

## Contents

<u>Contents.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>1. Introduction.....</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>2. Coca Cola in History: The Development of a Trade Mark.....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>2.1. The Invention of Coca Cola 1884–1886.....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>2.2. Asa G. Candler and the Coca Cola Company 1887–1917.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>2.3. The Woodruff Era.....</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>2.4. Coca-Cola’s Developement During the Second World War.....</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>2.5. Coca-Cola and the Cold War.....</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>2.5.1. In Germany.....</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>2.5.2. In France.....</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>3. Coca-Colonization and Cultural Imperialism.....</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>3.1. Coca-Colonization and Americanization.....</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>3.2. Coca-Colonization as an Enrichment .....</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>3.3. Coca-Colonization as a Manifestation of Cultural Imperialism.....</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>4. Coca-Cola as a Symbol of the American Dream.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>5. Coca-Cola in Advertising.....</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>5.1. The Company’s Advertising Strategies.....</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>5.2. Aspects of the American Dream in Coca-Cola’s Advertising.....</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>6. Conclusion.....</u>	<u>19</u>
<u>Appendix.....</u>	<u>22</u>

## 1. Introduction

The American Dream is a key concept within history, society and culture, therefore it is essential for an understanding of the American Way of life. The American Dream has countless manifestations and can appear in many ways. It is enclosed in visions such as “from rags to riches” as well as being represented by several objects or products. One example would be the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor, which has symbolized the American Dream for all those people who immigrated to the “New world” hoping for a better life. They saw America as the country where they could achieve their goals and become happy. Even to this day, the statue remained an icon of the United States and the American Dream. However, the American Dream can also be embodied by items and product of daily use. Such a product is without a doubt the soft drink Coca-Cola. The brand has become one of the most valuable brands all over the world with an unbelievably high degree of popularity. “Coca Cola” is the second most widely recognized term on the planet. Only the word “OK” is understood by more people.<sup>1</sup> But it is not the ingredients or the mixture that is the reason for the beverage’s great success, the soft drink has become unique by what it stands for. It is an item representing America, and therefore also a symbol of the American Dream.

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<sup>1</sup> Exler, Andrea. *Coca-Cola; Vom selbstgebrauten Aufputzmittel zur amerikanischen Ikone*. Hamburg 2006, p.8

## 2. Coca Cola in History: The Development of a Trade Mark

### 2.1. The Invention of Coca Cola 1884–1886

The pharmacist Dr. John Stith Pemberton invented the prototype Coca-Cola recipe in 1884. The formula differed a lot from the final version of Coca-Cola: Pemberton created his own cocktail based on the French coca wine “Vin Mariani” and called it “Pemberton’s French Wine Coca”. He started to sell the drink in his Drugstore in Atlanta and rapidly the coca wine became a big seller. However, in 1886, only two years after the invention of his “French Wine Coca”, Atlanta passed prohibition, and with the rise of the temperance movement, Pemberton had to cease the sale of any alcoholic drink. That is why he decided to change the formula of his coca wine and created a new, non alcoholic version, that is the way the idea of Coca-Cola was originated.<sup>1</sup>

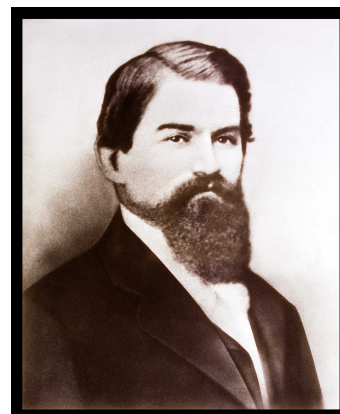


Fig.1: John S. Pemberton  
(1831–1888)

The basic ingredients of the drink were coca leaves and the kola nut. To counteract its bitter taste he added sugar and citric acid. At the time, soda fountains were wide-spread in the United States because carbonated water was considered to be very good for one’s health. Thus, Pemberton decided to serve the Coca-cola syrup with soda water.<sup>2</sup> Pemberton advertised his beverage as a cure for nerve trouble, dyspepsia, mental and physical exhaustion, headache, impotence and also as a cure for morphine addiction.<sup>3</sup> The latter was very common after the Civil War and also Pemberton, who was wounded in a battle, became addicted to the drug. The first sales were at Pemberton’s Pharmacy, “Jacob’s Pharmacy”, in Atlanta on May 8, 1886, where the drink was served at the soda fountain. During the first year, Pemberton sold an average of 9 drinks per day at the price of 5 cents a glass.

The famous Coca-Cola lettering was designed by Dr. Pemberton’s partner and book keeper Frank M. Robinson, who thought “the two Cs would look well in advertising”.<sup>4</sup> Robinson’s design remained almost unchanged even to this day.



Fig.2: The original and  
the current label

<sup>1</sup> Exler 2006, p.23

<sup>2</sup> Exler 2006, p.25

<sup>3</sup> “Coca-Cola”. 2.11.2010 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coca-Cola>>

<sup>4</sup> “The Chronicle Of Coca-Cola, Birth Of A Refreshing Idea”. 2.11.2010 <[http://www.thecoca-cola-company.com/heritage/chronicle\\_birth\\_refreshing\\_idea.html](http://www.thecoca-cola-company.com/heritage/chronicle_birth_refreshing_idea.html)>

## 2.2. Asa G. Candler and the Coca Cola Company 1887–1917

Given that the apothecary had financial problems, Pemberton started to sell shares of Coca-Cola to various partners in 1887.<sup>1</sup> One of them was Asa G. Candler, a businessman who became the sole owner of the label in 1891. However before Candler bought all the portions of the business and acquired complete control he found out that he was only allowed to use the formula, but not the name “Coca-Cola” due to the fact that it belonged to John Pemberton’s son Charley. In 1888, Candler sold the drink under the names “Yum Yum” and “Kola”, but they could not live up to the earlier success of the product.<sup>2</sup> The name “Coca Cola” and its red-white label already had a certain degree of popularity, so Candler established a legal claim to Coca Cola. He proceeded to buy exclusive rights, until finally he took total control over the brand in 1891.<sup>3</sup> After founding the Coca-Cola Company (the current corporation) in 1892, he registered the trademark "Coca-Cola", in the United States Patent Office on January 31, 1893, although it had already been used in the marketplace since 1886.<sup>4</sup>

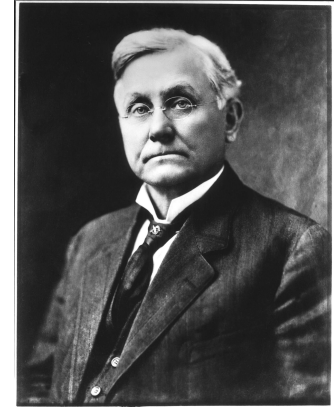


Fig.3: Asa G. Candler  
(1851–1929)

The Candler Era brought two notable innovations which were without a doubt significant for Coca Cola’s further history. The first being the bottling process: Until 1894 Coca-Cola was only sold at soda fountains by the glass. By installing the first bottling machineries, consumers could buy the drink by the case, this of course remarkably promoted the spread of the product. In 1896, only four-years after the Coca-Cola Company was launched, the drink was being sold in Canada, Hawaii, Mexico and Cuba.<sup>5</sup> This was the beginning of Coca cola being an internationally highly successful product. The development of what is today the worldwide Coca Cola bottling system began in 1899, when the franchised distribution system was established. The company just produced the syrup concentrate, which is then delivered to bottlers from different territories who by simply adding soda water and sweeteners, they finish the drink and then take care for the distribution of the resulting Coca-Cola product to the wholesalers, retailers and food

<sup>1</sup> Exler 2006, p.26

<sup>2</sup> Exler 2006, p.27

<sup>3</sup> Exler 2006, p.28

<sup>4</sup> “The Chronicle Of Coca-Cola, The Candler Era”. 2.11.2010 <[http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/chronicle\\_the\\_candler\\_era.html](http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/chronicle_the_candler_era.html)>

<sup>5</sup> Fritz, Helmut. *Das Evangelium der Erfrischung; Coca-Colas Weltmission*. Reinbek/ Hamburg 1985, p.58

service industry .<sup>1</sup> With this system, which is still used today, the Coca Cola Company managed to establish bottling plants throughout the United States and therefore promoted the geographical expansion of Coca-Cola.

The second innovation under Candler’s leadership, that had a huge impact on the future of Coca-Cola was the marketing strategy.<sup>2</sup> In those days, the sum of money the Coca Cola Company spent on advertising was exceptionally high. Advertising materials included signs, thousands of coupons for a complimentary Coca Cola in newspapers, and premiums like calendars, clocks and other articles of daily use, these of course all depicting the trademark. With slogans like “Demand the genuine” and “Accept no substitutes” the Company challenged imitators.<sup>3</sup> The use of radio advertising was an innovative way of advertising as well. The main aim, of course, was to convince as many people as possible to buy Coke, and when considering the company’s ever growing success, was handled quite nicely.

Due to the fact that many companies tried to imitate the product using similar names such Coke-Ola, Coca-Nola, Kola-Kola, or similar brand labels, Asa G. Candler decided to change the design of the bottle so that it was easily recognised and differed from the other beverages. He instructed the Root Glass Company of Terre Haute, Indiana to give the Coca Cola bottle a new look. They designed today’s well-known contour bottle, which was introduced in 1916.<sup>4</sup> At the end of the Candler Era the Coca-Cola Company turned out to be one of the most successful American enterprises ever.



Fig.4: The contour bottle

<sup>1</sup> “The Coca-Cola Company“. 2.11.2010 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Coca-Cola\\_Company](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Coca-Cola_Company)>

<sup>2</sup> Exler 2006, p.31

<sup>3</sup> Exler 2006, p.35

<sup>4</sup> Exler 2006, p.33f.

### 2.3. The Woodruff Era

In 1917, after 26 years of ownership, Asa Candler left the business and the Company was taken over by his children, they however sold it to a group of investors in 1919.<sup>1</sup> Four years later, Robert Winship Woodruff became head of the Company and held office till 1955. His statement “I want Coke to be within an arm's length of desire.”<sup>2</sup> matches excellently Woodruff’s approach in leading the Company. He improved the sales department greatly, developing new techniques to facilitate the selling of Coca-Cola to the public. The fabrication of six-pack cartons made it much easier for people to bring Coke home, as well as to build up stocks of the beverage.<sup>3</sup>



Fig.5: Robert W. Woodruff  
(1889–1985)

Just like Candler, Woodruff invested great sums of money on marketing even though his strategies differed clearly from those of his forerunner. Especially audio-visual advertising, such as commercials shown in cinema or on tv, and the sponsorship of sports events; these were counted among those new ways of marketing. The Company signed on more and more film stars or other celebrities, who would advertise the image of the brand.<sup>4</sup>

Woodruff amplified control quality, thus the standardization of the product was moved forward: quality and taste of Coca-Cola was exactly the same everywhere. The whole brand, no matter what is was, the bottle, the advertisement or the company’s delivery trucks were submitted identical norms.<sup>5</sup>

Woodruff’s dream was to distribute Coca Cola globally and to elevate it not only to the number one American soft drink, but also to an international one. To put this into practise Woodruff founded the “Foreign Sales Department”, later renamed as “The Coca-Cola Export Corporation” in 1926.<sup>6</sup> Under Woodruff, Coca-Cola’s expansion reached its apex and conquered the world.

<sup>1</sup> Exler 2006, p.37

<sup>2</sup> Richmond, Will. “Putting Premium Content Within an Arm's Length of Desire”. 2.11.2010  
<<http://www.videonuze.com/blogs/?2010-09-02/Putting-Premium-Content-Within-an-Arm-s-Length-of-Desire/&id=2698>>

<sup>3</sup> Exler 2006, p.46

<sup>4</sup> Exler 2006, p.49

<sup>5</sup> Fritz 1985, p.60

<sup>6</sup> Exler 2006, p.51

#### 2.4. Coca-Cola's Development During the Second World War

Since 1886, the year Coca Cola was first sold, popularity and success of the beverage have increased constantly. There are several reasons for this, the drink was created on the occasion of the upcoming prohibition movement and promised an exhilarating pleasure to the consumers. While the disposal of alcoholic drinks in the United States was not legal, the soft drink became more and more common throughout the country. It was not only the period of prohibition that helped the rise of Coca Cola. The expansion of Coca-Cola coincides with the technological progress in the United States: Without automobiles, television or the invention of the refrigerator the economic success of Coca-Cola presumably would not have been possible. This success can also be attributed to the extreme efforts on advertising that have been made without end.

The Second World War however, contributed its part to the product's worldwide distribution as well. Even though sugar was rationed and its purchase became very challenging and extremely costly during the war, Robert Woodruff pledged, "See that every man in uniform gets a bottle of Coca-Cola for five cents, wherever he is, and whatever it costs"<sup>1</sup> Woodruff assembled a team of technicians, the "Coca-Cola Colonels", who had the duty to cater all fronts with the beverage.<sup>2</sup> On June 29, 1943 when General Dwight Eisenhower arrived with the allied troops in North Africa, he sent a cablegram ordering new Coca-Cola plants to the fighting fronts. Only few month later, the first Coca-Cola plant was built in Algiers.<sup>3</sup> Woodruff's procedure turned out to be an extremely successful marketing venture because this was just the first of many plants to be established overseas during the World War.

The soft drink, officially an "essential war commodity" was considered a moral support for the troops.<sup>4</sup> Coca-Cola had not only developed to a highly successful beverage, it became "more than just a drink".<sup>5</sup> For the soldiers, it represented their country, reminded them of their families and also their lives back home. The image of Coca-Cola involved a feeling of hope, friendship, peace and freedom. "Whenever you hear 'Have a Coke', you hear the voice of America", this is what an advertising slogan from 1945 affirmed.<sup>6</sup> However, not only the GI's consumed Coca-Cola. During the war Coca-Cola was

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<sup>1</sup> Biedermann, Ulf. *Ein amerikanischer Traum; Coca-Cola: Die unglaubliche Geschichte eines 100jährigen Erfolges*. Hamburg, Zürich 1985 (Biedermann 1985), p.63

<sup>2</sup> Fritz 1985, p.50f.

<sup>3</sup> Fritz 1985, p.51f.

<sup>4</sup> Fritz 1985, p.50

<sup>5</sup> Fritz 1985, p.153

<sup>6</sup> Fritz 1985, p.47

established cumulatively in the local population as well. Thus Coca-Cola was introduced to the world market and it followed an unprecedented growth in sales and popularity.

## 2.5. Coca-Cola and the Cold War

During the Cold War the contrast between anti-Communism on the one and anti-Americanism on the other hand were formative for this time period. The political conflicts made a major impact on Coca Cola and the brand had to overcome some obstacles. Having evolved into a synonym for the United States of America, the soft drink met with the communist's strong disapproval and resistance.

### 2.5.1. In Germany

In Germany, Coca-Cola has been sold since 1929 with success.<sup>1</sup> Already in the nineteen-thirties Germany was among the most important foreign markets of the Coca Cola Company.<sup>2</sup> However between 1942 and 1949 the entire Coca-Cola production was dropped because of lack of raw material caused by the war.<sup>3</sup> As the production of the soft drink was resumed, Coca-Cola again would be available everywhere. Unfortunately, this did not apply for the whole country since it was divided into the Federal Republic of Germany in the West and the German Democratic Republic in the East. The disposal of Coca-Cola was only legal in West Germany. The marketing campaign “Mach mal Pause – trink Coca-Cola” hit the mark and sales increased steadily. The slogan obviously reflected the population's needs in the time of Germany's reconstruction. With the “economic miracle” American products like cigarettes, chewing gum and of course Coca-Cola became more than just consumer goods, they developed to status symbols.<sup>4</sup> In the communist occupation zone in the East however Coca-Cola was not receivable. Not until 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall would Coca-Cola be expanded into the former GDR. Also there, Coca-Cola was more than a drink, it symbolized their belonging to the Western world.<sup>5</sup>



Fig.6: The campaign “Mach mal Pause – trink Coca-Cola”

<sup>1</sup> “120 Jahre Coca-Cola – Chronologie einer Marke”. 2.11.2010 <<http://www.coca-cola-gmbh.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/mitteilung/pressrelease.do?id=12041>>

<sup>2</sup> Exler 2006, p.59

<sup>3</sup> Exler 2006, p.54

<sup>4</sup> Biedermann 1985, p.126

<sup>5</sup> Adam, Thomas (Ed.). *Germany and the Americas; Culture, Politics, and History*. No place of publication 2005 (Adam 2005), p.251



The frictions between communists and capitalists in Germany during the Cold War became the basis for the American comedy film “One, Two, Three”, directed by Billy Wilder. It tells the story of a love affair of Scarlet, the daughter of a Coca-Cola boss, and the keen east German communist Otto. The head of Coca-Cola's German branch Mr. MacNamara, who has the responsibility to take care for his boss's daughter, now has the job of trying to convert Otto to capitalism. In fact he succeeds and before you know it, Otto is a capitalist. Wilder not only criticizes the major influences of the United States, that not even the most confident communist can defy. He also makes fun of every other population group no matter what they are, German or American, communist or capitalist, man or woman.

### 2.5.2. In France

In France, communists introduced a bill into the French Assembly in 1949 to "prohibit the import, manufacture and sale of Coca-Cola in France, Algeria and the French colonial empire", stating that the soft drink was a danger to public health. They were strongly supported by winegrowers, who had an interest to get the product removed from the country. However, the bill was defeated and consequently the attempt to ban Coca Cola was doomed to failure.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, France's Communist press kept on invoking the dangers of Coca-Cola. The so called “Coca-Colonization” was perceived as an immense threat. The journal “Le Monde” commented, "What the French criticize is less Coca-Cola than its orchestration, less the drink itself, than the civilization -- or as they like to say, the style of life -- of which it is the symbol."<sup>2</sup> This demonstrates clearly that after all, it was not really the drink Coca-Cola that was seen as an American affront on French culture, but rather all American influences as a whole. The brand had become a symbol for the “American way of life”, and resisting Coca-Cola, was a way to show their negative attitude towards American domination.

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<sup>1</sup> “Foreign News: The Pause That Arouses”. 2.11.2010  
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,812138-1,00.html>>

<sup>2</sup> Kuisel, Richard F. *Seducing the French; the dilemma of Americanization*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1993 (Kuisel 1993), p.65

### 3. Coca-Colonization and Cultural Imperialism

#### 3.1. Coca-Colonization and Americanization

With the spread of the product, the term “Coca-colonization” came into existence. It first appeared in the French Communist Press during the 1950s. The portmanteau, combining the brand name Coca-Cola with the word colonization, is mostly used pejoratively to describe the growing import of American consumer goods that reputedly threatened local culture.<sup>1</sup> But according to a popular definition available on the internet, the phrase does not only refer to the importation of western goods, it also implies “the invasion by Western and especially American cultural values”.<sup>2</sup> This formulation emphasizes that with the implementation of the consumer good Coca-Cola, simultaneously the assertion of American culture generally comes along.

The perception of Americanization, which is used to describe the influence of the United States on the popular culture, technology, business practices, political techniques or language, of other countries<sup>3</sup>, is in many cases used as a synonym for Coca-Colonization, whereas it is normally not given such a negative connotation.

#### 3.2. Coca-Colonization as an Enrichment

Those formative influences exerted by one country on another can nevertheless also be appreciated as a gain. By thinking of Coca-Colonization and Americanization as the spread of modernity, the issue reaches a positive perception. The United States’ influences are in the interest not only for the U.S. but also of the world at large, because as a sophisticated country they introduce modern values and goods from which the other countries can benefit. Coca Cola is a “marker for the civilizing progress”<sup>4</sup> and with its spread, basic aspects of American culture like the economic system of capitalism and free market economy disseminate as well. Technological inventions like Henry Ford’s assembly line or Isaac Singer’s sewing machine, as well as the soft drink Coca Cola are parts of American culture and can be considered as an enrichment for others. The opinions, that the dissemination of Coca Cola does not necessarily have to result in cultural loss, and that the alleged dangers of products like Coca-Cola should not be taken too seriously, are shared by the historian Richard Pells.

“Still, the acceptance of Coca-Cola did not mean that Europeans were becoming more “Americanized” or that they had abandoned

<sup>1</sup> Kooijman, Jaap. *Fabricating the Absolute Fake; America in Contemporary Pop Culture*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2008 (Kooijman 2008), p.34f.

<sup>2</sup> “Cocacolonization”. 2.11.2010 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cocacolonization>>

<sup>3</sup> “Americanization”. 2.11.2010 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americanization>>

<sup>4</sup> Fritz 1985, p.23

beer and wine. Coke, after all, was a soft drink, not a foreign ideology. One could swallow it without giving up one's cultural loyalties or sense of national identity."<sup>1</sup>

### 3.3. Coca-Colonization as a Manifestation of Cultural Imperialism

The negative use of the term Coca-Colonization is based upon the assertion that through the importation of American goods and values, cultural heritage is destroyed. The United States is seen as a dominant nation, which tries to impose their culture upon all the others. Ludwig Marcuse, an exponent of European Anti-Americanism, describes the process of transition of different cultures to one standardized world culture as a consequence of America's all embracing influences, as followed:

"Europe and America no longer exist; there is only the phase of Western civilization which we call American because it came to birth in a European colony named America... Today Europe is a colony of its colony--and well on the way to becoming a second America."<sup>2</sup>

The global homogenization and the resulting loss of local culture, becoming apparent in the present citation, is the main argument for those, who oppose American influences. This negative evaluation of such cultural transfer is designated cultural imperialism.

With their spread, American products have to stand up to the local economic powers, kind of how Coca-Cola had to compete with the local beverage industries such as the wine industry in France and Italy, or the beer industry in Germany.<sup>3</sup> The U.S.'s desire for access to foreign markets hurts local industries, given that the majority of foreign industries are unable to compete with the economic strenght of U.S. The displacement of domestic goods by American products, and the emerge of a monotonous mass culture threatens traditional culture.

However, cultural imperialism does not only affect a country in reference to the economy. American influences throughout the world can be found in all domains of culture, which we all know but are often not aware of because they are so deep-seated in our everyday lives. Hollywood in the film industry, American ball games like basketball or football in sports, phenomenons like "McDonaldization" and Fastfood industry, the transfer of holidays like Halloween and even the natioanal language can be concerned. An example is the increased use of Anglicism or even the transformation of grammatical structures: Coca-Cola's advertising was criticized severely in France,

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<sup>1</sup> Kooijman 2008, p.36

<sup>2</sup> Wagnleitner, Reinhold. *Coca-colonization and the Cold War; The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1994 (Wagnleitner 1994), p. 8

<sup>3</sup> Fritz 1985, p.21

“but [Coca-Cola’s advertising] has ripped deep into what the French treasure most -- their language. One now sees posters and trucks bearing the inscription ‘Buvez Coca-Cola.’ You can say “Buvez du Coca-Cola” or ‘Buvez le Coca-Cola’ but you cannot say “Buvez Coca-Cola” because this is pidging French.”<sup>1</sup>



Fig.7: French Coca-Cola advertisement

Impacts of that ilk arouse fear that, due to the overwhelming influence of the United States, whole cultures might disappear gradually and Europe like the rest of the world, just like Ludwig Marcuse formulated it, is about to become “a second America”.

The motivation behind American cultural imperialism is the creed that American culture is more valuable and the belief that its influence is beneficial to other, “inferior” cultures. This belief in the superiority of U.S. culture is anything but new: This attitude was also visible in the age of imperialism in Latin America in the late nineteenth century. To justify this territorial expansion, America used the belief in its manifest destiny. It was the creed, that it was America’s mission to democratize the world. The editor John L. O’Sullivan, a fervent supporter of the Democratic Party, coined the expression and popularized it. In 1839 he described the United States as a nation whose fate was “to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High -- the Sacred and the True.”<sup>2</sup>

This approach can also be transferred to Coca Cola: One of Robert Woodruff’s first statements was that on earth there must not exist a “geographische[r] oder kulturelle[r] Breitengrad [...], der nicht an den Segnungen von Coca-Cola teil hätte”.<sup>3</sup> One could perceive it as Coca-Cola’s mission to refresh the world, and this mission was almost realized entirely: Today the soft drink is sold in over 200 countries. Only in North Korea, Cuba and Myanmar can Coca-Cola not be purchased.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Foreign News: The Pause That Arouses”. 2.11.2010  
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,812138-1,00.html>>

<sup>2</sup> “John L. O’Sullivan on Manifest Destiny, 1839”. 2.11.2010  
<<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/osulliva.htm>>

<sup>3</sup> Fritz 1985, p.63

<sup>4</sup> Exler 2006, p.7f

#### 4. Coca-Cola as a Symbol of the American Dream

The dissemination of Coca-Cola throughout the world and its development to a product being omnipresent in all our lives has formed Coca-Cola to what the editor William Allen White called “a sublimated essence of all America stands for”.<sup>1</sup> The softdrink represents American culture and mentality, to the same degree it also symbolizes the idea of the American Dream.

Even though it is basically impossible to give an exact definition of “the American Dream”, because of the term’s extreme vagueness and complexity, the idea is one shared by all Americans. As a key concept within American society it is deep-rooted in the country’s history and culture.

“From rags to riches” -- the idea that if someone works hard enough, he or she will necessarily prosper -- is one of the main concepts of the American dream, but by far not the only one. Many aspects have to be considered: the ideas of freedom, democracy, equality, the pursuit of happiness, togetherness or success, mentioned in the following are just some examples. Since everyone has another understanding for it, the American Dream is hard to conceptualize. Despite that, Coca-Cola absolutely can be named a symbol of the American Dream, because it stands for so many aspects of it.

Already the success story of Coca-Cola is part of the American Dream. Every year thousands and thousands of new products come into the market, but in most instances they disappear without being registered with the consumer. That a product becomes as ubiquitous and famous as Coca-Cola is exceptional. The home-brewed drink, originally sold as a wholesome beverage, has developed to a multi-billion dollar business. The brand value alone amounts 67,5 billion dollars, thus it is by far the most wealthiest one in the world.<sup>2</sup> To create a product like Coca-Cola must be the dream of every businessman.

During World War II the drink had boosted the morale of the troops, reminding them of their home country, peace, freedom and democracy. At the 1948 international Coca-Cola conference in Atlantic City a poster read: “When we think of the communists, we think of the Iron Curtain... But when they think of democracy, they think of Coca-Cola.”<sup>3</sup> This shows, that the idea of democracy, an inherent part of the American Dream, is enclosed in Coca-Cola as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Ramet, Sabrina P. and Crnkovic, Gordana. *Kazaaam! Splat! Ploof! The American Impact on European Popular Culture, since 1945*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2003, p.88

<sup>2</sup> Exler 2006, p.11

<sup>3</sup> Ramet/Crnkovic 2003, p.90

The product Coca-Cola is omnipresent. In almost every country of the world it can be purchased, and it is the same quality for everyone. It is available for everybody, no matter what class, age, sex or origin. Andy Warhol once said:

“you can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it.”<sup>1</sup>

Coca Cola announces the message, that through the consumption of the same product, a society comes into existence where all people are equal and social distinctions do not exist.

<sup>2</sup> Thus Coca Cola is a product, which unites the world and connects people. The ideas of equality, togetherness and the vision of a classless society, where people of different origins, races or religions would live in harmony and peace is part of the American Dream too.

America -- often referred to as “the country of unlimited possibilities” -- is seen by many as the place where everything is do-able and everybody can reach his goals. This attitude towards life, containing the feelings of freedom and happiness is conveyed by Coca-Cola.

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<sup>1</sup> “Coca-Cola”. 2.11.2010 <<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coca-Cola>>

<sup>2</sup> Fritz 1985, p.25

## 5. Coca-Cola in Advertising

### 5.1. The Company's Advertising Strategies

Playing a major role in Coca-Cola's history, advertising has contributed a lot to the success of the Coca-Cola Company. In 1886, when Coca-Cola was sold for the first time, an advertisement was published in the local newspaper "The Atlanta Journal", which read: "Coca-Cola, Delicious! Refreshing! Invigorating! The New and Popular Soda Fountain Drink, containing properties of the wonderful coca plant and the famous cola nuts."<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to experts, in 1886 the advertising budget had only been about forty-six dollars.<sup>2</sup>

Today the Coca-Cola company annually spends many millions of dollars on it. Over the years, when technology advanced, Coca-Cola's advertisement strategies became more and more sophisticated. Besides advertisements in newspapers and through bill boards, radio and later television have become the most important communication mediums. Early on, the company had also started to market itself through the sponsoring of sport activities. Since the Summer Olympics in Amsterdam in 1928, Coca-Cola has been an "official soft drink of the Olympic games". Coca-Cola also sponsored other big sporting events like the FIFA World Cup and for these reasons has been able to achieve more popularity.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most famous and successful campaigns would have to be the holiday campaign. This advertisement features a train of red delivery trucks, emblazoned with the Coca-Cola name and decorated with electric lights, driving through a snowy landscape. They cause everything that they pass to light up and people to watch as they pass through.<sup>4</sup> Part of this campaign was also the figure of Santa Clause, depicted as a chubby, bearded old man dressed in red and white -- the colours of Coca-Cola. It is often claimed that this is how the Santa Clause of today was invented. Christmas promotion started in 1930/31 and worked out so well, that it was launched regularly throughout the years.<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 8: Coca-Cola's Santa

The use of testimonials is another well-tried advertising strategy: This is the use of famous people to advertise the product and for this reason the consumers will see their

<sup>1</sup> Exler 2006, p.25

<sup>2</sup> Biedermann 1985, p.15

<sup>3</sup> Exler 2006, p.51

<sup>4</sup> "Coca-Cola". 2.11.2010 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coca-Cola>>

<sup>5</sup> Exler 2006, p.50

heroes with the product, and want to buy it. An example is Ray Charles, who sang “Things go better with Coke”. He is one of many celebrities, who gave Coca-Cola his voice.<sup>1</sup>

Since the turn of the century, it has been Coca Cola’s goal to remain ever-present in everyday life. Whether in drugstores, supermarkets, stadiums or at filling stations, Coca-Cola was available everywhere. Among these points of sale, the filling station is the one with the most distinctive symbolic character: Coke and gas, the both fuels that are vital for the American civilization.

## 5.2. Aspects of the American Dream in Coca-Cola’s Advertising

Through advertising, Coca-Cola’s attitude towards life is conveyed to the consumer. This philosophy, already described in the previous chapter, implies various aspects of the American Dream. In numerous advertising slogans and commercials those aspects can be recognised.

Coca-Cola’s promise to offer “a taste of freedom”<sup>2</sup> becomes apparent in the advertising slogan from 1926 “life liberty and the pursuit of thirst”. The idea of freedom, as a key concept of the American Dream also appears in an advertisement from 1969, which was published in all American magazines, which showed a Coca-Cola bottle. The text below it read: “America, Give me your tired, your hot, your thirsty, your weary, your parched, your worn-out [...]. Things go better with Coke.”<sup>3</sup> This is a modification of the Statue of Liberty’s inscription: “ Give me your tired, your poor/ your haddles masses yearning to breathe free/ The wretched refuse of your teeming shore/ send there, the homeless, tempest tossed to me/ I lift my lamp beside the golden Door.”<sup>4</sup> These are the lines of a sonnet by Emma Lazarus, which are to welcome the immigrants to the New World and promise them freedom. Thus this poem is an inherent part of the American Dream.

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<sup>1</sup> Exler 2006, p.90

<sup>2</sup> Howes, David. *Cross-cultural consumption: global markets, local realities*. London: Routledge 1996 (Howes 1996, p.4)

<sup>3</sup> Biedermann 1985, p.7 The full advertisement see appendix

<sup>4</sup> Fritz 1985, p.43



However, this was not the first time Coca-Cola was linked with the Statue of Liberty: Already in 1917 another advertisement was published, which showed a glass of Coca-Cola casting a shadow in the form of the Statue of Liberty's torch.<sup>1</sup> By putting Coca-Cola on a level with the Statue of Liberty, one of the most striking signs of freedom, also had helped turn the soft drink into a symbol of freedom.



Fig.9: Advertisement from 1917

Another example for a Coca-Cola advertisement that shows different aspects of the American Dream is a commercial from 1971. For this commercial the British band “The New Seekers” recorded the song “I’d like to buy the world a Coke...”, which became very popular. In the commercial, a group of multicultural teenagers, standing on a hilltop and each holding in the hand a Coca-Cola bottle, sing the song together:

“I’d like to buy the world a home  
And furnish it with love  
Grow apple trees and honey bees  
And snow white turtle doves

I’d like to teach the world to sing  
In perfect harmony  
I’d like to buy the world a Coke

And keep it company  
That’s the real thing

What the world wants today  
Is the real thing“<sup>2</sup>



Fig.10: The “Hilltop” Commercial from 1971

This commercial illustrates an attempt to portray Coca-Cola as a product capable of transcending political, religious, social, ethnic and economic differences. Through the consumption of Coca-Cola it is possible to unite the world and to achieve world peace. A world without frontiers, where all people live in harmony is depicted in this commercial. This vision of a peaceful world, where everyone is equal is certainly enclosed in the American Dream.

<sup>1</sup> Fritz 1985, p.44

<sup>2</sup> “Coke Lore, ‘I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke’ - The Hilltop Story”. 2.11.2010 <[http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/cokelore\\_hilltop.html](http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/cokelore_hilltop.html)>

The slogans “Have a Coke and be happy”<sup>1</sup> or “Open Happiness”<sup>2</sup>, state that with a Coca-Cola every need is fulfilled and happiness is guaranteed. Coca-Cola is “Happiness in a bottle”, and if you choose it to be your number one soft drink, you consequently choose to live on “the Coke Side of life”.<sup>3</sup> It is the positive side of life, where dreams come true.

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<sup>1</sup> Fritz 1985, p.155

<sup>2</sup> “Open happiness”. 3.11.2010 <[http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/presscenter/presskit\\_open\\_happiness.html](http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/presscenter/presskit_open_happiness.html)>

<sup>3</sup> “Coke Side Of Life”. 3.11.2010 <[http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/presscenter/presskit\\_CSOL.html](http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/presscenter/presskit_CSOL.html)>

## 6. Conclusion

Coca Cola was first produced and sold in 1886.<sup>1</sup> Over the years, and especially through its marketing, it became more and more popular and evolved into an item representing the American Dream. Whether the consumption of Coca-Cola really helps to complete one's dream, as Coca-Cola's advertisement announces it, is certainly questionable. A softdrink can not bring about world peace. Nevertheless it is a product symbolizing those visions, which are part of the American Dream. For everyone this concept can bear another meaning. Even though it is hardly possible to give an exact and universal definition for this term, there are some aspects, which presumably everyone would state, when asked to explain his or her vision of the American Dream: The feelings of freedom, peace, the pursuit of happiness and success might be some examples. Those notions are a part of what Coca-Cola stands for and thus make it an undeniable example for a product with symbolic character. Coca-Cola is "more than just a drink", that is what an advertising slogan from 1933 affirmed.<sup>2</sup> It is the liquefied manifestation of all promises of salvation that are enclosed in the American Dream.

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<sup>1</sup> Exler 2006, p.25

<sup>2</sup> Fritz 1985, p.153

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#### List of illustrations

Fig.1: <http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/presscenter/imageheritage.html>

Fig.2: <http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/tdgh-jan/Coca-Cola%20Logo.jpg>

Fig.3: <http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/presscenter/imageheritage.html>

Fig.4: [http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/presscenter/presskit\\_contour\\_bottle\\_image\\_library.html](http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/presscenter/presskit_contour_bottle_image_library.html)

Fig.5: <http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/presscenter/imageheritage.html>

Fig.6:  
[http://lh4.ggpht.com/\\_YdDLajn2pbI/SEYuP0IGxdI/AAAAAAAAAUQ/qTs5zBFSF3Q/Mach\\_mal\\_Pause\\_Coca\\_Cola.jpg](http://lh4.ggpht.com/_YdDLajn2pbI/SEYuP0IGxdI/AAAAAAAAAUQ/qTs5zBFSF3Q/Mach_mal_Pause_Coca_Cola.jpg)

Fig.7: <http://www.antique67.com/articles/coke/coke6.jpg>

Fig.8: <http://www.adclassix.com/images/coke2a.jpg>

Fig.9: Biedermann 1985, p.45

Fig.10: [http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/presscenter/img/imagehilltop/downloads/lg\\_hilltop\\_8.jpg](http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/presscenter/img/imagehilltop/downloads/lg_hilltop_8.jpg)

Appendix

# America,

Give me your tired, your hot, your thirsty,  
 your weary, your parched, your worn-out,  
 your mothers, your fathers, your sisters, your brothers,  
 your sons, your daughters, your surfers, your skiers,  
 your football players, your basketball players, your  
 yachtsmen, your pole vaulters, your hockey stars, your  
 lacrosse stars, your swimmers, your jockeys, your  
 baseball players, your soccer players, your weight-  
 lifters, your ping pong players, your chess enthusiasts,  
 your checker whizzes, your bridge players, your poker  
 players, your mah jong players, your kibitzers, your  
 sun worshippers, your moon worshippers, your potato  
 chip nuts, your pretzel eaters, your salted peanuts  
 fans, your hot dog eaters, your hamburger eaters,  
 your pizza pie eaters, your chili con carne devotees,  
 your steelworkers, your scientists, your gefilte fish  
 gourmets, your spaghetti eaters, your meat and potato  
 men, your tuna fish eaters, your fried chicken experts,  
 your bacon lettuce and tomato on toast eaters, your  
 cabdrivers, your pilots, your stewardesses, your travel  
 agents, your travelers, your poets, your construction  
 men, your insurance salesmen, your diplomats, your  
 secretaries, your telephone operators, your vacuum  
 cleaner salesmen, your ushers, your hippies, your  
 high school students yearning to pass math.

Things go better with Coke.

Erklärung zur Seminararbeit

*"Ich habe diese Seminararbeit ohne fremde Hilfe angefertigt und nur die im Literaturverzeichnis angeführten Quellen und Hilfsmittel benützt."*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ort, Datum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Unterschrift