

Havel in America

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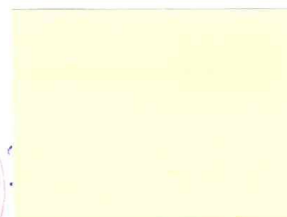
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na odkaz Václava Havla v Americe výhradně ze socio-politického hlediska. Jeho odkaz je v práci analyzován na základě svědectví významných amerických osobností a informací o iniciativách a památnících, které se v USA snaží ukázat respekt a úctu Havlovi. Ten se stal mezinárodním symbolem svobody a demokracie. V této práci je také hodnocena relevantnost a aktuálnost jeho slov, společně s tím, jak moc Havel působil na vývoj Ameriky a její a charakter.

Klíčová slova: Amerika, Česká republika, Československo, Kongres, odkaz Václava Havla, politika, Spojené státy, Václav Havel

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis is focused on the legacy of Václav Havel in America, especially from the socio-political point of view. The analysis is based on prominent American testimonies, initiatives and memorials that demonstrate the American respect and reverence for Havel, who, despite being Czech, has become an international symbol of freedom and democracy. Also, the relevance and topicality of Havel's words are discussed, as is his influence on American character and development.

Keywords: America, Congress, Czech Republic, Czechoslovakia, legacy, politics, United States, Václav Havel

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I hereby declare that the print version of my bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

The Czech politician Václav Havel gained rock star-status in the United States in the 1990s when he visited there, gave speeches, and met with presidents and other important public figures. During his political career, Havel desired to ensure that the relationship between his country and America would be stable and mutually beneficial, and would further the cause of democracy worldwide, and he worked diligently to see this desire come to fruition. As a result of such efforts, Americans grew to revere Havel as an international symbol of freedom and democracy, so much so that a bust of Havel was installed in the U.S. Capitol building in 2014, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, making him only the fourth foreigner to be so honored.¹ Over six years after this installation, Havel was once again thrust into the American limelight when this bust was donned with a Trumpian “Make America Great Again” cap during the U.S. Capitol riot of January 6, 2021. This symbolic act was perpetrated by Trump supporters who supposedly equated Trump’s words concerning “fake news” and “stolen elections” with the famous quote by Havel that “truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred.” In response, Czech journalist Pavel Fisher points out that Havel, if he were alive today, would have probably viewed this action as absurd.² Havel, he notes, favored human reflection, humbleness, and responsibility, and not riotous behavior spurred on by a manipulative megalomaniac who was actively challenging democracy.³ In any case, the fact that the rioters singled out Havel as a like-minded individual demonstrates not only that his legacy is in flux in America, the result of his words and actions being interpreted in various ways by various groups for various political purposes,⁴ but that Havel remains important to Americans, even a decade after his death.

¹ Václav Havel Library, “Ceremonial Unveiling of a Bust of Václav Havel at the House of Representatives,” <https://www.vaclavhavel.cz/en/index/calendar/696/ceremonial-unveiling-of-a-bust-of-vaclav-havel-at-the-house-of-representatives>.

² Pavel Fisher, “Havel s Trumpem na hlavě,” *Český Rozhlas*, 8 January 2021, <https://plus.rozhlas.cz/petr-fischer-havel-s-trumpem-na-hlave-8399783>.

³ Václav Havel, “A Joint Session of the U.S. Congress,” Speech, Washington, D.C., 21 February 1990, http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/1990/2102_uk.html.

⁴ Fisher, “Havel s Trumpem na hlavě.”

1 BIOGRAPHY

Václav Havel (1936-2011) was a Czech dramatist and essayist, the last president of Czechoslovakia and the first president of the Czech Republic. He came from a bourgeois background, his father being a wealthy entrepreneur.⁵ In communist Czechoslovakia in the late 1950s, this made getting into a university program difficult, but after completing his two years of compulsory military service, he was accepted by the Theatre Faculty of Academy of Performing Arts, from which he graduated in 1966.⁶ While studying, and working as a stage hand, he published several essays and articles on literature and drama, and he authored two of his most famous plays: *The Garden Party* (1963) and *The Memorandum* (1965).⁷

In 1968, during the Prague Spring, Havel actively participated in protests for political liberalization and change in Czechoslovakia. After the uprising was repressed, he often spoke out against normalization, all the while continuing to write plays, most notably *The Increased Difficulty of Concentration* (1969) and *The Audience* (1975). In January 1977, he signed the so-called Charter 77, the purpose of which was to remind the government of two international covenants on human rights that it had signed in 1968.⁸ As a result of his dissent and involvement in Charter 77, he was arrested and detained for five months for “harming state interests abroad.” During his time in custody, he was offered the chance to emigrate to the United States, but he refused, choosing instead to stay and protest. Due to such activities, he was imprisoned again in 1979, this time for four years, during which he wrote *Letters to Olga* (1983), in which he presented his philosophy through topics such as political responsibility, morality, and his relationship with God. Upon his release, he published *Largo Desolato*, a play about an intellectual dissident who is a moral leader but struggles with his identity.⁹

⁵ Knihovna Václava Havla, “Václav Havel: Family,” <https://www.vaclavhavel.cz/en/vaclav-havel/family>.

⁶ Knihovna Václava Havla, “Václav Havel: Early years,” <https://www.vaclavhavel.cz/en/vaclav-havel/early-years>.

⁷ Prague Castle, “Václav Havel,” <https://www.hrad.cz/en/president-of-the-cr/former-presidents/vaclav-havel>.

⁸ Gordon H. Skilling, “Socialism and Human Rights: Charter 77 and the Prague Spring,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 20, no. 2 (1978): 157-175, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.1978.11091519>.

⁹ Knihovna Václava Havla, “Václav Havel: Dissident,” <https://www.vaclavhavel.cz/en/vaclav-havel/dissident>.

In response to his plays, he was becoming increasingly popular in the West, which began to lend him political support. As his international popularity increased, however, so did his harassment at home. The police increasingly monitored him, and even raided his home, confiscating many of his books, photos, and personal correspondence. Such intimidation tactics, however, did not stop him from making public appearances, speaking at demonstrations, and talking about Charter 77 with foreign authorities. As a result of such activities, he was again sentenced to prison, this time for nine months, in 1989.¹⁰ His release happened to coincide with massive demonstrations against the government. Havel became the head of the Civic Forum, an opposition group that did not support the Communist government and demanded changes in the political situation.¹¹ Ultimately, the Forum was able to topple the Communist Party without violence in what came to be known as the Velvet Revolution. “Once Soviet communism was collapsing, Czechoslovak communism followed suit, because nobody was ready to fight for it.”¹² Soon afterward, Havel was elected Czechoslovak president. During his inauguration, he pledged to keep Czechoslovakia a democratic country and support free elections.¹³ On February 21, 1990, Havel addressed a joint session of the United States Congress. His speech was about his life, Soviet oppression, and the situation in Czechoslovakia. He also mentioned the need for respect for individuality, freedom, and cooperation.¹⁴ Havel’s speech, which was broadcasted live in Czechoslovakia, was “interrupted” by seventeen standing ovations.¹⁵

In 1992, Havel resigned from the presidency because he did not support the impending dissolution of Czechoslovakia into the Czech and Slovak republics. Then, in January 1993, he was elected the first president of the newly-formed Czech Republic, a position that he held for a decade. During this presidency, he focused on building civil society, preparing and negotiating the Czech Republic’s accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1999) and to the European Union (2004). His good relations with American political leaders such as Bill Clinton and Madeleine Albright made such negotiations easier.¹⁶

¹⁰ Knihovna Václava Havla, “Václav Havel: Dissident.”

¹¹ Prague Castle, “Václav Havel.”

¹² Tucker Aviezer, *The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 170.

¹³ Prague Castle, “Václav Havel.”

¹⁴ Jolana Humpálová, „Nejinstitutivnější projev v historii. Kongresman vzpomíná na Havla v USA,” February 22 2020, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/nejinspirativnejsi-projev-v-historii-kongresman-vzpomina-na-havla-v-usa-89772>.

¹⁵ Michael Žantovský, *Havel* (Prague: Argo, 2014), 359.

¹⁶ Knihovna Václava Havla, “Václav Havel: President,” <https://www.vaclavhavel.cz/en/vaclav-havel/president>.

After his mandate ended in 2003, Havel received numerous accolades for his activities supporting human rights and democracy. Also, for his literary output, he received many state honors and honorary doctorates.¹⁷ Among many awards, he won the Erasmus Prize for fighting for upholding “the idea that genuine peace between countries can only be achieved if every individual citizen in those countries has the chance to live in a free and just society.”¹⁸ Vaclav Havel died on Sunday, December 18, 2011, the result, noted his biographer, of “a progressive general exhaustion combined with a sudden loss of the will and the fighting spirit that had characterized him for most of his life.” Upon his death, condolences came in droves.¹⁹

U.S. president Barack Obama said that he admired Havel’s ability to “work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.” Obama also mentioned that Havel was a hero because he not only exposed the wrong side of a totalitarian system but proved that weapons are not as powerful as good and moral leadership. Former president George W. Bush also sent condolences in which he mentioned that Havel’s liberty-oriented opinions not only changed Czechoslovakia’s direction but the world’s. He characterized Havel as “dignified, charming, humble, and determined.” Bush and Obama both noted that Havel’s life was not easy, and that he suffered greatly in the name of freedom, but that in doing so he became “one of its greatest heroes.”²⁰

¹⁷ Prague Castle, “Václav Havel.”

¹⁸ Praemium Erasmianum Foundation, “Václav Havel,” <https://erasmusprijs.org/en/laureates/vaclav-havel>.

¹⁹ Žantovský, *Havel*, 20-22.

²⁰ CNN Wire Staff, “World Reacts to Vaclav Havel’s Death,” 18 December 2011, <https://edition.cnn.com/2011/12/18/world/europe/czech-republic-havel-reax/index.html>.

2 CONGRESS SPEECH

On February 22, 1990, Havel addressed a joint session of the U.S. Congress. It must have been a unique experience to speak to such a powerful and important body, especially for a man who never saw himself as a politician or a president. And this, after he met President George Bush and had a formal luncheon with congressmen. He began his address with the shocking phrase, “the last time they arrested me, . . .” and kept the Congress in rapt attention from then on.²¹ The speech, which lasted for an hour, was consecutively interpreted into English, and which was broadcasted live in Czechoslovakia, was “interrupted” by seventeen standing ovations.²² “Paradoxically,” reported Radio Prague International, Havel “devoted much of his historic speech . . . appealing to Washington to help – not Czechoslovakia but the Soviet Union. Doing so, he said, was the best hope to ensure newfound freedoms.”²³

2.1 Political part

The speech had two main parts: political and philosophical. He began by describing the situation in Czechoslovakia. He mentioned that it used to be ruled by a strict and conservative Communist party that operated a totalitarian system, but that, after the Velvet Revolution, it had been transformed into “a country which has complete freedom of speech, which is preparing for free elections, and which seeks to establish a prosperous market economy and its own foreign policy.”²⁴

Another topic was cooperation and gratefulness for having America, the world’s most powerful country, as an ally. He mentioned that Europe had to face significant threats and issues, and Americans were quick to intervene and help. Havel also recognized that it was the cooperation between U.S. president Woodrow Wilson and Czech statesman Tomas G. Masaryk that enabled Masaryk to found an independent Eastern European state based on U.S. values and principles. Opposing such values and principles was the Soviet Union, the second most powerful nation. Also founded on utopian ideals, over time, the Soviet Union became unpredictable, erratic, and dangerous. Nobody knew what its rulers would decide to do, who they would try to conquer or “drag into its sphere of influence.” America and the

²¹ Susan Page, “For Havel, Cheers on a New Stage Czech Leader Gets Praise in Congress,” *Newsday*, 22 February 1990, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/278198823?accountid=15518>.

²² Žantovský, *Havel*, 359.

²³ Brian Kenety, “1990: Mr Havel goes to Washington,” February 2 2020, Radio Prague International, <https://english.radio.cz/1990-mr-havel-goes-washington-8107427>.

²⁴ Václav Havel, “A Joint Session of the U.S. Congress,” Speech, Washington, D.C., 21 February 1990, http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/1990/2102_uk.html.

Soviet Union became two enormous forces battling over the identity of Europe. Havel noted that Americans “may have contributed to the salvation of us Europeans, of the world and thus of yourselves for a third time: You have helped us to survive until today without a hot war this time, merely a cold one.”²⁵

Havel then transitioned into discussing how the United States could “help the world today.” He probably surprised his audience by stating that, if America wants to help the world, it must start with the Soviet Union, helping its long-time enemy to peacefully and quickly evolve into a democracy, no matter how complicated and demanding such a change might be. Doing so would benefit America as well, allowing it to “reduce the burden of the military budget.” And reduced military spending, noted Havel, would be just the beginning: “the millions you give to the East today soon will return to you in the form of billions in savings.”²⁶

He also expressed support for President Bush, who initiated a reduction of American and Soviet troops in Europe, including the surprisingly speedy withdrawal of Soviet forces from Czechoslovakia. Havel then announced his intention to reduce the size of the Czechoslovak army, which he considered out of proportion in comparison with the population of the country. Finally, he expressed hope that Czechoslovakia would make a successful return to Europe, both politically and economically, and “returnees” would not be a detriment to Europe but rather an advantage.²⁷

2.2 Philosophical part

Havel then turned philosophical, stating, “I have only been president for two months, and I have not attended any schools for presidents. My only school was life itself.” Even so, he knew enough to know that democracy is an ideal that cannot be achieved fully, because people will never be able to live in a “democratic utopia.” Nevertheless, countries can at least strive for democratic perfection, using the American 200-year-old democracy as a model. Compared to Czechoslovakia and other Communist countries suffering under a

²⁵ Havel, “A Joint Session of the U.S. Congress.”

²⁶ Havel, “A Joint Session of the U.S. Congress.”

²⁷ Havel, “A Joint Session of the U.S. Congress.”

totalitarian system, many obvious advantages resulted: the American economy was not in decline; Americans were not dying and were not humiliated or oppressed.²⁸

Even though post-Communist countries, recognized Havel, have much to learn from America, they still have experience and knowledge to offer in return. Timothy Barney wrote in his journal article: “not only could he educate his American audience about his own journey and his nation’s journey, the Czechs, Slovaks, and even by extension Poles, Hungarians, and others had moral advantages that Americans did not have.”²⁹ For example, they can provide insights into the communist ideology: how it works and how it is enforced. Such insights would prove useful in the global fight against Communism. Then Havel said, “the specific experience I’m talking about has given me one great certainty: Consciousness precedes Being, and not the other way around, as Marxists claim.”³⁰ Consciousness is, in this sense, everything we think: our opinions, ideas, dreams, myths, truths. And Being is who we are resulting from our gender, environment, economic class, etc. Marxists claimed that where and who we are results in what we think. Havel believed that what we think influences our environment and determines whom we become. Therefore, he appealed to people’s behavior, morality, and ethics.³¹ He stated that the future of the world depends on our hearts, humbleness, and responsibility. Havel saw a link between human conscientiousness and the state of the world. In his opinion, without “a global revolution,” the world is headed toward catastrophe – demographic, social, and ecological.³²

In terms of morality, Havel saw society as incapable of placing it before politics, science, and economics. In his opinion, responsibility is the basis of morality. “Responsibility to something higher than my family, my country, my firm, my success.” Therefore, Havel decided to engage in politics and fight for morality. If people just talked about what is right and had programs and plans but nobody to carry them out, the world would not progress. The last appeal to the congresspeople was to transform their (and in general people’s) words into actions. He said, “I will end where I began. History has

²⁸ Havel, “A Joint Session of the U.S. Congress.”

²⁹ Timothy Barney, “Václav Havel at the End of the Cold War: The Invention of Post-Communist Transition in the Address to U.S. Congress, February 21, 1990,” *Communication Quarterly* 67, no. 5 (October 2019): 560-583, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2019.1668444>.

³⁰ Havel, “A Joint Session of the U.S. Congress.”

³¹ “What Did Congress Hear? Something about Nacho Chips?” *Washington Post*, 3 March 1990, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1990/03/03/what-did-congress-hear-something-about-nacho-chips/135d4bbf-2bcd-47f7-9aa2-6ac387b455f9/>.

³² Havel, “A Joint Session of the U.S. Congress.”

accelerated. I believe that once again, it will be the human spirit that will notice this acceleration, give it a name, and transform those words into deeds.”³³

2.3 Reactions

After Havel’s speech, Bush declared him “one of the heroes of the revolution of 1989.” He also mentioned the admirable transformation of Havel, going from rags to riches – from prisoner to president. Bush also valued Havel for not begging for American aid but for asking for an investment. In response, Bush decided to establish a Peace Corps program that would help to train English teachers in Czechoslovakia. He also pledged to open the U.S. market to Czechoslovakian products.³⁴

Recently, former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright characterized Havel’s speech to Congress as “very idealistic” and “not the sort that most national leaders would give.” But, Havel’s ideas and convictions were different from those of other presidents in general. He was not into political rhetoric that would use fear, aggressivity, and anger to prove his points. He did not like divisive rhetoric. She also said that even though the speech delivery was relatively poor (he had never been a professional public speaker and his English was not on the highest level), it did not matter because he was uniquely authentic. She then concluded that, to preserve Havel’s legacy, people should fight the enemy and commit to the greater good, thereby fulfilling their civic and moral responsibilities.³⁵

Many people in America still remember Havel’s speech. An article “Havel’s Speech Resonates Today” describes an event called “Václav Havel, Speaking Today” that took place in the Capitol Visitor Center Auditorium. It aimed to highlight his historic speech and to remember his legacy. Almost 400 people attended this event on February 18, 2020. Madeleine Albright spoke there about Havel and provided the audience some background to the speech. Also, Martin Palouš, the director of the Vaclav Havel Center for Human Rights and Democracy, talked about Havel’s political opinions and playwright career. He said,

³³ Havel, “A Joint Session of the U.S. Congress.”

³⁴ Marilyn Greene, “Bush Hails Havel: ‘Hero of ‘89,’” *USA Today*, 21 February 1990, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/306267938?accountid=15518>.

³⁵ Madeleine Albright, “The Legacy of Vaclav Havel and the Future of Democracy,” Speech, Washington D.C., National Endowment for Democracy, 5 October 2016, <https://www.ned.org/madeleine-albrights-remarks-the-legacy-of-vaclav-havel-and-the-future-of-democracy/>.

“Havel ultimately accepted the main role in his own political drama.” Meaning, he did not refuse to participate in what he came up with; Havel was not only speaking about issues, but he was ready to do the hard work himself.³⁶

³⁶ “Havel’s Speech Resonates Today,” 20 February 2020, Embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington, D.C. https://www.mzv.cz/washington/en/culture_events/news/havel_s_speech_resonates_today.html.

3 TESTIMONIES

The testimonies of Bill Clinton, Madeleine Albright, George H. W. Bush, George W. Bush, and Carl Gershman are included in the thesis to help understand Havel's influence in America. They talk about their perception of his legacy and experience with Havel. It gives a better insight into what Americans think about Havel's ideas, values, and convictions.

3.1 Bill Clinton

Bill Clinton was the 42nd president of the United States (from 1993 to 2001). He cooperated with Havel when the Czech Republic was about to join NATO in 1999 and when the Czech Republic was preparing to be a part of the European Union. He also supported the economic transformation of the Czech Republic. When it comes to his relationship with Havel, Clinton perceived Havel as a real friend,³⁷ stating, "I had always watched Havel closely from afar. So, I felt that we would be friends from the beginning. And I knew that I admired him."³⁸

The first time Clinton and Havel met was at Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's house. Afterwards, Clinton described Havel as an amiable person who was full of life. They bonded over their appreciation of music, especially jazz and rock-and-roll. He also liked Havel because he was not "easy to read," and because he never supported any dogma or ideologue, and he never trusted people who did so. Havel, noted Clinton, wanted people to embrace "universal values" and act in accordance with them. Such values included not just universal suffrage, but also human rights and minority rights. He also recognized that it is crucial to have allies with a similar mindset, who would make it easier to build a stable democracy.

People also liked Havel because he remained down to earth. He knew that happiness and real-life joy did not stem from fame or political power. Even though he had both, he never vied for superiority. Clinton knew the situation in the Czech lands, and he appreciated Havel's realism. Both Clinton and Havel recognized that the transition from a totalitarian system to a democracy is a long process that requires debates, wise leadership, and patience. They both agreed that direction was key. Even small steps were positive, if they took place freely.

³⁷ Rosamund, Johnston and Lenka Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe: Rozhovory s americkými intelektuály, politiky a umělci*, (Brno: Host, 2019), ISBN 978-80-7577-604-4

³⁸ Vaclav Havel Library Foundation, "Clinton Interview." <http://dpanther.fiu.edu/dpS-ervice/dpPurlService/purl/FI14103414/00001>

Clinton believed that Havel's playwright career played an essential role in his life and contributed to his overall political success. He knew how politics should work and that totalitarian systems make people weak, helpless, and machine-like. He used his absurdist dramas to criticize the totalitarian system in Czechoslovakia.³⁹

Clinton perceived Havel as a hard-working person who never gave up. Like filmmaker Miloš Forman, he could have left Czechoslovakia for good and been famous in New York, but he did not. He stayed to work and fight for what was right. He tried hard to change Czechoslovakia's situation. This type of dedication appealed to many Americans, even if from afar. Also, he was one of the very few people, who freed their countries non-violently, except for Havel it was Gandhi and Mandela.⁴⁰

3.2 Madeleine Albright

Madeleine Albright is an American politician and diplomat of Czech origin. She was born in Prague, and at university, she wrote a dissertation thesis on the Czechoslovak press in 1968. In 1990 was Albright one of the organizers of Havel's official visit to Washington. She has been an important person when it comes to the relationship between the Czech Republic and America. As Havel's adviser and translator, they were very close friends. He believed her a lot when it came to political matters because she was one of the most influential people contributing to the Czech accession to NATO.

The first time they met was in 1990 when Albright went to Prague as a vice-chair of the National Democratic Institute and was a friend of Jiri Dienstbier, a Foreign Minister. He made it possible to meet Havel at the Prague Castle. Albright claims that she felt from the very beginning that Havel's effort and interest in Czechoslovakia was extraordinary. He was exactly how she portrayed him, and as she says, „I thought he was the incarnation of what Czechoslovakia needed to be.“⁴¹

Madeleine Albright remembers Havel as a very modest person. No matter the circumstances, he has always been humble. Even though his works were spectacular, he was quite self-critical. She stated that she had to remind him what he has done and how great he is because he underestimated himself. When Albright and Havel went together to see his plays in New York, he did not present himself as a huge star. Instead of criticizing others,

³⁹ Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 48-50, 57.

⁴⁰ Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 55-57.

⁴¹ Vaclav Havel Library Foundation, "Albright Interview."

<http://dpanther.fiu.edu/dpService/dpPurlService/purl/FI17082901/00001>

he said that he could have done it differently. For her, it was interesting to observe the audience as well as Havel's reactions. She said that not everybody was able to understand it fully, but they seemed amused.⁴² "They had done a whole retrospective in New York of all his plays, and I think people were not just charmed but fascinated by the variety of his plays."⁴³

She claims that for Václav Havel was typical humanism, morality, respect for individuality, and interpersonal relationships. In an interview with Kabrhelová, she said that meeting Havel was a life lesson because she spent much time studying and reading about Czechoslovakia during communism. She wrote a thesis on the Czechoslovakian media press in 1968, and their friendship helped her understand this topic (and in general, the totalitarian system) even better.⁴⁴ "There's no way to describe to you what an unbelievable honour it was to know him at all, and then to become friends with him was beyond my imagination."⁴⁵

When Albright compared herself to Havel, she pointed out that they had a slightly different opinion on some political matters. It was mainly because they both had a very different life experience; the communist government influenced him. Therefore, he was sceptical of a system in which just a few dominating political parties run the country. For him, civic society and various movements were more important. Albright was from the democratic West, so she was defending the role and significance of large but democratic parties and loyal opposition.⁴⁶

When it comes to Vaclav Havel's legacy, Albright mentioned that Havel is a moral leadership role model. He was not refusing responsibility for his actions, and through this, he showed people that they could do great things if they are willing to take a risk and hold themselves accountable afterwards. Also, he did not seek his good in power, but he used it for better purposes – to protect others, make their lives better, and make sure they live in freedom. Albright stated that "the governments are actually the servants of the people and not the other way around." That is a statement that agrees with Havel's ideas and convictions.⁴⁷

⁴² Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 88.

⁴³ Vaclav Havel Library Foundation, "Albright Interview."
<http://dpanther.fiu.edu/dpService/dpPurlService/purl/FI17082901/00001>

⁴⁴ Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 85-86.

⁴⁵ Vaclav Havel Library Foundation, "Albright Interview."
<http://dpanther.fiu.edu/dpService/dpPurlService/purl/FI17082901/00001>

⁴⁶ Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 89.

⁴⁷ Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 99-100.

3.3 George H. W. Bush

George H. W. Bush was American president from 1989 to 1993, and his presidency started the new era of relationships with Central and Western Europe.⁴⁸ He played an essential role during the unification of Europe. Together with Michail Gorbachov, they were the initiators of the end of the Cold War, which resulted in the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, unification of Germany and the collapse of the USSR. Žantovský, Havel's biographer and the director of Vaclav Havel library, said that it would not happen without the United States because they played a critical role and led the whole process.⁴⁹ Bush was also the first president to officially visit Czechoslovakia in its 70-year history. In an interview with Stapleton, he said that Vaclav Havel was a great man who never acted high and mighty. He was always very thoughtful but realistic at the same time.⁵⁰

During his visit to Czechoslovakia in 1990 (it was the anniversary of the Velvet Revolution), he spoke to the public on the Wenceslas Square to remind the importance of the relationship between America and Czechoslovakia. In his speech, he expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to be the first American president to visit Czechoslovakia after such a difficult period.⁵¹ His stay was “part of a wider tour of America's allies”; therefore, it had a strong political subtext. To demonstrate his belief in Czechoslovakia's “new liberty”, he donated a copy of their Liberty Bell, saying, “In 1776, when our Declaration of Independence was first read in public, a bell tolled to proclaim the defiant thrill of that moment...”⁵²

3.4 George W. Bush

George W. Bush jr. was American president from 2001 to 2009. During that time, America was going through the “war against terrorism.” In an interview with Stapleton, Bush said that he perceived Havel as a very smart, kind, and brave person. Havel's view on terrorism was apparent – in countries where freedom is absent, people are willing to kill others to enforce their ideology. Therefore, powerful, and democratic countries should help and stop

⁴⁸ Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 111.

⁴⁹ “Žantovský: Role Bushe staršího při sjednocení Evropy byla rozhodující. S Havlem si padli do oka,” *iRozhlas*, 1 December 2018, https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/george-bush-stars-i-michael-zantovsky-vaclav-havel_1812011616_jgr.

⁵⁰ Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 111-113.

⁵¹ Knihovna Václava Havla. “George Bush.” 1 December 2018.

<https://www.vaclavhavel.cz/cs/index/novinky/1029/george-bush-12-6-1924-30-11-2018>.

⁵² David Vaughan, “George Bush Sr. tolls a bell for Czechoslovakia,” *Radio Prague International*, 22 September 2012, <https://english.radio.cz/george-bush-sr-tolls-a-bell-czechoslovakia-8551027>.

tyranny. Because in order to have peace and prosperity, the key factors are freedom, cooperation, and respect for individuality. Havel supported the operation in Afghanistan and Iraq because he stood for the idea that peace required difficult decisions.⁵³

In 2003 Vaclav Havel received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from George W. Bush. The Medal is “the highest civilian award in the United States and recognizes exceptional meritorious service.” He was the first Czech and one of the very few non-Americans who got this highly prestigious award. The president and his advisory board choose who will be awarded that price based on their life achievements regarding freedom, democracy or supporting other national interests. The non-American awardees are Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Kohl or Jacques-Yves Cousteau. Havel received this award for his exceptional commitment to freedom, foreign policy involvement, and perseverance during Communist rule.⁵⁴

3.5 Carl Gershman

The U.S. National Endowment for Democracy (NED) supports democracy and its development worldwide, especially in non-democratic nations like Cuba, China, Russia, or Northern Korea. The NED also supported the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia. The organization’s president, Carl Gershman, once struggled to keep the organization afloat because, although Congress had funded the NED, so members did not see the point in maintaining it. In 1990, Gershman invited Ivan Havel and former Czechoslovak politician Martin Palouš to speak to Congress to change their minds. Using Czechoslovakia as a concrete example, they clarified the organization’s purpose.⁵⁵ Afterwards, the NED and the Havel administration developed a “mutually beneficial relationship.”⁵⁶ Americans helped develop democracy in Czechoslovakia, and in return, Czechs and Slovaks lobbied for the NED organization in America. In the process, Václav Havel influenced Gershman by increasing his commitment to democratic principles and values.⁵⁷

⁵³ Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 112-115.

⁵⁴ Vladimír Tax, “Havel to receive U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom,” *Radio Prague International*, 23 July, 2003. <https://english.radio.cz/havel-receive-us-presidential-medal-freedom-8076320>.

⁵⁵ Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 159-160.

⁵⁶ Vaclav Havel Library Foundation, “Gershman Interview,” <http://dpanther.fiu.edu/dpService/dpPurlService/purl/FI17082900/00001>.

⁵⁷ Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 159-160.

When talking about Havel, Gershman said that the permanency of Havel's legacy is important because he understood the dire situation in which the world found itself and yet managed to stay positive and never lost his sense of humor.⁵⁸ His coping mechanism was "living in truth." Although not religious, Havel wanted people to focus on their spiritual sides, to take responsibility for something larger than themselves. "Pursuing the truth," thought Havel, would lead to increased freedom. Yet, even when people are free, they still should not become complacent, because true freedom requires continuous effort. In fact, notes Gershman, Havel saw complacency, ignorance, and blindness as the enemies of progress and freedom,⁵⁹ along with "greed, and self-interest, and materialism." Havel, concluded Gershman, "worried about the complacency of people who live in stable, affluent societies" like the United States, and "he thought he had a responsibility to alert them."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Vaclav Havel Library Foundation, "Gershman Interview."

⁵⁹ Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 161-164.

⁶⁰ Vaclav Havel Library Foundation, "Gershman Interview."

4 CZECH-AMERICAN MATTERS

Havel's influence was an essential factor in Czech-American matters. He worked hard to become a respected figure that will have his say in politics during his life. It started with Charter 77 when Havel gained international recognition. Then, when NATO accession was his objective, it was easier for him to strengthen those relationships.

4.1 Charter 77

Charter 77 drew the attention of many nations, not just the United States, because of many factors. One of them was a contradiction in the theory and practice of socialism. Even though the 1975 Helsinki Accords, signed by Czechoslovakia, were supposed to guarantee human rights, Czechoslovakia continued to violate them by oppressing its citizens. Another was a contradiction in the expectations and reality of socialism. There was a noticeable difference between the "socialism with human face" system put forth by First Secretary Alexander Dubček in the late-1960s and the more Soviet-like reality of normalization under Gustav Husák's régime in the 1970s. Charter 77 was a bold, open, and direct confrontation of this regime. It mentioned many human rights violations, including "freedom of expression, freedom from fear, freedom of information and the press, religious freedom, the right to travel, and non-discrimination in education." It also mentioned excessive surveillance and illegal searches and seizures, which were in direct violation not only of the Helsinki Accords but of the CSSR's Constitution and should have been banned.⁶¹

The whole situation around Charter 77 became an international concern quite quickly because the Communists took serious counter-measures against it. Sympathy for the chartists was wide-ranging, even among leaders of other socialist nations. U.S. President Jimmy Carter agreed with the chartists' call for human rights, and under his direction, the U.S. State Department officially declared that the Czechoslovak government had truly violated the Helsinki Accords.⁶²

On January 26, 1977, Florida Congressman Dante Fascell declared Charter 77 and other protest activities in Czechoslovakia to be signs of a "thirst for liberty." The charter, he said, appealed to the Czechoslovak government to "respect [the] human rights and fundamental freedoms freely" agreed upon in Helsinki, but which had since been "curtailed" or taken

⁶¹ Gordon H. Skilling, "Socialism and Human Rights: Charter 77 and the Prague Spring," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 20, no. 2 (1978): 157-175, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.1978.11091519>.

⁶² Gordon H. Skilling, "Socialism and Human Rights: Charter 77 and the Prague Spring," (1978): 157-175.

away. He then condemned the Czechoslovak government's efforts to extinguish "that spark of hope" among its people, by arresting or torturing leading dissidents such as Havel. In doing so, concluded Fascell, the government had broken the "crucial promise" it had made in Helsinki and should be disrespected and held accountable for so doing. Finally, in support of his claims, he asked that a full translation of Charter 77 be included in the Congressional Record.⁶³ President Ronald Reagan would later agree with Fascell's appraisal and call on Czechoslovakia to respect the human rights detailed in the Helsinki Accords. He also stated his appreciation of the "bravery and steadfastness" of those who fought for "their democratic convictions."⁶⁴

4.2 NATO

In the early 1990s, one of Havel's first objectives was a quick dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia. Initially, he questioned the purpose of NATO once the Pact is over. However, soon he realized that NATO should have its place in Europe since it is a security guarantee and political partnership. He also believed that it is essential to have it open to new members.⁶⁵

Havel started working on the expansion of NATO in 1993. The United States was a key member, and Havel's attitude towards America was quite positive. He openly expressed his gratefulness to America for defending freedom in Europe - he saw the United States as a valuable ally. In 1991 he even apologized for the lies of the Communists and their propaganda during the previous four decades.⁶⁶ Havel wanted Europe to be a "friendly family" whose members do not build walls or divide themselves into blocks as it was before, during the Cold War. He believed that Europe does not need to be protected by superior countries but should defend itself by having its own security system. He saw NATO as the only reliable and effective organization that could provide security.⁶⁷

⁶³ Dante Fascell, "The Helsinki Spark," House of Representatives, 26 January 1977, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB213/stmt/stmt02.pdf>.

⁶⁴ Ronald Reagan, "Czechoslovak Human Rights Initiative," 31 December 1986, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB213/stmt/stmt04.pdf>.

⁶⁵ NATO Review, "Václav Havel: Remembering the Big Little Man," <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2012/05/07/vaclav-havel-remembering-the-big-little-man/index.html>.

⁶⁶ NATO Review, "Václav Havel."

⁶⁷ Žantovský, *Havel*, 436-437.

However, some Clinton administration members were initially hesitant and did not see NATO enlargement as an advantage. They perceived it as a distraction from domestic priorities and held the opinion that, “in the absence of a clear security threat, an enlargement of NATO was not necessary, and might even be counter-productive.” However, as was later proven in Yugoslavia, security was not guaranteed in post-Communist countries. Thus, NATO enlargement became stability-driven and strategic rather than threat-driven.⁶⁸

Havel was often traveling abroad to meet politicians and talk about the enlargement. In the process, international relationships became stronger and more reliable. Mostly he was traveling to the United States, where he negotiated with President Clinton. In 1993, he and Polish president Lech Wałęsa urged Clinton to enlarge NATO and start an operation to help keep peace in the former Yugoslavia.⁶⁹ Clinton came to understand how vital NATO enlargement was for the Czech Republic and Poland. Cooperation and peace-making efforts were crucial if Europe were to be united and democratic. However, Clinton’s goal was a joint alliance that would include Russia as well. When Yeltsin signed an agreement with Ukraine about not violating their territory, and when Ukraine agreed to give up their nuclear weapons, Clinton’s ideas seemed possible.⁷⁰ Despite his rather idealistic opinions, NATO did not accept Russia. Even though a “NATO-Russia Council (NRC)” was established to serve as a forum for negotiations, “Russia’s disproportionate military action in Georgia in August 2008 led to the suspension of formal meetings of the NRC and cooperation.” Later, Russia’s military intervention and occupation in Ukraine caused the suspension of efforts to build a partnership and stopped their cooperation indefinitely.⁷¹

In 1994, when the United States started to consider NATO’s enlargement, Madeleine Albright was U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. She played a crucial role when negotiating the accession, but at that time, the countries were not yet ready. But she and General Shalikashvili travelled around Eastern Europe, explaining to the NATO members that the Partnership for Peace would help the candidates prepare.⁷² The program was a compromise solution that the Clinton administration came up with. In other words, it was a

⁶⁸ Žantovský, *Havel*, 436-438.

⁶⁹ David Gilbreath Barton, *Havel: Unfinished Revolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), 290.

⁷⁰ Vaclav Havel Library Foundation, “Clinton Interview,” <http://dpanther.fiu.edu/dpService/dpPurlService/purl/FI14103414/00001>

⁷¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Relations with Russia,” https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50090.htm.

⁷² Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 96.

“precursor to a full NATO membership.”⁷³ Albright noted that Havel’s goal was to be a part of the West. During Clinton’s visit to Prague, Havel expressed his belief in the Western democracy pattern and showed interest in the political support that was going on among other countries.⁷⁴ For Havel, “NATO represented an alliance whose goal is to defend the shared values, moral principles, culture and civilization through solidarity and strong political commitment.”⁷⁵

In 1994, Clinton introduced a declaration that did not include any timeline or names of the countries accepted to NATO. This concerned Havel because it seemed like an empty promise. Havel realized that completing the expansion would require much work. For example, they needed to persuade the U.S. Congress and fifteen member countries that accession is a good thing. Havel, Clinton, and other NATO-enlargement supporters had to face reproaches and negative comments. However, Havel decided to fight against it and said that NATO should not be seen as a military tool but as a guarantor of principles and values. He stood for the idea that post-Communist countries should be given a chance to be included in Europe after being artificially divided during the Cold War. In his eyes, it would be immoral and unfair to keep the line there and not allow Eastern European countries to share the benefits and responsibilities of NATO. The approach was widely appealing.⁷⁶

In 1994, after the NATO Summit in Brussels, President Clinton visited Prague and had a luncheon with the presidents of the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. Havel gave a speech about the Czech Republic being ready to participate and share NATO membership responsibility. He did not want the Czech Republic to be seen only as a country seeking advantages, but as a nation willing to fight for freedom and democracy because it shares the same values as other NATO countries. Also, he mentioned that he does not see the Partnership for Peace as a substitute for full membership, but rather as a way to strengthen the relationship with NATO and to adapt and get ready for joining.⁷⁷

In 1999, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary were admitted to NATO (Slovakia joined in 2004). The accession made a huge difference in their stability – both political and economic. Compared to other countries like Belarus or Ukraine, they quickly integrated into the European Union and became less prone to conflicts and crises. Non-admitted countries

⁷³ NATO Review, “Václav Havel.”

⁷⁴ Johnston and Kabrhelová, *Havel v Americe*, 96.

⁷⁵ NATO Review, “Václav Havel.”

⁷⁶ Žantovský, *Havel*, 441-442.

⁷⁷ Václav Havel, “Luncheon Hosted by President Clinton for the Presidents of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic,” <https://archive.vaclavhavel-library.org/Archive/Detail/35422>.

found “themselves in a geopolitical void, torn between their conflicting instincts and affinities.”⁷⁸ Interestingly, even though Havel was always perceived as a peacemaker, he became quite an influential figure in fighting repressive regimes. For example, he advised Clinton to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo by bombing. He argued that “evil had to be confronted.”⁷⁹ Also, he supported Bush’s effort to stop Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Havel claimed that it was a moral duty of NATO to do so.⁸⁰

When Havel was in America in September 2002, he paid homage to the victims of the terrorist attack from September 11, 2001, and talked to Bush about their anti-Iraq efforts and that the operation against the Hussein regime should be more about cooperation with other NATO countries and not a private matter of the United States.⁸¹ For Havel, NATO is an alliance that must change and adapt according to new threats and challenges. Furthermore, they both agreed that the Alliance’s enemy is not Russia but a global terrorism that hates freedom, and that countries can stop terrorism only if they cooperate.⁸²

In 2004, because of Havel’s good relationships with America, he became the United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee’s co-chair. For the Committee and the chairman, Havel was a respectable representative of freedom and democracy. He proved to be an expert in totalitarian systems because he understood them and knew how difficult and challenging it can be to fight against them. Together with his colleagues, they were creating strategies to overcome dangerous ideologies. Ronald Reagan’s former advisor, Peter Hannaford, said they saw a parallel between the Soviet Union and terrorist threats; they both are enemies of freedom and peace.⁸³

⁷⁸ Žantovský, *Havel*, 443.

⁷⁹ Barton, *Havel*, 290.

⁸⁰ Barton, *Havel*, 290.

⁸¹ “Czech President Ends Visit to USA,” BBC Monitoring European – Political, ProQuest Central, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/451530104?accountid=15518>.

⁸² Jaromír Marek, “Bush a Havel k NATU,” Radio Prague International, <https://cesky.radio.cz/bush-a-havel-k-natu-8068085>.

⁸³ “Havel bude v americkém výboru bojovat proti terorismu,” 1 October 2004, *Novinky.cz*, <https://www.novinky.cz/zahranicni/clanek/havel-bude-v-americkem-vyboru-bojovat-proti-terorismu-306746>.

5 HAVEL'S PLAYS IN AMERICA

Havel's first time in America was in 1968 during the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia. He travelled to New York to see his play *The Memorandum* (1965) at the Public Theater. It was a "year for political activism and artistic expression in both the United States and Czechoslovakia."⁸⁴ There were many demonstrations against the Vietnam War, gatherings in Central Park, and protests of intellectuals and artists in the USA. Havel was astonished by the rebellious side of America and the presence of freedom. "During this visit, he caught the spirit of contemporary American "counterculture" and returned to Prague full of exciting experiences."⁸⁵

Meanwhile, in Czechoslovakia, Prague Spring meant liberalization, reforms and change of the strict regime. It was an era of pursuing "socialism with a human face". Therefore, Havel was allowed to visit New York after being invited by Joseph Papp, a theatrical producer.⁸⁶ Gail Papp, a wife of Joseph Papp, talked about Havel in an interview with Ian Willoughby. She had a chance to meet Havel and accompany him during his visit in New York. Papp and her husband lived in East Village, the centre of hippies; therefore, Havel had the chance to feel the atmosphere himself. When talking about the play *The Memorandum*, she said, "It got very fine reviews. It had a wonderful cast. It was a crazy kind of play – just the kind of play that the Public Theater likes to do. And Joe had a great time directing it."⁸⁷ During his trip, he met many people that would later help him in his fight for Czechoslovakia. They were prominent individuals that created a network of Havel's crucial relationships. When he came back to Czechoslovakia, the situation escalated, and two months later, the Prague Spring was ended by the Soviet occupation. Havel went quite quickly from an internationally respected figure of the cultural scene to a censored artist whose books and plays were banned.⁸⁸

Even though he was persecuted and harassed in Czechoslovakia, in America, he was still a distinguished playwright, and his plays were not forgotten. In 1968 he won Obie Awards for the play *The Memorandum*, in 1970 for *The Increased Difficulty of*

⁸⁴ Tess Megginson, "Havel in the Village: American and Czechoslovak Theatre in 1968," 15 May 2018, *Re:Views*, <http://reviewsmagazine.net/havel-in-the-village-american-and-czechoslovak-theatre-in-1968/>.

⁸⁵ Martin Palouš, "Encounters with America," 30 March 2015, <https://www.vhlf.org/havel-in-the-world/encounters-with-america/>.

⁸⁶ Martin Palouš, "Encounters with America."

⁸⁷ Ian Willoughby, "Gail Papp on Václav Havel Among New York's Hippies – and under house arrest in communist Czechoslovakia," 19 November 2018, <https://english.radio.cz/gail-papp-vaclav-havel-among-new-yorks-hippies-and-under-house-arrest-communist-8145586>.

⁸⁸ Martin Palouš, "Encounters with America."

Concentration (1969) and in 1984 for *Private View* (1976). However, he could not collect the Obie certificates because the Communists did not allow him to leave Czechoslovakia.⁸⁹ The only award he got during his “captivity” was when Joseph and Gail Papp smuggled it to Czechoslovakia during their official trip to Hrádeček.⁹⁰ He collected the rest in person in 2006 at the Public Theater.⁹¹

Even when Havel was forbidden to travel to the United States, Public Theater was still performing many of his plays, such as *Largo Desolato* (1985), whose copy he struggled to get out of the country to be translated and put on in the theatre. Later, in the 1980s, Joseph Papp tried to invite Havel to America so that he would be allowed to travel. Havel was delighted by the offer, but he had to refuse it. The reason was that “there were other people who didn’t have that kind of advantage and he didn’t want to stand out in any way.”⁹²

As a former president, Vaclav Havel kept travelling to the United States to see his plays performed in theatres. One of his journeys was in 2010 when he was 73 years old. Havel went to see the play *Leaving* (2008) at the Wilma Theatre in Philadelphia. He was in contact with the director of the play, and he was overseeing it “from afar.” However, Havel admitted that some of his original ideas and meanings could be lost in translation, but at the same time, some new meanings can arise. Moreover, it is also “a great secret – who the play appeals to, and where and how.” The play gains much depending on the interpretation, translation, and audience. Havel said that the variability makes him excited for every premiere.⁹³

⁸⁹ Michael Feingold, “Vaclav Havel, 1936-2011,” *The Village Voice*, 14 December 2011, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2011/12/14/vaclav-havel-1936-2011/>.

⁹⁰ Ian Willoughby, “Gail Papp on Václav Havel Among New York’s Hippies – and under house arrest in communist Czechoslovakia.”

⁹¹ Michael Feingold, “Vaclav Havel, 1936-2011.”

⁹² Ian Willoughby, “Gail Papp on Václav Havel Among New York’s Hippies.”

⁹³ Jan Richter, “Václav Havel to attend US premiere of his latest play *Leaving*,” *Radio Prague International*, 5 October 2010, <https://english.radio.cz/vaclav-havel-attend-us-premiere-his-latest-play-leaving-8573969>.

6 INITIATIVES

Many initiatives were set up in America to honour Havel's legacy. In this thesis, Program at Florida International University and Vaclav Havel Library Foundation is mentioned.

6.1 Florida International University

At Florida International University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), there is a Václav Havel Program for Human Rights and Diplomacy, and the director is Martin Palouš, who is also the president of the Václav Havel Library Foundation. As they state on the website, it is an "essential public, academic, and ethical creation at the right time and the right place." Palouš says that they are trying to put theory into practice and make citizens, students, intellectuals, artists and politicians interested in international dialogue about democratic systems, totalitarian systems, and universal human rights. He says that the world is changing all the time, and we have to ensure that democracy and human rights are still the priority and fundamentals of society. The initiative is trying to keep history in the centre of attention of the younger generation to make sure that the values and ideas that were once won will not be forgotten. David J. Kramer said about the Program that it also serves as a reminder of the fragility of democracy and that it is not something we should take for granted.⁹⁴ Havel stressed that when he said that Czechoslovakia purchased democracy at a great cost, they would not give it up.⁹⁵

The initiative also helps with Cuban struggles regarding freedom because they see similarities in the former Czechoslovak and Cuban totalitarian system. Therefore, the implementation of knowledge in practice is possible. They are trying to show how to make a peaceful transition from a communist system to a democratic system. "Our ambition is to foster partnerships, international dialogue and greater global exchange in the areas of human rights, democratization and diplomacy."⁹⁶ When the current Czech member of the House of Commons, Ondřej Benešík, visited SIPA in Florida, he gave a speech in which he compared the situation in Cuba and former Czechoslovakia. He mentioned that Havel was the national hero, and today he is an international symbol of freedom. Benešík's family experienced suffering and indignity that resulted from the country's losing its freedom. Therefore, his

⁹⁴ Steven J. Green School of International & Public Affairs - Václav Havel Program for Human Rights & Diplomacy, "About Us," <https://havel.fiu.edu/about-us/>.

⁹⁵ Václav Havel, "A Joint Session of the U.S. Congress."

⁹⁶ Václav Havel Program for Human Rights & Diplomacy, "About Us."

parents made him appreciate democracy and nurtured the desire to maintain it. He stated that the problem today is not the absence of democracy but the complacency accompanying it. That is why he sees potential in the Program for Human Rights and Diplomacy initiative. He finished his speech with the call to action: “Your real challenge is to encourage others, who have never been unfree, to believe in your message enough to fight for freedom and encourage it in places, like Cuba, where it does not exist.”⁹⁷

6.2 Václav Havel Library Foundation

Another initiative aiming to “honor, preserve, and build upon the legacy” is Vaclav Havel Library Foundation (VHLF) in New York.⁹⁸ It is a non-profit organization founded in 2012 and located in the Bohemian National Hall in Manhattan. Martin Palouš is the President of the Foundation, Madeleine Albright, Laura Bush, and Dagmar Havlová are its co-chairs. The Foundation managed to win the favor of many American political leaders who perceive Havel’s ideas and values as something we have to uphold and protect. Also, VHLF collaborated with the American Friends of the Czech Republic (an organization that supports Czech-U.S. relations) to place Havel’s bust in the United States Capitol.⁹⁹

They promote Havel’s ideas, inform the public about his contributions, support research of topics related to Havel, and “complement Vaclav Havel Library in Prague by organizing access to unique materials documenting Havel’s accomplishments and activities.”¹⁰⁰ Among patrons and sponsors of VHLF are Madeleine Albright, Henry Kissinger (American politician and diplomat), Martin Palouš, and Suzanne Vega (American folk singer).¹⁰¹ On 13 October 2013, the Foundation organized a workshop called The Legacy and Sources of Vaclav Havel and His Era. They cooperated with the New York Public Library, the Harriman Institute and East-Central European Center of Columbia University. The aim was to arrange and create a plan that the organizations would follow to gather, share, and digitalize documents related to Havel. They discussed the establishment of the archive, digital issues, and the historical context of the documents.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Ondřej Benešík, “Speech at Florida International University,” Miami, Florida, March 2016.

⁹⁸ Václav Havel Library Foundation, “About VHLF: Mission,” <https://www.vhlf.org/about-us/mission/>.

⁹⁹ Václav Havel Library Foundation, “About VHLF: History,” <https://www.vhlf.org/about-us/history/>.

¹⁰⁰ Václav Havel Library Foundation, “About VHLF: Mission.”

¹⁰¹ Václav Havel Library Foundation, “About VHLF: Supporters,” <https://www.vhlf.org/about-us/supporters/>.

¹⁰² Václav Havel Library Foundation, “About VHLF: History.”

In 2016 VHLF lobbied for a declaration of Havel Day in New York City. Eventually, Mayor Bill de Blasio agreed and set the date to 28 September. It is also a national holiday in the Czech Republic and Vaclav's name day. In 2016 it was Havel's anniversary of the birth; therefore, they decided to organize an event on 28 September. With Amnesty International's help, they prepared some of his plays, photographic exhibition and unveiling of a bust.¹⁰³ Other performances took place at the Bohemian National Hall in Manhattan, for example, Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe*, a play dedicated to Havel after his imprisonment, and Havel's play *Mistake* dedicated to Beckett. Other cities like Washington, D.C. were celebrating Havel's legacy as well.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Dominik Jůn, "New York to Mark Late President's 80th Birthday with Václav Havel Day," Radio Prague International, 14 June 2016, <https://english.radio.cz/new-york-mark-late-presidents-80th-birthday-vaclav-havel-day-8222878>.

¹⁰⁴ Dave Park, "New York City Rings in September 28 as Václav Havel Day," Expats.cz, 29 September 2016, <https://news.expats.cz/expats-info/new-york-city-rings-in-september-28-as-vaclav-havel-day/>.

7 MEMORIALS

Memorials dedicated to Havel also reflect his legacy. The fact that Havel's bust is in the Capitol, among significant American figures, is an honour that no other Czech ever received.

7.1 Havel's bust in the Capitol

In the U.S. Capitol, Havel's bust was unveiled on November 19, 2014. It was installed among other non-American, but world-known leaders like Winston Churchill, Raoul Wallenberg, and Lajos Kossuth.¹⁰⁵ Kossuth and others were fighting for democracy, and for the people in their countries – for him, it was Hungary. He was called a “freedom-fighter,” a “visionary,” and even the “George Washington of Hungary.”¹⁰⁶ All of them had some features in common – bravery, willingness to fight for others, and a sense for democracy. Other people having their bust in the U.S. Capitol are former American leaders. For example, Martin Luther King's bust serves to memorialize his work toward civil rights and suffrage.¹⁰⁷

Havel's bust was installed there because of his bravery to face the communists not using any weapon. For doing so, he had to stay in prison for a few years; he was surveilled all the time; he had to hide his works and worry for his family. Even though he could have left for a better life, he decided to stay. Stay and fight for Czechoslovakia. Nancy Pelosi, who was the House Minority Leader, perceived Havel's ability to lead people and his leadership style as something that could be taken as an example. People worldwide could learn from his excellent leadership, especially in countries where democracy is not guaranteed or in countries where people striving for democracy are oppressed.¹⁰⁸

To put a bust to the U.S. Capitol, the House of Representatives had to resolve. Even though Democrats' and Republicans' relationships are rather complicated, they managed to agree on this unanimously. One of the most influential people who helped to get Havel's bust to the Capitol was Elliot Berke. He managed to get there also Churchill's statue. In his opinion, both showed their devotion to freedom, which should be celebrated and shown to the world. The bust was paid for by the Foundation of Vaclav Havel Library and the Association of American Friends of the Czech Republic. Milton Cerny, the director of the

¹⁰⁵ Zlatica Hoke, “Havel's Bust Gets Place Among Greats in US Congress,” VOA News, November 20, 2014. <https://www.voanews.com/usa/havels-bust-gets-place-among-greats-us-congress>

¹⁰⁶ Bryan Dawson, “The Louis Kossuth Bust in the United States Capitol,” American Hungarian Federation, March 15, 1990. http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org/news_AHFHistory_Kossuth_Capitol.htm

¹⁰⁷ Architect of the Capitol, “Martin Luther King Jr. Bust.” <https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/martin-luther-king-jr-bust>

¹⁰⁸ Hoke, “Havel's Bust Gets Place Among Greats in US Congress.”

Association, said that it took some time to get everything done because it was a very long process. However, Havel had such a good reputation in America, so it was not hard to convince people that placing his bust to the Capitol would be a good thing to do. Today, Havel's and Churchill's busts stand next to each other because they are unique personas of the 20th century, and it is such an honor that one of them is Czech, said Fred Malek, the chairman of the Association.

Bohuslav Sobotka, the Czech Prime Minister at that time, stated, "no one who paid the price for freedom should be forgotten." Sobotka also said that unveiling that bust is paying respect to Havel and other people who fought or kept fighting for democracy and freedom. He said that it is an honor to every person who does not give up in that fight. He fought even when they threatened him with imprisonment and death.¹⁰⁹

Carl Gershman, the founder of the National Endowment for Democracy, sent an obvious message in his statement when he said that Congress honors a man who represented Czechs in the whole world and earned recognition for that. Therefore, it would be better if his successors did not ruin his reputation by being narrow-minded and fearful when the world's pace is quick, and one must pay attention to the country's right direction.¹¹⁰

7.2 Havel's Place

Havel's Place is a memorial called "Democracy speaking" initiated by Bořek Šípek (Czech architect and designer) and Petr Gandalovič (Czech ambassador to the U.S. in 2011-2017). The installation includes two linked chairs and a round table through which grows a linden tree. There are 38 such Places worldwide that create a network, and the whole project was coordinated and sponsored by the Vaclav Havel Library. The very first one was installed in Washington D.C., at Georgetown University.¹¹¹ Madeleine Albright and Dagmar Havlová participated in its grand opening in 2013.

The idea behind this project was to create places in public where people can sit and have conversations. Also, it reflects the openness of democracy and philosophy of Vaclav Havel because the dialogue was his most potent weapon. The Place was meant to serve as the meeting point for people who are willing to think, discuss various topics and listen to others. As the author Bořek Šípek states, Havel was a fan of quality conversation, and he liked when

¹⁰⁹ Hoke, "Havel's Bust Gets Place Among Greats in US Congress."

¹¹⁰ "Velká pocta pro velkou osobnost: V Kapitolu odhalili Havlovu bustu," *Česká televize*, November 19, 2014. <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/svet/1008784-velka-pocta-pro-velkou-osobnost-v-kapitolu-odhalili-havlovu-bustu>.

¹¹¹ Knihovna Václava Havla, "Havel's Place," <https://www.vaclavhavel.cz/en/havelsplace>.

people around him shared that “hobby” with him. On the other hand, he hated when someone was not able to listen to his partner or opponent. A call for dialogue is nowadays definitely a part of Havel legacy, and it is becoming even more important in our quarrelsome world.¹¹²

¹¹² “Lavička Václava Havla,” <http://www.boreksipek.eu/w-havelplaceCZ2.html>.

8 THE STATE OF AMERICA TODAY

When it comes to the state of America in Havel's era and now, there is quite a difference. Martin Palouš and David J Kramer, in an article "Have We Learned Any Lessons?" write about the relevance of Havel's words today. Thirty years ago, Havel praised the United States for its achievements in democracy and freedom. He said that former Communist countries should take America as a role model in education, politics, economy, and overall prosperity. The authors state that his words are compelling and meaningful in contrast to recent events such as the Capitol riots and the impeachment process. Nowadays, the polarized population, accusations against one another and attacks on political opponents give America a bad image. "Nastiness in politics is nothing new, but the spillover effects of our political leaders' rhetoric and actions are rippling across society." According to the authors of the article, America was the role model in freedom, strength, and prosperity compared to other countries under the influence of the Soviets (once they realized that the propaganda was based on lies). However, recent surveys show that the United States is drifting away from the spotlight. Russia and China are striving for power and influence and continually debase democracy. "The United States not only is failing to push back aggressively against such nefarious efforts but, through some disturbing actions and behaviour of its own, is helping to narrow the gap between countries long known for their democratic system of government and those living under authoritarianism."¹¹³

The authors assume that Havel would be upset by the world's state and the absence of true freedom and democracy. He would lament the rise of populism, the shrinking sense of human responsibility, and the inability to aim at the greater good. Today, his speech can serve as a reminder that everything we do has an impact. Democracy and freedom require hard work, responsibility, and dedication. The authors claim that hopefully, his ideas will resonate with as many people as possible, because they remain relevant and important.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Martin Palouš, David J. Kramer, "Have We Learned Any Lessons?" *The American Interest*, 22 February 2020, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2020/02/22/have-we-learned-any-lessons/>.

¹¹⁴ Martin Palouš, David J. Kramer, "Have We Learned Any Lessons?"

CONCLUSION

“Havel and America were a love story at first sight,” noted his biographer Žantovský. They shared similar values – freedom and individuality. He viewed America as a country of progress, power, and openness but also of tolerance to diversity at the same time. He knew that Americans could be supportive when it comes to people who lost their freedom and individuality elsewhere. What Americans liked about him was his bravery to face the system, his strength to win that fight, and the fact that he stayed modest after all. However, he felt that even though the United States is a great ally when it comes to freedom and individuality, in other aspects (e.g., capitalism, welfare, or environmental issues), he had to agree with European countries and therefore prefer their practices. These slightly different opinions on some matters caused Havel’s internal tension in his decision-making.¹¹⁵

One of the main objectives of the thesis was to determine what Havel means to Americans and why they respect him. Czech MP Ondřej Benešik proposed three points. First, America was built on a solid Christian foundation. It is known for its tolerance toward different Christian denominations and other religions. However, Christianity is not a dogma in America. It is more a “moral compass.” So, Havel’s emphasis on morality impressed them and made Havel famous because it supported their beliefs. Second, Americans like strong, heroic stories. So, a story of an intellectual who almost died in prison because of his relentless belief in morality and then, in the “miraculous” year of 1989, became a president, is a story they adore. Third, according to Benešik, was their hatred of Communism. For Americans, it is something they fear and consider as the biggest threat. Therefore, Havel’s resistance to the communist party and his ability to fight against it is immensely appreciated and admired. In the end, Benešik recognized that the “love” between Havel and America was mutual. Havel loved America as a nation built on the ideals of freedom, democracy, individual human rights, and respect.¹¹⁶

The former Czech representative to the United Nations, Martin Palouš, was asked whether there ever was any misunderstanding or disagreement between Havel and Americans. He claimed that Madeleine Albright criticized some features of his “non-political politics” during his presidency. For example, she did not like his distrust of political parties and the inability to implement the standard structures of parliamentary democracy.

¹¹⁵ Žantovský, *Havel*, 361.

¹¹⁶ Ondřej Benešik, “Názor na odkaz Václava Havla v Americe,” Email, 2020.

When Palouš was asked about the relevance of Havel's words today, he said that applying Havel's ideas is a hard thing to do. In America, his students are fascinated by Havel's speeches and essays and are willing to discuss them and conduct an authentic internal dialogue with Havel. However, it is hard to transform their knowledge into actions (in bilateral relations of the Czech Republic and America or the European Union and America). A good example of the struggle is a discussion about Cuba, in which Havel's ideas resonate but are challenging to implement.¹¹⁷ Virtues, ideas, opinions, and convictions that Havel was proposing should never disappear because if they do, the state of our world can dramatically change for the worse. Because, as Havel said, "salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart."¹¹⁸

Ultimately, this thesis has proven that the legacy of Vaclav Havel is still active and relevant in the United States. Judging by memorials that preserve his legacy and testimonies that praise Havel, it is evident that he was a well-respected figure. Even though his ideas and convictions can be a subject of many different interpretations (or misinterpretations), it is crucial to bear in mind that Havel stood for love and truth, not wealth, power, or manipulation.

¹¹⁷ Martin Palouš, "Havlův odkaz v Americe," Email, 2020.

¹¹⁸ Havel, "A Joint Session of the U.S. Congress."

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