

## **Spreading The Spirit of The American Dream Through Walt Disney's Film "Meet The Robinsons"**

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### ***Abstract***

This article is aimed to know about the spirit of American dream and its influences. The study is a qualitative study using library research and the data were obtained from texts. The data are analyzed and presented descriptively. The researcher finds that The American Dream has influenced people around the world because America has very effective ways to promote their ideology through soft power "five big ideas". The power is more powerful than military power. Meet the Robinson has been a provocative film; it can be media to promote the spirit of the American Dream.

**Keywords:** *The American Dream, Soft power, five big ideas*

### ***Abstrak***

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui tentang semangat dan pengaruh dari *American Dream* (mimpi orang Amerika). Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan menggunakan studi kepustakaan dan data yang berasal dari teks. Data dianalisis dan disajikan secara deskriptif. Peneliti menemukan bahwa *The American Dream* telah mempengaruhi orang di seluruh dunia karena Amerika memiliki cara yang sangat efektif untuk mempromosikan ideologi mereka melalui *soft power* "lima ide

*besar*" . Kekuatan ini lebih kuat daripada kekuatan militer . Para Robinson telah menjadi film yang provokatif ; Mereka juga dapat menjadi media untuk mempromosikan semangat dari *American Dream*.

**Kata Kunci:** *Mimpi Amerika , Soft Power , Lima Ide Besar*

## **Introduction**

What do you think when you watch some American kids movies like *Finding Nemo, Ratatouille, Up* and others? Do you find some good teaching or not? perhaps the films inspire you to do more than what have you done now. Of course when we watch films we get something, although everybody has different reasons to watch films such as spending their leisure time, forgetting their problems, killing time, time for sharing happiness with peers or getting information. People do not realize that watching films is like being influenced by the film maker about their beliefs or ideology. Film is a media to transfer information to public about when, where, how, what and why the film is made.

As a media to share information, it is like a book, it has a document that can be used as references for students' studies. They can get data from film. They can see pictures of some era such as understanding the condition in the late of eighties or nineties; it can be seen from some film the real life of the age. When we watch "Titanic" we understand about how the life in that era, how women dress up and how about social condition in the era. It is described clearly about the differences between the rich and the poor. Through film they can promote and spread their product, lifestyle (fashion, hairstyle), tradition even ideology.

Without forcing the watchers, the watchers want to imitate the tradition of the country. It will be easier to provoke children because of their tendencies to imitate what other people are doing. Thus, producing kids movies is the most effective way to influence children such as if they watch *Finding Nemo*, they can imitate the dialogue or songs from the film “Keep swimming, keep swimming, keep swimming” listening to the song that was sung by Dory, (in *Finding Nemo*) children will imitate directly without realizing that they have been influenced by the spirit of the film maker. Therefore the writer is going to analyze the spreading of the spirit of the American Dream through a Walt Disney’s film *Meet the Robinson*.

### ***The American power***

The United States is a superpower nation that has shaped international condition by exploiting the United States’ *five big ideas*. The *five big ideas* are *peace, hegemony, capitalism, democracy and culture*. They were very effective to shape the United States’ position in international relations. The world respects the United States as well as imitates Americans life style because the United States can effectively apply *five big ideals*. Besides having the *five big ideas* the United States has some powers such as economic, cultural, and military powers. The United States’ powers brought peace in the world and constructed as well as designed the United Nations. The hegemony brought relative security and laid the foundation for progressively more open trade and capital markets. The United States’ capitalism taught the world how to create unprecedented wealth. Democracy inspired people around the world to

change their relations with political authority and American culture is a magnet for the world's youth (Jentleson & Weber, 2008: 44-45).

As a powerful country, America has many ways to promote those five big ideas to every country around the world. Those ways have been done by America to succeed the promotion, but those ways are covered by American powers to persuade other country to follow America. The American powers are hard power and soft power. According to Joseph S. Nye (2002) in *The Paradox of American Power*, he defines hard power and soft power.

Nye states that there are actually two powers in America, they are hard power and soft power. Hard Power is a power that applies military and economic power to persuade others to change their position (Nye, 2002: 27). In Nye's another book, the title of the book is *the Power to Lead*, he states almost similar definition. Hard power is a power to induce and threat others. He also explains that there are some other powers that are used as indication of hard power such as population, territory, natural resources, economic strength, military forces and political stability. Nye in his two books provides more explanations that there is soft power as well.

Soft power is a power that getting others to want what you want it co-opts people rather than coerces them (Nye, 2002: 27).

Soft power: getting the outcomes one wants by attracting others rather than manipulating their material incentives. It co-opts people rather than coerces them.... Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others to want what you want (Nye, 2002; 28).

Soft power is interesting because if it is applied well, other countries want to obey the nation, admire its values, emulate its examples, and aspire to its level of prosperity and openness. Soft power

rests on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preference of others. The ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as attractive culture, ideology and institution. The concept of soft power is if someone can get you to want to do what s/he wants, then they do not have to force you to do what you do not want to do. If the United States represents values that others have, it will cost U.S less to lead. Soft power is not merely the same as influence though it is one source of influence. Nye adds that soft power is more than persuasion or the ability to move people by argument; it is the ability to entice and attract.

Supported by those powers, America can be more super power country that can influence other country to be like America. American democracy has inspired people to be democratic. America can be world police and keep the world peace after World War II and the spirit of capitalism can support other country to be wealthier. American can attract other country by using its soft power especially its culture.

### ***American Culture Value***

According to Nachbar and Lause in their book, studying about culture (in this case is popular culture) is as a reflective mirror of its audience that must focus upon two aspects of the zeitgeist – the “transitory” and the “concrete”. The zeitgeist which characterizes a particular era is composed of “transitory” attitudes and perspectives which last only as long as the era itself and then fade from view. In this era culture expresses highly significant concrete belief and values that transcend the specific time period and represents the fundamental character of the culture itself. Moreover they add that popular culture

reflects change and stability... ,... it does not merely reflect our hearts and minds but it manipulates them. (Nachbar and Lause, 1992:5-7).

American culture is very popular around the world such as American habits, film, music, actors/actress, dramas, food and so forth. Because of the popularity, America tries to spread its five big ideas through its culture such as film, music, dramas and so forth. Every thing that has been made by American must have good purpose to promote the American five big ideas because through those products American can persuade other country without inducing and threatening them. International community can be influenced well without any conflicts.

America has many kinds of culture but in this chance the writer is going to discuss about the American film especially film for children. There are many film may be billion films that had been made by American. The wonderful thing for this case is those films are not only created for entertaining the watchers but also giving knowledge and spreading the American five big ideas. Film still becomes a favorite for people to spend their spare time. Besides enjoying the story of the film people can get moral teaching with or without their awareness. On the other hand, most of American films are considered bad for our country because they contain violence, sex, pornography, etc. That is why there are many statements from some influential people in our country that America is a bad and arrogant country. They state anti-America, they provoke students of universities who have not understood yet about the goodness and badness of America to demonstrate. It cannot be denied that everything in this world has goodness and badness. Both goodness and badness can be learned for our improvement and betterment as well.

America is like other things, it has goodness and badness. If it is learned more deeply and seriously we can get improvement and betterment for our lives and our country. It is not easy for America to be the biggest, the most influential country in the world and even the world police.

### ***The American dream***

American has a very good spirit to face this life. The spirit has been a heritage from their founding fathers. They have magical spell that can inspire all of American who came from different backgrounds and ethnics. It is like a myth for them. It is called “The American Dream”. The phrase inspires American to reach their ambitions, willing, fancy and dream as well. The American Dream is viewed as the lofty ideals for all American to gain the best in their lives. It supports them to have easy and comfortable lives, which makes them stand on their own feet and become a boss for themselves.

According to Turner, 1986, *“The American Dream means a promise of freedom and chance, i.e, “the chance to be wealthy, even to those who start without anything as a reflection of pioneers in subjecting the wilderness of the new world.”* These promises have provoked many people from Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia to come to America to have new life although not all of them can reach their dreams.

The American Dream has been a national issue for centuries starting from the early settlers of America to the modern day. It is a dream of having an opportunity to get better job, status or life. These have inspired all of Americans.

There are some opinions about the history of the term of American Dream. It was first used by James Truslow Adams in his *Epic of America* written in 1931. *“He Stated that dream of land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone with opportunity for each according to his/her ability and achievement.* But according to Gary Colombo in his *Rereading American Cultural Context for Critical thinking and writing* *“the dream of individual opportunity has been at home in a since the puritans discovered the new world in the western hemisphere (17)”*.

Beside that, according to Craven and Johnson (59), the key word of The American Dream is opportunity and success in which life, liberty and happiness become the last goal. Both opportunity and success can be gained by all without looking at the status, the gender or the race. As stated in the United States’ *Declaration of Independence*, the founding fathers of America say: *“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their created with certain unalienable rights that among there are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”*

For Black American, they have different opinion to others because the term was first popular in 1963. The American Dream is having equal position to the whites in all fields of life. The spirit of the black American Dream firstly appeared when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr gave speech at a demonstration by 200, 000 people for civil rights for blacks entitled *“I have a dream”* to his black followers at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC, on August 28, 1963.

*... in spite of the difficulties and frustration of the moment i still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American Dream ... i*

*have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”*

Dr. King had keynote speech before he delivered his speech in front of more than 300, 000 followers. His keynote was “I Have A Dream”. It could provoke the followers (demonstrations). (Thomson, 1973:12)

This new Black rhetoric, therefore was consciously or unconsciously developed to achieve two main goals essential to the success of the ambitious and daring direct-action civil rights..., to create a viable interclass unity..., to inspire and convince the hitherto powerless...(Thomson, 1973:12)

Because of the reasons above the writer is going to discuss about the influence of the magical phrase “The American Dream” in a movie titled *Meet the Robinsons*. The American Dream influenced to an orphan boy who wanted to be adopted and to reach his dream as a scientist.

## **Research Method**

The writer applies library research to find the data about the spirit of The American Dream. The writer will utilize bibliographical sources (printed materials) containing information related to the topic. The data is gathered from printed materials such as books, magazines, journals, newspapers, literary works, and other written materials and also data from video and electronic media or websites. Both of the media have important role to support the writer to complete the data. The printed materials are taken from the American Studies Library of Gadjah Mada University General Library.

## **Discussion**

United States has more powerful power than their military power is. America was popular for their wars and their hard power. Nowadays America has tried to influence other nations by maximizing their five big ideas (peace, hegemony, capitalism, democracy and culture) that are really effective to influence other country. It has already been proven, through business, technology (Computer and internet) fashion, film and others.

In this chance the writer sees the influential of American's power from popular culture because it can not only reflect but also manipulate our minds. In this case, the reflection is through film especially kids movies. Through kids movies America can spread their ideology, culture and tradition. One of them is American's spirit that can inspire America into very influential country around the world. It is the American Dream. This spirit has been spreader through popular culture one of them is film, in this case is kid movies Meet the Robinson.

Through Meet the Robinson film, it shows about the progress of technology in America. Technology can solve some problems, Mr. Robinson can create a time machine that can be used by Lewis to meet his family in the future and can see his past, his dream to meet his mother who left him in the orphanage.

Besides technology the film describes about the spirit of the American dream. The American Dream means a promise of freedom and chance, i.e, "the chance to be wealthy, even to those who start without anything as a reflection of pioneers in subjecting the wilderness of the new world." The spirit of the American Dream can be seen from the beginning of the film.

Around here, however, we don't look backwards for very long.  
We keep moving forward, opening up new doors and doing new things,  
because we're curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.

Walt Disney

Forget your past and keep moving forward”

“Don't focus on your bad luck but keep moving forward”

“From failure you learn”

Meet the Robinson

Those expressions above show that how strong the director of the movie wanted to introduce the spirit of American dream to all of the children in America even around the world. The Motto of the character “keep moving forward” has been known in American because it is like their motto “The American Dream”, a dream to reach opportunity, liberty and happiness. Its influence has influenced all of American to be success not based on who you are but what is your creation that can support your life itself and for all American as well.

Therefore, those expressions are expected to be learnt by some children or someone who have watched the film, it means that don't give up before you reach your dream. Your failure can even support your future. The statements above are like the magical phrase that can inspire and provoke all American” The American Dream”. One of the dialogues in the film that shows of the spirit of the American Dream is a dialogue between Wilbur and Lewis, when Wilbur explains about Laszlo Robinson did.

Wilbur: “He keeps working and working until finally, he gets it! The first working time machine! Then, he keeps working and working until finally, he gets it again! The second working time machine!”

The spirit is “Keep working”. Keep working means no giving up until you can reach what you dream of.

In the film “Keep Moving Forward” is Mr. Robinson motto that is taught to his son Wilbur. Wilbur always support and give spirit to Lewis by saying keep moving forward.

Lewis : I don't even know what I'm doing.

Wilbur: Keep moving forward

Lewis : I mean, this stuff is way too advanced for me

Wilbur: Keep moving forward

Lewis : And what if I can't fix this, what are we going to do?

Wilbur: Keep moving forward

Lewis : Why do you keep saying that? And don't just say keep moving forward!

Wilbur: It's my dad's motto

Lewis : Why would his motto be keep moving forward?

Wilbur: It's what he does

Besides inspiring many successful men in America, in the film the American Dream has inspired two boys who were orphans. As orphans, they do hope for being adopted by a good family, having harmonious family with lovely parent like other children. Besides having the dream, they had different dreams for their futures. They are a close friend, they always share everything and help each other.

They are Lewis (after he was mature, he was known as Cornelius Robinson) and Goob (Yagoobian) in his future he became Lewis' enemy. Lewis and Goob are really different, Lewis is very smart boy who always creates something especially a machine to rewind his past but Goob is a very stupid boy who likes eating and sleeping. In the future he becomes a very bad man who enemies Lewis. They had individual dreams, they focused on how to reach their dreams. They also learnt from their experience that they had got. (American's spirit)

Lewis could be successful after his long trip to meet his future family with his future son Wilbur Robinson by using time machine. He could learn many things including how to appreciate his friend. He met Goob his roommate who became a very bad man because of his selfishness. American never forgets their experiences and learns from the experience because they don't want to make same mistakes. It can be seen when America had last presidential election. They did not vote for Mc Cane because they remember when he betrayed American in Vietnam war, it is much better for American to vote for Obama, "From Failure you learn"

After getting the experience in his trip, Lewis cared much about Goob's dream and helped him to reach it. Goob could win in a baseball game because he woke Goob up so Goob could catch the ball. It was a very great thing for Goob.

Lewis as a unique boy was eager for being adopted, he never gave up until more than one hundred adopters came and rejected him. He was really upset for the 124th adopters rejected him but at that time he got new dream to meet his biological mother. Orphan in America got the first right to be adopted and cared by others since Abraham Lincoln

stated it was his second inaugural on March 4, 1865, Lincoln made a speech that stands among the greatest pronouncements in history. At the threshold of victory, Lincoln spoke only of peace and of ending the nation's sectional differences. His closing lines are among the most eloquent in the English language:

“With malice toward none, with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.”(Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2009)

The speech has given a big hope to all of orphan, they can have a family if they can be adopted. There are some reasons in America to adopt a child such as they don't have a child at all or they don't want to have children just adopted children or foster children because of American culture. They think that children are sometimes disturbers in their lives. In the film, it is described that every orphan wanted to be adopted and they were worried if they hadn't been adopted in their tens they would hard to get adopter. It is stated that “it has been 124 adopters and next year I will be 13 years, it will be hard for me to be adopted”.

It means that after they have been teenagers, it will be hard to get adopter. It happens not only to Lewis but also to Goob. He had been rejected many times.

Goob looked very stupid because he was very tired to support Lewis every night to make his experiments. In this case, Goob wanted to show his loyalty as a friend until he had to lose his dream as a

professional baseball player but it must be emphasized on that he never gave up reaching his dream.

Besides the spirit of American Dream, the film also shows some criticisms about American. Black is slave and it must serve the white. In the film after Lewis became a father (he came to his future by his time machine), he created a hat and its color was black and it was created to serve the white as the owner. "I was created to be slave to serve them forever, it was a slave of human". Because of some conditions, the hat became different thing and it controlled the white, the owner must follow what the hat said. It is like America nowadays. They are being controlling and governing by the black president Obama. It is not a good condition for all Americans, some of them feel not comfortable. It is like the condition of the movie.

Beside that "Goob" the nickname of Lewis' roommate, means a peanut. It is an African language. It is to express someone who is useless and stupid.

In the film also expressed the characteristic of America as the biggest country. America always thinks that they are always right so that they can do what they want to do. It was stated in the movie that there was a character who was always right (Mrs. Robinson). "I am always right even when I am wrong"

On the other side we can learn from American culture that they can be successful because they always work or do something with good discipline, they are hard worker. It was like Lewis' condition. He worked so hard even he didn't sleep to do his experiment. He made them on time. Beside that American people are human beings who always plan what

they want to do even for bad purposes. They always have “things to do” it shows that they are very discipline.

Finally, Lewis in the film could reach his dream to be adopted and had a good and happy family. He could be a professional scientist supported by his family, so did Goob, he could win a competition. He could be successful because he learns from his experiences.

### **Conclusion**

Besides having military power America has another power that is more powerful to induce other country. The power is soft power, by using American big five ideas including peace, hegemony, capitalism, democracy and culture, they can spread their ideology. One of them is the term of American dream. The term has inspired and provoked all American to be successful more than other countries around the world like nowadays. Through a film “Meet The Robinson” America can spread their spirit of the American Dream well.

The writer hopes that we can learn from the experience of America and American life, learn from sides, goodness and badness, select the right one for our country. We have own culture that must be suitable for our country.

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