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Assignment 4B

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“A tale of two Americas. And the mini-mart where they collided”

By Anand Giridharadas

“Life, liberty and pursuit of happiness”. Probably the best known paragraph in the American declaration of independence. It embodies the codex that by many is interpreted as ‘the American dream’. A dream that includes the values rights, liberty, opportunity and equality. Furthermore, the idea of how hard work enable success through social mobility. This particular set of ideas have for years been the guidelines for those who seek happiness overseas in the United States of America. But how does the dream adapt for the native Americans? Is the storyline and the codex then the same? These questions are being sought out by Anand Giridharadas in his TED-talk *“A tale of two Americas. And the mini-mart where they collided”* published on the TED website in 2015.

The article’s preliminary passage establishes a violent incident, a collision between nationalities, in the Dallas mini-mart 10 days after the attack on the Twin Towers. *“Where are you from?” he asks. “Excuse me?” Raisuddin answers. His accent betrays him. The tattooed man, a self-styled true American vigilante, shoots Raisuddin in revenge for 9/11”*¹ By this the reader is thrown directly into the relation created between the native American Mark Stroman and the Indian immigrant Bhuiyan Raisuddin who survives the attack. A relation that constitute the framework of a discussion concerning what the American dream consists of and who it is entitled to.

Raisuddin embodies the one seeking the American dream and Stroman the one born right into it. This initiates one of the several contrasts Giridharadas introduces in his TED-talk, here in relation to his own experience as an Indian immigrant, *“The American Dream was thriving, but only in India. In America, not so much.”*² By involving his background Giridharadas establishes his ethos, which makes him a credible source when discussing the American Dream. As mentioned earlier the American Dream includes success enabled through

¹ Anand Giridharadas, “A tale of two Americas. And the mini-mart where they collided”, *TED* website, 2015 line 10-12

² Video (03.59-04.08)

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hard work because of social mobility. A social mobility that in the 21st century in greater extent is entitled to third world countries inhabitants by travelling to the industrialised countries. This division in nationality is transfigured through an observation Raisuddin makes in his pursuit of happiness; *“In fact, he observed that many with the fortune of being American were nonetheless trapped in lives that made second chances like his seem impossible”*³ This leads on to a second contrast, a contrast taking place within the borders of America.

*“America was fractured into two distinct societies: a republic of dreams and a republic of fears”*⁴ Raisuddin reflects upon how his attacker must belong to the republic of fears, especially because it was the nationality of Raisuddin, or the assumption of the same, that had the last say before the first shot. Raisuddin belonged to the other republic in comparison to Stroman, the republic of dreams. He believed in the good of mankind, and in second chances, just as America had given him. This indication and contradiction can be seen as a critique of how religion often makes disagreements more difficult to solve and more importantly how hostile generalisations can end up isolating a nation from a more diverse and less conflict-ridden society, the society that created Stroman. Furthermore, Giridharadas adds *“(…) America, generous with second chances to the children of other lands, today grows miserly with first chances to the children of its own”*⁵ A critique that establishes the last contrast. The contrast between the American dream and the American reality.

*“America is simultaneously the most and the least successful country in the industrialized world”*⁶ Successful when we look upon the global economics, branding and soft power. Least successful when discussing how the American people is divided by a huge economic gap domestically. Giridharadas mentions how the proud nation of America maybe for too long have lulled themselves into being okay with this huge division in their society. They are captured in a certain social group as their parents were before them. Over the last centuries a growing ignorance of this division have turned the country into the being the land of possibilities, for everyone else but themselves. In the section of the transcript line 119-135 Giridharadas presents his idea of a solution to this in form of a note of caution; *“The moral challenge of my generation, I believe, is to reacquaint these two Americas, to choose union over secession once again. This isn’t a problem we can tax or tax-cut away. It won’t be solved by tweeting harder(…), or starting one more artisanal coffee roasting service.”*⁷ He does not only

³ Line 45-46

⁴ Video (04.15-04.20)

⁵ Line 102-104

⁶ Line 88-89

⁷ Line 120-123

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use irony to keep the reader or listener in line, but also presents an idea that speaks to the common American people, the idea of a united America, an appeal to pathos. Additionally, Giriharadas address his audience with the pronouns we and you, while he also asks rhetorical questions, which makes an invitation to reflect upon the questions concerning the American Dream with him. Especially the in relation to the reunion between the republic of fears and the republic of dreams.

As mentioned the American dream consists of a set of values, but these are challenged. America has developed into being a country where opportunities are entitled to immigrants rather than native Americans. This can be explained on the basis of national problematics such as wealth and educational gaps, gaps that only can be handled by the United States of America. These problematics finds expression in aggressions turned towards the immigrants seeking the American Dream, and thereby removing the necessary focus on American society's condition. A condition, that by reconditioning can re-create the American Dream, as a dream, that can be entitled to everyone who is willing to work for it, as it were in its original state.