in two major ways, economic and its negative psychological impact on society.

During Civil war Lincoln had quite tough time when he was rethinking all his attitudes and army strategies that he was never concerned about. And even in those moments he had not forgotten his American dream. Before he took the office he got on train and went from Springfield to Washington. That would not be very unusual if he was not giving speeches about the war on the way to Washington. Cullen claims that was only the beginning of his dream of Upward Mobility. Lincoln spoke to German immigrants while he was passing by Cincinnati "I hold that while man exists, it is his duty to improve not only his own condition, but to assist in ameliorating mankind," trying to show his support to them (AD, 94).

Some scholars call Lincoln a hedgehog, who had a central vision. Meaning he had one major thing he was concerned about and he kept going that direction. He was following policies that were managed by a single principle.¹⁸ Lincoln's central vision or the American dream was Lincoln's central vision was the Union, to be more linear to save the Union. The United States were supposed to be the strongest nation, to which all the others stare and the ones they will follow. He would do anything to maintain the Union. The Thirteenth Amendment that he suggested was something that was supposed to help him to make it happen. There was a chance to finish the war, but he knew if they would do so The

Thirteenth Amendment would not be approved. Hence he had done his best convince his party colleagues and some deserters. The reason why he was so keen about his was simple. It was The Union. He wanted the Southern states to get back to the Union and to the Congress.

Lincoln was also closely connected to Puritan ideology that quite proves this statement “in early life I was inclined to believe in what I understand is called the ‘Doctrine of Necessity’ that is, that the human mind is impelled to action, or held to rest by some power, over which the mind itself has no control; and I have sometimes (with one, two or three, but never publicly) tried to maintain this opinion in argument. The habit of arguing thus, however, I have, entirely left off for more than five years.”¹⁹ It especially shows the Puritan’s philosophy in a way that if they work hard God will reward them (AD, 98).

Lincoln had the ability to use the right moment to win. He maintained the Union due to The Thirteen Amendment and slavery was slowly leaving the nation. Cullen talk about him as humble man “from modest circumstances propelling himself to the pinnacle of national achievement, realizing a dream, and then leading his people to save that dream for others” (AD, 109). That is exactly who he is for most of Americans. The best embodiment of the American dream in U.S. history seems to be Abraham Lincoln, a man, who came from nothing and was able to realize his American dream despite not very successful beginnings. Abraham Lincoln is the most famous and indeed also influential figure of the American history. It could be said that he accomplished the American dream of Puritans. Lincoln’s is a representative of a powerful story that is an inspiration for many Americans.

¹⁸ James M. McPherson, “The Hedgehog and the Foxes,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 12, no. 1 (1991): 49-65.

¹⁹ Allen C. Guelzo, “Abraham Lincoln and the Doctrine of Necessity,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 18, no. 1 (1997): 57-81.

2.4 Social Equality

Fourthly Cullen introduces the dream of social equality. Freedom as well as equality had always been very relative in America, in truth it was racially limited aim. Cullen opens the chapter with story about a boy called Homer Plessy, he was not a slave either Negro, but his great-grandmother was African-American.

He was free to do whatever he wanted and able to express his opinion. Once he got on train and he went to that was going from New Orleans to Covington and he took a seat in part of the train for whites. In 1890 in Louisiana was claimed a law ordering that Negroes had to seat in different part of the train. "Collaborators.... included a citizens' committee of Creoles and the lawyer they hired, a northern white 'carpetbagger' writer and lawyer named Albion Tourgée who moved to North Carolina briefly after the Civil War" wanted to arrest him. He had to go to the trail. The president of the court said that having separated cars in the train for whites and Negroes is anti-constitutional, because of the fact this issue was under the federal government's law, because travelling between two states, but also the Fourteenth Amendment, which declared that "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny any to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws" (AD, 104). Unluckily Homer Plessy was travelling within a state, so he had to go to prison, despite the fact he had light skin, but his decent was African. This case showed what equality meant and its versions. There was political equality, social equality and civil equality. Civil equality was the equality in public area, social was about rights they had in solving anything with other people and the last once, political equality was about rights related to government. And these descriptions played the major role in front of court (AD, 105). Plessy's story was judged according those principles and but at the end it failed on the idea that separation was the main problem and he was free. That also shows the wrong made specification of term equality.

Although Lincoln ended slavery by releasing the Thirteen Amendment he knew that African-Americans were not equal. He stated that if he could protect the Union without freeing slaves he would do it or if he could free all the slaves he would do so as well as freeing only some of them. He was not racist. In truth he knew quite well that slavery is wrong. On the other hand he did not have the fundamental belief that all men are created equal. Moreover he was certain about the fact they are not and never will be, mainly

because of their physical differences; on the other hand he also knew that slavery was bad for the nation.

Cullen claims that the heart of the American dream is equality, because all the citizens of the United States need to believe in equality, that everyone can get his own piece of the American dream cake. Everyone should be able to have the same opportunities and that they can achieve their dream. It makes them believe that they live in “a reasonably fair country that bears some relationship to its founding ideals in this case, that ‘all men are created equal’ ” (AD, 108). Wars over equality were not always happening on field of battle or courts, but on streets and familiar as “civil war movement” or also called “the black freedom movement” term which was maybe more pertinent and which prompt was this movement was about (AD, 109). In addition it was not only movement for freedom, but also rights they were supposed to have and entitlement to vote.

Some Americans aware of the fact that equality did not mean freedom and freedom did not equal equality already a long time before Civil War. Although the Civil War maintained the Union it did not abolish slavery and also the main goal was not the equality for Afro-Americans. Some scholars claim the war was actually never about slavery but rather about human rights (AD, 115). W.E.B. DuBois, American historian and sociologist had the same vision as Lincoln; he did not want to separate Negroes but not make them equal at the same time. For practical reasons he thought they should not be separated nor equal. So it is clear that the greatest man of the American history never thought of Afro-Americans as equal (AD, 116). Equality was also pointed on women. The American dream was primarily aimed and achieved by man. Women did not have many possibilities to reach their desires and they were expelled from the opportunity, although a few of them did not give up. Afro-American women were even more excluded were from the chance to realize their American dream, which was strongly divided by race but also by gender (AD, 119-120).

The greatest character, which was fighting for equality and human rights of African-Americans as well as ordinary American citizens, seems to be Dr. Martin Luther King. He had pastoral background he was himself co-pastored. He was the youngest man who

received the Nobel Peace Prize.²⁰ Cullen does not even hesitate to call him a hero or prophet of the dream of equality. He came from good family and had many privileges that other Blacks did not have (AD, 121). Nobody is able to explain how he became a great leader, but he turned into the role very well and suddenly he had many possibilities in his hands and how he could work with them (AD, 124). He was pointing out to the fact that American was always dealing with racial problems as well segregation and democracy that was proclaiming that all the men are equal (AD, 125). Slaves were free but there was still ongoing racial segregation. When he was speaking to graduates at Lincoln University he stated that America is still a dream that has not been accomplished. Because of the fact people were not equal and they were not live as one big family. Freedom was only abstract phrase as well as equality (AD, 128). Equality without freedom could not work (AD, 129-130). “As any Puritan would have said, the struggle between good and evil is to a great extent one between pride and humility” and King also believed in that he tried his best in accomplishing the American dream of equality, although he did not achieve it to its extent.

2.5 The Dream of Coast

“The American Dream was never meant to be a zero-sum solution: the goal has always been to end up with more than you started with” (AD, 159). This is the core of any version of the American dream that suppose you work hard enough to get better than you to started realizing the dream, so it is basically about some kind of improvement and upward mobility that I already mentioned earlier. The fifth dream Cullen mentions is “the Coast” dream that differentiate from the previous ones. It is not a dream about hard work but about its outcome made by not very difficult work that does not require intelligence or exertion and gambling. Cullen points out that the difference between the previous dream of upward mobility and dream of good life in the Coast is the fact that this achievement is more about quantity than quality. And the line between earning money in order to have some security and earning money to be rich is very thin. He argues that the wealth of rich people does not usually come from their salary but their investments or shares. If people follow only the aim called money they can miss the whole point of the American dream (AD, 160).

²⁰ “Martin Luther King Jr. - Biographical.” Nobelprize.org. Nobel Media AB 2013. Accessed 28 Apr 2014. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-bio.html.

Each of the dreams had specific geographical location where was set up and from where it was spreading all over America. The Puritan dream was coming from New England. The Dream of Equality was coming from the South the core of the Dream of Upward Mobility was in middle-west and the dream of Cost also comes from the west (AD, 160-161). The author argues: "Gains demand gambles" and he explains it later as America is into finite rate based on gambling. He shows real examples of gamblers such was as the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus, Spanish colonist Hernan Cortés or English politician and sea captain Sir Francis Drake. All of them had liking in hazard (AD, 161). The people who really wanted to live in the west were worried about his matter (AD, 164). The city of hazard was Las Vegas and it lasted until today. California has been the dream place to live and it is not different way even today. The idea of California is that that is the place where "gold in rush" (AD, 169).

In the half of the chapter Cullen comes up with tale expressing the American dream better than any other, *The Great Gatsby*. It is a novel about adherence to false material and empty values such as money. It also shows what effect it has on people and their spirit, how it makes them emotionally totally empty and they are not able to love anybody. The book was published when the dream of Cost was strengthening through California. Gatsby organizes spectacular, shining and shallow party through which he wants to bring attention of Daisy, who is his big love from past. The paradox of this novel, perhaps the whole idea of the American dream, is that although Gatsby is using illegal tools such as fraud to impress Daisy, his intentions are very innocent and pure. He does whatever he is able to reach his American dream which is Daisy (AD, 182). The story about Daisy and Gatsby shows how difficult is to accomplish the dream, even though you have all the necessary tools to make it happen and how close you can be to the "the coast" and still so far. Gatsby is confident that he can transform back into past and make Daisy love him again and he does not give up on the idea until the end. Some dreams are not able to achieve or it takes a long way to do so, but people keep on dreaming anyway. Dreams hurry people and make their life valuable, whether it is reachable one or not. That brings me to the point what is this dream about. Gatsby believed in green light, that stands for the hope, dream he has, love for Daisy and. It also Cullen says: "What makes the American Dream American is not that our dreams are any better, worse, or more interesting than anyone else's, but that we live in a country constituted of dreams, whose very justification continues to rest on it being a place where one can, for better and worse, pursue distant goals" (AD, 182). The

essence of this American dream is the idea that what happened in the past is not important and the crucial is what will happen in the future, not the history. Cullen disproves this statement and shows the importance of past in our life, “history is in the end the most tangible thing we have the source and solace for all our dreams” (AD, 184).

3 ELLISON IN CONTEXT OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Ralph Ellison, a representative of literature after 1945 and black identity in prose, was born into family with slave background; his grandparents were slaves. He studied at segregate school and after he went to black college. Later he moved to New York. At the beginning he was influenced by the leading representative of the nascent black prose Richard Wright and naturalism, but after he found his own way, which was a great collection of realism, surrealism, symbolism, folklore and myth.²¹

When he returned back to civilian life after World War II, he wrote its crucial and so far only novel *Invisible Man*. The story of *Invisible Man* is set in the 1930s and the whole story plot describes well one of his essays “the nature of our society is such that we are prevented from knowing who we are“, which is precise reflection of the story of *Invisible Man*. It is a symbolic life journey of nameless, people overlooked “invisible” non - white narrator. He considers his blackness as reason for people to do not see him. Ellison compares blacks to women that are humiliated and the object of racism. The structure of the novel offers different narrative forms. Ellison lets the readers to explore the diversity American culture and identity through the novel. There are another feature of so called American monologue including anecdotes and tall tale sermon and autobiography, journals and songs. It can be seen as novel as epic or myth. *Invisible Man* is a mixture of naturalism and nightmare. His own life experience seemed to greatly influence him when he was writing the novel.²² It has become a part of not only non-white literature, but generally modern post-war U.S. literature. The novel was awarded by the National Book Award and the American Academy of Arts and Literature offered its author an annual scholarship in Rome.²³

America in the 1920s, when Ellison wrote his novel, was a country full of contrasts. Before the First World War, the country of America was represented as a country where all people of different nationalities, religions or race could leave in peace. Later on racial tensions in American society reached boiling point especially if we are talking about political, social and cultural intolerance. It was mainly caused by increasing immigration that brought people who were uneducated and could not find a job. As the result it immediately incorporated them into lower class. The immigration was the major problem

²¹ Richard J. Gray, *A History of American Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004), 674.

²² Richard J. Gray, *A History of American Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004), 675-676.

of the 1920s and it was also caused racial problems. People in the South, mostly farmers, who were on the edge of poverty, were object of discrimination and extreme racism. Lynching was common in south. A racial caste system so called Jim Crow laws, were operating primarily in southern and boulder states between 1877 and 1960s stated that all non-white people will be separated among the whites. This resulted into point when toilets, hospitals, schools, buses, parks and more of other public buildings were divided to the black areas from the white Americans areas. Jim Crow law was more than anti-black laws it was kind of lifestyle. It continued to World War II, where African Americans and Japanese Americans were in separated units.²⁴ This is an image of the situation until 1954. The comeback of the KKK was another frightening issue. The organization believed in the superiority of the white race. The revival of the KKK started in the south but it was very fast spreading to the whole America. They were fighting for representing Americanism and to maintain White supremacy, which was their major goal.²⁵

Those times seem to inspire and effect on Ellison's work. The story plot is set in the United States during the pre-Civil Rights era when black Americans were the same human rights as white citizens of the same state. The novel starts in the South of American the states like Greenwood, South Carolina in the late 1920s and mid-1930s. The overwhelming part of the actions takes place in the north of the country, especially in New York and district called Harlem. The novel is one of the most important works in Afro-American literature and post-war literature in the United States.²⁶

²³ Chicago Tribune, "Ralph Ellison: His Voice Resounds," Chicago Tribune, April 20, 1994, accessed April 28, 2014, <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/keyword/ralph-ellison>.

²⁴ Mae M. Ngai, "Nationalism, Immigration Control, and the Ethnoracial Remapping of America in the 1920s," *OAH Magazine of History* 21, no. 3 (2007): 11-15.

²⁵ Chris Rhomberg, "White Nativism and Urban Politics: The 1920s Ku Klux Klan in Oakland, California," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 17, no. 2 (1998): 39-55.

²⁶ Clarke, Graham, "Invisible Man: Race and Identity by Kerry Mcsweeney; New Essays On Invisible Man," *Modern Language Review* 85, no. 40 (1990): 938-939.

4 AMERICAN DREAMS IN INVISIBLE MAN

4.1 Racism and Invisibility

“I am an invisible man. No I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasm. I am man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me.”²⁷ This very first quote from the novel brings us immediately to the struggle of finding identity and racism. He considers himself nameless and invisible because of his black skin. Racism accompanies the narrator through his journey of finding an identity.

The Invisible Man presents himself as someone who is not seen by the others from the very first line. He suggests he is not like the main character of works of Edgar Allan Poe. It is essential to bring closer Poe’s style to understand the meaning of the thought. His writing style was unique, mystical, enigmatic and sometimes even horror. Poe’s stories are most of the times narrated from the first person and the author is usually also the narrator and sometimes he is even involved in the plot. That is the reason why is the Invisible Man trying to emphasize the fact he is not a ghost, he is a real man made flesh and bones, but other people do not see him. Blindness or maybe better to say ignorance of people is what makes him invisible. The narrator presents as someone without an identity. He continues by describing the invisibility. He says it is not a physical matter but rather psychological. Sometimes he even finds his invisibility and state of person who is unseen as advantage, but most of the times it unpleasant and he tries to persuade his mind that he is not invisible. The first time we realize that there is much more in his invisibility and that he has black skin is when he shares an anecdote about a white man he bumped into man who was calling him foul names. Invisible Man asked him to apologize to him but the man does not give attention to him and he keeps fighting, because he cannot see the narrator. He assumes the white man only thought he was in the middle of walking nightmare and Invisible Man leaves the place laughing (IM, 4). The narrator is a great fan of Louis Armstrong, a black singer, who he considers as someone who “made poetry out of being invisible” down to the fact people never appreciated what he has done in music. While listening to Louis he

²⁷ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage International, 1995), 3. Parenthetically as IM.

immerses in the sound and recalls the African-American history. He is listening to the song “Black and Blue” and he considers the lyrics “What did I do to be so Black and Blue?” as something that calls for action and change (IM, 12). At the end of Prologue he reminds again of the fight with white man and he says that the white man is the one who “controls that dream world”. Firstly we face to certain consciousness of the Invisible Man that whites are those who run the world and he may not be able to ever achieve what he wants, because he is invisible for the people who live in this dream world.

Although the protagonist has to face racial attacks I decided to draw attention only to the major of them that either left some impact on his or they were important for his identity. I would like to point out the grandfather’s speech who gave his grandson valuable advice that came to his mind several times during and which proves slavery was still present. “Son, after I’m gone I want you to keep the good fight. I never told you but our life is a war and I have been traitor all my born days, spy in the enemy’s country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction” (IM, 15). He also says he wished to forget all the past of slavery. Although the war finished in 1865 and four million slaves were free, but the Reconstruction which followed next two years made some big challenge. All the blacks were controlled by “black codes” that did not let them be as free as they were supposed to be after Thirteen Amendment, which was abolishing slavery and they were the representatives of the South wanted to make sure they will still be a good labor force. All of that was written in “black codes” that made very angry the North.²⁸ Because of the fact young Invisible Man did not understand well the last words grandfather’s last words it sticks to his mind. Later when it again comes to his mind he tries to understand to its real meaning and at the end he will make it and see how wise words those were. As is grandfather claimed white people were still very superior.

The first time he remembered his grandfather’s last words was when he was giving graduation speech. Inspired by words of one of the major figure of African-American history, Booker T. Washington, he delivers speech about “humility was the secret, indeed, the very essence of progress” (IM, 17). He does not believe in what he says after what said his grandfather before he died. His speech was success and was invited to come later to speak at a gathering of the town’s white citizens. Although he felt it was victory for his

community it was just the opposite. The white leaders were only making fun of him and his words. They did not take any of the words seriously they rather catch every opportunity to turn his words into joke. After the speech he is invited to a boxing battle with some of his fellows. They are all invited for entertainment of the white leaders, who consider them as stupid with lack of intelligence and only source of amusement. The black boys are hired for the boxing as well as paid for that. The Invisible Man accepts the money for the fight and the fact completely disproves the claim of humanity he was talking about in his speech earlier that day. When he pronounces the phrase “social responsibility” while having the speech, the audience asks him to repeat several times and then they burst into laugh. The whites are having fun, drinking, watching exotic dancers and black boys are fighting against each other to raise the excitement of white leaders. This scene shows very well the subordination of black, inequality and also the way the white ones wanted to have control over black people. I will describe this all situation better when I will be analyzing the attitude towards women in the novel, which was very similar as to blacks. The dancer represents something those boys could only dream about, maybe not even that. White woman was something completely forbidden for African-Americans and those white wealthy are very much enjoying to torture the young boys with the white naked dancer.

Ras the Exhorter or also called the Destroyer, which is probably more fitting nick name, is the black nationalist, who is strongly convinced that Blacks should fight better for their freedom and destroy the white power. He is against the integration with whites. He is mad about the idea and he shows the opposite extreme. His effort for equality shifts into violence. On the other hand he shows to the crowds of black citizens of Harlem a hope and strength in what he proclaims. He is a proud black man.

Brotherhood is another prove of racism in the novel, an organization that looks like it is protecting the equality and the same rights for everyone, but it is only another white community that the Invisible Man get involved to. I will explain how the organization worked in greater detail it later when I will be analyzing the equality and social classes within the novel.

The white leaders entertain themselves by watching torture of black boys that is absolutely subordinate and racist. It shows how strong the white power was in those times.

²⁸ History.com, “Reconstruction,” History.com, 2009, accessed April 28,

One of the mottos of Declaration is that “all the men are created equal”. Despite the fact I explained that it was rather meant all the white people are created equal, after one thousand years the racism in American society and white power was still very present.

4.2 Equality and White Power

Equality is one of the cornerstones of the Declaration of Independence. The most significant prove of inequality in *Invisible Man* is Brotherhood. It was a big political group of people which was supposed to protect those who were repressed due to their race or social class. The protagonist believes in the organization and that he can fight for racial equality, but his attempt fails because of white supremacy.

Invisible Man is sent to New York by Dr. Bledsoe, the founder of the college, in order to help him with his possible career, what is obviously a lie. Dr. Bledsoe is mad at protagonist for taking Mr. Norton outside the campus and letting him to speak to Trueblood and see the things that they did not want the white man to see. Despite the fact he explains the whole situation and the fact Mr. Norton tells him that he spoke to Bledsoe and said it is not protagonist’s fault; Dr. Bledsoe blames him for everything that happened in the afternoon. He wants to punish him so he tells the Invisible Man to go to work to New York in order to earn money to pay the college, if he does so he can return back to the college. He says he will give him a good recommendation, what he will later realize was the worse he could ever possibly get because Dr. Bledsoe wanted to make sure he will never earn as much money to return back to the college.

When he arrives to New York he is disappointed with the fact he does not get positive response from potential employers. He decides to travel to Harlem. It is a district of New York mixed with different social classes, mainly with African-Americans. “I had never seen so many black people against a background of brick buildings, neon signs, plate glass and roaring traffic-not even on trips I had made with the debating team to New Orleans, Dallas or Birmingham” (IM, 157). That is how the narrator describes Harlem. He is amazed by crowds of black people, noise, tension and he is even surprised by seeing black police man directing traffic. He meets Ras the Exhorter, who is having

impressive speech about whites who they want to get out of the city. The protagonist is not yet aware of who is Ras.

While the Invisible Man is having a speech to protect marshal who was almost attacked by crowd and trying to keep the people under control and he is seen by white brother Jack, who is impressed by his speech abilities and is chasing after him. He invites him for cup of coffee and shares his great impression about the speech earlier. He calls him brother and tells him they need a good speaker for his organization exactly like him, who would represent Harlem. Although the Invisible Man resists the idea because he does not believe in it, Brother Jack tries to push him. He gives him some time to think about it.

As a consequence, the Invisible Man does not have money and he has to pay for his rent he decides to accept the job offer. Brother Jack takes him to the party where is this lady Emma who doubts if the Invisible Man is black enough to represent the rights and needs of Harlem. He invites the narrator to the library to explain what the organization does and its goals and mission. "It's simple we; we are working for better world for all people. It's that simple. Too many have been dispossessed of their heritage, and we have banded together in brotherhood so as to do something about it" (IM, 298). The Invisible Man is impressed. Nevertheless nothing is only black and white. They are indeed helping the people, but only the people they want.

They ask the Invisible Man to cut all his connections with past and move out of the place he used to live in Harlem. Brother Jack tells the Invisible Man he can be as Booker T. Washington or even greater (IM, 300). Booker T. Washington was self-made man, one of the most important figures of Afro-American history. He was born as slave and made it to be a speaker of slaves and he was the founder of Atlanta compromise, which was an agreement between whites and blacks in the South. The blacks were supposed to work as the white wanted but receive education and legal rights.²⁹

The narrator is not only asked to leave the past behind, but also the name and gain completely new identity. He is introduced to all the Brothers and feels very important. "Everyone smiled and seemed eager to meet me as though they all knew the role I was to play. All grasped me warmly by the hand." After brother Jack asked him about his opinion

²⁹ History.com, "Booker T. Washington," history.com, 2009, accessed April 28, 2014, <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/booker-t-washington>.

about women rights, but he did not really care about the answer and did not even let him to share his opinion and he starts to admire Jack, thinking about his power, authority and respect he has. Suddenly he feels very strong and inspired.

Brotherhood claims it is organization fighting for equality but as I said earlier nothing is black and white and even between brothers we find racist comments: “How about spiritual, Brother? Or one of those real good ole Negro work songs?” says one of the drunk brothers. He adds: “all colored people sing.” This extract obviously shows racial attitude towards Afro-Americans. The invisible Man finds himself some of the behaviors of brothers strange. The only lady in the room tells him that some of the brothers are not very developed (IM, 307). She unintentionally proves attitude towards equality and race does not seem to be that clear from the Brotherhood point of view. The first day of his new life and new identity he is asked to give a speech in Harlem. He was given material about which he is supposed to speak; he realizes there is not much place, actually not place at all for his own thought, but strictly given form of speech that he must follow. Although his past comes to his mind he knows he has to forget and change his life completely if he wants to stay in Brotherhood. “They call us dumb and they treat us dumb. And what they do with dumb ones? Think about it, look around!” (IM, 335). He shows as great speaker, a preacher from the south and he uses simple sentence so the broad public understands him and like his speech that is something we cannot say about Brother Jack. He takes him a side and warns him “Careful now... Don’t let end your usefulness before you’ve begun” (IM, 338). The Invisible Man does not pay attention and he raises his speech, he starts crying at the end. The Brother Jack is worried that the Invisible Man will rebel over his control.

Despite the fact people loved the speech and he made success the Brotherhood does not think the same. The way he spoke was not following its ideology. “It was the most unsatisfactory beginning,” said one of the brothers. The Invisible Man asks whether he has done something wrong and he is answered, “The worst you could have done”. Brother’s Jack face was “broad with its hate-burning eyes”. He decides to teach him the true science, take him out of Harlem until he learns everything about the organization and the way he should speak. Jack will keep eyes on him. The Invisible Man is rethinking everything he said and he is glad for the success it had but not happy about the reaction of the Brotherhood. He finds himself thinking about Dr. Bledsoe and Mr. Norton. “I thought of Bledsoe and Norton what they have done. By kicking me into dark they’d made me see the

possibility of achieving something greater and more important than I'd ever dreamed"(IM, 347). He wants to give them back what they had done to him. He calls for revenge.

During next six month he is learning about the Brotherhood with his supervisor Brother Hambo. His life became very organized, he goes to rallies and meetings and he is introduced there as some kind of hero. He had been learning about the organization itself and especially their policy. Jack tells him not to "over do it" and keep it in between inspiration and ideology. It seems although is Jack the leader he is not completely following the ideology (IM, 352). He tells him he will become a speaker of the Harlem District, but he emphasizes he has to do what is demanded and "be under strict discipline to the committee" (IM, 353). He adds that he cannot underestimate the discipline and he should follow the ideology. The invisible Man is introduced to Tod Clifton, who is sort of competitor to him and Ras, who is the chief of the whole organization. Ras strongly believes in division of white and black what does not really correspond with the ideology of Brotherhood. Later, the Invisible realizing the success his speech had, but he saw Brotherhood in different way than it was. "The Brotherhood had both science and history under control" (IM, 375). He is relocated in order to speak about "Women Question" (IM, 399). Clifton is missing and Ras comments it as he "failed his assignment". It is obvious he was cleared away.

The Invisible Man lost the belief in Brotherhood and its ideology. When he organizes public funeral for Cliff he is asked to come to the committee who is completely against him. They are furious about the fact he was doing something without them confirming him he can do so. That is all what is the Brotherhood about; power and authority. "You weren't hired to think. Had you forgotten that? If so, listen to me: You weren't hired to think." says Brother Jack to the protagonist, explain very clearly what he was demanded (IM, 461). And finally he explains the Invisible Man what is Brotherhood like "Such crowds are only raw materials, material to be shaped to our program." He also says their goal is to do not ask people on the street what to think but to tell them (IM, 465). He is disillusioned about the organization. He is even taken and beaten for not following the ideology.

Some people claim the Brotherhood was “euphuistic synonym for the Communist party” in 1930s.³⁰ It was an organization that had its own science and anyone who was not following the rules was cleared away. The leaders were very manipulative as the brothers themselves. They used the Invisible Man not for his speaker skills but for self-interest. They were not fighting for equality but only for their own visions. Equality was meant only for their people. At the end the Invisible Man realizes that the Brotherhood is only a source of power of white people, there was nothing else, no further meaning. He seeks for destroying the organization; therefore he desires revenge once again. The participation in Brotherhood damaged his own identity more than before he joined it. In the organization he became unable to be his true himself. Once again is obvious that dream of equality for everyone fails and white power wins.

4.3 The Invisible Man’s Dream and Disillusionment

The mind of the Invisible Man is filled with a few dreams. Their descriptions change through the novel, but the core of all of them is to be visible. Although he finds out later that the invisibility brings him freedom. The Invisible Man can be seen as individual who wants to step up from the crowd, but there are too many obstacles on the way up. All his dreams fail at the end because of the white supremacy.

At the very beginning he dreams about being like the Founder of the college where he studies. He has got a bit bronze statue in front of the college. The made up Founder is his big inspiration. He is similar to Booker T. Washington, but we never get to know the exact name of the Founder. We know he represents the American dream and someone who wants to help to improve the society. When he joins Brotherhood and they compare him to Booker T. Washington, he refuses it and says he rather wants to be like the Founder, he claims “... in the first place, the Founder came before him,” he means Booker T. Washington “and did practically everything Booker T. Washington did and a lot more. And more people believed in him” (IM, 299). That is one of the few descriptions of the Founder we get from the novel. The Founder represents hope for the Invisible Man. A hope that he

³⁰ Orville Prescott “The New York Times,” *The New York Times*, April 16, 1952, accessed April 28, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/06/20/specials/ellison-invisible2.html>.

can also can change the society. He represents his American dream described in two words; equal society.

When he is delivering the graduation speech and he sees it made real success he is proud and honoured to be invited to speak at the meeting of white leaders later the same afternoon, when he sees that his words do not mean anything to the white audience he is very disappointed and feels that he will never mean anything to them. His ambitions are suddenly melted in ballroom filled with smoke.

Another man who inspires him is the second founder of the college and its Dean Dr. Bledsoe who he admires for becoming a leader in black community and he is sort of the same inspiration and the right representative of the American as the Founder. He wants to be like him one day. Until the day he finds out who he really is. Although he promises he can return to the college if he earns money, by sending negative recommendations to the possible employers he makes sure he will never come back. He does not believe it until he reads the recommendation letter in the Emerson's office. When he sees it written down on the paper, he is absolutely destroyed by the fact. Invisible Man's admiration turns to effort for revenge.

In the Brotherhood he feels his ambitious are fulfilled. He becomes an important figure of the organization and he also receives recognition. He is admired for his speaking skills and his strong thoughts. He has the feeling that he has finally got the opportunity to show what the others were killing in him. That was another illusion he had to face when he joined white community. He was not hired to speak about what he wanted, but rather about what they wanted and what was according to the ideology of Brotherhood. As in previous case he seeks for revenge when he finds out the truth and the revenge leads to violence.

His American dream fails when he does not live in society that is equal and he cannot change the fact. Although he has the drive that American dreams needs to be accomplished, he is too blind. He is unable to see the real character and intention of people and he always see them in a good light. He is indeed quite naive. All the times he believed things could change, but at the end he is disillusioned. He is not able to beat up the white supremacy on his own. We can argue that lost of his ambitions was caused by white people who always destroyed them. He was taught by the whole society how important is to achieve the American dream but no matter how much he tries, the white people do not let him to reach it. He has always been seeking to impress them, but they did not truly care about what he

thinks. He was only another Negro to them. He desperately wants to be an example to his community as his inspiration the Founder, but he fails, because he is not given the chance.

4.4 Harlem, New York – City of Dreams

According to Cullen each of the American dreams had specific orientation meaning geographical location where was set up and from where was spreading all over, we can claim that the dream cost of the Invisible Man was New York and above all its northern district Harlem. It is well-known district especially because of mixed social classes that live there. It is considered to be one of the dangerous districts of New York.

Firstly is the Invisible Man coming to New York to find a job and earn money to pay for his college. He is not coming to New York only because the fact Dr. Bledsoe sent him the city, but he is also aware of the fact it is the place where he could make more money than anywhere else. The same way people dreamt about the Coast which was rather about getting quantity than quality. The Invisible Man meets stranger at the bus station where he is waiting for the bus to the city of dreams and they start to talk. After the stranger finds out the Invisible Man is heading to New York he says: “New York! That’s not a place, it’s a dream. When I was your age it was Chicago. Now all the little black boys run to New York. Out of the fire into melting pot. I can see you after you’ve lived in Harlem for three months. Your speech will change....you might even meet a few white folks” (IM, 150). It seems like the stranger was a fortune teller that was able to predict the narrator’s future. Young, black boys were coming to New York not only to earn money but also to reach their American dream. The stranger was completely right when he said within three months he will change the way he speak and he will meet white people.

He also claims the protagonist is going to New York in order to gain freedom he always heard about. He says that Invisible Man surely wants to experience big restaurants and white woman that he could not ever meet in the south. Perhaps the Invisible Man was exactly wishing for all this to happen and we find out Crenshaw words were very wise. Before the stranger left the bus he gave to the narrator advice. “But for God’s sake, learn to look beneath the surface . . . you don’t have to be completely fool in order to succeed. Play the game, but don’t believe it” (IM, 151). The Invisible Man was not listening to him very carefully therefore he did not comment any of his advice. The man was also warning him against white people.

When he arrived to New York he thought about how hard he will work and serve his employer so he would send great reports to the dean of the college and he would save money and return back full of culture from New York. He will be the leading campus figure that everyone will admire. He will speak gently and correct. He will try to do his best to get contacts and make best of them (IM, 154). Sounds quite naive but he was sure this Northern of dreams is the right place to realize all his dreams he had in his mind and make him a richer person not only in material way, but also the immaterial one like improving his character and identity.

“I had never seen so many black people against a background of brick buildings, neon signs, plate glass and roaring traffic-not even on trips I had made with the debating team to New Orleans, Dallas or Birmingham. They were everywhere moving along with so much tension and noise that I wasn’t sure whether they were about to celebrate holiday or join a street fight” (IM, 157). He was also shocked seeing black policeman directing traffic. This city seemed to be more independent than the one he came from. He was amazed. Of course he heard about the Harlem but suddenly it was real, he could reach it.

He reminds of words of the stranger he met on the way to New York. Now when he sees it himself with eyes widely open he agrees: “The vet had been right: For me this was not a city of realities, but of dreams; perhaps because I had always thought of my life as being confined to the South” (IM, 157). New York was the city where he could make his mark and follow his desires and dreams. It is most significant when he joins Brotherhood. Regardless it is not for long, he feels as leader of black community in Harlem and that is something he always wished to be like the Founder and becomes the hope for black people in Harlem.

4.5 Invisible Women

Despite the fact that the main characters of Ellison's *Invisible Man* are not women they play a notable role in the novel and there is seen a great inequality between them and white men. As I mentioned in the theoretical part, women have never had the same opportunities and were not equal, which is the cornerstone of any of previously announced American dreams. American dream was strongly divided by race but also by gender. I would like to point out a few distinctive inequalities and the way they treat women in this novel. The women were

seen the same way as black boys and they were considered as secret tool for realizing white men's desires.

I am aware of the fact there has been already written a book³¹ and thesis³² touching this topic. As long as I consider women in *Invisible Man* as important I decided to put it to my thesis to emphasize the position of women in achieving the American dream. I will try to point out two most significant scenes when women are considered as object of racism. I believe I will bring something new into this matter due to the fact that the mentioned sources do not deal with analysis of women from the perspective of the American Dream.

In the very beginning of the novel, in the scene where Invisible Man joins so called Battle Royal and take part in the ring. Women are there as source of entertainment for white men. The dancers are only seen some kind of property of white man they are in charge of and considered as sexual object. He does not admire her character and her abilities, but only for superficial reasons that means only for her body. As a result we can already see how women were treated in this novel. In this particular scene the dancer is displayed as someone without emotions or feelings she is only an object (IM, 19). "They caught her just as she reached a door, raised her from the floor, and tossed her as college boys are tossed at a hazing, and above her red, fixed smiling lips I saw terror and disgust in her eyes, almost like my own terror that which I saw in some of the other boys" (IM, 20). The dancer might be considered only as sexual object, but she has great power over them, both white as well as black men in the ballroom. Invisible Man also feels desire for her, but at that time was not allowed to stare at white woman and want her to realize their desires. That means she was only making him uncomfortable and ashamed for his thoughts. The quotation I took from the novel seems to describe exactly the way the atmosphere that was in the ballroom. Very intimate and full of scare in the eyes of black boys, who were not supposed to look at her and let their imagination to go far with white woman. Therefore the white man aware of that fact push the dancer to even more provoke sexually the black man, so they could be enjoying looking at them being absolutely hopeless and fighting with their inner desires.

³¹ Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber, eds., *Women in Literature: Reading through the Lens of Gender* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003).

³² Batchelor, Nicole. "Ralph Ellison's Invisible Women." MA diss., Lehigh University, 2003.

It is also interesting to point out that black men are in very similar position here as the dancer. She is not only is the source of paid entertainment here but also the black boys, who are hired to come to the ring and they get paid so the white woman who is dancing for the man. The white men are enjoying black man fighting and they pay them for it. This is not only the result of race, but more generally about subordination of black and inequality for both blacks and women. The white men are using both of them to realize their own animalistic desires.

“This creature was completely hypnotized. The music quickened. As the dancer flung herself about with a detached expression on her face the men began reaching out to touch her. I could see their beefy fingers sink into the soft flesh. Some of the others tried to stop them and she began to move around the floor in graceful circles, as they gave chase, slipping and sliding over the polished floor” (IM, 20). This is another extract from the novel shows how are white people portrayed as well as their perverted desires. Invisible Man describes it as “I could see their beefy sink into the soft flesh”, who are running around the room to catch her and take over her. They want to be supervisors and they want her to be their subordinate and do exactly as they want. They enjoy seeing the white dancer over the black man, it excites them and they use the black man as a tool to realize they own animalistic desires.

Secondly the invisible women are seen in the scene with Jim Trueblood and Mr., Norton. Trueblood is a villain like black man without education who had incest with his daughter. He lives with his family close by the university campus. Mr. Norton is old wealthy white man, one of the founders of the college, where which attends the Invisible Man. He is asked to drive Mr. Norton around the campus. Unluckily and accidentally he takes him to the place where Jim true Blood lives. When the protagonist shares the story about Trueblood, Mr. Norton is very shocked but fascinated in some way.

“She was being more rare, more beautiful, purer, more perfect and more delicate than the wildest dream of poet. I could never believe her to be my own flesh and blood. Her beauty was well-spring of purest water-of-life, and to look upon her was to drink and drink again. . . She was rare, a prefect creation, a perfection of purest art.” Not even the proudest father would speak about his own daughter than was Mr. Norton did. He describes her as “more delicate than the wildest dream of poet” which sounds the way too intimate and arousing from father. He talks about his daughter with a great desire that is forbidden because she was his “own flesh and blood”. It seems he liked her much more than daughter

or one could say different way than father should like his own child. Nevertheless it seems he never let his cravings to come out, because as white educated man he was well aware of law, therefore also incest (IM, 42). That is something that Jim Trueblood did not really think about when he was making his daughter pregnant. Although they have some kind of the same desires Mr. Norton as educated white man could keep them only as secret desires and suppress them.

When he talks to Trueblood it seems he is going through his desires with his daughter through his experience. We know it from the very visible signs he says “please” to Trueblood to continue with his story of incest when the Invisible man tells him he will take him back to the campus. His eyes are bright and getting big when he is listening to Trueblood (IM, 60). Trueblood very often compares women to fruit or food itself when he describes them sexually “look down on a wagonful of watermelons, and you see one of them young juicy melons split wide open a'layin' all spread out and cool and sweet on top of all the striped green ones like it's waitin' just for you“ (IM, 56). It is all said in very perverse way, heir parts of bodies are compared to the fruit and once again we can see that women are not considered equal but rather an object, fruit or food. He is very much enjoying to be superior to woman. He also feels the simple human or rather to say man needs to be seen as male and he it is represented it the pregnancy of his daughter. He feels heroic to do so, fulfilled that he could make two women pregnant, he feels he is admired by society for doing so. Because the greatest men goal since ever is to build a house, get a child, plant a tree. He feels as master doing it twice.

“First she was trying to pullin' away and I'm trying to hold her down to keep from sinnin'. Then I'm pullin' away and shushin' her to be quite so's not to wake her Ma, when she grabs holt to me and holds tight. She didn't want me to go then/and to tell the honest-to-God truth I found out I didn't want to go neither”. Trueblood suggest his daughter actually wanted him to rape her and it seems it was nothing only pleasure to do so. When comes to admiration of the act he says he was only dreaming and it actually never happened. “I wakes up intendin' to tell the ole lady 'bout my crazy dream” (IM, 59). Therefore he does not take the responsibility of the incest.

Both of the extracts I took from the novel point out the position of women in the society in the 1930s in America. Trueblood blames his daughter for provoking him and making him to rape her. Therefore we can see that women were displayed in very negative way and blamed for their sexuality. Although the Mr. Norton would not do anything

against the law because of the moral values he experiences his animalistic and incest desire through Trueblood. The exotic dancer is portrayed only as a tool to fulfil naughty desires of white men and entertain them. The position of women in society is compared to the way white people treated blacks. Women's bodies were source of fantasy and desire both for white and black men. Women were strictly subordinate and no matter the colour of skin, men were always authoritative and superior. The conditions and opportunities in achieving the American dream were even worse for the black women, who were basically unable to speak up. White and black women fail in achieving the American dream due to white supremacy that does not consider them equal and does not give them opportunity for self-fulfilment. In addition black women were facing racism. In conclusion the American dream was not divided only by race but also gender.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this Bachelor thesis was to analyze the theme of the American dream in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. It was necessary to bring closer the American dream itself and its versions, afterthoughts apply them into story of a black boy struggling with his own identity in 1920s America.

First version of the American dream, which Jim Cullen published in his book *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* was Puritan dream. Dream of hard work rewarded by success. Puritans believed in destiny for every single person and they were convinced that if you work hard and follow the rules, God will accept you to the heaven. Secondly it was the Declaration of Independence that firstly and officially shaped the American dream. What is important is the phrase "pursuit of happiness" defines the idea of the American dream and it is a framework of American life. The very beginning of the statement includes the extract "all the men are created equal" which was evidently dealing with the major social problem in the United States, slavery and equality, but at the time when was the Declaration of Independence adopted, was not defined well what "equality" means. Therefore it was difficult to act this way. Thirdly version defining the American dream is the idea of "self-made man". Through time the description had changed. Hard work was not any longer considered as tool for someone's destiny but rather as self-fulfillment. The meaning of the American dream changed into commercial success and upward mobility. The example of "self-made man" and this version of the American dream was the sixteenth president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, who came from poor conditions and made it to the Congress and later to the White House. Fourthly was the dream of social equality. Freedom was something that had always been quite relative in America. The American dream was in to some extent racially limited and it was the major obstacle with which struggled the protagonist of Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*.

The last version of the American is the Dream of good life in the Coast. Each of the dreams I mentioned had its geographical location from where it was spreading to the rest of the United States. The city where young *Invisible Man* could reach his American dream was New York and its Northern district Harlem.

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is novel about young black boy who is trying to find his own identity in the world of white supremacy. He is lost in the world, in his own dreams. He does not consider anyone as a person, but only as a member of certain race. The narrator

joined through his life different communities and at the end he is realizing that his identity has been limited by racist ideas and attitudes. He becomes conscious of the fact he was not honest to himself and he thought that the society separates him from the others.

Although he comes to the city of dreams in order to work hard and earn some money he soon joins Brotherhood which is supposed to be an organization which protects those who are repressed due to their race or social class. The protagonist believes in the organization and especially that he can fight for racial equality. Unfortunately he is not that important for the organization as he thinks, but he is only a tool of white leaders to promote their ideology.

The Invisible Man fails in achieving the American dream in any form, because he does not live in society that is equal and he is not able to change the fact. He realizes Black Nationalism is too complex and it cannot work in America. He rather steps back and hides from society. He makes himself “invisible” in the terms of not judging white or black people as the right or not right race. Finally he makes himself free of illusions and claims that “Live is to be lived, not to controlled, and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat. Our fate is to become one, and yet many – This is not prophecy, but description” (IM, 465).

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