



# **The american dream and the american nightmare in literature by William D. Howells and Henry James**

*Carolina Hein*

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Seminar paper from the year 2008 in the subject American Studies - Literature, grade: 1,7, University of Constance, 4 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: This term paper deals with the origin of the American Dream, with the American Nightmare and with the two novels "The Rise of Silas Lapham" written by William D. Howell (1885) and "The American" by Henry James (1877). The term paper mainly concentrates on the main characters and their social life and shows that the protagonists, who live the way that the term "American Dream" implies, experience the seamy side of the American Dream. The American Dream has a long history which goes back several hundred years. For some people the American Dream might stand for property, for others it might be the image of freedom and equality. By all means, the American Dream promises a more comfortable life and the realization of the deepest dreams. But reality can turn the American Dream into the American Nightmare. Searching for a well paid job to raise their standards of living, people acknowledge that it is difficult to move up the economic ladder. Longing for equal opportunity, people face discrimination due to their race or social class.

This term paper deals with the origin of the American Dream and two novels The Rise of Silas Lapham written by William D. Howell, originally published in 1885, and The American by Henry James published in 1877. The term paper mainly concentrates on the main characters and their social life and shows that the protagonists, who live the way that the term "American Dream" implies, experience the seamy side of the American Dream. Before Europeans had moved to the new continent, the first immigrants living in America were Asians (Jordan, Winthrop D./Leon F. Litwack. The United States, Conquering a Continent Volume 1. California: North West, 2003: 1). In 1492, Christopher Columbus discovered an unknown continent which was named "America" after the explorer Amerigo Vespucci. Reports of America visitors connected the impression of America with "a paradise on earth" and the "El Dorado" and thus attracted people (Freese, Peter. The American Dream and the American Nightmare: General Aspects and Literary Examples. Paderborner Universitätsreden 7. Paderborn: Universität-Gesamthochschule, 1987: 8). Terrible and dangerous life situations, daily suffered by men and women during the "Protestant Reformation", forced victims of "religious persecution" to flee the countries (Freese 1987: 10). Searching for protection, they moved from the "Old World" to the "New World" (15).

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