

## An American Dilemma Gunnar Myrdal

The intellectual foundation of the Civil Rights movement. Powerful, but overly optimistic.

Why did the Carnegie Foundation choose Gunnar Myrdal? The explanation given by the Carnegie foundation itself in the preface

"The direction of such a comprehensive study of the Negro in America, as the Board thereupon authorized, was a serious question. There was no lack of competent scholars in the United States who were deeply interested in the problem and had already devoted themselves to its study, but the whole question had 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 the search ended in the selection of Dr. Gunnar Myrdal, a scholar who despite his youth had already achieved an international reputation as a social economist, a professor in the University of Stockholm, economic adviser to the Swedish Government, and a member of the Swedish Senate. Dr. Myrdal had a decade earlier spent a year in the United States as a Fellow of the Spelman Fund, and when the invitation was extended to him by the Corporation in 1937, was about to make a second visit at the invitation of Harvard University to deliver the Godkin Lectures. "

Myrdal's publications to that date included:

- The Political Element in the Development of Economic Theory. (1930)
- The Cost of Living in Sweden, 1830–1930 (1933)
- Crisis in the Population Question (1934)
- Fiscal Policy in the Business Cycle. The American Economic Review, vol 21, no 1, Mar 1939.
- Population, a Problem for Democracy. Harvard University Press, 1940.

The claim that Myrdal was disinterested is disingenuous. His credentials as a socialist were well established. He worked closely all his life with his wife, Alva. These quotes are from the Wikipedia entry on Alva:

"Myrdal's observation of the great social and economic disparities in the United States also led to an increased political commitment - "radical" was the term that she and her husband came to use to describe their shared political outlook." "Myrdal first came to public attention in the 1930s, and was one of the main driving forces in the creation of the Swedish welfare state."

As a PhD candidate in statistics I became familiar with the prominent figures in the field of intelligence research. Intelligence measurement had been one of the first applications of statistics; its founders included Galton, Pearson, Fisher and Spearman. At the time of Myrdal's writing the leading figures would have included Edward Thorndike, Louis Terman, Hans Eysenck, John C. Raven, Cyril Burt and Louis Leon Thurstone. An assessment of intelligence should have referenced these men. Thorndike is mentioned only in the introduction, as a source, but not noted in text, footnotes or bibliography. Thurstone is mentioned in a different context, factor analysis. The sources Myrdal cites as authorities on intelligence, such as G. O. Ferguson whom Myrdal sets up as a straw man, are unfamiliar.

Overlooking the leading intelligence researchers of the day may not have been accidental. It appears that Myrdal already had an agenda, and may have been selected to fulfill that agenda. A search of the text for the number of references to other contemporary and historical figures known for their treatment of American race issues reveals:

Franz Boas mentioned 37 times

Ruth Benedict 4 times

John Dewey 15 times  
H. L. Mencken 1 time  
Mark Twain 0 times  
Alexander de Tocqueville 1 time, not on race  
Theodore Bilbo, 4 times, on Back to Africa movement

Boas, the founder of the field of Anthropology, was a strong advocate of the position that race is a social construct. He was also an advocate of the Standard Social Science Model, that environment is much more influential than heredity in shaping a person's intellect and character.

The 1930s witnessed a dramatic change in intellectual climate. Scientists who believed heredity dominated – Francis Galton and what is sometimes called the London School of Social Science, were displaced by behaviorists. The eugenics movement, coopted by Hitler, lost force in Europe and America.

Myrdal, a socialist idealist with only one year's experience in the United States, cloistered on a campus, entered this study believing that all humans are primarily products of their environment. Observing the obviously unequal treatment of Negroes in the United States, he attributed all of the difference in outcomes between black and white to behavioral issues alone. Inasmuch as he was probably engaged on the assumption that he would come to that conclusion, and the team he assembled was of like mind, it is not surprising that that is what emerged.

This book was a major influence on the changes that took place in the United States during the civil rights movement. It documents the unsustainable system of segregation that existed at that time. Segregation was simply incompatible with the American constitution and most Americans' sense of justice and equality. The system had to end, and it did. See [\[\[ASIN:1258772795 Take Your Choice: Separation or Mongrelization\]\]](#) for a representative example of the losing argument.

The expectation that when legal barriers fell, black Americans would prove themselves to be the equal to whites has turned out not to be the case. The differences appear immutable. This has been blamed on white racism for more than fifty years. Such racism is only hypothetical, hard to identify in words or actions, but it is given as the reason for ongoing differences.

Race remains America's dilemma three generations after Myrdal wrote this book. He hoped to prescribe a solution. He certainly changed things, but the problem did not go away.

The book is huge and offers an extremely broad survey of the race situation as of World War II. It is valuable as a historical reference. As history I would assign it five stars. As social science, three. Therefore I compromise at four. The table of contents below is very detailed, a good overview of the book itself.

## CONTENTS

Foreword, by Frederick P. Keppel	v
Author's Preface	ix
Introduction	xli
.....1. The Negro Problem as a Moral Issue	
.....2. Valuations and Beliefs	
.....3. A White Man's Problem	
.....4. Not an Isolated Problem	
.....5. Some Further Notes on the Scope and Direction of This Study	
.....6. A Warning to the Reader	

## PART I. THE APPROACH

- ....Chapter 1. American Ideals and the American Conscience 3
  - .....1 . Unity of Ideals and Diversity of Culture
  - .....2. American Nationalism
  - .....3. Some Historical Reflections
  - .....4. The Roots of the American Creed in the Philosophy of Enlightenment
  - .....5. The Roots in Christianity
  - .....6. The Roots in English Law
  - .....7. American Conservatism
  - .....8. The American Conception of Law and Order
  - .....9. Natural Law and American Puritanism
  - .....10. The Faltering Judicial Order
  - .....11. Intellectual Defeatism
  - .....12. "Lip-Service"
  - .....13. Value Premises in This Study
- ....Chapter 2. Encountering the Negro Problem 26
  - .....1. On the Minds of the Whites
  - .....2. To the Negroes Themselves
  - .....3. Explaining the Problem Away
  - .....4. Explorations in Escape
  - .....5. The Etiquette of Discussion
  - .....6. The Convenience of Ignorance
  - .....7. Negro and White Voices
  - .....8. The North and the South.....
- ....Chapter 3. Facets of the Negro Problem 50
  - .....1. American Minority Problems
  - .....2. The Anti-Amalgamation Doctrine
  - .....3. The White Man's Theory of Color Caste
  - .....4. The "Rank Order of Discriminations"
  - .....5. Relationships between Lower Class Groups
  - .....6. The Manifoldness and the Unity of the Negro Problem
  - .....7. The Theory of the Vicious Circle
  - .....8. A Theory of Democracy

## PART II. RACE

- ....Chapter 4. Racial Beliefs 83
  - .....1. Biology and Moral Equalitarianism
  - .....2. The Ideological Clash in America
  - .....3. The Ideological Compromise
  - .....4. Reflections in Science
  - .....5. The Position of the Negro Writers
  - .....6. The Racial Beliefs of the Unsophisticated
  - .....7. Beliefs with a Purpose
  - .....8. Specific Rationalization Needs
  - .....9. Rectifying Beliefs
  - .....10. The Study of Beliefs
- ....Chapter 5. Race and Ancestry 113
  - .....1. The American Definition of "Negro"
  - .....2. African Ancestry
  - .....3. Changes in Physical Appearance

.....4.	Early Miscegenation	
.....5.	Ante-Bellum Miscegenation	
.....6.	Miscegenation in Recent Times	
.....7.	"Passing"	
.....8.	Social and Biological Selection	
.....9.	Present and Future Genetic Composition Trends	
....	Chapter 6. Racial Characteristics	137
.....1.	Physical Traits	
.....2.	Biological Susceptibility to Disease	
.....3.	Psychic Traits	
.....4.	Frontiers of Constructive Research	
	PART III. POPULATION AND MIGRATION	
....	Chapter 7. Population	157
.....1.	The Growth of the Negro Population	
.....2.	Births and Deaths	
.....3.	Summary	
.....4.	Ends and Means of Population Policy	
.....5.	Controlling the Death Rate	
.....6.	The Case for Controlling the Negro Birth Rate	
.....7.	Birth Control Facilities For Negroes	
....	Chapter 8. Migration	182
.....1.	Overview	
.....2.	A Closer View	
.....3.	The Great Migration to the Urban North	
.....4.	Continued Northward Migration	
.....5.	The Future of Negro Migration	
	PART IV. ECONOMICS	
....	Chapter 9*. Economic Inequality	205
.....1.	Negro Poverty	
.....2.	Our Main Hypothesis: The Vicious Circle	
.....3.	The Value Premises	
.....4.	The Conflict of Valuations	
....	Chapter 10- The Tradition of Slavery	220
.....1.	Economic Exploitation	
.....2.	Slavery and Caste	
.....3.	The Land Problem	
.....4.	The Tenancy Problem	
....	Chapter 11.. The Southern Plantation Economy and the Negro Farmer	230
.....1.	Southern Agriculture as a Problem	
.....2.	Overpopulation and Soil Erosion	
.....3.	Tenancy, Credit and Cotton	
.....4.	The Boll Weevil	
.....5.	Main Agricultural Classes	
.....6.	The Negro Landowner	
.....7.	Historical Reasons for the Relative Lack of Negro Farm Owners	
.....8.	Tenants and Wage Laborers	
.....9.	The Plantation 1 enant	
....	Chapter 12. New Blows to Southern Agriculture During the	
.....	'Thirties: Trends and Policies	251

- .....1. Agricultural Trends during the 'Thirties
- .....2. The Disappearing Sharecropper
- .....3. The Role of the A.A.A. in Regard to Cotton
- .....4. A.A.A. and the Negro
- .....5. The Local Administration of the A.A.A.
- .....6. Mechanization
- .....7. Labor Organizations
- .....8. The Dilemma of Agricultural Policy
- .....9. Economic Evaluation of the A.A.A.
- .....10. Social Evaluation of the A.A.A.
- .....11. Constructive Measures
- .....12. Farm Security Programs
- ...Chapter 13 Seeking Jobs Outside Agriculture 279
- .....1. Perspective on the Urbanization of the Negro People
- .....2. In the South
- .....3. A Closer View
- .....4. Southern Trends during the 'Thirties
- .....5. In the North
- .....6. A Closer View on Northern Trends
- .....7. The Employment Hazards of Unskilled Work
- .....8. The Size of the Negro Labor Force and Negro Employment
- .....9. Negro and White Unemployment
- ...Chapter 14. The Negro in Business, the Professions, Public Service and Other White Collar Occupations 304
- .....1. Overview
- .....2. The Negro in Business
- .....3. Negro Finance
- .....4. The Negro Teacher
- .....5. The Negro Minister
- .....6. The Negro in Medical Professions
- .....7. Other Negro Professionals
- .....8. Negro Officials and White Collar Workers in Public Service
- .....9. Negro Professionals of the Stage, Screen and Orchestra
- .....10. Note on Shady Occupations
- ...Chapter 15, The Negro in the Public Economy 233
- .....1. The Public Budget
- .....2. Discrimination in Public Service
- .....3. Education
- .....4. Public Health
- .....5. Recreational Facilities
- .....6. Public Housing Policies
- .....7. Social Security and Public Assistance
- .....8. Specialized Social Welfare Programs during the Period After 1935
- .....9. The Social Security Program
- .....10. Assistance to Special Groups
- .....11. Work Relief
- .....12. Assistance to Youth
- .....13. General Relief and Assistance in Kind
- ...Chapter 16, Income, Consumption and Housing 364

.....1.	Family Income	
.....2.	Income and Family Size	
.....3.	The Family Budget	
.....4.	Budget Items	
.....5.	Food of Consumption	
.....6.	Housing Conditions	
....Chapter 17	The Mechanics of Economic Discrimination as a Practital Problem	380
.....1.	The Practical Problem	
.....2.	The Ignorance and Lack of Concern of Northern Whites	
.....3.	Migration Policy	
.....4.	The Regular Industrial Labor Market in the North	
.....s.	The Problem of Vocational Training	
.....6.	The Self-Perpetuating Color Bar	
.....7.	A Position or "Indifferent Equilibrium"	
.....8.	In the South	
....Chapter 18.	Pre-War Labor Market Controls and Their Consequences for the Negro	397
.....1.	The Wages and Hours Law and the Dilemma of the Marginal Worker	
.....2.	Other Economic Policies	
.....3.	Labor Unions and the Negro	
.....4.	A Weak Movement Getting Strong Powers	
....Chapter 19.	The War Boom — and Thereafter	409
.....1.	The Negro Wage Earner and the War Boom	
.....2.	A Closer View	
.....3.	Government Policy in Regard to the Negro in War Production	
.....4.	The Negro in the Armed Forces	
.....5.	. . . And Afterwards?	
<b>PART V. POLITICS</b>		
....Chapter 20.	Underlying Factors	429
.....1.	The Negro in American Politics and as a Political Issue	
.....2.	The Wave of Democracy and the Need for Bureaucracy	
.....3.	The North and the South	
.....4.	The Southern Defense Ideology	
.....5.	The Reconstruction Amendments	
.....6.	Memories of Reconstruction	
.....7.	The Tradition of Illegality	
....Chapter 21.	Southern Conservatism and Liberalism	452
.....1.	The. "Solid South"	
.....2.	Southern Conservatism	
.....3.	Is the South Fascist?	
.....4.	The Changing South	
.....5.	Southern Liberalism	
....Chapter 22.	Political Practices Today	474
.....1.	The Southern Political Scene	
.....2.	Southern Techniques for Disfranchising the Negroes	
.....3.	The Negro Vote m the South	
.....4.	The Negro in Northern Politics	
.....5.	What the Neero Gets Out of Politics	
....Chapter 23.	Trends and Possibilities	505
.....1.	The Negro's Political Bargaining Power	

- .....2. The Negro's Party Allegiance
- .....3. Nemo Suffrage in the South as an Issue
- .....4. An Unstable Situation
- .....5. The Stake of the North
- .....6. Practical Conclusions

## PART VI. JUSTICE

### ....Chapter 24. Inequality of Justice 503

- .....1. Democracy and Justice
- .....2. Relative Equality in the North
- .....3. The Southern Heritage

### ....Chapter 25. The Police and Other Public Contacts 535

- .....1. Local Petty Officials
- .....2. The Southern Policeman
- .....3. The Policeman in the Negro Neighborhood
- .....4. Trends and Outlook
- .....5. Another Type of Public Contact

### ....Chapter 26. Courts , Sentences and Prisons 547

- .....1 . The Southern Courts
- .....2. Discrimination in Court
- .....3. Sentences and Prisons
- .....4. Trends and Outlook

### ....Chapter 27. Violence and Intimidation 558

- .....1 . The Pattern of Violence
- .....2. Lynching
- .....3. The Psychopathology of Lynching
- .....4. Trends and Outlook
- .....5. Riots

## PART VII. SOCIAL INEQUALITY

### ....Chapter 28. The Basis of Social Inequality 573

- .....1. The Value Premise
- .....2. The One-Sidedness of the System of Segregation
- .....3. The Beginning in Slavery
- .....4. The Jim Crow Laws
- .....5. Beliefs Supporting Social Inequality
- .....6. The Popular Theory of "No Social Equality"
- .....7. Critical Evaluation of the "No Social Equality" Theory
- .....8. Attitudes among Different Classes of Whites in the South
- .....9. Social Segregation and Discrimination in the North

### ....Chapter 29. Patterns of Social Segregation and Discrimination 605

- .....1. Facts and Beliefs Regarding Segregation and Discrimination
- .....2. Segregation and Discrimination in interpersonal Relations
- .....3. Housing Segregation
- .....4. Sanctions for Residential Segregation
- .....5. The General Character of Institutional Segregation
- .....6. Segregation in Specific Types of Institutions

### ....Chapter 30 Effects of Social Inequality 640

- .....1. The Incidence of Social Inequality
- .....2. Increasing Isolation
- .....3. Interracial Contacts

.....4. The Factor of Ignorance

.....5. Present Dynamics

## PART VIII. SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

....Chapter 31. Caste and Class 667

.....1. The Concepts "Caste" and "Class"

.....2. The "Meaning" of the Concepts "Caste" and "Class"

.....3. The Caste Struggle

.....4. Crossing the Caste Line

....Chapter 32. The Negro Class Structure 689

.....1. The Negro Class Order in the American Caste System

.....2. Caste Determines Class

.....3. Color and Class

.....4. The Classes in the Negro Community

## PART IX. LEADERSHIP AND CONCERTED ACTION

....Chapter 33. The American Pattern of Individual Leadership and Mass Passivity 709

.....1. "Intelligent Leadership"

.....2. "Community Leaders"

.....3. Mass Passivity

.....4. The Patterns Exemplified in Politics and throughout the American Social Structure

....Chapter 34. Accommodating Leadership 720

.....1. leadership and Caste

.....2. The Interests of Whites and Negroes with Respect to Negro Leadership

.....3. In the North and on the National Scene

.....4. The "Glass Plate"

.....5. Accommodating Leadership and Class

.....6. Several Qualifications

.....7. Accommodating Leaders in the North

.....8. The Glamour Personalities

....Chapter 35. The Negro Protest 756

.....1. The Slave Revolts

.....2. The Negro Abolitionists and Reconstruction Politicians

.....3. The Tuskegee Compromise

.....4. The Spirit of Niagara and Harper's Ferry

.....5. The Protest Is Still Rising

.....6. The Shock of the First World War and the Post- War Crisis

.....7. The Garvey Movement

.....8. Post- War Radicalism among Negro Intellectuals

.....9. Negro History and Culture

.....10. The Great Depression and the Second Wor!d War

....Chapter 36. The Protest Motive and Negro Personality 757

.....1. A Mental Reservation

.....2. The Struggle Against Defeatism

.....3. The Struggle for Balance

.....4. Negro Sensitiveness

.....5. Negro Aggression

.....6. Upper Class Reactions

.....7. The "Function" of Racial Solidarity

....Chapter 37. Compromise Leadership 768

.....1. The Daily Compromise



- .....2. The Vulnerability of the Negro Leader
- .....3. Impersonal Motives
- .....4. The Protest Motive
- .....5. The Double Role
- .....6. Negro Leadership Techniques
- .....7. Moral Consequences
- .....8. Leadership Rivalry
- .....9. Qualifications
- .....10. In Southern Cities
- .....11. In the North
- .....12. On the National Scene
- ...Chapter 38. Negro Popular Theories 781
- .....1. Instability
- .....2. Negro Provincialism
- .....3. The Thinking on the Negro Problem
- .....4. Courting the "Best People Among the Whites"
- .....5. The Doctrine of Labor Solidarity
- .....6. Some Critical Observations
- .....7. The Pragmatic "Truth" of the Labor Solidarity Doctrine
- .....8. "The Advantages of the Disadvantages"
- .....9. Condoning Segregation
- .....10. Boosting Negro Business
- .....11. Criticism of Negro Business Chauvinism
- .....12. "Back to Africa"
- .....13. "Miscellaneous Ideologies"
- ...Chapter 39. 'Negro Improvement and Protest Organizations 810
- .....1. A General American Pattern
- .....2. Nationalist Movements
- .....3. Business and Professional Organizations
- .....4. The National Negro Congress Movement
- .....5. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- .....6. the N.A.A.C.P. Branches
- .....7. The N.A.A.C.P. National Office
- .....8. The Strategy of the N.A.A.C.P.
- .....9. Critique of the N.A.A.C.P.
- .....10. The Urban League
- .....11. The Commission on Interracial Cooperation
- .....12. The Negro Organizations during the War
- .....13. Negro Strategy
- ...Chapter 40. The Negro Church 858
- .....1. Non-Political Agencies for Negro Concerted Action
- .....2. Some Historical Notes
- .....3. The Negro Church and the General American Pattern of.... Religious Activity
- .....4. A Segregated Church
- .....5. Its Weakness
- .....6. Trends and Outlook
- ...Chapter 41. The Negro School 879
- .....1 . Negro Education as Concerted Action
- .....2. Education in American Thought and Life

- .....3. The Development of Negro Education in the South
- .....4. The Whites' Attitudes toward Negro Education
- .....5. "Industrial" versus "Classical" Education of Negroes
- .....6. Negro Attitudes
- .....7. Trends and Problems

....Chapter 42. The Negro Press 908

- .....1. An Organ for the Negro Protest
- .....2. The Growth of the Negro Press
- .....3. Characteristics of the Negro Press
- .....4. The Controls of the Negro Press
- .....5. Outlook

PART X. THE NEGRO COMMUNITY

....Chapter 43. Institutions 927

- .....1. The Negro Community as a Pathological Form of an American Community
- .....2. The Negro Family
- .....3. The Negro Church in the Negro Community
- .....4. The Negro School and Negro Education
- .....5. Voluntary Associations

....Chapter 44. Non-Institutional Aspects of the Negro Community 956

- .....1. "Peculiarities" of Negro Culture and Personality
- .....2. Crime
- .....3. Mental Disorders and Suicide
- .....4. Recreation
- .....5. Negro Achievements

PART XI. AN AMERICAN DILEMMA

....Chapter 45. America Again at the Crossroads in the Negro Problem 997

- .....1. The Negro Problem and the War
- .....2. Social Trends
- .....3. The Decay of the Caste Theory
- .....4. Negroes in the War Crisis
- .....5. The War and the Whites
- .....6. The North Moves Toward Equality
- .....7. Tension in the South
- .....8. International Aspects
- .....9. Making the Peace
- .....10. America's Opportunity