

The American Dream in 1930s American Society Through the Boys in the Boat (2023)

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines how *The Boys in the Boat* (2023) represents the American Dream in 1930s American society through the portrayal of social and economic conditions. Set during the Great Depression, the film depicts poverty, unemployment, and social pressure, illustrating the working class's struggle to achieve success and foster nationalism through the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the analysis covers both intrinsic and extrinsic elements. The findings show that the film highlights resilience, solidarity, and persistence among the lower class in facing adversity. Overall, it reflects the socio-political climate of 1930s America and presents the American Dream as a symbol of hope and revival amid crisis.

Keywords: *Great Depression, American Dream, Social and Economic, Working Class.*

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INTRODUCTION

The 1930s were a defining period in American history. This era was marked by the Great Depression, a major economic crisis that shook the social and economic order of American society. Skyrocketing unemployment rates, rampant poverty, and the collapse of various industrial sectors created extraordinary life pressures for millions of Americans. In this uncertain situation, Americans still held on to one great hope, the American Dream. This concept, which refers to the belief that anyone, regardless of background, can achieve success through hard work and perseverance, became a symbol of optimism that continued to burn amid economic and social downturns.

Scholars such as Cullen (2003) and Hochschild (1995) have noted that during the 1930s, the American Dream was not simply a personal aspiration but a national ethos a unifying ideal that helped sustain public morale during widespread economic hardship. In cultural production, particularly film, the Dream was often framed through narratives of perseverance, communal solidarity, and moral fortitude, serving as both a reflection of and a prescription for the national mood. Classic works of the era, such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), embodied these ideals, reinforcing the belief that resilience and integrity could transcend structural barriers.

The American Dream was thus embedded in media as both a mirror of reality and a tool of persuasion. As Doherty (1999) argues, cinema in this period often functioned as a cultural coping mechanism, offering audiences symbolic victories over economic despair. This framing is essential for understanding *The Boys in the Boat* (2023), a contemporary cinematic narrative that consciously draws on 1930s themes and imagery to evoke the endurance of the Dream across generations.

The Boys in the Boat (2023) is one of the cinematic narratives that strongly portrays this spirit. This film, adapted from the true story of the University of Washington rowing team, depicts the struggles of a group of young men from working-class backgrounds who strive for glory at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Set against the backdrop of America's economic devastation

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during the Great Depression, the film offers a profound representation of determination, team solidarity, and the courage to overcome limitations in order to achieve dreams. The journey of these athletes is a symbol of the struggle of American society that does not give up, even though it is faced with a very harsh reality.

This study also relates to previous research that addresses similar themes. The first previous study is written by Siswandi et al. (2022), which shows that there are negative stereotypes toward the Black community in America through the film *Fatherhood*. To challenge these negative stereotypes, the film highlights how the American Dream is represented in *Fatherhood* as an effort to challenge racial stereotypes against the black community. This is seen from how there was an effort to break the stereotype embedded in the minds of the community regarding racism against black people, especially for the figure of a black father, which conveys a message about the American Dream conveyed through the film.

Moreover, Adijoyo (2018) also related to how the cultural aspect of the United States or American society is depicted through the film. It is further explained that US companies made numerous efforts of cultural diplomacy using movies and comic books on Captain America to increase the positive perspective of the US image as a superpower country, which can be seen in Marvel Industry. The Marvel Industry has worked hard to produce Captain America movies and comic books to build a new image and recover the United States' negative images around the world. In addition, the US government helped this effort by issuing policies and various steps to ensure that all stages of producing the movies and comic books aligned with efforts to improve the US image worldwide.

Another study from Shanahan (2018) also shows how the American dream has become the ideology of the national ethos of the United States, which means it has become an ideal of freedom, individualism, opportunity, and equality that includes the opportunity to achieve success and prosperity. The political condition in 2016 during the 2016 US presidential election resulted in the decline of the American Dream. However, Disney released the animated film *Zootopia* (2016) with a big theme of the American Dream. This study has the purpose of questioning the discourse of American Dream that appeared through *Zootopia* during the 2016 presidential election of America. This study shows that there is propaganda in the form of film's role in fighting the decline of the American Dream initiated by conservatives who employed racial narratives, as seen in Trump's campaign.

Therefore, this study aims to explain how the film *The Boys in the Boat* (2023) represents the social and economic conditions of American society in the 1930s through narrative and visual elements. This study analyzes the visual and narrative choices used in the film and how these elements construct a representation of the social and economic challenges faced by the American working class during the Great Depression. By attending to aspects such as theme, plot, characters, conflict, setting, and cinematography elements, such as camera shots and camera angles, this study explores how the film frames the atmosphere and reality of the period cinematically.

Moreover, this study also examines the conditions of American society in the 1930s as depicted in the film. This includes an understanding of the lives of the working class, socio-economic background, and the daily challenges faced by the characters. The primary focus will be on characters such as Joe Rantz and the Washington Huskies rowing team, who reflect marginalized groups in society yet retain hope to survive and rise.

Lastly, this study aims to explain how the film represents the concept of the American Dream amid conditions of economic decline and social pressure. The film will be analyzed as a visual narrative that depicts the belief that success and social mobility can still be achieved through hard work, perseverance, and solidarity, even in the most difficult situations. This representation will be examined in depth to determine how the Dream becomes a driving force for the main characters in facing life's challenges.

Through an in-depth analysis of *The Boys in the Boat*, this study is expected to contribute to understanding how historical and social narratives are transformed into popular media. In addition, the study highlights how the concept of the American Dream remains relevant as a symbol of hope and resilience during some of the most difficult times in the nation's history.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method based on the analysis of the film's narrative structure, following Robert McKee's approach to film narrative analysis. This approach aims to examine how dramatic structure, plot, characters, conflict, and climax in *The Boys in the Boat* (2023) represent the social and economic conditions of American society in the 1930s. This method was chosen because it can reveal hidden meanings behind cinematic representations and illustrate how ideological and social messages are constructed through a systematic and symbolic narrative structure.

According to McKee (1997), an effective film story typically follows a three-act structure, such as setup, confrontation, and resolution, along with other important elements such as inciting incidents, turning points, climaxes, and character arcs. Therefore, in this study *The Boys in the Boat* (2023) is analyzed in depth by mapping the story's elements based on intrinsic and extrinsic components aligned with McKee's framework. The principal aim is to understand how the struggles of working-class characters are represented as part of the narrative of the American Dream within the historical context of the Great Depression.

Intrinsic elements refer to the internal building blocks of the film's narrative, such as plot progression, character development, setting, thematic focus, conflict, and the point of view through which the story unfolds.

Extrinsic elements relate to factors outside the film's fictional world, including its historical background, socio-political climate, economic conditions, and even the director's personal, cultural, or ideological standpoint.

The principal aim of this methodological approach is not only to dissect the film's story mechanics, but also to uncover how the struggles of working-class characters are intentionally framed within the broader American Dream narrative, especially in relation to the historical realities of the Great Depression.

The primary data in this study is George Clooney's *The Boys in the Boat* (2023), analyzed as both a cultural and narrative text. Data collection techniques involve a close analysis of the film's entire storyline, accompanied by intensive note-taking of narrative, visual, and cinematic elements that reflect social conflict, ideology, and character transformation. The analysis focuses on the film's dramatic structure, beginning with the inciting incident when Joe Rantz joins the rowing team for economic reasons. The turning point emerges as internal and external tensions rise within the team, while the climactic resolution occurs through the team's victory at the Berlin Olympics.

Furthermore, McKee's approach emphasizes the importance of character development as a reflection of internal and social conflict. Accordingly, this study traces Joe Rantz's journey as a symbolic embodiment of lower-class experience, highlighting his identity crisis, alienation, and eventual recognition through solidarity and collective struggle. Here, character change is not merely viewed as a personal achievement, but as a transformation deeply intertwined with collective resistance and shared aspirations.

This research also involves the analysis of cinematographic elements that support the dramatic narrative, such as camera shot types and camera-angle techniques that strengthen the nuances of powerlessness, resistance, and victory. The interpretation process follows an inductive path, meaning that meaning is drawn organically from the interplay between narrative and cinematography within its socio-historical context rather than forcing the film into pre-set analytical molds.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the author employs an approach in obtaining the data to answer the questions carried out in this study. The author analyzes the film based on two elements, such as intrinsic and extrinsic elements.

Intrinsic Elements

In analyzing the intrinsic elements from the film with the purpose to obtain the data to answer the questions in this study, the author divides the intrinsic elements into two

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categories, such as narrative elements and cinematography elements. It is understood that in order to analyze the film based on the purposes of this study, narrative elements and cinematography elements in this film become two important elements in understanding the intrinsic elements.

Narrative Elements

In this study, narrative elements are part of the intrinsic analysis that is very important in understanding the representation of the condition of American society in the 1930s as depicted in the film *The Boys in the Boat*. According to Achin et al. (2017), narrative elements consist of several main components, namely theme, characters and characterization, plot, conflict, and setting. Each of these elements makes an important contribution in conveying the moral, social, and ideological messages of the film.

The main themes raised in this film are perseverance, unity, and hope in facing life's difficulties, especially in the midst of the Great Depression. This film illustrates that success does not only come from talent or privilege, but also from hard work and collective spirit. In addition, this film also displays the theme of the American Dream, where the characters struggle to escape economic limitations in order to achieve success, which is depicted through the struggle of the University of Washington rowing team towards the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Additionally, the film foregrounds nationalism, especially when the American team faces Nazi Germany. The victory of the American rowing team is not only a victory in sports, but also a symbol of the success of democratic values and hard work in facing the fascist ideology glorified by Germany at that time.

Furthermore, an important aspect to analyze is the character of the film, where the main character in this film is Joe Rantz, a young man from a poor family background who has had to survive alone since childhood. Joe is depicted as a tough, solitary figure, but has a great passion to change his life. Joe's transformation process from someone full of emotional wounds to a confident athlete who contributes greatly to the team is a real reflection of an individual's struggle to achieve dreams amidst limitations. In addition to Joe, other important supporting characters are Coach Al Ulbrickson, who is known to be strict but has a strong vision for the team, and George Pocock, a boat builder who also acts as a spiritual mentor. Other characters in the rowing team, including Chuck and Don, also display the typical social dynamics of lower-class people who must support each other in order to achieve common goals. The presence of Joyce, Joe's lover, also strengthens the emotional side and motivation of the main character.

The plot of the film is also a crucial aspect in the narrative elements of the intrinsic elements, where the plot of this film follows a linear structure with a clear chronological order. Starting from the orientation, namely the introduction of Joe Rantz's life background and the difficult times he faces. The complication part is shown when Joe joins the rowing team and begins to face physical, emotional challenges, and internal conflicts, both within himself and within the team. The climax occurs when the University of Washington team competes in the Berlin Olympics, where they must defeat the top teams from Europe, especially from Germany, which was in the world spotlight at that time because of its Nazi ideology. The falling action and resolution occur when they succeed in winning the race and making America proud. This plot forms a heroic narrative that not only touches the emotional side of the audience, but also reinforces the message that hard work and unity can overcome limitations. In addition, conflict also plays an important role, where in this film itself the conflict is divided into two, namely internal conflict and external conflict. The strongest internal conflict appears in Joe Rantz, who from the beginning is told to have experienced trauma because he was abandoned by his family and felt he had no place in the world. This emotional conflict is reflected in his doubts and distrust of others, which become obstacles in the process of forming the team. Meanwhile, external conflict appears in the form of competition with other rowing teams that are more established and supported by a strong system, especially the team from Germany. In addition, socio-economic conflict is also very pronounced, considering that all team members come from the lower class and have to struggle to survive while training hard. Tension also arises when the team is almost unable to

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travel to Berlin due to lack of funds, showing the real impact of the Great Depression on the sports sector and the general life of American society at that time.

The last aspect is the setting, where the time setting in this film is the 1930s, when the United States was hit by a major economic crisis. Meanwhile, the setting includes several important locations, such as Seattle (the rowing team training center and Joe's residence), Poughkeepsie Regatta (the location of an important qualifying round), and Berlin (the location of the 1936 Olympics). The strong setting and realistic visuals strengthen the depiction of the suffering of society during the Great Depression, such as slums, long queues, and the limited conditions of the campus. Meanwhile, the Berlin setting provides a sharp contrast to the atmosphere full of Nazi propaganda, which can strengthen the atmosphere of ideological tension between American democracy and German fascism.

Tabel 1 Mapping Intrinsic Findings with Film Evidence

Theme / Finding	Visual / Dialogue Evidence from the Film	Timestamp
Perseverance & Hard Work	Joe keeps rowing despite his bleeding hand	00:54:12 – 00:54:18
American Dream – Underdog Spirit	Coach Ulbricksen: “Row like every stroke is your last chance”	01:44:05 – 01:44:10
Joe Rantz – Trust Issues	Hesitation before shaking hands with teammates	00:36:47 – 00:36:53
Philosophical Value – George Pocock	“It’s not about beating the other guy, it’s about the perfect stroke”	00:58:33 – 00:58:38
Inciting Incident	Joe signs up for the rowing team for a scholarship	00:21:04 – 00:21:15
Turning Point	Poughkeepsie Regatta – facility disparities shown	00:47:20 – 00:47:30
Climax	Don is sick but urged by Bobby to keep going	01:50:24 – 01:50:35
Resolution	U.S. team victory with American flag waving	01:53:10 – 01:53:20
Internal Conflict – Trauma	Flashback of young Joe abandoned	00:12:50 – 00:13:05
External Conflict – Rival Teams	Berlin parade shows German grandeur	01:47:14 – 01:47:25
Setting – Economic Limits	Seattle dock and worn equipment	00:22:05 – 00:22:15
Setting – Nazi Ideology	Berlin stadium with Nazi banners	01:47:14 – 01:47:25
Close-up – Intense Emotion	Don’s pale face during Olympic final	01:50:24 – 01:50:28
Long Shot – Nazi Power	Hitler in grand stadium	01:47:14 – 01:47:25
Low Angle – Athlete Strength	Rowers mid-stroke on the water	00:12:10 – 00:12:17
High Angle – Team Vulnerability	U.S. boat appears small in vast water	01:51:44 – 01:51:45

Source: Clooney, G. (Director). (2023). *The boys in the boat* [Film]. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Cinematography Elements

The other elements analyzed in this study along with narrative elements is cinematography elements, as the film *The Boys in the Boat* uses cinematography elements effectively to strengthen the delivery of meaning and emotion from the story being raised. As part of the intrinsic elements in film studies, cinematography functions to form visual aesthetics, strengthen the atmosphere, and direct the audience's attention to the message the director wants to convey. In this film, the two main aspects analyzed are the type of shot, such as camera shot and camera angle.

This film utilizes various types of shots to convey strong emotional and social meaning in each scene. One of the most prominent is the close-up shot, which is a shot from a very close distance, which is used to show the emotional expression of the character in depth. For example, when the scene approaches the climax of the competition at the 1936 Olympics, close-ups are used to capture the expressions of fatigue and determination of the athletes, especially

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when Don is sick but is still spurred on by Bobby to continue fighting. The use of this technique is very effective in building tension and audience empathy for the character's struggle.

Besides, long shots are used to depict the large scale of a scene, such as when a match is taking place or when introducing the background of American society hit by an economic crisis. The extreme long shot at the beginning of the film depicts the atmosphere of a slum area where the working-class lives, emphasizing the social background and atmosphere of decline due to the Great Depression. In the opening scene of the Olympics, the long shot highlights the grandeur of the stadium and the spirit of German nationalism, while providing a contrast to the limitations faced by the American team.

Tabel 2 Camera Shot in Film

Camera Shot	Scene	Details
Close-up Shot	 <p>(<i>The Boys in the Boat</i>, 2023, 01:50:24 – 01:50:28) (<i>The Boys in the Boat</i>, 2023, 01:50:29 – 01:50:35)</p>	This shot is used when Don loses his power because of his sickness, and Bobby tries to motivate him to increase his power and strength and overlap with their competitors during the Olympics 1936 race. This shot has a purpose to show an intense moment, which highlight the emotional impact in the film.
Long Shot	  <p>(<i>The Boys in the Boat</i>, 2023, 01:47:14 – 01:47:25)</p>	This shot is used to portray how powerful Adolf Hitler was as Führer of Nazi Germany and the supreme leader in establishing the Olympics in 1936. The use of this shot is intended to show how terrible the figure of Adolf Hitler is to other countries and showing the greatness of the German people in front of the world

Source: Clooney, G. (Director). (2023). *The boys in the boat* [Film]. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Furthermore, the film also uses low angle shots strategically to show the strength and determination of the characters. For example, when the rowing training scene is on the water, the camera is placed from a low angle to show how strong the athletes are against the current and challenges. This shot gives a heroic impression and shows the character's dominance over the environment or obstacles faced. In the context of ideology, low angles are also used when showing Hitler in the stands, creating an impression of frightening authority and a symbol of absolute power from the Nazi regime.

On the other hand, high angle shots are used to show the vulnerability and helplessness of the characters. For example, when the American team is in the back position during the race, the camera is placed from above to strengthen the impression of weakness and oppression experienced by the team. This shot also appears in the scene showing Joe Rantz's loneliness, showing how small and marginalized he is in the social structure.

Additionally, wide angle and bird's eye view are also used to show the coordination of the rowing team during the competition. Wide shots show rows of athletes in boats rowing in sync, reinforcing the message of cooperation and togetherness. Bird's eye view in the race

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creates a strategic perspective that depicts the competition between teams on the track, while building tension in the visual narrative.

Tabel 3. Camera Angle in Film

Camera Shot	Scene	Details
Low Angle	 (<i>The Boys in the Boat</i> , 2023, 00:12:10 - 00:12:17)	This angle creates the impression that the rowers are incredibly skilled, which underlines the tension in their muscles and the intensity of their efforts while rowing, while also mainly focusing on their determination to win.
High Angle	 (<i>The Boys in the Boat</i> , 2023, 01:51:44 - 01:51:45)	This technique can be used to show how the main character with its surroundings face major challenges, such as the rowing course or in their personal lives. The use of this technique also depicts a larger scene where their rowing boat appears small in the middle of a vast body of water, which can create a sense of uncertainty or the overwhelming pressure of an environment that is larger than theirs.
Bird's Eye	 (<i>The Boys in the Boat</i> , 2023, 01:52:04 - 01:52:06)	This technique has a purpose to show a visual representation of the coordination and synchronization required in rowing, as well as show how the team works as a unified whole

Source: Clooney, G. (Director). (2023). *The boys in the boat* [Film]. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Extrinsic Elements

In analyzing the extrinsic elements from the film with the purpose to obtain the data to answer the questions in this study, the author divides the extrinsic elements into several themes related to the topic, such as American society during the Pre-World War II Era, the Great Depression, ideological clash in Olympic 1936 Berlin, and the concept of American Dream. It is understood that in order to analyze the film based on the purposes of this study, those four themes found in this film become important elements in understanding the extrinsic elements of this film.

Tabel 4. Mapping Extrinsic Findings with Film Evidence

Theme / Finding	Visual / Dialogue Evidence from the Film	Timestamp
American Society Pre-WWII	Breadline scene in slum area	00:08:40 - 00:08:55
Great Depression - Lack of Money	Joe counts coins in dorm room	00:20:48 - 00:20:55
Great Depression - Clothing Poverty	Chuck admits stealing clothes after bankruptcy	00:39:25 - 00:39:35
Sports Funding Shortages	Fundraising scene before Berlin trip	01:38:10 - 01:38:25
Ideological Clash	Nazi salute vs U.S. reserved stance at parade	01:47:14 - 01:47:25
American Dream - Collective	Team celebrates Olympic victory	01:53:10 - 01:53:20
American Dream - Personal	Joe smiles at Joyce in the stands	01:53:10 - 01:53:20

Source: Clooney, G. (Director). (2023). *The boys in the boat* [Film]. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

American Society during the Pre-World War II Era

The conditions of American society in the pre-World War II era, especially throughout the 1930s, are the main social and historical contexts represented in the film *The Boys in the Boat*. This period was marked by a massive economic crisis known as the Great Depression, which began in 1929 and had a wide impact until the war. The lives of the people at that time were greatly affected by economic instability, high unemployment rates, extreme poverty, and the

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collapse of many industrial sectors. This is also shown in McElvaine (1993), where the crisis created massive socio-economic impacts among the American society around 1930s. Hence, the film cleverly captures this atmosphere and uses it as a backdrop for the struggles of its characters.

One of the strongest representations of the conditions of society at that time is the economic inequality and life of the working class depicted through the main character, Joe Rantz. He is a figure who grew up with financial limitations, lost family support, and had to struggle alone to continue his education. This reality reflects the reality of many Americans at that time, especially the younger generation, who lived in limitations but still tried to pursue education and work to improve their living conditions.

This stressful social condition is also evident in the daily lives of other characters in the film. Some of them are depicted living in slums, wearing shabby clothes, and even having to steal clothes because they cannot afford to buy them. For example, the character Chuck tells that the clothes he wears are the proceeds of stealing due to his father's bankruptcy. This shows that the economic crisis not only impacts the industrial sector or the stock market, but directly touches the most basic aspects of people's lives such as food, clothing, and education.

Not only that, this film also depicts how these social conditions affect the world of sports. The rowing team from the University of Washington, despite winning the qualifying round for the 1936 Olympics, was almost unable to go to Berlin due to lack of funds. This is similar to Austin (2015), where the economic crisis limits sports funding, so athletes and communities must struggle independently, demonstrating a spirit of mutual cooperation and nationalism. Hence, the sports sector during that time was also not free from the impact of the Great Depression, where government funding and support were very limited. In the film, athletes, coaches, and their families must raise funds independently in order to represent America in international events. This moment illustrates the spirit of mutual cooperation and nationalism of the American people that continues to burn even though the country is in crisis.

The conditions of pre-war American society were also colored by increasingly heated global ideological conflicts, especially between American liberal democracy and German fascism under the leadership of Adolf Hitler. This tension was strongly reflected in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, which the Nazis used as a propaganda platform to demonstrate Aryan racial superiority. Despite calls from various groups to boycott the Games because of issues of racial discrimination and human rights abuses by the Nazis, the American government still sent representatives as a form of international diplomacy and a symbolic statement that democratic values would continue to be fought for on the global stage. This is similar with Large (2007), where the 1936 Berlin Olympics were utilized as a Nazi propaganda event and a symbol of the struggle for American democratic values, as well as representation of the working class in the rowing team. Hence, the presence of the American rowing team, especially consisting of working-class youth, represented ordinary people who brought the nation's hopes and pride to the international stage. When they finally won the competition, the victory was not only a sporting event, but also became a symbol that the American people still had the spirit to compete, survive, and triumph over all forms of challenge, both from within the country and from external ideological threats.

The Great Depression

The Great Depression was a global economic event that lasted from late 1929 to around 1939, and became the deepest and most widespread economic crisis in modern history. In the United States, its impact was very destructive, especially for the working and middle classes (Musafa'at, 2014). The film *The Boys in the Boat* is mainly set in the 1930s, when the economic conditions in America reached their lowest point. This event is not just a passive background in the film, but becomes an important element that shapes the motivations, conflicts, and social dynamics of the characters.

In the film, the Great Depression is explicitly depicted through the lives of the characters, especially Joe Rantz as the main character in this film. He is depicted as a young man who was abandoned by his family and had to struggle alone to survive and pay for his studies at the University of Washington. This reality reflects the reality of many young Americans at that

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time, who had to choose between continuing their education or earning a living. When Joe finally decides to join the rowing team selection not only because of his love of the sport, but because of the financial reward that could help him pay for college, this emphasizes how difficult the economic conditions were at that time for the lower classes.

Furthermore, the film shows a visual portrait of the lives of poor people during the Great Depression, such as slums, inadequate housing conditions, and manual labor done by the characters. One concrete example is the confession of Chuck, who said that all his clothes were stolen because his father went bankrupt. This illustrates how desperation and limitations make many people have to break norms in order to survive.

This crisis also had a direct impact on the sustainability of the University of Washington rowing team itself. Although they managed to win the national qualifying round and obtained the right to represent America at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, their departure was threatened with cancellation due to limited funds. The government was unable to finance the team because financial resources were very limited. This condition shows that not only individuals are affected by the economic depression, but also institutions such as universities, sports organizations, and even the central government. Finally, with a high collective spirit and nationalism, funds for departure were collected through the personal initiative of athletes, coaches, and their families. This reflects the value of solidarity that grows in response to the crisis, a typical characteristic of American society in difficult times.

In addition to the economic aspect, the Great Depression also became a setting that formed the character and resilience of the characters in the film. Characters like Joe Rantz and his friends were not only competing in the sports arena, but they were struggling to escape poverty and prove that they deserved a place in a harsh world. In this context, the Great Depression was not only an economic disaster, but also a social battlefield that gave birth to a generation of fighters. Ideologically, the representation of the Great Depression in this film also functions as a narrative contrast to the symbolic dominance of Nazi Germany at the Berlin Olympics (Rippon, 2006). However, the American rowing team, who came from poor backgrounds without great resources, and with minimal training facilities, managed to defeat elite teams from other countries that were fully supported by their regimes, especially Germany, which used the Olympics as a political propaganda tool. Hence, their victory became a kind of moral symbol that determination, hard work, and an unyielding spirit are more valuable than power or wealth.

Olympic 1936 as the Ideological Clash

The 1936 Berlin Olympics were one of the most controversial sporting events in modern history, serving not only as an athletic competition but also as a global ideological stage between two opposing poles, such as the liberal democracy of the United States and the fascism of Nazi Germany (Rippon, 2006). In *The Boys in the Boat*, the event is both the climax of the story and a symbol of the clash of values between two very different political and cultural systems.

Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime saw the Olympics as an opportunity to flex Germany's glory and assert Aryan racial superiority to the international world. To make it become a reality, extensive preparations were made, including building a magnificent stadium and temporarily removing anti-Semitic symbols in order to maintain the country's image abroad (Large, 2007). But behind the extravagance of the event, there was systematic propaganda that sought to prove that Nazi ideology was morally, physically, and culturally superior to other nations, especially the United States.

The film captures this ideological tension through visual narrative and dialogue between characters. One scene shows German athletes giving the Nazi salute as they pass their leader, Adolf Hitler, while the American team, particularly the Washington Huskies, responds with derision and apathy. This was not just a cultural difference, but a manifestation of the tension between two nations with opposing worldviews, where one upholding racial supremacy and totalitarianism, while the other upholds the values of democracy, diversity, and the struggle of the lower classes.

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The United States' participation in the 1936 Olympics itself was widely debated. Several human rights groups, Jewish community leaders, and labor organizations urged the government to boycott the event because Germany blatantly discriminated against minorities. But in the end, America still sent representatives, including legendary black athlete Jesse Owens and the University of Washington rowing team, as a representation of the spirit of freedom and opportunity for all.

In the film, the Washington Huskies, whose members all came from working-class backgrounds, appear as a symbol of the "true" America. This is because all members were not from the elite, but from ordinary people who fought against all odds. When they managed to defeat the top teams from Europe, especially Germany who hosted the Olympics and fully supported with the regime, the victory became more than just a sporting achievement. It was a victory of ideology, where hard work, solidarity, and perseverance managed to overcome a system that relied on the doctrine of power and discrimination.

This ideological narrative is strengthened through the conversation between Joe Rantz and Jesse Owens in the film, which shows their mutual support and shared struggles as fellow "underdogs" in society. Owens as a black athlete and Rantz as a child from a poor family illustrate that their victory was not only over opponents on the track or arena, but also over the social structure that had oppressed them.

American Dream

The concept of the American Dream is a central ideology in American culture and history that emphasizes the belief that anyone, regardless of social and economic background, has the opportunity to achieve success and a better life through hard work, dedication, and personal initiative (Hume, 2022). The film *The Boys in the Boat* very powerfully displays this representation of the American Dream through visual narratives and characters who struggle from limitations to greatness. Based on Marchand (2023), in the historical context of the Great Depression and global tensions leading up to World War II, the American Dream appears as a source of hope and moral strength for the American people.

Joe Rantz as the main character in this film becomes the real personification of the American Dream. He comes from a dysfunctional and poor family, was even abandoned by his own family and had to survive independently from a young age. Economic difficulties not only hindered his access to education, but also made him feel unwanted and worthless. This is aligned with Katznelson (2005), where many teenagers were forced to struggle in facing economic hardship by choosing between education and livelihood. However, it was from that slump that Joe rose and found his life's purpose through the University of Washington rowing team. Joe's journey is a reflection of the idea that success is not only determined by origin, but by perseverance and the courage to keep trying, which becomes the central meaning of the American Dream itself.

All members of the Washington Huskies in the film also come from working-class backgrounds, showing that the American dream is not only for individuals, but can also be achieved collectively. The team faced many limitations, both in terms of economy, facilities, and experience. However, with great teamwork, discipline, and a never-give-up spirit, they managed to challenge and even defeat elite teams from Europe, including Nazi Germany, which was hosting the Olympics at the time. Their victory in Berlin was not only an athletic victory, but also a statement that ordinary people could stand on equal footing and even surpass great powers with the basis of spirit and solidarity.

The American Dream in this film is also strengthened through the ideological conflict that emerged during the 1936 Olympics. As already mentioned previously, Nazi Germany implemented the concept of "Aryan racial superiority" and used sports as a tool for political propaganda. In contrast, the American team, especially the Washington Huskies, represented the values of inclusivity, hard work, and egalitarianism. They were not representatives of the social elite or professional athletes with full state support, but young people from poor families who brought the spirit of democracy and proof that everyone has the same opportunities. In this sense, the American Dream serves as an ideological counterpoint to fascism.

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Furthermore, the film's narrative suggests that the American Dream is not only about material success or winning a competition, but also about the formation of identity and self-esteem. This is aligned with Marchand (2023), where the concept of American Dream became the motivation to build a new life and be separated from war, poverty, and oppression. For Joe Rantz, the success of being part of the team and winning the gold medal not only changed his fate, but also gave him a sense of belonging, meaning, and social acceptance, things he had never had before. This suggests that the American Dream is also closely related to a person's emotional and spiritual dimensions.

CONCLUSIONS

The *Boys in the Boat* (2023) transcends a mere sports narrative, serving as a poignant reminder that the American Dream has always been influenced by its historical context. Set against the backdrop of the Great Depression, the film illustrates how individuals like Joe Rantz and his working-class teammates forged their futures not through privilege, but through persistence and solidarity, pushing forward despite systemic challenges. Its visual storytelling not only captures themes of hardship and hope but also prompts reflection on how ideals like democracy and equality become deeply personal yet profoundly political, especially in light of the 1936 Berlin Olympics and the rise of fascism. From a historical and cultural viewpoint, the film posits that the American Dream is not a static concept; it evolves with economic, political, and social changes, highlighting cinema's ability to shape our understanding of the past and contemporary national identity. This perspective opens avenues for future research into how films across various periods redefine the notion of "making it" in America and what these evolving definitions reveal about culture. Ultimately, *The Boys in the Boat* reminds us that the American Dream is less about reaching a finish line and more about the collective struggle to navigate the turbulent waters of history, suggesting that "it's not about beating the other boat; it's about finding your perfect stroke," a truth that underscores the dream's enduring nature for each generation that dares to pursue it.

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