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THE AMERICAN DILEMMA 70 YEARS LATER

Introductory remarks

I was provoked into writing this essay by the questions asked 70 years ago by Gunnar Myrdal, who delivered the book *An American Dilemma. The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (Harper & Row, Publishers, New York and Evanston 1944) into the hands of readers. This may seem nothing out of the ordinary, as books have been published at least since the time when Johann Guttenberg invented the technology of casting individual types in metal, in a form that allowed combining them into columns, and a press printing practically unlimited numbers of copies from a single galley, making it possible to publish – after years of tedious preparations – the printed Bible in 1455. The “42-verse Bible”. Yet Myrdal’s book enjoys an extraordinary status in the history of contemporary social sciences. It is so, as in many aspects it is reminiscent of a saga, narrated by a Swede, about the process of the American Society’s laborious approach to the message of the creed thus penned in The Declaration of Independence:

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are, Life, Liberty, and Pursuit of Happiness [original spelling].

Against the inclusive nature of this Creed, namely that all people are free by nature, the majority of white residents of the originally British colonies, and later

also of the independent United States did not extend it to the black inhabitants of the same land. Still in 1847, the US Supreme Court thus answered the question of whether “the blacks are also citizens?” in the *Dred Scott v. Stanford* case:

We think they are not, and that they are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word ‘citizens’ in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides and secures for citizens of the United States.¹

Myrdal seeks the answer to the question why a society and the state built from the outset upon the traditions of the Enlightenment and democratic principles refuses, against its constitution, the basic rights and freedom to a significant part of its citizens. Why it is so easy for so many to speak of the fundamental values which are called the “American Creed” not without justification, and at the same time consider a significant part of residents of the same land by nature worse than themselves, ergo, not deserving citizenship and the rights it entails. How can people combine these opposing points of view into a seemingly coherent whole? How did such a status quo arise and can one – and if one actually can, then through what actions – conclusively terminate that vicious circle forcing to choose between two mutually exclusive options?

In many aspects, Gunnar’s adventure with America is reminiscent of two earlier cases, namely those of Alexis de Tocqueville and Max Weber. The first, a lawyer by education living in 1805–1859, was sent to the US in 1831 by the French government to become acquainted with the processes of development of the American penal system. Taken down in the 14 notebooks, the observations from his 10-month-long peregrinations in the territory of the United States – from the East Coast to the frontier of the contemporary settlement in the West – later became the grounds for the four-volume treaty *Democracy in America*, published in 1835–1840 and still read today.

The latter, Max Weber (1864–1920), even though familiar with Protestantism from his own German experience, wrote a book entitled *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (*Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*) under the impulse of a few-months-long (September–December 1904) stay in the US and under the impact of direct observation of Protestant religious communities, their systems of values, and lifestyles. He published it in 1904–1905, in two successive issues of *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaften und Sozialpolitik* magazine (est. in 1903). The direct reason for Weber’s visit to the United States was the nervous illness he contracted in 1898. To this day, the professional sociologist environment believes *The Protestant Ethic* to be among “the ten most influential books published in the 20th century”.²

¹ Quoted after J. J. Macionis, *Sociology*, 10th edition, New Jersey 2005, p. 368; A. P. Blaustein, R. T. Zangrando, *Civil Rights and the Black American*, New York 1968, p. 160.

² See: materials of *ISA World Congress of Sociology held in Montreal 1998*, www.isa-sociology.org/books.

None of the three authors mentioned above intended to become a professional Americanist, be it before setting off to the United States or having returned from there. Yet they all wanted to understand the United States without a Europe-centric bias, as a *sui generis* reality (ethical system, society, and state), not simply “suspended” in time, but dynamically “becoming”.

Gunnar Myrdal’s adventure with America

Gunnar Myrdal lived in 1898–1987. An economist by education, he was interested chiefly in the problems of money and cyclical fluctuations. With time, he also took an interest in the theoretical premises of economic models, economic (including tax) policy, state interventionism (especially during the great economic crisis of 1929–1933), conditions determining effective international cooperation in economies of different countries, and – already in the 1950s – the theory of economic underdevelopment of backward countries and the essence of the phenomenon of poverty. His pioneering studies in the theory of money, cyclical fluctuations, and the thorough analysis of the mutual conditioning of economic, social, and institutional phenomena had Myrdal awarded the Nobel Prize in 1974 (NB: together with F.A. Hayek, who presented views exactly opposing those of Myrdal). The significant stages in his professional career included the position of professor at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva (1931–1932) and at Stockholm University (1960–1967). Moreover, he was a member of the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences (since 1945), the executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (1947–1957), and the founder of the Institute for International Economic Studies at Stockholm University (1961). Also worth noting in his political and state activities are, in particular, the position of Member of Parliament (in 1934–1938 and 1942–1947), and the post of Trade Minister in the Swedish government (1945–1947).

Gunnar Myrdal found his way to the United States for the first time in the late 1920s for a year’s stay financed by the Spelman Fund. Yet his true intellectual adventure of living in America did not begin until 10th September 1938, when the Carnegie Corporation invited him to programme, manage, and conduct studies on black US citizens. Why him? Were there, at the time, not enough Americans in the US, excellent academics fascinated with the question, who had significant scientific achievements. Once again, then: why? This is how the question was addressed by Frederick P. Keppel speaking on behalf of the Carnegie Corporation, whose president he was at the time: the questions that we desire to deal with

[...] have been for nearly a hundred years so charged with emotion that it appeared wise to seek as the responsible head of the undertaking someone who could approach his task with a fresh mind, uninfluenced by traditional attitudes or by earlier conclusions, and it was therefore decided to “import” a general director [...] And since the emotional factor affects the Negroes no less than

the whites, the search was limited to countries of high intellectual and scholarly standards, but with no background or traditions of imperialism which might lessen the confidence of the Negroes in the United States as to the complete impartiality of the study and the validity of its findings. Under these limitations, the obvious place to look were Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries, and the search ended in the selection of Dr. Gunnar Myrdal.³

Gunnar Myrdal was invited to become the director “of a comprehensive study of the Negro in the United States, to be undertaken in a wholly objective and dispassionate way as a social phenomenon”.⁴ Myrdal accepted the invitation. After 10th September 1938, together with Richard Sterner from the Royal Social Board, Stockholm, they took their first formal steps required to carry out the project.

Following the advice of President Keppel, Myrdal embarked on his task, not from studies of books, but from travelling the southern states. Every day for two months, he stood face to face with problems that he found new and emotions he had never experienced before. Jackson Davies of the General Education Board became the organiser of the field research, and at the same time his guide, while the contact points were inspired by the State Agents for Negro Education.

We established contact with a great number of white and Negro leaders in various activities; visited universities, colleges, schools, churches, and various state and community agencies as well as factories and plantations; talked to police officers, teachers, preachers, politicians, journalists, agriculturists, workers, sharecroppers, and in fact, all sorts of people, colored and whites.⁵

After additional queries in libraries and archives, the first draft of the intended study was ready in January 1939. Taking part in the discussion of the draft were both eminent American intellectuals – Ruth Benedix, John Dollard, Ralph Linton, Frederic Osborn, Robert E. Park, and William I. Thomas – and people known from civic movements and actions for equal rights for black US citizens, whose number included William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, the author of the well-known book *The Philadelphia Negro. A Social Study*, published in 1899. Moreover, a seven-person-strong permanent body was set up to manage, and a research team was appointed. This was composed of over 70 people dealing with various themes outlined in the general programme. Besides the above, a permanent administrative secretariat was established.

Research work started in the summer and autumn of 1939. In the coordination of the entire project, Gunnar Myrdal was assisted, in particular, by Samuel A. Stouffer. Soon, however, Myrdal and Frederick Keppel, the president of Carnegie Corporation, were faced with another problem to be solved which could not have been envisaged by any party in 1937. War broke out in Europe. After the German invasion of Denmark and Norway in April 1940, friends advised Myrdal

³ See: G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma. The Negro Problem and modern Democracy*, New York–Evanston 1962, p. xlviii.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. li.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

to return to Sweden. He left in June 1940 yet managed to return to the United States, through a roundabout route in May 1941. Three months later he was joined by Richard Sterne and Arnold Rose. The work on the implementation of the research programme gained momentum.

By September 1940, Samuel A. Stouffer managing the entire programme in Myrdal's absence from the US had managed to collect the preliminary results of the research (written over 15,000 pages!), and preparation of the texts for print began. The matter was not easy, as the entire project had neither resulted from the vision of an individual career nor from the systematic activity of any American institution of higher education or any other academic institution. Two years later, the text was ordered, and was first published in 1944. Besides the prefaces and introduction, the book comprised 11 parts divided into 45 chapters, 10 appendices, a list of 44 tables and charts, a bibliography, numbered footnotes, and an index. Altogether, the work was typed on over 1400 pages.⁶

The titles of all parts and chapters of the book, when taken together, provide the perfect information about its contents. Thus, the first part titled *The Approach* discusses: 1) *American Ideals and the American Conscience*, 2) *Encountering the Negro Problem*, and 3) *Facts of the Negro Problem*. The second part – *Race* – speaks of *Racial Beliefs*, *Race and Ancestry*, and *Racial Characteristics*. The third part is composed of two chapters: the seventh on the population of the black residents of the US, and the eighth on their internal migrations. The fourth part is devoted to economics, and contains an analysis of 1) economic inequalities, 2) the tradition of slavery, 3) the South's plantation economy (including black farmers), 4) the critical position of the South's agriculture in the 1930s, 5) the exodus from the South in search of employment outside agriculture in the 1930s, 6) The Negro in business, the professions, public service and other white collar occupations, 7) The Negro in the public economy, 8) revenues, consumption, and the condition of homes, 9) The mechanics of economy discrimination as a practical problem, 10) Pre-war labor market controls and their consequences for the Negro, and 11) The war boom – and thereafter. The fifth part concentrates on politics, its determinants, southern conservatism and liberalism, policy implementation, and trends and possibilities. The sixth part examines questions related to the state of the system of justice, including inequality of justice, the police and other public contacts, the courts, the judicial quality of sentences and prison services, and violence and intimidation. Part seven of the book describes and analyses the social inequalities, with special attention being paid to the grounds for social inequalities, patterns of segregation and discrimination, and the impact of social inequalities. The eighth part presents the social structure, referring successively to the concepts of social castes and classes, and

⁶ The description of the book's contents is reconstructed from its second edition, printed on the 20th anniversary of completing the work on the text prepared for print in 1942, see: G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma. The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition, New York–Evanston 1962.

the situation of the blacks in the social structure of the USA. Examined in the ninth part are the characteristics of leadership and *concerted action*, and especially the American: 1) model of individual leadership and mass passiveness, 2) Accomodative leadership, 3) The Negro protest, 4) The protest motive and Negro personality, 5) Compromise leadership, 6) Negro popular theories, 7) Negro improvement and protest organizations, 8) The Negro Church, 9) The Negro School, and 10) The Negro Press. The tenth part renders the specific characteristic constituents of black US communities, including the institutions operating within them and non-institutional aspects of the Negro community. Finally, the eleventh and final part returns to the central problem of the book and seeks an answer to the question about the condition of *an American dilemma* in the early 1940s: whether, as far as the problem of the Blacks is concerned, America is again at a crossroads?

The appendices inform successively about: the methodology of evaluation of human beliefs and events (and also the principle of accumulation, especially in social sciences) used throughout the studies, the semantic fields of the regionalisms used in the book, groups that in various communities experience similar (in certain aspects) problems to those of the black residents of the United States, earnings (before the second world war) of this part of the American population in selected branches of economy, the most frequently performed occupations, the spatial distribution of black Americans in selected cities, studies of castes and classes in black American communities, research on Negro leadership, and quantitative studies of racial attitudes. Altogether, the appendices cover over one hundred pages. Twenty years later: the conflict between the reformers and defenders of the status quo.

In his introduction to the second edition of *An American Dilemma* (1962), Arnold Rose states that the years 1942–1962 brought about not only a significant change in the situation of the coloured US population, but also – to a greater extent as an answer to the success of the reformers – the re-activation of the defenders of the *status quo ante bellum*. The factors reinforcing the abolitionist tendencies mentioned by Rose include the changes entailed by the successive phase of the process of the formation of the American industrial society, technological progress, maturing of the collective awareness of black US citizens, increasing sensitivity of Americans to the image of the country reinforced by global public opinion, and initiatives generated by civil rights supporters both on the federal, and state and local scenes. Tendencies opposing the abolitionist orientation found their expression, primarily in the states of consciousness, and in the movements and organisations of the white residents of the South as well as, to a certain extent, the North.

What was the link between the industrialisation of the country with movements supporting the liberation of America from racism and its various impacts? In the 1790s, racism developed in the agricultural areas of the US, especially under the influence of the demand for a cheap and at the same time constant workforce, after 27-year-old Eli Whitney constructed the cotton gin in 1793. The cotton gin is believed by many interpreters of US history to be “the invention that divided

North and South". When, beginning with the 1930s, the cotton monoculture in the southern states began to deteriorate (influenced by the diminishing demand for cotton, diversification of agriculture, and development of industry), the demand for unskilled labour in the South also decreased, and so did the racist convictions that were once necessary to justify the attitude of the white planters to black slaves. It must, however, be remembered that the ideologies – in this case, racism, motivated with the simplified version of human nature, outlast the conditions that created them. Their eagerness to liberate oneself from discriminating practices and the diminishing demand for simple labour intensified migrations from the traditionally agricultural areas to the cities (first to those situated in the northern states, and after 1840 – also to Midwestern cities).⁷

Until the conclusion of the Civil War, the internal emigration of slaves was illegal, according to the laws of the southern states. Nevertheless, secret smuggling routes were established. An organiser of such escapes from the South, who was to become especially well-known was Harriet Tubman, an illiterate former slave. Her track, years later given the name of the Underground Railroad, made it possible for 300 people – men, women, and children – to move to the North. After 1900, 70% of all the American Blacks already lived in the cities, which resulted in a far-going change of the American social structure.⁸ These changes definitely influenced the improvement of the status of the coloured people of the North and West, which in turn could be (and was!) used in the struggle for the civil rights of the former slaves who remained in the South.

Especially advantageous for the coloured people was the technological progress of 1940–1954, which increased the supply of jobs and options for gainful work. "While measures vary, it has been estimated that the rise of average real income among Negroes since 1940 has been two to three times that among whites".⁹

Nevertheless, the technological progress and, in particular, automation also had negative impacts. The unskilled hired hands with a low level of education, dominant among the black workers, were the first to shift en masse to the ranks of the unemployed (including the "permanently unemployed") category.

Influenced by access to schools (easier in the North and West than in the South), and the constant development of the educated elite, the level of positive collective self-identification grew among black Americans. It became the power stimulating the emancipation movements whose participants also included the

⁷ It is estimated that the successive waves of mass internal migrations, also including those in the first half of the 20th century, consisted of over six million black Americans moving from the South to the industrial cities of the North and Midwest.

⁸ The former caste system based on the master – slave relationship began to be replaced by new imperatives, defining a new place in the class and layer structure of the industrial society to individuals and families. Moreover, in the cities, the newcomers could use their newly acquired civil rights more fully, and not only participate in elections but also, should the need occur, make use of the legal protection they were entitled to and of institutions of education.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. xxiv.

white opponents of racial discrimination. The number of organisations existing earlier (including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], the Garvey Movement, and the Urban League) was now joined by new ones. Some of them were a spontaneous reaction to the violence and discriminatory behaviours of the whites, while others originated under the influence of intellectual visions of amending social and political systems. Non-violence resistance techniques were taken over from Gandhi (among others, by the Congress on Racial Equality [CORE]) and used in the struggle for the abolition of racial segregation. The technique attracted the attention of the entire country during the bus strike in Montgomery (Alabama) headed by Reverend Martin Luther King. Beginning in 1958, another form of opposition, known as a sit-in, promoted among others, by the Nonviolent Coordinative Committee (SNCC), developed.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, there were certain new abolitionist organisations which reached for means of violence themselves (a philosophy of violence), as was the case with the United African Nationalist Movement led by James Lawson. Still other organisations, already established after the second world war, and under the influence of experiences from the period, decided to oppose the general American assimilation tendencies, and – opposing all the forms of discrimination – fought for the right to maintain their racial and cultural independence. Moreover, all the movements and organisations, both mentioned and not mentioned above, are clear proof that the collective actors representing practically all the milieus and generations of coloured US citizens in public life – both with elementary education and those belonging to the intellectual elites, religious and political ones included – joined the struggle for equal rights against all forms of discrimination and stereotypical racial beliefs in the two decades in question (1940–1960).

Significant changes took place in American opinion-forming circles. Under the influence of events related to the second world war and including a higher number of contacts with citizens of other countries and the role of black soldiers in the American forces, the collapse of the isolationist orientation, and also the reaction to world decolonisation processes, the influential American circles began to pay ever more watchful attention to how the United States is perceived in the international community. In the new circumstances and resultant moods, it was self-evident that racial discrimination – even in an assuaged form – is a negative burden for the US and its role in global politics.

Problems related to civil rights were becoming increasingly visible on the federal scene which triggered far-reaching collaboration (also in legislative institutions) between various civic forces, including ones outside the American mainstream. Thanks to its right to explain the Constitution, the US Supreme Court was exceedingly more and more clearly becoming an independent actor on the political stage. Supporting in its sentences the egalitarian principle, in 1944 the “Court declare[d] unequivocally that the white primary was illegal, and that such subterfuges to prevent Negroes from voting in the South were unconstitutional.”¹⁰

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. xxxiii.

Similarly, subjected to the collective pressure of various organisations representing black citizens, US presidents began to support the elimination of discriminating practices from labour relations and education with increasing consistency.¹¹

The Congress joined the anti-discriminatory activity to a lesser extent, which was most frequently explained with the negative influence of the congressmen and senators representing the South. The decision to award federal authorities with the right to stop local election commissions from rendering the participation of coloured people in elections more difficult, was considered its first decision clearly in support of civil rights since the 1870s.

At the state level, the authorities of New York, together with the related local authorities, became involved in civil rights defence. This entailed primarily the protection of the state's residents against all forms of discrimination due to race, creed or nationality, while leasing (and trading) housing, as well as in labour relations.

Which civil forces of the time opposed the black and white citizens of the United States who strove for equal rights? Predominantly, which is understandable in the light of the initial phase of the economic development of the country, they were the white residents of the South. Beginning with 1954, these were not only spontaneous reactions which grew from the culture of subjugation and segregation, but also organised activities. The role of the animator and representative of the conservative forces was taken over by the White Citizens' Councils. Although in many aspects, these expressed moods analogous to those that in the 1920s accompanied the power-play acts of terror, organised by the second Ku Klux Klan¹² now, the idea was not only the psychological effect of intimidation, but also the defence of the grounds for the current social status quo based on the caste system.

The decision of the US Supreme Court to abolish segregation in public education was considered a profound threat to that status quo. On 17th May 1954, the Supreme Court considered – having investigated the *Brown v. the Board of Education* (in the city of Topeka, Kansas) case – that racial segregation in public education was contradictory to the US Constitution. What mattered here were neither

¹¹ See: the decisions of Franklin D. Roosevelt concerning employment in the federal administration and in companies related to the federal government, and also even more anti-discriminatory activities undertaken by Harry S Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower supporting the sentence of the Supreme Court concerning the segregation of schools, even when – as in the case of Little Rock, Arkansas – this required the support of the military. Similarly significant were the actions undertaken by the Kennedy administration which aimed to curb racial discrimination in public interstate transport, including coaches and railroads.

¹² The first Klan, boasting 500,000 members, was established in 1866 by former Confederate soldiers. Its internal structure, built along the lines of the Invisible Empire, covered the entire South. Colloquially, the Klan was known as *Kyklos*. The second, besides the earlier slogan of supremacy of the white race, also preaching militant patriotism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Catholicism consisted of approximately 4.5 million members in the 1920s. It was also active in the states of the North and Midwest. In the 1930s, the number of members of the second Klan dropped below 10,000. Moreover, anti-racist actions were initiated by many other societies, including the Knights of the White Camelia. Some of these organisations were of a clandestine nature.

economic nor political considerations, but primarily those of a symbolic nature. To quote Arnold Rose: "The ideology of racism was no longer a response to a conflict between economic-political forces and the idealism of the American Creed, but rather an expression merely of a traditional psychology."¹³ Yet now, the South was no longer a monolith. Some, much like Bryant Bowles, were still eager to pose as defenders of the white race, which found its expression in the National Association for the Advancement of White People that he organised in 1955. Others, supported, albeit not to the same degree in the Deep South and in the Upper South, the cessation of "fighting the war between the States" and sending the previous convictions of the need to maintain the subjugated status of the Blacks into historical oblivion. This was not done solely for ideological reasons or the conviction of the irreversibility of the process of history, but for more pragmatic reasons, as it was already known that "violence directed against the Negroes can easily spread to white-owned property and other institutions, and so the traditional leaders try to keep excitement in check".¹⁴

In the North, the anti-abolition movement was decidedly weaker, especially in organised forms. It found its expression, amongst others, in the attempts to stop the influx of Blacks to residential districts, the refusal to rent housing to them, barring them from jobs and social clubs, and even a reluctance to maintain personal contacts. Thus, it grew weaker; yet from time to time anti-abolitionism was also visible in the North. This status quo, especially in the realm of public life, resulted partly from the various family ties with the South, and partly from the economic links with southern business.

As the position of Black Americans in the labour market was not sufficiently strongly defended by the AFL-CIO¹⁵ they organised a trade union of their own: the Negro American Labor Council. The position of Black Americans was gradually changing to their benefit, although the direction of the changes was not always of a linear nature. Even though still early in 1940 "Negroes were excluded from most occupations outside of agriculture and services", in 1962 "some Negroes were to be found in nearly every occupation".¹⁶ Moreover, labour relations improved, even though the structural violence (expressed in unequal access to schools caused by the unequal situation of families in the social structure) influenced them negatively. In addition, the unequal access to funds reserved by the federal government for social policy (e.g. to aid for the poor and aged, children and the unemployed, and support of council housing, etc.) was in fact eliminated.

Black Americans could not only participate in elections (local, state, federal) without obstacles,¹⁷ but could also become candidates and be elected by white votes

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. xxxvi.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. xxxvii.

¹⁵ Until 1961, the AFL-CIO would even refrain from open involvement of the union in activities aimed at the elimination of racial discrimination from labour relations.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. xxxviii.

¹⁷ Although still not to the same degree as in the Deep South and the rural areas of the Upper South. Still binding in five states was the poll tax, while literacy and "understanding" tests were practised

(e.g. to school councils). A two-party system also began to develop in the South, and in the presidential election (e.g. in 1960), black votes decided the victory of Democratic Party candidates. In 1916 there were already four black members of the Congress. In the North, seats in the councils of cities and smaller local communities were frequently taken by many representatives of this part of American society, elected from among other representatives in democratic elections. The structures of the Democratic Party also began to be reinforced in the quarters inhabited by “coloured” people. As a result, Afro-Americans gradually became a significant part of the “iron electorate” of the Democrats.

Criminal Law began to be applied more justly, especially when the parties – the aggressor and the victim – were of a different skin colour. Cases of brutal police behaviour towards black participants of conflict situations were less frequent. After 1950 “lynching was a rare event (...) and even murders of Negro prisoners by white policemen and jailers became infrequent. Thus, even while tensions mounted between races in the South, total violence declined.”¹⁸

For years, the problems most difficult to solve and which at the same time left a clear trace of former racial divides, were residential questions. The intensified inflow of coloured people to the cities of the North and West was accompanied by the escape of the white residents to suburban districts. Simultaneously, in the areas inhabited by coloured people, the prices of both buildings and real estate for development dropped. The space used by the new occupants quickly became devastated. Urban districts of poverty began to expand and the cities themselves yielded to transformation. The former residential areas began to develop commercial and office spaces. Rose believes that when the work on the second edition of *The American Dilemma* began, “housing segregation remains as the most serious and least soluble aspect of the race problem, at least in the Northern states”.¹⁹

Segregation in public and private (but open for the public) places, as well as the forced segregation in schools, play areas, restaurants, hotels, and commercial facilities in the North began to visibly disappear, to a large extent as an initiative and under the pressure of the local and state authorities. Nevertheless, it long remained the direct reason for serious tensions, if not riots in the South (especially under the influence of the process of desegregation of schools, public utility areas, and means of transport). Only in 1959–1960, did the abolitionists have to resort to protests based on the sit-in methodology to break down the discrimination practices still used in 200 cities of the South.

Marriage, other than endogamous marriage, has always been a problem, for reasons of both objective nature and subjective, racial, religious, ethnic/national, and legal nature, with their number – much like that of exogamous marriage – by

in others, and paramilitary groups of the White League and Red Shirts type were still active in Louisiana, Mississippi, and the Carolinas.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. xi.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. xii.

providing an important factor of the position assumed by the given group in the social structure, informed about the degree of its internal differentiation, level of openness to the other, dominant beliefs, and eventually the level of traumatic experience from bygone days. In societies such as the American one, i.e. composed of people who originate from various cultural bastions, continuously changing under the influence of the directions of immigration processes, changing with time, the number of marriages concluded outside of the group was and remains an additional marker of the level of social integration, cultural assimilation, and consent to multiculturalism. Moreover, the convictions about comprehensive consent to integration at the meso- and macrostructural level do not need to be accompanied at all by an analogous consent to the establishment of lasting unions at the level of microstructures, interracial marriages included. In the period of time in question, interracial marriages in the South were still illegal, while in the North – both due to the direction of movements of internal American migrants and the beliefs belonging to the internal migrants – their number was slowly growing.

Arnold Rose closes his analysis of the changes in American racial relations during the two decades following the first publication of *The American Dilemma* with two general conclusions.

First, he believes that the changes that took place at the time in the relations between the white and black citizens of the United States and their pace “appeared as one of the most rapid in the history of human relations”.²⁰ Moreover, these changes were “the most rapid and dramatic in world history without violent revolution”.²¹ Although much of the former segregation or practices and convictions seemingly justifying the attitudes discriminating the Blacks remained in the South, and proof for housing segregation continued throughout the country, nevertheless, “the all-encompassing cast system had been broken everywhere. Prejudice as an attitude was still common, but racism as a comprehensive ideology was maintained by only a few.”²²

Secondly, even though in 1962, black Americans

[...] still experience discrimination, insults, segregation, and the threat of violence, and in a sense have become more sensitive and less ‘adjusted’ to these things [...] Schooled as they are by the American Creed, their standard of compromise for the present situation is not what existed in 1940, but what the Constitution and ‘the principles of democracy’ say it should be.²³

In 1962 most sociologists, as Arnold Rose believed, recognised the forecasts of *The American Dilemma*, optimist. Yet has reality really changed in line with these predictions? Gunnar Myrdal himself did not participate in the preparation of

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. xiiii.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. xiiv.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*.

the second edition of his book, referred to as *the Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, limiting his involvement only to the writing of a 5-page long preface. Why? The answer is:

The present book will have to remain my first and my last contribution to the study of the Negro problem in America. As I did not want to express views on a subject on which I could no longer constantly follow the discussion. I have refrained from making further comments on the Negro issue" (Arnold Rose, *Postscript Twenty Years Later*).²⁴

Seventy years later: is *today* isomorphic towards past forecasts? On the eve of proclaiming the declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson was convinced that George III and the British Parliament were guilty of the rebellion of the colonies against the metropolis. And as "people are by nature free, government results from a social contract, and should it fail to fulfil its functions in line with the collective will, the collective has the right to overthrow it with the use of force".²⁵ In this Jeffersonian maxim, only the last element changed after the adoption of the Constitution: America overthrows its governments not with the use of force but following the procedure of free and fair elections. This is how Barack Obama, the 44th US President was elected. Thus, seemingly, one of the many. In fact, he is the first black (in his paternal line; Barack Obama senior came from the African Luo tribe and was born in Kenya) and white (in his maternal line Anna Durham had English, Irish, and Native American roots) leader of the United States. Was then the process of liberation of the American Society from racism and its consequences concluded on 20th January 2009, that is on the day when Barack Obama took over the presidential power in the US?

The question of black American slaves turns up in Polish sources in the first²⁶ version of Tadeusz Kościuszko's testament in 1798. Let us reiterate that Tadeusz Kościuszko first turned to Thomas Jefferson (referred to in the testament as "my friend") to assume the role of the trustee of Kościuszko's testament, authorising him in this way to dispose with, after Kościuszko's death, the estates awarded him by the US Congress for the service in the American Army (\$18,912.03, "disregarding the interest sent [for Kościuszko] to European banks", and 500 acres of land that "was situated by the Scioto in Ohio State").²⁷ Kościuszko wanted Jefferson to use the estate "for buying out Negroes, either his own or others", and for granting them with freedom". On his behalf, for "teaching them profession, instilling them with moral obligations, which may make them good neighbours, good fathers or

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. xxix.

²⁵ P. Zaremba, *Historia Stanów Zjednoczonych*, Paris 1957, p. 72.

²⁶ Altogether, there were four of them: of 1798, 1806, 1816, and 1817. In the first, the trustee was Thomas Jefferson. In the second – on the power of court decision – Benjamin L. Lear, in the third, after B. L. Lear's death, Colonel George Bomford, and in the fourth – after Bomford's death – Lewis Johnson. See: L. Pastusiak, *400 lat stosunków polsko-amerykańskich*, Vol. 1, Warszawa 2010, p. 174–175.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 154 and 175.

good mothers, husbands or wives – teaching them so that as citizens they be the defenders of their liberty, their country and good public order, and for raising them in everything that may make them happy and make them useful”.²⁸

As Kościuszko decreed, such a portion of his estates was to be earmarked to the buyout of the Blacks that the remaining share would also be sufficient to pay for the “good education” of their children. Every bought out slave “should be married and receive 100 acres of land, tools and animals for farming”. Moreover, before being bought out, everyone “should become familiar with the duty of the Citizen in a free State to defend his Country against the alien and internal enemies who would like to change the Constitution for the worse, which as a result would make them (Negroes) slaves again”.²⁹

Yet the further course of action proves that the subsequent three Testaments were not so explicit in this principal area. In 1802, Kościuszko presented the estate by the Scioto in Ohio to Louise Francoise Felix, a French woman who, by the way, was not too satisfied with the quality of land after seeing it. Although, as court documents prove, Kościuszko’s assets continued to grow through the years to the amount of \$40,000, they were significantly squandered by the administrators (especially Colonel George Bomford). In 1852, the case ended with the verdict of the court “ordering the administrators and guarantors to return the missing money” and rendering Kościuszko’s 1798 testament null and void. No slave was bought out. It also remains unknown what happened to the remaining part of Kościuszko’s assets.³⁰

After the second world war at least three generations of Polish sociologists dealt with the questions of racism in the US. In the first generation, these were Jerzy J. Wiatr and Zygmunt Bauman who studied the question the longest, in the second – Ewa Nowicka-Rusek, and in the third: Andrzej Kapiszewski, Jarosław Rokicki, Tadeusz Paleczny, and others.

Jerzy J. Wiatr first encountered the issues of the *Ludzie kolorowi w strukturze społeczeństwa amerykańskiego* (literally: “Coloured people in the structure of American society”) in the first edition of *An American Dilemma* (of 1944) at the University of Warsaw in the 1951/1952 academic year, at a lecture by Stanisław Ossowski. His first book devoted to the subject was an extended version of his doctoral dissertation (defended in the spring of 1957, with the tutor being Julian Hochfeld). The book was published as *Zagadnienia rasowe w socjologii amerykańskiej*.³¹ The following books were already the result of the author’s personal

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 155. L. Pastusiak quotes Kościuszko’s letters to Jefferson and Jefferson’s letters to Kościuszko from Izabella Rusinowa (selection, introduction), *Tadeusz Kościuszko, Thomas Jefferson. Korespondencja [1798–1817]*, Warszawa 1976.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 156.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 175; E. Gomulka, *Dlaczego nie spełniono ostatniej woli Tadeusza Kościuszki*, “Kultura”, 21st March 1976.

³¹ Literally: “Racial questions in American sociology”, Warszawa 1959.

contacts with the deep South (initially, thanks to a scholarship from the Ford Foundation), the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and Emory University in Atlanta. This is how *Naród i rasa w świadomości społecznej* (literally: "Nation and race in society's perception"), his second book³² – making reference both to the questions raised in the first and to the author's later contacts with the United States and the reflections they entailed, and a series of reportages published in *Radar* magazine – originated. Although Wiatr's third book, *Od Lincolna do Nixona: szkice historyczno-socjologiczne*,³³ tackles the question of race, it nevertheless focuses primarily on the general questions in the development of American history, and uses this perspective to look at the characteristics of American racial dilemmas. Finally, the fourth book, published by Wydawnictwo Adama Marszałka in Toruń in 2005, and entitled *Dylemat amerykański po sześćdziesięciu laty* (literally: "The American dilemma 60 years later") provides a peculiar synthesis of J.J. Wiatr's confrontation with the American reality, and the factors determining its dynamism. For many years, Arnold Rose helped Wiatr understand that reality, among others through the studies he published in *The Negro Morale: Group Identification and Protest*,³⁴ and in his later books. Wiatr first met Rose in 1956, during the 3rd World Congress of Sociology, and since that time could count on long disputes with the academic, whenever he needed them for insight.

J.J. Wiatr's cognitive attitude towards American racial dilemmas is well rendered by the last two sentences from his latest book: "Over a decade ago, one could think that the solution to the racial problem in America depends on a change of law and on overcoming the racial prejudice. Today, it is known that something more is needed: a change in the Americans' attitude to the inherited social inequalities."³⁵ Expressing his judgement with full conviction, Wiatr refers to Jeremy Ryfkin, and following him says that – exposing the unbridled rights of an individual to develop their individual's personality and initiatives, and even the unique style of fulfilment of human fate – American society "to a much lesser degree than European society is ready to recognise that the state is obliged to care for the poor. As a consequence, the fate of the Afro-Americans who managed to escape the inherited poverty remains indifferent to the conservative majority of American society."³⁶

Of Zygmunt Bauman's books, the ones to have a long-lasting influence on the circles dealing with the problems of society in the 1960s were the collection of studies published as *Z zagadnień współczesnej socjologii amerykańskiej*.³⁷ One of the studies concerned Myrdal's understanding of valuation in social sciences.³⁸

³² Published by Wydawnictwo Iskry, Warszawa 1962.

³³ Literally "From Lincoln to Nixon: essays in history and sociology", Warszawa 1976.

³⁴ The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1949.

³⁵ See: *Dylemat amerykański*..., p. 99.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 99; see also: J. Ryfkin, *The European Dream: How Europe's Vision of the Future is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream*, New York 2004.

³⁷ Literally: "From the questions of contemporary American sociology", Warszawa 1961.

³⁸ See: Chapter VI, *Myrdal: Problem wartościowania w naukach społecznych*..., p. 181–197.

Gunnar Myrdal himself described these questions, together with others, in the first and second appendixes to *An American Dilemma*, already mentioned in this essay. In another study, *Values in Social Theory*,³⁹ Myrdal formulated his views in the following manner: "All social sciences have been stimulated by the need to improve society rather than by the sheer curiosity of its mechanism. Social policy was primary, and social theory – secondary." Here, a reader of *An American Dilemma* is certain to easily find an additional key to the understanding of Myrdal's intentions visible in his analysis of the clash of values entered into the American Creed against the reality of racial relations in American society before the outbreak of the second world war.

A cognitively important example of the attitude of the second generation of Polish sociologists to the issues of interracial relations in the United States, including their dynamism (not only under the influence of the evolution of American society itself, but also of the significant changes taking place in Africa as a result of political decolonisation) is Ewa Nowicka's still read book under the telling title of *Afrykanie z wyboru. Afryka w świadomości Murzynów amerykańskich*.⁴⁰ Its uniqueness lies in the fact that, eager to understand her contemporary young black Americans, the author decided to spend a year at Atlanta University and Howard University with them and their academic teachers, a project which became possible thanks to a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies. Doing this, she was interested not as much in the vestigial elements of the former culture, which survived against all the adversities of fate in these milieus – even though they are simply invisible to a person not versed in the complexity of the process – as in the stimulation of a particular "cultural self-awareness of blacks in the US".⁴¹ It is generated by public opinion – of both America and the world – focused on Africa after the second world war, also under the influence of decolonisation processes. Until recently, being a rightful black US citizen meant as much as becoming liberated through your behaviour from the tradition of slavery and racial segregation, and to prove that you are not worse than the whites. Now, it wasn't enough to be similar to the stereotypic white. You simply needed to have something more: the strengthening pride of your African origin; an African collective awareness, which did not provide an alternative for an analogous American collective awareness, but complemented it. With your head raised high, as "black is beautiful". Ewa Nowicka knew that this could not be learnt just so, from outside, yet one needed to reach for Florian Znaniecki's *humanistic coefficient*.⁴² Nowicka decided to take the step. Although she was able to spend a number of months at Harvard University, she chose Howard University.

³⁹ Published in New York in 1958, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Literally: "Africans by choice. Africa in the awareness of American Negroes", Warszawa 1979.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁴² In: F. Znaniecki, *The Method of Sociology*, New York 1934, p. 36–37.

The works of the youngest generation of scientists concentrated on stereotypes, auto-stereotypes, and inter-ethnic relations determined by skin colour and anthropological traits, origin, culture, the development of national identity and nationalism, and also on the fear-derived nature of xenophobia. This was the case among others with Andrzej Kapiszewski [See: idem, *Stereotyp Amerykanów polskiego pochodzenia*, (literally: "The stereotype of Americans of Polish origin"), Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wrocław–Gdańsk, 1977, and *Asymilacja i konflikt. Z problematyki stosunków etnicznych w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, (literally: "Assimilation and conflict. On the problems of ethnic relations in the United States of America", Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1984), Tadeusz Paleczny,⁴³ and Jarosław Rokicki].⁴⁴

The process of forming contemporary Afro-American society lasted for nearly four centuries and went through a variety of phases, conditioned by numerous factors. As a rule, their impact was that of entire syndromes, although some of them would become more – and others less – important. The consequences of some of these reasons have been present to this day. Others entered a state of dormancy, much like stereotypes, and only became animated in the cases of violently emerging acute social, political, and economic conflicts. Yet others have withered.

The history of the forefathers of today's Afro-Americans begins in August 1619 when, as noted by John Rolfe, one of the first settlers in Jamestown, Virginia "came a Dutch man of War that sold us 20 negroes".⁴⁵ It is estimated that over 400,000 black slaves had been brought to the original 13 colonies, and later to the US, by the date of the legal prohibition of slavery: 1804 in the North, and in the South since the announcement of Abraham Lincoln's preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on 22nd September 1862 (officially published on 1st January 1863), announcing freedom for all the slaves remaining in the territories of the rebelling states of the South from that day forth.⁴⁶

Towards the end of the 1960s, the US Bureau of the Census estimated that of the 200 million US citizens, whites accounted for 87.5%, and blacks for 11%. The remaining 1.5% of the population were counted as Asians, Indians, and other non-whites. According to the same source, in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century (when the number of US residents exceeded 300 million in October

⁴³ *Ewolucja ideologii i przemiany tożsamości narodowej Polonii w Stanach Zjednoczonych w latach 1870–1970*, Warszawa-Kraków 1989.

⁴⁴ *Kolor, pochodzenie, kultura*, Kraków 2002; *Nadzieje i porażki Akcji Afirmatywnej*, „Kra-kowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2004, No. 2(1), p. 111–123.

⁴⁵ *The Story of America*, Pleasantville–New York 1975, p. 108.

⁴⁶ The letter of Abraham Lincoln to abolitionist Horace Greeley, publisher of *New York Tribune*, of 22nd August 1862, proves, however, that the president found the question of unity of all the states more important than the very abolition of slavery. To quote his words, "If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do it." Quoted from: *The Story of America...*, p. 149.

2006) the share of whites in the entire population of US residents had dropped by 12.4 percentage points, and amounted to 75.1%. In turn, a growth tendency was visible (mostly due to the greater birth rate in black US families) in the proportion of African Americans (to 12.3%), Mexicans (to 5.4%), and Native Americans (to approximately 1%). Also increasing were the populations of Americans of Asian origin (the Chinese – up to 0.9% of the entire US population, Filipinos – 0.7%, Indians – 0.6%, and the Japanese – 0.3%). According to the criteria assumed, 3.8% of the population could not be counted into any of the groups listed above.⁴⁷ Yet, after subtracting the group of white Hispanics (8.11%) from the group of white Americans, the proportion of this most numerous category drops down to 65.83% of all US residents, parallel to the increase in the number of Hispanics (White Hispanics and Non-White Hispanics counted jointly at approximately 16%), and Americans of Asian or Pacific Island descent (3.8%).

Moreover, and which is important to understand the changes taking place in the structure of the entire US population, it must be noted that:

- the amalgamation factor is growing: as far as there were approximately 3.8 million Americans born from multiracial couples in 2000, nine years later, the number reached 5.4 million, and that

- the population of some cities and states is quickly changing: while the whites are moving out to the suburbs, their place is being taken, apart from African Americans, by the new immigrants from South America, and Asians. The directions of external migrations also result in an intensification of the exchange of the population of the south-western states. According to the US Census from 2000, whites are already a minority in 48 out of the 100 largest American cities (10 years earlier, this was true for 30 cities). In 2000, whites (or to be more precise non-Hispanic Whites) already accounted for only 43.8% of the residents of the cities, while African Americans (non-Hispanic African American) – for 24.1%, Hispanics – for 22.5%, Asians – 4.6%, and others – 3%. The situation in the country's capital, Washington and in the states of California, New Mexico, Hawaii, and Texas is analogous.

If demographers are right and nothing significant stops or changes the course of the current trends, in around 2050, the share of the white population (counted without White Hispanics) in the total number of US residents will drop below 50%. This is possibly how the history of the US will come full circle, and will the United States then be not only multicultural, but also multi-coloured.

Significant changes are visible in the American system of education. In the mid-19th century, nearly every other young person (including a decided majority of those of non-white origin) aged from 5 to 19 remained outside the system of education. The situation underwent a profound change when, beginning in 1918, the states introduced a mandatory education law, extending the school duty over the youth under 16 years of age. With time, legislation was amended in various ways,

⁴⁷ The largest groups within that section were Native Hawaiians – 140,600 and Alaska Natives – 106,600.

also increasing state expenditure on education (e.g. in the school year 2001/2002 to the level of 5.6% of the GDP), and introducing the “no child left behind” principle, envisaging not only an improvement of the school level, but also support for the families unable to cope with the growing expenditure. The system of schools was to become an efficient means of promoting equal opportunity, or in other words, limiting the power of the impact of structural violence. However, in fact, these actions to a greater extent “express our aspirations [...] than our achievement”.⁴⁸ Much as in many other countries, even public schools are not uniform. Moreover, the correlation between school quality and the affluence of the area, teacher earnings, level of income, and the colour of skin of the parents is legible. To oppose the impact of these inequalities, as well as racial segregation remaining in significant relation to those, “some districts have started a policy of busing, transporting students to achieve racial balance and more equal opportunity in all schools”.⁴⁹ The means leading to the equalisation of opportunities was also to be the “Affirmative Action, that is the protection policy towards the black minority, introduced by President Kennedy in 1961” and later developed.⁵⁰ The first steps, reminiscent of the later actions of the Affirmative Action programme were taken towards veterans of the second world war. The federal government decided to finance their studies, independent of their racial affiliation. However, special aid was launched for African Americans in need of material assistance to be able to enrol into colleges on the power of the GI Bill. Until 1960, financial support of studies from federal funds was only granted to 350,000 black men and women. Yet another programme under the name of the Affirmative Action was launched in 1965 by President Johnson’s administration. On its power “employers were instructed to monitor hiring, promotion, and admissions policies to eliminate discrimination – even if unintended – against minorities”.⁵¹

As statistical analyses prove, only 62% of young Americans continue education, and go on to study immediately after graduation from high schools. Continuing their education least frequently are students coming from families whose annual income does not exceed (data for 2001) \$10,000 (only 25.3%). Continuing education most frequently are children of families with revenues of \$72,000 and over (64.7%). The dependency between the race of the parents and the school career of their children is even more visible. Thus, graduating at high school level are 56% of boys and 58% of girls from a Hispanic background, 79% of those from an African American background, and between 88% to 89% from families that belong to the non-Hispanic White category. Analogous data for graduates of four-years

⁴⁸ J. J. Macionis, *Sociology*, 10th edition, New Jersey 2005, p. 521.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 525.

⁵⁰ J. Rokicki, *Nadzieje i porażki akcji afirmatywnej*, “Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2001, No. 2(1), p. 111; see also: J. Coleman, T. Hoffer, S. Kilgore, *Public and Private Schools. An Analysis of Schools and Beyond*, Washington DC 1981.

⁵¹ J. J. Macionis, *op. cit.*, p. 378; NORC, *General Social Surveys 1972–2002: Cumulative Codebook*, National Opinion Research Center, Chicago 2003.

colleges are: 11% in the group of students of Hispanic origin, 17% of male and 18% of female students in the group of African Americans, and 89% and 88% respectively among the non-Hispanic Whites.⁵²

Expenditure incurred by the parents on the non-school education of children casts a clear light on the educational opportunities of the young. As far as 1972 is concerned "the rich spent five times as much as the poor, in 2007, the ratio was already 9:1".⁵³ Sean Reardon of Stanford University complements this information with the conclusion that "in the 1950s and 1960s, race determined to a great degree the results of children at school, and now it is the level of the parents' income which decides about them".⁵⁴

Is the diversification of income of American families of the early second decade of the 21st century actually growing? Yes it is. The structure of income, and consequently the social structure of the United States undergoes (also under the influence of the most recent crisis) a clear polarisation, with the level of wealth currently becoming one of the most clearly visible indications of racial affiliation. "The Golden decades of the 1940s, 1950s, and the 1960s, when the middle class were becoming richer and everyone had their chance of success is now only history."⁵⁵ American studies of stratification of society reach back to the British tradition of Charles Booth and his empirical analyses of the conditions of life and work in London during the last two decades of the 19th century.⁵⁶ The results of his analyses were ordered into eight classes/layers divided into equal halves by the poverty line. The empirical grounds for being counted into one of eight classes included the nature of the occupation performed and the value of income. Situated above the poverty line were, among others, the lower and higher middle class. Terms including social status, types of statuses (granted, inherited, and achieved), social prestige and social distance, and also standards of equality, superiority, and inferiority were made popular by Robert Park (1864–1944) from the Chicago school. The Gallup Institute used the trichotomic stratification distinguishing lower, middle, and upper classes in the late 1930s, and saw those names being taken over by journalists and colloquial language.

They won their place in American sociology with the studies of William Lloyd Warner (1898–1970) and the six-volume book *The Social Life of a Modern Community* by W.L. Warner, and Paul S. Lunt, published in 1941–1959.⁵⁷ They recognised stratification to be a system of layers composed of individuals with similar social status, hierarchically ordered according to standards of superiority

⁵² US Census Bureau 2003.

⁵³ M. Zawadzki, *Amerykański sen pryska w edukacji*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 11th–12th February 2012, p. 7.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ Ch. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People of London*, 17 vols, London 1892–1902.

⁵⁷ Yankee City Series, Vol. 1, New Haven 1941.

and inferiority established in the collective awareness. Most frequent correlates of these standards are: occupation, value of income and the way of earning it, the assets, style of life and customs, functions played in the social division of work and power, and the housing and the district in which it is situated. The basic type of stratification built on these grounds consists of the following six classes/layers (with both terms treated here synonymously) “upper-upper, lower-upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, upper-lower, and lower-lower”. A feature characteristic of stratification and the state of social conflicts is the following dependency: the more the stratification is developed and combined with the patterns of social mobility (upward or downward along the hierarchical social ladder), the more it cushions social conflicts. It operates the other way round too: the more clearly it becomes polarised, the more visible the discrepancy between wealth and poverty becomes visible and generates various forms of unconventional political behaviour, frequently going beyond the binding standards of law.⁵⁸

American wealth and poverty. It goes without saying that they are still correlated with the impact of former caste⁵⁹ and class-strata divisions, and the racial stereotypes reinforced through them. Moreover, both wealth and poverty are inherited. Thus, they also exert a significant impact both on the opportunities and on the life aspirations of successive generations. As the old metaphor says, the colour of the money is the same for whites and blacks, yet the level of wealth they define is not.

According to various sources, the stratification of American society at the threshold of the 21st century was as follows: 5% of the American population belonged to the upper class. The annual income of members of that class ranged from \$164,000 to \$1,640,000, and came from inherited shares, investments, and real estate, etc. This class includes, among others, the 400 richest American families with property, mostly inherited, of the minimum value of \$550 million each. The upper class is divided into:

- The upper class (metaphorically called “blue bloods”, and also “old money”). They account for 1% of the population. One belongs to it by birth. These families live in the exclusive districts of the old towns and stately homes, including ones remaining in the hands of the family. They receive their education at the best private universities, and run various types of foundations. Women from the milieu become involved in charity and also support the development of symbolic culture.
- The lower upper class. This is the subclass that gathers most of the families counted as “upper class”. They are, to use another name, “the working rich”, and draw their assets, not only from inherited wealth, but also from their own professional

⁵⁸ R. J. Dalton, *Protest Politics. Measuring Protest. Prediction of Protest. Participation and Contemporary Democracies*, [in:] R. J. Dalton, *Citizen Politics in Western Democracies. Public Opinion and Political Parties in the United States, Great Britain, West Germany and France*, Chatham 1988, p. 59–73.

⁵⁹ Sanctioned among others, by the “so-called Jim Crow laws – classic case of institutional discrimination – [which] segregated US society into two racial casts”; see: J. J. Macionis, *Sociology*, 10th edition..., p. 368.

activity. Some of them are sometimes defined as “the new rich”. This is where the essence of the classical formula of the American dream comes true: to gain so much, so as to get to this subclass.

– The middle class. Until recently, between 40% to 45% of Americans were counted into this class. They are the main purchasers in the American goods and services markets, who set the US economy in motion. This class is believed to be more racially and ethnically diverse than the upper class. It falls into the upper, middle and the lower middle.

– The upper middle class. The annual income of this category of families lies in the range of between \$80,000 to \$160,000. The markers of this class include a large convenient house in an expensive district, multiple cars, and insurance. Two thirds of children in these families received solid higher education. Most frequently practised professions: physicians, lawyers, engineers, financiers, and members of supervisory boards in big corporations. They are major influences of local and state politics.

– The average middle class (sometimes also referred to as “the white-collar class”). The annual revenue of the households in this subclass ranges from \$40,000 to \$80,000. Due to their number and income they assume a significant position in the structure of American society. Professionally they are medium-rung managers, teachers in various schools, traders, and real estate agents. Approximately every other person holds a higher education diploma, as a rule obtained from the state education system. Corroboration of the success achieved is a decent house and a regular income, also after the end of professional activity.

– The working class. (Also defined as the lower-middle class of the “blue collars”). It is estimated that this class accounts for approximately a third of the entire American society. Typical occupations: mostly industrial employees and employees of other major businesses. In the past, a large share of this class were defined as “the industrial proletariat”. Household revenue is in the range of \$25,000–\$40,000 per annum. Problems of the class: low wages, frequently periodical or even permanent unemployment, occupational diseases, low insurance, and low retirement pensions. Every other family in this category has its own house, but probably in a poor district. Approximately only a third of the children from these families graduate from high schools (as a rule, at the level of baccalaureate).

– The lower class. The last 20% of the American population with low income and unstable conditions of life. The US federal government counts approximately 25,000,000 of “the working poor” and approximately 33,000,000 of people considered poor, and also living below the poverty line in this class. About 60% of those counted as the lower class do not own a house but rent accommodation in the poorer city districts (which, *nota bene*, are frequently situated in the former centres of these towns). Education: approximately 50% of the people in this last category of the social structure graduated from high school, and 25% – from college.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ L. A. Keister, *Wealth in America: Trends in Wealth Inequality*, Cambridge 2000.

Polarisation of wealth and poverty is visible even more strongly should we divide the 100% of American families into five equal parts. According to data from the US Census Bureau of 2002, this proves that Americans counted into the first 20% by income (i.e. the poorest) have at their disposal 4.2% of the income (salaries and wages, other revenue, income from invested capital, etc.), and 1% of the accumulated wealth (the total of money and other assets minus the significant debt) of the entire US population. The second 20% has at its disposal 9.7% of the income and 1% of the wealth, the third – 15.4% and 5% respectively, the fourth – 22.9% and 11%, and the fifth 20% (the richest) dispose of 47.7% of the income and 82% of the wealth.⁶¹

As the data and forecasts of the US Census Bureau show, the poverty index (covering both relative and absolute poverty), which in 2010 amounted to 15.1% will grow towards the end of 2012 (mostly due to the high level of unemployment holding, and the level of wages correlated to it) to 15.7%, and will be the highest in nearly 50 years. This means that the processes of polarisation of the American social structure continues to deteriorate. Supporting such a conclusion is, among others, the continuously growing disproportion between the income of the people who belong to the higher and lower social strata. Let us use an example. In 2011, one in six working Americans earned below \$11,200 a year, and the annual income of a family of four did not exceed the level of \$22,300. According to the estimates made by trade unions, at the time, a CEO of a stock exchange listed company earned on average 343 times as much as an average employee (in 1980, the multiple was much lower, and the ratio was 1:42). Influenced by the accumulation of the old wealth with the impacts of the process of the polarisation, the 400 richest Americans currently have at their disposal assets equal to what half of all the US citizens have.⁶²

Despite the better access to schools than in the past, and fuller preparation to occupational roles, in particular for the contemporary information society, African Americans still earn significantly less than whites. The median of the annual revenue of an African American family in the first year of the 21st century amounted to \$33,598, which only accounted for 59% of what non-Hispanic white families earned at the same time. This difference was translated not only at the level of the aspirations of both types of families, but also on the place of residence. While approximately 74% of white families have their own houses, the ratio for African American families, as attested by the data of the US Census Bureau of 2002, did not exceed 48%. Data from the same census leaves no room for doubt that upward mobility depends to a great degree not only on the opportunities that – in the sense of positive law – are equal for all, but also on the volume of material assets providing a *conditio sine qua non* for competing in the race for the accumulation of an appropriate human and social capital. This is why, although a significant number

⁶¹ Ch. Russell, M. Mogelonsky, *Riding High on the Market*, “American Demographics”, Vol. 22, No. 4, p. 44–54.

⁶² I quote this data from: A. Popiołek, I. Sudak, *Amerykanie najbiedniejsi od 1965 r.*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 24th July 2012, p. 21.

of African Americans found themselves among the wealthy in the 1980s and the 1990s, nevertheless, the average income of African American families only grew to a minimum degree during those two decades.

What should not be a reason to wonder, in the light of the information already quoted, is that upward mobility among black women was significantly lower than among black men. In the labour market, if they found gainful employment at all, they played poorly paid roles of cleaners, child minders, receptionists, secretaries, and waitresses. They earned little (in 2001, 76% of what a male was paid for the same working time), were discriminated, and as a rule had no view to promotion. When nearly every other marriage ends in divorce, they lose the basic sustenance together with healthcare and other insurance. Moreover, the number of their dependants includes unemployed children, often already of age. What they find absolutely true is the conclusion that when the earning opportunities are lost, there is always poverty which remains.

Some African American women actively supported feminism. The attention among them also focused on slogans typical of white feminists, for example, "working to increase equality, expanding human choice, eliminating gender stratification, ending sexual violence, promoting sexual freedom".⁶³ A more radical formula of feminism, both white and black, was contained in a report by the Presidential Task Force on Women's Rights, dating back to as early as 1970. It contained eight claims considered basic, seven less emphasised, and one controversial. The first category encompassed the claims of

[...] equal pay for equal work, equal opportunity for on-the-job training and promotion, women's right to obtain credit, a strong legal voice, ratification and implementation of the Equal Rights Amendment by states that have not done so, maternity leave, child care centres publicly founded, recognition of the economic importance of house work and child care, and the right to Social Security benefits and disability insurance.

The second, on the other hand, included

[...] revisions of children's books to portray women and girls in more varied roles than those of wife and mother, a new image in the media, better acknowledgement in the history books of the contribution women have made in many fields, freedom in schools, elimination of quotas that limit the number of women accepted into colleges and graduate schools, and to guidance consulting which advises high school girls to stick to such fields as teaching and nursing, a change in the attitude that housework should rest mainly on women's shoulders.

Considered the most controversial of the 16 claims put forth by the report was the right of women to "unrestricted abortion and freedom from unwanted children".⁶⁴ Speaking in general categories, some of the racist convictions and practices have a background similar to institutional prejudice and discrimination. In

⁶³ J. J. Macionis, *Sociology*., p. 345.

⁶⁴ Quoted from: *The Story of America*, New York 1975, p. 438.

most cases they begin as an externalised expression of ethnocentrism and the lack of knowledge it hides, as well as helplessness towards the reality, as well as as the justification of the economic exploitation. Later they shift into active behaviours, forcing minorities into lower positions in the system of social stratification. This position and its objectively visible symptoms (poorer place of residence, lower level of education, profession and occupational activity which brings lower income, lifestyle and level that do not enjoy social recognition, etc.) become in turn proof justifying the ethnocentric and racist beliefs. This is how the vicious circle emerges. The convictions and actions that were originally based on erroneous assumptions generate the seemingly rational explanation of their essence as a consequence.⁶⁵

An attempt at a conclusion

The 70 years that have passed since submitting the first edition of *An American Dilemma* to print and the half a century which has passed since the second edition prompt a conclusion that the controversy between the leading principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence,⁶⁶ and the situation of the black residents stifling American society for nearly two centuries, named by Gunnar Myrdal in the title, is already gone.

It is certainly so in light of the constitutional law and the later legislation of the Congress. In the case of the Constitution, these are, in particular, the 13th Amendment of 1865, abolishing slavery (Amendment 13, sections 1. "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any subject to their jurisdiction." and 2: "Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation," the 14th Amendment of 1868, which decides about citizenship (Amendment 14, Section 1. "All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws," and the 15th Amendment from 1870 stating that the "right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude" (Section 1). Subsequent Civil Rights Acts were passed in 1957, 1960, 1964, 1965 and 1968, and:

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 363; see also: *Institutional Racism in America*, ed. L. L. Knowles, K. Prewitt, Englewood Cliffs 1969.

⁶⁶ "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness".

- set up a Civil Rights Commission in the Executive Branch to gather information on the deprivation of citizens' voting rights based on color, race, religion or national origin (1957),
- established federal inspection of local voter registration polls and introduced penalties for anyone who obstructed attempts to register to vote (1960),
- guaranteed all citizens equal provisions guaranteeing equal access to public places and facilities, equal employment rights (irrespective of race), and also the right to withhold federal assistance to schools practising or tolerating any forms of discrimination (1964),
- outlawed the practice of requiring voters to pass literacy tests in order to register to vote, and established extensive federal oversight of administration of elections in cases of the proof or probability of refusing voting rights to any category of citizens (1965),
- instituted severe penalties for interfering with the freedom of voting and education, and prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing (1968).

Not insignificant for the new climate were the decisions (1965) expanding the Social Security Act with the Health Insurance Act for the Aged (those who have reached 65; known in short as Medicare) and awarding special federal funds (on the power of another amendment known as Medicaid) designed for state governments for the support of the poor, independent of their age (if the income of these people or families did not exceed the amount set by law). Entitled to that form of benefit were also families with large numbers of children, the blind, and people with a high degree of disability. Even more initiatives were launched in the 1960s as part of the federal programme known under the name of the Great Society, administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Influenced by that process, the procedures of defining and executing Civil Rights found themselves under the control of not only appropriate institutions, but also public opinion and NGOs (non-governmental organisations), whose number included societies and associations founded and managed by African Americans. A very special role among them was played by Marcus Garvey, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, Walter White, Roy Wilkins, Rosa Parks, A. Philip Randolph, Whitney M. Young Jr., César Chávez, Jesse Jackson, and Dr Martin Luther King Jr., initially, some of them (especially Garvey) sought the solution to the problem by "uniting all the Negro peoples of the Word into one great body to establish a country and government absolutely their own," or by "black separatism" (Du Bois). Others, thinking along the lines of Malcolm X, saw their opportunity in the movements of the Black Muslim, and – as Eldridge Cleaver – Black Panther. Yet others sought for non-violent forms of action, as a student leader Stokely Carmichael did.

With the passing of years, it was, however, the tendency which aimed at the full integration of the black community with American society that won over. This was already a new quality expressed not in the opposition towards the US, but in

the activity furthering a lasting change of the American reality, as well as the running of black citizens in local, state, and US Congress elections.

The media also found themselves under the pressure of the new tendencies. It was now demanded, frequently inconclusively, that they reject the language of the former racism – with a characteristic of hatred, and replace the traditional stereotypes with attempts to understand the situation of the minorities. A new compound coinage found its way to the language of public debates and journalists' expressions: political correctness. The change made some radical conservative circles conclude that the media and also film were taken over by the liberal cultural elite, promoting minorities together with their problems and culture, and also the advocates of feminism and gay rights. The Conservative voice also became audible, especially with the Fox Network gaining on popularity.

At the highest level of power, the evolution of social movements was clearly manifested during the victorious electoral campaign of John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic to become a US president. At that time, at the beginning of the 1960s, many Americans found it a cultural shock, not unlike the one that accompanied the election of Barack Obama in the autumn of 2008. Significant signals of a change in the attitude of white Americans towards racial questions have also been the careers of Colin Luther Powell⁶⁷ and Condoleezza Rice.⁶⁸

The events from the period known as the Redemption which began after the Compromise of 1877, together with the racist practices related to the Jim Crow laws, already belong to the infamous past. Yet, at the time when Myrdal's team conducted research and the first edition of his book was being prepared, i.e. in 1937–1941, sitting in the US Congress (of the 75th and 76th term) was only one black American.⁶⁹ When the second, anniversary edition of *An American Dilemma* was published in 1962, there were four African Americans in the House of Representatives. The situation began to change radically after 1969, with 11 Africa Americans in Congress (10 in the House of Representatives and one in the Senate), and in 1983 there were 21 black people elected to the House of Representatives.

⁶⁷ Born in New York's Harlem in 1936 to a family of Jamaican immigrants and a graduate of New York City public schools, C.L. Powell was a four-star general of the American army, Ronald Reagan's National Security Advisor in 1987–1989, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1989–1993, and Secretary of State in the George W. Bush administration, the first black secretary in the 65 years since the establishment of the post.

⁶⁸ C. Rice, born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1954, is a daughter of a Presbyterian minister and a music teacher; Professor of political sciences, first black woman to hold the post of Stanford University Provost in 2001, author of books on the Soviet Union and systemic transformations in post-1989 Europe, in 2001–2005 National Security Advisor in the Cabinet of George W. Bush, and the 66th United States Secretary of State (from 2005 to 2009).

⁶⁹ Although in 1869–1871, there were already three congressmen of black origin: two in the House of Representatives, and one in the Senate, and in 1875–1877, there were as many as eight. Nevertheless, from 1901 to 1929 (that is, from the 57th to the 70th term) no black was elected to the House of Representatives or to the Senate.

From 1993 to 2009, their number ranged from 40 to 43.⁷⁰ Moreover, the first black American women found their way to the ranks of senators and MPs.

Under the influence of the successive waves of migration from South to North, to the Midwest states, and to cities including New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and to the West Coast, constituencies dominated by a black electorate and their opinion forming organisations formed. The collective memory of the experience from the days of the great depression, when Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programmes, also including funds earmarked for assistance to the unemployed, made the black communities ever more aware of their interests and possibility of defending them by participating in voting. These were no longer masses of individuals incapable of resistance, but material segments of civic society. The political force that now expressed them most fully was the Democratic Party.

Not without influence on the course of the changes were the processes taking place in the international community. The status of the white race, formerly a hegemon of the civilisational processes, was significantly traumatised in the early 21st century in the clash against the quickly developing economies of China, Brazil, Mexico and India. For the first time, the *white* United States became a multi-billion debtor of the *yellow* China.

It would, however, be a mistake to believe that the American dilemma contained in the collision of American Creed ideology with the material reality of everyday American life, dominated for centuries by various forms of racism, was already finally solved. The intellectual bankruptcy of racism rhetoric only resulted in an eruption of new questions. Why – if we are all free, and the races, albeit different, are equal by nature, and this equality is moreover safeguarded by law – are the material opportunities of whites and blacks so different? Why, although theoretically everyone has the same opportunities, do they not achieve the same results? To what extent is this status quo influenced by the heritage of the past, while the wealth of some grew at the cost of the unpaid (as it was, slave!) or poorly remunerated work of others? Is it sufficient to expose the principles of individualism (*every man is the architect of his own fortune*) in this case, or is it just the opposite, besides the effort and the ethos of the labour of individuals, is there also a wise policy of the state taking into account the good of everyone necessary?

The dilemma analysed by Gunnar Myrdal in the contemporary United States shifts from the realm of the race to the realm of social policy. In its modern wording it reads as follows: how to combine into a coherent whole the free market with the principles of the welfare state? In its extreme version, the free market only brings riches to some at the cost of others. If the others do not concede to the role of the pariah and at the same time, the costs of their own success cannot be transferred to the shoulders of the communities and states that are still not sufficiently strong

⁷⁰ Still dominant among them were Members of the House of Representatives. In 1993–1999 and in 2005–2009 only one US senator was of Afro-American origin, and there were none in 1999–2005.

enough to be able to defend them efficiently, major social shocks are inevitable. It is true that human values originate from our choices. And it is us, society, who is the sovereign. To equalise the opportunities, state interventionism is necessary. What, however, must be done simultaneously so that the cost of the welfare state is not too great and does not block the market? A question which becomes more important as populist ideologies feed on the lack of rational correlation between the free market and the welfare state. Ideologies that today are not only of leftist origin as they used to be, but also come from the extreme right.

The original version of Myrdal's dilemma meant the removal of racial prejudices and discrimination in the name of humanist, enlightenment values contained in the American Creed. This was successfully achieved. Open racism lost to the American Creed, especially in light of the binding law. However, today's dilemma cannot be solved by the removal of one of its two components: be it wealth or poverty. Both are acutely visible and still bear significant consequences.

Of the members of congress elected in 2009, 44% are millionaires. At the same time, the unemployment rate, the main reason for unemployment amounted to slightly over 9% in the US, and an average American earned approximately \$39,000 per annum on average. The two candidates running for US presidency in the coming election differ significantly, not only in the colour of their skin and programme but also in the level of wealth. The first of them, the Republican Mitt Romney, revealed in his last tax statement an income of \$43 million. He paid 14% tax from that sum, although at the time the rate for Americans who earned the highest income was 35%. The other, Democrat Barack Obama, in an analogous statement proved an income of \$1.8 million. He paid 26% tax, and additionally donated 13% of his income to charity. How does public opinion perceive differences that go so far. The Occupy Wall Street movement, prominent in 2011, subscribes to the opinion that 1% of Americans (the wealthiest) exploit the rest. According to statistics from recent years, while the revenue of the financial elites grows exponentially, in the case of the rest of Americans it has nearly stalled, if not impoverished. As a result, children from many non-affluent European families have a greater opportunity to multiply their human capital than an analogous category of children in American families.

Contemporary developed societies must find other solutions than those proposed so far by extremist ideologies and movements. It is possible, as the knowledge and will, and the social policy built on their foundation are capable of generating mobility going beyond the limits set by the vicious circle.⁷¹ Thus, the key to solving the dilemma in question is most probably contained in a rational combination – subordinated to the idea of public right, of an effective free market with wise state social policy. Is it, nonetheless, possible to combine individualism with collective action? Zbigniew Brzeziński believes it is. The experience of Roosevelt's New Deal is one of the proofs. This is how Brzeziński refers to it.

⁷¹ G. Myrdal, *The American Dilemma*..., p. 75, footnote b.

The genius of the New Deal liberal solution was to fuse the individualism intrinsic in American historical experience – an individualism that has inherently reinforced a conservative reluctance toward collective social action – with a sense of social responsibility as defined through the political process.⁷²

The revolution of the labour market informs convincingly about the directions of change. The employment structure in the United States at the turn of the 21st century did in no way resemble the patterns known from the past. At the time, only 3% of all occupationally active Americans worked in agriculture, with 24% being employed in industry, and no fewer than 73% in services. To be able to exist, such an economy – the Third Wave economy, the super-symbolic economy – must be based not on the physical power and simple manual skills inherited from generation to generation, but on knowledge, and even then it requires continuous provision of new solutions.⁷³ Under these conditions, an opportunity to stand up to the contemporary in an efficient manner is granted only to those communities that treat everyone's open access to the school system – independent of the position in the social structure, wealth of the parents, race, gender, or religion – in the same way as they do equality, freedom, life, and the pursuit of happiness. Under the influence of the processes that set this civilisation in motion, the semantic field of illiteracy is also changing. And so do the grounds for authority. Everyone who is now incapable of, or does not want to participate in lifelong learning will become an illiterate of the 21st century, much like those who could not read and write were counted into this group in the 20th century. Moreover, today, knowledge is “the most universal and fundamental source of power [...], as it makes it possible to turn round the challenges that could require the use of force or wealth. It can frequently be used to convince others that they act in the desired manner, although it does not lie in their interest. Knowledge gives power of the highest quality.”⁷⁴ However, in 2001–2003, the American economy liquidated approximately 3,000,000 jobs.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, unemployment intensified not only under the influence of the rapid civilisational evolution, but also under the impact of the financial crisis and its consequences both for those who lost work and for their dependants. Yet unemployment is not only a lack of means. It is also a growing sense of wrong, and an internal imperative to protest, which forms the substrate not for a rational reflection, but for demagoguery and populism that offer no opportunity to amend the actual reality. A sharp conflict concerning who is guilty of the crisis and who is going to pay for it is intensifying. Immanuel Wallerstein claims, and not without justification, that two questions be-

⁷² *Between Two Ages. America's Role in the Technetronic Era*, New York 1970, p. 235.

⁷³ *Gospodarka oparta na wiedzy. Wyzwania dla Polski XXI wieku*, ed. A. Kukliński, Warszawa 2001.

⁷⁴ A. Toffler, *Zmiana władzy. Wiedza, bogactwo i przemoc u progu XXI stulecia*, Poznań 2003, p. 645.

⁷⁵ L. Uchitell, *Defying Forecast. Job Losses Mount for a 22nd Month*, “New York Times”, 6th September 2003.

come especially controversial today. “The first question are taxes: who pays them and to what amounts; and the other – how much will states invest in education, health, and lifelong guarantee of income.”⁷⁶ How long is that phase of the crisis going to last? Wallerstein believes it may continue for 20, 30, and possibly even for 40 years. That period will feature “chaos and violent shocks in international relations and economy. [...] Details are absolutely unknown [...] the USA held an uncontested hegemony and was the center of the world system from 1945 to the end of the 1960s. Never before or later did it have such an opportunity to control the world economy.” The destabilisation lasting for two or three decades, “is linked to the demise of the power of the previous hegemon”.

Which country or group of countries will replace the United States in this role? Is it possible, at least in general terms, to draw some sensible paths leading beyond the circle of crisis-genic events and processes? Competing here are three visions: 1) “of the Democratic, relatively egalitarian world that has never yet been”, 2) a conservative current that serves “‘let us turn the screw to the maximum’, load them with burdens, and press them down to the ground with the police and the army”, and 3) the liberal current claiming that the method based on force will be insufficient, for which reason “we must buy out the poor and enrol into the system”, and to make “capitalism more egalitarian”.⁷⁷

Which road will the United States take? Following the considerations I present in this essay, I believe it will be the third, if Americans elected Barack Obama the President of the United States for a second term.

The American Dilemma w siedemdziesiąt lat później

Autor ponawia pytania, jakie przed czytelnikami siedemdziesiąt lat temu postawił Gunnar Myrdal, oddając do ich rąk książkę *An American Dilemma. The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York and Evanston 1944). Książka ta osiągnęła w dziejach współczesnych nauk społecznych status niezwykły. Myrdal szuka bowiem odpowiedzi na pytanie, dlaczego społeczeństwo i państwo tworzone od początku na oświeceniowych tradycjach i demokratycznych zasadach odmawia, wbrew konstytucji, istotnej części swych mieszkańców podstawowych praw i wolności. Kolejne istotne pytania brzmią: dlaczego tak wielu tak łatwo jest mówić o fundamentalnych wartościach, nazywanych nie bez racji *the American Creed* i jednocześnie znaczącą część mieszkańców tej samej ziemi uważać za z natury gorszą od siebie, a więc niezasługującą na obywatelstwo i prawa z nim związane. Jak ludzie łączą te przeciwstawne punkty widzenia w pozornie spójną całość? Jak doszło do takiego stanu rzeczy i czy można – a jeśli tak, to poprzez jakie działania – doprowadzić do trwałego unicestwienia tego *the vicious circle*, zmuszającego do wyboru pomiędzy dwoma wzajemnie wykluczającymi się możliwościami?

⁷⁶ From the Polish translation.

⁷⁷ A. Leszczyński, *Koniec świata Ameryki. Rozmowa z prof. Immanuelem Wallersteinem*, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 28th-29th July 2012, p. 20.