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Letnik XXVIII, številka 3–4, 2017

Revija za teorijo in raziskave vzgoje in izobraževanja

Šolsko polje

Education
and the American Dream

ed. Mitja Sardoč

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Education and the American Dream

Mitja Sardoč

As a central element of American culture, the American Dream is said to represent a distilled version of basic American values and the single most important emancipatory ideal associated with the American 'way of life'. As Jennifer L Hochschild emphasized in her book *Facing Up to the American Dream*, it represents 'a central ideology of Americans [...], a defining characteristic of American culture' (Hochschild, 1995: p. xi). In fact, both in the US and abroad, the American Dream constitutes a symbol of progress and has been synonymous with hope in general. Moreover, throughout history, its progressive idealism has had a galvanizing influence on a number of emancipatory social projects, e.g. the Civil Rights movement. At the same time, its promise of upward social mobility [firmly grounded in the merit-based idea of equal opportunity] encapsulates best the idea of non-discrimination and fairness that stand at the very center of social phenomena as diverse as racial desegregation, the 'war for talent', migrations, educational reforms etc.

The voluminous literature on the American Dream in disciplines as diverse as sociology (Hauhart, 2016), political science (Ghosh, 2013; Hochschild, 1995; Jillson, 2016), the economy (Shaanan, 2010; Stiglitz, 2013), migration studies (Clark, 2003), history (Cullen, 2003), advertising (Samuel, 2001), cultural studies (Lasch, 1996; Lawrence, 2012), linguistics (Fischer, 1973), religious studies (D'Antonio, 2011), anthropology (Duncan, 2015), literary studies (Churchwell, 2013), educational theory (DeVitis & Rich, 1996) as well as philosophy (Cannon, 2003; Peters, 2012; Sandel, 1996), points out that the idea of the American Dream is far from simple or unproblematic. In fact, as Robert Hauhart emphasizes in his

book *Seeking the American Dream*, '[i]t would be foolish, and counter-productive, to ignore the contributions that derive from history, literature, economics, anthropology, political science and journalism' (Hauhart, 2016: p. ix).

Yet, its 'standard' interpretation as an idealized 'metaphor of basic American values' and the US 'dominant national ideology' (Hochschild and Scovronick, 2003: x), is no longer straightforward, as the American Dream has also been associated with a wide range of ideas not everyone finds appealing. As an archetype of (material) success and consumerism in general, the American Dream has also been subjected to a number of objections leading to the criticism that its promise of equal opportunity and material prosperity for all has not been fulfilled. As the writers of the joint report *Opportunity, Responsibility and Security: A Consensus Plan for Reducing Poverty and Restoring the American Dream* by two of the leading US think-thanks, i.e. Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research [AEI] have emphasized, the current state of affairs 'contradicts our country's founding ideals' (AEI/Brookings, 2015: p. 8).¹

Furthermore, backed with indicators and other data on increasing economic inequality (compared to other democratic countries), some of the leading contemporary scholars (e.g. Krugman, 2012; Putnam, 2015; Rank et al., 2016) and public intellectuals (e.g. Chomsky, 2017; Reeves, 2014) have questioned its emancipatory potential as well as its basic promise of upward social mobility.² It is precisely this gap between its emancipatory potential and its idealized image on one side and a set of indicators suggesting that the American dream has utterly failed, that has given rise to a series of objections leading to the assertion that it represents an empty or even false promise. In fact, while its advocates champion it as some sort of a 'brilliant construction' (Hochschild, 1995: p. xi), its [many] critics depict it as nothing less than a 'necessary illusion' (Lasch, 1996: p. 52).

Surprisingly enough, despite a number of divergent approaches aiming to shed light on this complex [and controversial] social ideal, some of the recent interpretations over its alleged failure(s) have been disturbingly simplistic. While part of the 'problem' in understanding the American Dream is to a large extent dependent on the complexity of the social fact

1 The report is available at Brookings' webpage: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Full-Report.pdf>

2 See, for example, Alan Krueger's article 'The great utility of the Great Gatsby Curve' discussing the relationship between intergenerational mobility and income inequality in USA <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2015/05/19/the-great-utility-of-the-great-gatsby-curve/>

itself, a reductionist understanding of its nature and an impoverished understanding of its vitality can be primarily attributed to the 'standard' interpretation best epitomized in Jennifer Hochschild's introductory chapter to her book *Facing up to the American Dream* ['What is the American Dream']. This substantive question came to define what the existing research on the American Dream has been focusing on. Nevertheless, despite much of its productivity, this approach – to a large extent – turns out to 'hit the target but miss the point'.

This journal special issue of the *Šolsko polje* journal entitled 'Education and the American Dream' aims to move the discussion further. It brings together 7 articles and an interview on some of the most pressing issues associated with the American Dream and its relationship with education. The article by Robert Hauhart, as he emphasizes, 'attempts to lay out some of the principal theoretical and empirical issues that bear on the future potential for studies of the American Dream'. In his paper, Michael Peters 'describes the crafting of the American dream as a rhetorical device that utilises narrative resources to tell and retell a story of America's history as a philosophical reflection on the core value of social equality that defines national identity and the future to which all Americans might aspire to'. Furthermore, it also examines the role of the American Dream in Obama's speeches that he contrasts with Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again!'. Cyril Ghosh examines various elements of university admissions in the US and argues that the Percent Plans are the 'most aligned with the widely popular ideology of the American Dream and therefore has the potential to have the broadest possible support from Americans across the ideological spectrum'. In his interview Peter McLaren discusses some of the persisting challenges associated with the American Dream and its controversial historical legacy. In particular, he challenges straight away the 'standard' interpretation of the American Dream and questions its overall coherence. The concluding part of the interview is devoted to the presentation of the relationship between education and the American Dream. In his essay, Srečo Dragoš analyses two separate questions linked with the local and global meaning of the American Dream, i.e. [i] the resilience of the American Dream, which is strengthened in proportion to the distance from its origin (why the above mentioned dreams are the strongest on the global periphery in the case of Slovenia); and [ii] whether such a development is more dependent on voluntaristic or more on deterministic factors. Next, Igor Bijuklić 'examines the subject of technocracy in the Progressive era (1880-1920) focusing on the instrumental character that was ascribed to communication for achieving social cohesiveness and a perfected socialisation of men among the growing populations of immi-

grants'. In particular, he aims to examine how mass production and consumption introduced uniformity as their new potential and how, consequently, conformism gained an entirely new character while losing all its explicit characteristics. In his essay, Darko Štrajn examines the conceptual foundations of the relationship between the American Dream and education. In the final contribution for this journal special issue, Maja Gutman 'aims to analyze the narrative and archetypal frameworks of the American Dream and demonstrates, how the solid structure of this concept forms an invisible modern mythological fabric in modern media representations, and more broadly, popular culture'. Furthermore, the book review by Valerija Vendramin evaluates Robert Putnam's book *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*.

As the contributions to this journal special issue make clear, the basic question over the American Dream might not *substantive* [what is the American dream] but *motivational* [why is the interest for its preservation and reproduction so important].

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American Dream Studies in the 21st Century: An American Perspective

Robert C. Hauhart

Introduction

In a paper published a few years ago I argued (somewhat tongue in cheek) that the United States' most common export is not McDonald's hamburgers, Levi's jeans, nor rock n' roll; rather, it is the American Dream. (Hauhart, 2011) However, although perhaps not entirely serious at the time, the publication of this special issue of the journal in Slovenia leads me to believe I may have been on to something: the American Dream is known and of interest across the globe, not just in the United States. The iconic phrase is, in fact, a staple of journalistic meditations, both in the United States and elsewhere as this random sampling of articles suggests. ("Aarondeep Living the American Dream," *Coventry Telegraph*, Coventry, UK (January 20, 2015); Krishnaswamy, V. "American Dream," *Mail Today*, Delhi, India (January 22, 2016); Rifkin, Jeremy. "Worlds Apart on the Vision Thing," *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, Ont., CAN (August 17, 2004), at A15; Ng, Teddy. "President Living in a Dream World." *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong (April 4, 2013); "Michelle Obama and the American Dream." *Turkish Daily News*, Ankara, TR (August 30, 2008); "Holding on to European Dream still a Possibility." *Irish Times*, Dublin, IRL (February 11, 2005); and Sun, Xi. "When the 'Chinese Dream' meets the 'American Dream.'" *Straits Times*, Singapore (May 1, 2013)) Moreover, as the list of book length studies used as references to this paper, including my own *Seeking the American Dream* (2016), suggests there is no dearth of longer examinations of the Dream. Still, serious research into the American Dream has been less than satis-

fying in many respects. There are a number of reasons this is so. There is, as one example, the problem of definition. There is also the problem of evidence since very few studies have attempted to test the definitions proposed by collecting evidence in support of one or another. The present paper will consider these and other factors that bear on developing a better understanding of the state of American Dream studies today.

The Question of Definition: What is the American Dream?

One of the more intriguing issues with respect to the American Dream is the fact that many of us assume we know what the phrase means. If, for example, one asks another person – as I have – whether they know what the American Dream is, many – and perhaps most – faced with the question will answer that they do know. Yet, if one follows up and asks the respondent to define it, one is likely to receive a range of answers. Thus, the matter of definition is a critical one for studying the American Dream.

There is a general consensus that the first recognized, widespread use of the phrase “American dream” in print may be attributed to James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book, *The Epic of America* (Cullen, 2003; Hawthart, 2016:p. x). In his epilogue, Adams recounts many of the advances that Americans made over its several centuries of existence in diverse fields of endeavor from medicine and science to literature and drama. Adams (1933: p. 317) then defines the idea that he believes has made the most important benefit to world progress:

If, as I have said, the things already listed were all we had to contribute America would have made no distinctive and unique gift to mankind. But there has also been the American *dream*, that dream of a land in which life should be better and fuller and richer for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement. (Emphasis in original.)

Adams went on at some length to elaborate on his understanding of the phrase and the role it played in life within the United States. While all of Adams’ reflections on the meaning of the term are not critical with respect to its definition, it is worth noting that he wrote:

[The American Dream] is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (1933: p. 317)

A page later he elaborates further by stating:

No, the American dream that has lured tens of millions of all nations to our shores in the past century has not been a dream of merely material plenty, though that has doubtless counted heavily. It has been much more than that. It has been a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as man and woman, unhampered by the barriers which had been slowly erected in older civilizations, unimpressed by social orders which had developed for the benefit of classes rather than for the simple human being of any and every class. And the dream has been realized more fully in actual life here than anywhere else, though very imperfectly even among ourselves. (1933: p. 318)

Absent from Adams' discourse is any discussion of upward mobility although there is a statement about inequality: "There is no reason why wealth, which is a social product, should not be more equitably controlled and distributed in the interests of society." (1933: p. 322)

While Adams does not address upward mobility directly, it is implicit in his formulation that the American Dream is of a country where each and every one may prosper. Prosperity, of course, is intimately connected with the idea of economic success and it is this feature of the American Dream that has generated the greatest number of alternative conceptions attributed to it. The emphasis on prosperity, regardless of Adams' strenuous objections to a vision of the United States that elevates material success to the level of constituting Americans' highest achievement, has a long history within American culture and thought. The 'success ethic,' has long been celebrated in American popular literature, where one can 'pull oneself up [in society] by one's bootstraps.' This idea was first popularized, and then epitomized, by the *Ragged Dick* series of approximately 100 boys' novels written by Horatio Alger, Jr. beginning in 1868. Although Schamhorst (1980: pp. 75–6) contends that *Ragged Dick*'s ambition is properly read as a rise to respectability, and not pure desire for riches, the Horatio Alger tales, as conceived in the popular imagination, have devolved into paeans to the "success ethic" in the 150 years since their first appearance.

This emphasis on economic success leading to upward mobility in American culture is also found in Tocqueville's examination of the American character in *Democracy in America* (1961), first published in the 1830's. However, Tocqueville's view was less sanguine than Horatio Alger's. Tocqueville found that Americans' desire to fulfill every material want, quench every physical desire, acquire every newly invented means of doing so, and struggle to rise above the mass of common men was doomed to

failure. In Tocqueville's estimation, the restless ambition to master business and amass wealth that he witnessed only led Americans to dwell on the advantages that they do not possess. For Tocqueville, the restless spirit of unchecked desire that drove Americans was a burden that overhung their lives and darkened their brows. The aspiration for upward mobility was then, in a term the film director Alfred Hitchcock was said to have created, a "Macguffin" – an object of desire that everyone wants and inspires the action in a plot, but one that will often reveal itself, as the Maltese Falcon did, in the book (Hammett, 1929) and film (John Huston, 1941) of the same name. Allegedly gold encrusted with diamonds, the Maltese Falcon turned out in the end merely lead painted black.

The upshot is that Adams, in initially framing his vision of the American Dream, only had the first word – not the final word – about its meaning. Other writers have offered subsequent definitions and treatments of the idea, whether directly or indirectly. Indeed, not too long after Adams formulated his vision of the American Dream, Robert Merton (1938), in perhaps the most famous ten page sociological paper ever written, used the idea of the "success ethic" to help explain the social forces that contribute to Emile Durkheim's (Simpson, 1963) meditations on anomie. In so doing, Merton disagreed, albeit implicitly, with Adams' idealistic emphasis on the American Dream of a nation where every man and woman can attain fulfillment as the United States most characteristic cultural quality. In its place Merton instilled competition and, most particularly, competition within a capitalist economic order where the accumulation of wealth as a pecuniary symbol of success is the dominant cultural goal (Merton, 1938: pp. 675–76). Merton, in short, saw the principal driving motivation of American culture to be the attainment of material success contrary to Adams' renunciation of materialism's primacy and his exaltation of opportunity for all. The two visions of the central cultural aim and impetus within the United States are thus diametrically opposed.

For Merton (1938), however, the situation in which the principal cultural goal was pecuniary success was only one part of the cultural equation. Equally important was the degree of access to institutionalized means to achieve success as well as the relative proportion between success within the institutionalized means for achieving valued goals and actual (or perceived) receipt of pecuniary reward. In Merton's view, an equilibrated balance between cultural ideals and social structural opportunities was the only manner in which a society could sustain itself successfully. He found in the United States that the strength of the drive for pecuniary success constituted "a disproportionate accent on goals" (Merton, 1938: p. 674) that overwhelmed the institutionalized means to satisfy

the pecuniary desires inspired by the 'success ethic'. One consequence according to Merton was crime: the dominant 'cult of success' would induce some members of society to evade the institutionalized means by breaking the rules resulting in "...fraud, corruption, vice, crime, in short ..." (p. 675). Many, embracing Merton's observation, have subsequently taken up this perception of the impact and operational definition of the American Dream (Quinones, 2015; Messner and Rosenfeld, 2013; Contreras, 2012). In sum, Merton's identification of pecuniary success as the predominant cultural goal in the United States directly contradicts James Truslow Adams' focus on the American Dream as the United States' principal aspiration and primary contribution to the world.

Jennifer Hochschild's (1995) treatment of the definitional question remains perhaps the most enlightening overall. Initially, Hochschild (1995: p. 15) agrees with Merton that "[T]he American dream consists of tenets about achieving success" and that "[P]eople most often define success as the attainment of a high income, a prestigious job, economic security." Yet, Hochschild finds this answer insufficient because, in her view, it fails to answer four questions: Who may pursue success? What does one pursue? How does one pursue success? And why is success worth pursuing? (1995: pp. 18–24) Hochschild's discussion of these questions leads her to identify four corresponding flaws to the American Dream. Thus, for example, the universalistic exhortation that everyone may, and should, pursue success in the United States is problematic because everyone cannot participate equally nor can most start over. Likewise, the belief that the American Dream offers a reasonable anticipation of success falters where there simply aren't enough resources or opportunities to go around. Further, Hochschild notes that individualism in the United States infuses the Dream with the idea that success results from actions and qualities under one's control, thereby placing the onus of failure on each person. Finally, the separation of society's members into winners and losers has debilitating effects on both: losers clearly feel badly about their failure but winners suffer from pride which, as the Bible instructs, often goes before the fall (1995: pp. 26–34). Hochschild's cogent analysis ultimately leads her to re-frame both Adams' and Merton's conception of the American Dream. In so doing, she emphasizes, on the basis of numerous strands of evidence from the United States that the American Dream has come to centrally rely on an expectation of intergenerational upward mobility (1995: p. 44, 47). Hochschild's conception has become perhaps the most common, or popular, definition of the American Dream as many immigrant families testify to the desire for a better life for themselves and their children as the primary motivation for coming to the United States. This

definition, of course, raises the problem most often posed today in studies of the American Dream: is the dream in danger because of the gap between aspirations for economic and social mobility and the realities of limited opportunity and slowed economic growth?

The Problem of Class, Race and Gender Privilege in a Promised Land of Equal Opportunity

The lure of Adams' vision of the American Dream – a land of equal opportunity where each person may achieve his or her fullest development – is endangered, and becomes dangerous, where economic privilege remains, barriers to class mobility retain their force, and the 'success ethic' continues to dominate a people's aspirations. In such a matrix of forces, two social outcomes are often produced. First, the "have nots" feel marginalized, face inordinate disadvantages that they often cannot overcome, and – consequently – incur disabling envy, anger and class resentment. This is the class divide that has been subjected to considerable analytic scrutiny in recent years in the United States (Putnam, 2015). Second, however, even those who benefit from the advantages of privilege can feel beleaguered and betrayed and perceive, wrongly, that their way of life is threatened. Reacting to their own misperception, the privileged can become further isolated within their protected and segregated enclaves and fume with resentment of their own (Hochschild, 2016). Arguably, this is the state in which the United States finds itself in today with both the privileged and the underprivileged embattled. The American Dream, which suggests that the United States is a land of opportunity where all can prosper, raises expectations that cannot be fulfilled since those expectations have no limits. Rich and poor alike can become embittered when the reality fails to meet each group's imagined vision of what the American Dream promise has held out to them as their rightful reward

Campos (2017) is among the most recent analysts to provide data that suggests economic inequality remains firmly entrenched in the contemporary United States, leading to the white working class resentment that drove Donald Trump into the Presidency. However, what that economic and related social survey data show is that while a substantial economic gap separates working class Americans in the United States from the professional classes and elites, white working class households still earned substantially more than black working class households (Campos 3). Campos concludes that a "genuine working class movement" (Campos 3) would therefore unite white and black working class members against their true class enemies. This form of idealistic analysis, however well intentioned, simply disregards the nature of privilege which demands

that embedded notions of racial, class and gender superiority cannot be whisked away (or wished away) by reference to the economic reality. Rather, the American Dream, with its open ended, universalistic invitation to prosper offers no respite from pecuniary and status competition once the race is on. The classes, including the white American working class, will never feel as though they have achieved their dream so long as they remain subordinated within a class hierarchy. In a hierarchical society, it is merely a question of who deserves to be looked down on. In the United States, and probably in all class societies, resentment is generally directed downward (even as inclusion and opportunity are withheld from the lower classes from above) – toward non-white racial and ethnic groups, women, the young, and any group that can be treated as ‘the other,’ that is, outsiders. This history of exclusion has been ably documented by Jillson (2004) with specific reference to the American Dream and by Karel (2006) with regard to the illusory “meritocratic” nature of elite higher education in the United States.

Pernicious Outcomes: The Catalytic Effect of the American Dream

The American Dream may – or may not – have been correctly defined by James Truslow Adams but its impact within the matrix of social and economic forces alive today in the United States has generally become pernicious. The twin emphases of competitive capitalism and American individualism that form the backbone of the American cultural ethos quietly buttress the American Dream’s urgent exhortation to prosper in ways that are antipathetic to individual success as a person and destructive to social stability. Examples are many. One that we have already broached is crime. Others may be equally insidious.

In recent years the United States has become aware of a looming student debt crisis. Yet, the social and economic factors that have precipitated the crisis have been manifest for decades. Young people in the United States have long been told that to prosper economically they need to obtain a college or university degree. Overwhelmingly in recent decades, high school graduates have flocked to U.S. higher education in response. Yet, since the time of the post-war G.I. Bill (The Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944) the cost of college tuition has risen dramatically, especially within the last few years. As William Celis (1994) of the *New York Times* reported on the G.I. Bill’s 50th anniversary, a returning WW II American serviceman, Mike Machado, attended St. Mary’s University, a private college, in San Antonio, TX for \$ 85 per semester tuition while receiving a \$ 250 monthly stipend for living expenses for his family of four

– all paid for by the United States government. By comparison, Jacqueline Williams, who left the Air Force and attended a two year college in San Antonio in the early 1990s, was given \$ 4,800 per year under the G.I. Bill which did not even cover her tuition (Celis, 1994). Over the twenty-plus years since, college tuition has increased exponentially. One review states that the tuition at private national universities in the United States has risen 179% between 1995 and 2015. (Mitchell 2015) Other reviews report different figures, some of which show lower increases, but the steep trajectory of increased tuition and related costs over time in the United States remains the central story.

The resultant gap between coverage of college costs by, for example, the G.I. Bill beginning in 1944 and higher rates of tuition and fees has been filled in the United States through private student loans. Students, urged to attend college or university, and facing generally unfavorable job markets without a college degree, have been persuaded to incur substantial debt on the theory that it is the only viable avenue to achieve the American Dream of prosperity. The result according to a seven part series reported by a team of reporters from the *New York Times* in 2012 (Martin and Lehren, 2012) has been the creation of a generation of student debtors. As the various stories reported make clear, students, driven by the desire to achieve upward mobility and pursue their American Dream incurred substantial college tuition debt only to find in many cases that changes in the economy did not allow them to prosper as they anticipated. Mixed into this set of circumstances the authors of the story note are increased efforts to lure student consumers: “Colleges are aggressively recruiting students, regardless of their financial circumstances. In admissions offices across the country, professional marketing companies and talented alumni are being enlisted to devise catchy slogans, build enticing Web sites — and essentially outpitch the competition” (Martin and Lehren, 2012). The intersection of the pressure to attend higher education, the lack of marketable skills in the U.S. job market upon graduation from high school, the influence of peers, parents, and guidance counselors, and the desire to reach for their own personal conception of the American Dream create a nearly irresistible vortex of forces. In the process, Adams’ vision of the American Dream is reconfigured beyond recognition. Absorbing the latest op-ed piece as I write this I read, “Student debt is crushing Mainers’ dreams,” (Libby, 2017) a story that has not reached its end.

The student debt crisis in the United States might seem an anomaly disconnected from Adams’ American Dream if it were not for the fact that other personal and societal financial crises did not share some of the same structural and social-psychological features. Among the more re-

cent is the 2008 housing crisis in the United States (and across much of the developed world) which led directly to the so-called Great Recession of 2009–10. The United States has long had an official policy of encouraging home ownership (Carliner, 1998). Federal officials were instrumental in loosening lending restrictions on first-time homebuyers, a practice that contributed to both an increase in home buying and, combined with lowered down payment and relaxed credit requirements, to the sub-prime mortgage and housing crisis of 2006–2010 in the United States (Streitfeld and Morgenson, 2008). Numerous sources over the past fifty years have documented the degree to which Americans literally bought into this vision: owning a home became identified as a central part of the American Dream (Williams, 2009; De Palma, 1988). Builders, loan companies, banks, and private investors targeted Americans in order to sell them the Dream. Michaelson (2009), in his account of the Countrywide Financial collapse during the 2007–10 U.S. housing market crisis, describes in candid detail his role in sculpting gauzy, 30 second television commercials urging consumers that they, too, can own a part of the American Dream with the help of Countrywide. Lures of this nature were used to enroll creditors in mortgages that were under-collateralized and encouraged buyers to purchase more expensive homes than they could afford, sometimes based on fraudulent paperwork. The combination of these forces – driven by the unquenchable desire of Americans to buy a home as part of the American Dream – led directly to the U.S. mortgage and housing crisis that ultimately spread throughout the world (Hauhart, 2011). The aftershocks of this crisis linger today in many countries (Marks-Jarvis, 2015). In short, the mortgage/housing market crisis, like the student debt crisis, owe much of its origination to the manner in which Americans conceive of their contemporary American Dream aided and abetted by institutions which are more than willing to sell them their vision of the American Dream – for a price.

Reproducing Class Stratification:

Institutional Performances and Cultural Incapacity

James Truslow Adams' conception of the American Dream envisages a level playing field of opportunity for all. However, numerous studies of educational institutions and workplaces in the United States suggest that both formal and informal cultural barriers exist that prevent many Americans from achieving their American Dreams, most particularly ones that incorporate upward mobility as a core goal. They do so, according to many studies, through a process of succumbing to elimination.

The first line of Susan Dewey's (2011: p. ix) *Neon Wasteland*, her observational study of a topless dancing venue in New York state pseudonymously named "Vixens," sums up the dilemma for many Americans seeking the American Dream. Cinnamon, one of the dancers Dewey befriends, says "There are some lines that, once you cross them, you can't go back again." As Dewey (2011: p. ix) relates,

She was explaining how it was impossible for her to leave her job as a topless dancer not only because it was the sole source of economic support for her daughter, but also due to her perception that she was somehow psychologically damaged by her experiences onstage.

These factors, however, are only a small part of the equation as Dewey (2011: p. xiii) comments further regarding the structural factors that also come into play:

Women who have engaged in sex work for lengthy periods as their sole source of income can find it particularly difficult to seek out other jobs because employers are, at best, hesitant to view such experiences as translatable skills and, at worst, prone to negative judgments about the nature of such work.

Thus, although the women who worked as topless dancers at Vixens were uniformly there as a result of the "powerfully seductive promise of socioeconomic mobility through the rapid generation of cash income" (2011: p. xiii) as part of "a first step toward a better future," (2011: p. 21) Dewey finds that their hopes for social mobility, deliberately played upon by management, are almost never realized. As Cinnamon acknowledges in the first line Dewey chose to start her book, crossing certain lines eliminates one from alternative futures.

Social elimination through cultural incapacity starts long before employment in a working class, dead end job, however, as Julie Bettie (2014) documents in *Women Without Class*, her study of the intersection of race, gender performances, and class at Waretown High, a pseudonymously named school in California's Central Valley. Education has long been identified in the United States as one of the principal routes – if not *the* primary route – to upward social and economic status (Sorokin, 1959). However, while education may be a route to upward social, economic and cultural mobility, schools are not ideally meritocratic, if they are meritocratic at all (Deresiewicz, 2015; McNamee and Miller, 2013) in the way in which the school process helps or hinders those from class origins other than the middle class professional groups that dominate them. As many studies show (Lareau, 2011), there are cultural limitations that

impair some from succeeding in educational institutions. Bettie's careful ethnographic report on student peer groups at Waretown High is simply among the more recent to describe how the intersection of certain life circumstances combine to disable some students from achieving through education.

Bettie's observational study of girl peer groups details identifiable preferences for styles of dress, accessories, speech, and demeanor (2014: p. 45) that telegraph specific group membership. These group affiliations based on cultural choices, when combined with salient school curriculum choices and engagement/dis-engagement from specific extracurricular activities, act either to facilitate – or restrict – what Bettie (2014:p. 49) calls “class futures.” Thus, while there is a strong tie between a person's class origin, their present socioeconomic status, and success in school, the critical influence of peer group membership with its shared codes either shapes further the reproduction of one's social class or, when resisted, allows for class related performances that augment the ability to pass from one class to another, whether upward or downward.

At Waretown High, Bettie was able to identify the prominent peer groups: preps, chicas, cholas, hicks, skaters, and smokers. The preps were mostly white, with a handful of Mexican-American girls, middle class, well integrated into the school environment, and displayed good social and academic skills. These girls dressed well, often had their own automobiles, and expressed themselves with distinctive styles for their hair that always emphasized feminine display in a manner not shared by other girl groups (2014: p. 20–1, 57, 63). The chicas, on the other hand, who were Mexican-American and predominantly working class, wore more makeup and tight fitting clothing than the prep girls. They avoided difficult college preparatory classes and gravitated to the vocational or business classes. They showed generally little interest in the classroom curriculum, often flirting with male substitute teachers and turning their attention to a girl culture built around heterosexual romance, clothes, appearance, shopping, and shared personal interests (2014: pp. 58–60; pp. 63–64). As Bettie describes, these preferences and alliances shape the class futures that individuals can envision, aspire to achieving, and attain.

Prep girls, for example, embrace adult, middle class norms for comportment during late adolescence as one means of preparing to move upward socially and economically through another educational institution. (2014: p. 61) This means that while the prep girls may not be any less sexually active than their chicas peers, they conduct their sex lives in more secrecy and insure that their upward trajectory is not disrupted by an unplanned pregnancy by using birth control (often without the knowledge

of parents) (2014: p. 68). Chicas (and non-preps generally), on the other hand, engaged in displays that violated adult, middle class norms by engaging publicly in ways that laid claim to adult status before middle class adults think appropriate (2014: p. 61). For example, having little likelihood of an extended adolescence in higher education like the preps, the chicas are more ready to see having a baby while still in high school as a valuable marker of adult status. Motherhood, and the responsibility for care and nurture that comes with it, can be used to gain respect that might not otherwise be forthcoming on other grounds (2014: p. 69).

The attitudes that group members share, sometimes implicitly, are key to these girls' class futures. As Bettie (2014: p. 72) relates, non-prep girls seldom wanted to talk about their plans after high school. Indeed, Bettie observes that "...I saw clearly [that raising the subject] caused the girls to feel uncertainty and a related stress, so they changed the conversation to music and fashion." As one example, the "going away to college" experience was not something the chicas could envision, let alone desire: it was a prep dream that their class origin, their peer group affiliation, and the consequences of their peer group choices reserved for the preps and not for them. Working class "performers" among Bettie's subjects could, at most, aspire to attend the local community college while beginning their working and parenting adult lives at the same time (2014: p. 71). Working class non-performers, such as the largely white "smokers," could envision and expect even less for the future. Typically from "hard living" families with parents who had not finished high school or barely done so, the smokers also had little interest in the school's curriculum, rarely expressed plans for after high school, and often simply hoped to hang on to graduate (2014: pp. 13-4; pp. 85-86).

These constellations of combined class factors clearly have direct implications for the ability of various class actors to achieve the American Dream of upward mobility although it is important to recognize that origins are not determinative. Bettie (2014: pp. 159-60), for example, carefully discusses the differences in orientation that facilitate the transition from working class culture to aspirational middle class culture and middle class futures. These class differences also expose class members to other experiences related to the American Dream as well. As Bettie (2014: pp. 73-6) describes, working class students who want to "make it" are quick to become targets of those trying to sell them the American Dream in one package or another. As one example, proprietary, for profit, schools present themselves as alternatives to the public and private non-profit sector by advertising widely, making appealing promises of a better future, deploying deceptive techniques, and targeting the most vulnerable youth –

often those from low income populations of color (2014: p. 76). Yet, as Bettie (2014: p. 76) concludes, students who try and take this alternative route “will still probably not end up with jobs that pay them enough to support themselves and will likely go into debt as a consequence of attending.” It almost seems that believing in the American Dream of upward mobility has become a predisposing factor in insuring that one does not achieve it.

Conclusion

Given the foregoing, why would anyone believe in the American Dream? Yet, rather miraculously, nearly everyone in the United States does. As Hochschild (1995: p. 55) observes based on mountains of evidence she presents, “Americans are close to unanimous in endorsing the idea of the American dream.” A modest analysis that I produced with a colleague reached the same conclusion about American college students who almost universally believe in the Dream and think they will attain it (Hauhart and Birkenstein, 2013). How can one explain this? Perhaps Rank, Hirschl, and Foster (2014) come closest with their discussion of elements of the American Dream that have produced very little scholarly examination: hope and optimism. As these authors correctly point out, without the existence of hope (for something) sustaining the optimistic possibility that what is sought can be achieved, what exactly would the American Dream consist of? Thus, while my present effort is limited by my inability to take the matter further in the context of this paper, it may well be that the proper province of American Dream studies will always be the nature of people’s hopes and aspirations, the challenges they face, and the outcomes they experience. Like the American Dream itself, studies of this nature would constitute an endless quest – but one well worth pursuing.

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Conflicting Narratives of the American Dream: Obama's Equality of Opportunity and Trump's "Make America Great Again"¹

Michael A. Peters

You have to describe your country in terms of what you passionately hope it will become, as well as in terms of what you know it to be now. You have to be loyal to a dream country rather than to the one you wake up to every morning. Unless such loyalty exists, the ideal has no chance of becoming actual.

Richard Rorty, (2008) "Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America"

I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave owners - an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on earth is my story even possible.

Senator Barack Obama, (2008) "A More Perfect Union"²

Introduction

Richard Rorty (1998), the American pragmatist philosopher, begins his book "Achieving Our Country" with the comment, "National pride is to countries what self respect is to individuals: a necessary condition for self improvement" (p. 3). He provides a narrative re-crafting of the dream in pre-Vietnam America by reference to Walt Whitman and John Dewey. According to Rorty, Whitman and Dewey shaped the secular dream of America based on the notion of exceptionalism without reference to the divine – a society where all Americans would become mo-

1 This essay is an updated and substantially rewritten paper based on Peters (2012) with a new section on Trump and the American Dream.

2 For the full speech and video see http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/03/18/obama-race-speech-read-th_n_92077.html.

bilized as political agents in the cause of democracy. He argues that, for Whitman and Dewey, the conjunction of the concepts "America" and "democracy" is an essential part of a new description of what it is to be human. Rorty's success as a philosopher is related to his ability to tell a new story about America and the American Dream, to re-describe the past using a different vocabulary and to highlight how a new philosophical history can make us feel differently about who we are and who we might become. Rorty offers us a "philosophy of hope," a philosophy based on the narrative of cultural invention, self-discovery and national self-creation.³

What Rorty's book also draws attention to is the power of narrative and the way in which the American Dream is a specific narrative that comes into being at a particular time and place and then can be "read back" onto American history – on the Puritan beginnings and those who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. It is a narrative that can be "read forward," projected onto the future, as a means of establishing a vision for a society and economy. This is the art of narrative retellings of the America Dream, which, in the hands of Rorty or Barack Obama, becomes a shining beacon to unify the people in recognizing what is best in America. The question is whether, in a time of radical change and transition – when America is losing its world position as the only superpower, when millions of Americans are losing their homes and jobs as a result of the recession and financial crisis, when America enters into a massive budget-cutting and deficit-financing mode – whether the American Dream can be reclaimed, refurbished, re-articulated and retold in era of decline.

Obama is a skillful politician and is well known for his oratory. He has consistently made reference to the American Dream in his campaigning for the presidency and after, often focusing on his own remarkable story as emblematic of the possible. He has also carefully used the intellectual resources of the American Dream to unify Americans and to provide the vision for the society he wants others to dream of. The question is, in a time of decline, how serviceable is this dream: Can it be restored? Are its core ideals able to be refashioned?

Fareed Zakaria, like Obama, believes that it is possible to restore the America Dream and, like millions of immigrants in developing countries, remembers the attraction of America when he was young:

3 See Rorty's (1999) "Philosophy and Social Hope," which represents his hope for, "a global cosmopolitan, democratic, egalitarian, classless, casteless society" (p. xii) and runs this hope together with his antagonism towards Platonism – towards the search for Truth (as correspondence), certainty, reality and essences. He finds the roots of his view in the work of the American native tradition in pragmatist philosophy best represented in the work of John Dewey.

The American dream for me, growing up in India in the 1970s, looked something like the opening credits of *Dallas*. The blockbuster TV series began with a kaleidoscope of big, brassy, sexy images – tracts of open land, shiny skyscrapers, fancy cars, cowboy businessmen and the very dreamy Victoria Principal.

A few years later, when I got to America on a college scholarship, I realized that the real American Dream was somewhat different from *Dallas*. I visited college friends in their hometowns and was struck by the spacious suburban houses and the gleaming appliances – even when their parents had simple, modest jobs. The modern American Dream, for me, was this general prosperity and well-being for the average person. European civilization had produced the great cathedrals of the world. America had the two-car garage. And this middle-class contentment created a country of optimists.

Writing in *Time* in October 2010 and rerunning the theme on CNN in February 2011, Zakaria notes the angry and dispirited mood of Americans who, after the worst recession since the Great Depression, are strikingly fatalistic about their prospects. The middle class has been hollowed out and American workers are losing jobs as American companies locate off shore. The American Dream can be restored, Zakaria argues, but it will involve hard and painful choices, and he makes the following recommendations: shift from consumption to investment; invest heavily in education and training; develop “fiscal sanity”; and simplify the tax code and benchmark. He goes on to argue:

My proposals are inherently difficult because they ask the left and right to come together, cut some spending, pare down entitlements, open up immigration for knowledge workers, rationalize the tax code – and then make large investments in education and training, research and technology, innovation and infrastructure. But the fact that it is a solution that crosses political borders should make it more palatable, not less. And time is crucial.

Zakaria buys into the concept of the American Dream without scrutinizing or historicizing it and the way it has changed and been narratively re-crafted for every age: “That dream or hope has been present from the start. Ever since we became an independent nation, each generation has seen an uprising of ordinary Americans to save the American Dream from the forces which appear to be overwhelming it.”

Yet with all narratives of this kind that serve as a basis of a national ideal and spell out an appeal to the better nature of citizens to unify them

by alluding to a vision, we need to ask: What is the history of the narrative? Who are the main storytellers, and to what ends do they tell the tale? When we ask these questions, the American Dream seems a very white dream, one that does not recognize how the dream rested on exploitation of indigenous peoples, the black slave economy, and a corporate America that increasingly squeezes wealth from the American people and exploits cheap labor elsewhere in developing countries. While it is based on an ideal of inclusiveness, it never offered indigenous peoples or African-Americans much hope.

“The Epic of America”

James Truslow Adams was the historian who first coined the term “American Dream” in “The Epic of America,” published in 1931, significantly at a time when America was suffering the early years of the Great Depression. He chose his title well. The term “epic” refers to a long, narrative poem detailing the heroic deeds and events significant to a culture, tribe or nation. In archaic Greek style, these poems followed a certain format, exhibiting set literary conventions that described a heroic quest, normally beginning with an invocation to the muse, where genealogies are given and the values of a civilization are heralded.

Homer’s “Iliad” and “Odyssey” are classic examples that begin the Western tradition. These epics were often long national poems that described and embroidered the development of episodes or events important to the history of a nation or race, and were told in an elevated style. It is a form that persists through the medieval into the modern era.

To describe America as an epic is to make an appeal to noble sentiments, and Adams was aware of this; especially in the context of the 1930s, he wanted to highlight and romanticize the ethic of equality – and in particular, equality of opportunity and equality before the law. He also wanted to use these ideals and principles to describe a country based on the conscious development of a secular social order that found its origins in the Declaration of Independence, which holds certain 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.” But do epics make good history? And is the American Dream is still an attainable and serviceable ideal?

Adams depicted a dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wag-

es merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position (pp. 214–215)

Adams was a writer rather than an academic, and as a freelance writer, he wrote colonial histories. His trilogy on the history of New England was warmly received, and he won the Pulitzer Prize for the first volume, “The Founding of New England” (1921). He was active in the American Society of Arts and Letters and various historical societies. In his “The Epic of America,” Adams attempted to address the historic development and philosophic vision of America that strongly reflected the values of the Declaration as uniquely American and extolled the advantages of education as a means for the promoting of equality of opportunity, meritocracy and social mobility. When he wrote “The Epic of America” while living in London, 16 percent of the workforce was unemployed – some 8 million Americans – and unemployment was to get much worse as the Depression dragged on. He died disappointed in his country after a heart attack in 1949.

Jim Cullen (2003) historicizes the American Dream, focusing on the founding fathers and the Declaration of Independence as “the charter of the American Dream,” as well as on Abraham Lincoln and his dream for a unified nation, and Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream of racial equality. He argues that the contemporary version of the American Dream has become debased, built on its outlandish dreams of overnight fame and fortune. Perhaps most significantly, Cullen sees the American Dream as embodying the ideal that all men are created equal. Even with the obvious contradiction of slavery, the essence of this dream allowed for the possibility of racial equality, class mobility and home ownership – values that are part of the core of collective consciousness of Americans.

Like Adams, Cullen deplores the way the American Dream increasingly becomes the pursuit of material prosperity and consumerism. David Camp (2009) suggests that while it matured into a shared dream under Roosevelt’s New Deal, when a new level of security was cemented in place by The Social Security Act of 1935,⁴ it was re-calibrated during the period of postwar prosperity:

Buttressed by postwar optimism and prosperity, the American Dream was undergoing another recalibration. Now it really did translate into specific goals rather than Adams’s more broadly defined aspirations. Home ownership was the fundamental goal, but, depending on who

4 See the wonderful set of photos that accompanies this article at <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2009/04/american-dream200904?currentPage=1>.

was doing the dreaming, the package might also include car ownership, television ownership (which multiplied from 6 million to 60 million sets in the U.S. between 1950 and 1960), and the intent to send one's kids to college. The G.I. Bill was as crucial on that last count as it was to the housing boom. In providing tuition money for returning vets, it not only stocked the universities with new students – in 1947, roughly half of the nation's college enrollees were ex-G.I.'s – but put the very idea of college within reach of a generation that had previously considered higher education the exclusive province of the rich and the extraordinarily gifted. Between 1940 and 1965, the number of U.S. adults who had completed at least four years of college more than doubled.

This was an ideal that translated the American Dream into a new society based upon purchasing power, epitomized by John Kenneth Galbraith's (1958) "The Affluent Society," focusing on attaining hitherto undreamed levels of personal affluence. The succeeding decades exposed a commitment to high levels of personal debt via new credit cards, easy credit and family investment portfolios in the bull markets of the day. At the same time, the American Dream was being drained of its substantive content and, "decoupled from any concept of the common good (the movement to privatize Social Security began to take on momentum) and, more portentously, from the concepts of working hard and managing one's expectations." As he goes on to comment:

These are tough times for the American Dream. As the safe routines of our lives have come undone, so has our characteristic optimism – not only our belief that the future is full of limitless possibility, but our faith that things will eventually return to normal, whatever "normal" was before the recession hit. There is even worry that the dream may be over – that we currently living Americans are the unfortunate ones who shall bear witness to that deflating moment in history when the promise of this country began to wither. This is the "sapping of confidence" that President Obama alluded to in his inaugural address, the "nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, and that the next generation must lower its sights."

As S.L. Hanson and J. Zogby (2010) indicate: "Cullen (2003) and others (Sherraden, 1991; Newman, 1993; Shapiro, 2004; Moen and Roehling, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Ho, 2007) have suggested that the American Dream may be unraveling as we see a growing wealth gap, ongoing race and gender inequality, and expanding poor immigrant populations. Perhaps the 21st century is not a time of increasing progress toward the American Dream."

Obama on the American Dream

Obama is a savvy politician who knows the currency and power of the concept of the American Dream. His second book, entitled “The Audacity of Hope,” (2006) was subtitled, “Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream.”

Most Americans have simple dreams. A job that can support a family. Health care we can count on and afford. A retirement that is dignified and secure. Education and opportunity for our kids. But today, the price of the American dream is going up. All across the country, Americans are working harder for less. We’ve never paid more for health care or for college. It’s harder to save, and it’s harder to retire. There are things we need to do right now to give our economy a boost, but a short-term stimulus is not enough. We have to put the American dream on a firmer foundation.

His recipe was clear: “stop giving tax breaks to companies that ship jobs overseas, and to put a tax cut in the pocket of middle class Americans”; “protect a secure retirement by easing the burden on America’s seniors”; “change our bankruptcy laws to protect workers’ pensions instead of protecting banks”; “make health care affordable and accessible for all Americans.” He wrote, “We also have to be clear that the American dream must never come at the expense of the American family.” He also indicated the, “need to expand paid leave” and, perhaps most fundamentally, “It’s time to put a college education within reach of every American.”

The book became a national bestseller in the fall of 2006, and its promises and policy sketches became part of his 2008 campaign for the presidency. The phrase, “the audacity of hope” was one adopted from his pastor, Jeremiah Wright (whose version was, “the audacity *to* hope”), and Obama also used it as the basis also for his keynote at the 2004 Democratic Convention.⁵ In that speech, he began by recalling his grandfather’s dream and his family heritage to say: “I stand here today, grateful for the diversity of my heritage, aware that my parents’ dreams live on in my precious daughters. I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that, in no other country on earth, is my story even possible.”

In the same paragraph, Obama then alludes to the Declaration as a basis for America Dream: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. That they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” and he goes on to say, “That is the true genius of Amer-

5 For the full speech, see <http://www.librarian.net/dnc/speeches/obama.txt>.

ica, a faith in the simple dreams of its people, the insistence on small miracles,” and ends his speech with his own version of the Dream: “I believe we can give our middle class relief and provide working families with a road to opportunity. I believe we can provide jobs to the jobless, homes to the homeless, and reclaim young people in cities across America from violence and despair. I believe that as we stand on the crossroads of history, we can make the right choices, and meet the challenges that face us. America!”

In his post-election travels, Obama listened to a 30-year-old law school graduate who said he is no longer able to make the interest payments on his educational loans, much less able to have a mortgage or a family. He said he had been inspired by Obama’s campaign. But now, “That inspiration is dying away,” he said. “I really want to know: Is the American dream dead?”

“Absolutely not,” Obama responded. “There is not a country in the world that would not want to change places with us,” he continued. “We are still the country that billions of people in the world look to and aspire to.”

“It’s like the American dream in reverse.” That’s how President Obama, ten days after taking office, described the plight of Americans hit by the faltering economy. His catchy description fell short – the dream has turned into a nightmare for tens of millions.

Opinion polls reveal that increasingly, Americans believe that the American Dream is a thing of the past. Perhaps surprisingly, Hanson & Zogby (2010) report the majority of Americans consistently reported that the American Dream is more about spiritual happiness than material goods. Americans continue to believe that working hard should be the most important element for getting ahead in the United States, but does not guarantee success. A majority of respondents believe that achieving the American Dream will be more difficult for future generations. Americans are increasingly pessimistic about the opportunity for the working class to get ahead and increasingly optimistic about the opportunity for the poor and immigrants to get ahead in the United States.

As Hanson & Zogby (2010) comment, “Beliefs about opportunity are essential aspects of social systems in that they involve subjective interpretations of the legitimacy and openness of the stratification system ... In the United States, there is considerable evidence that systems and structures work to the distinct advantage of some and to the disadvantage of others.” Obviously, growing and structured inequality is not compatible with the American Dream, as its main ideological tenet is to suggest that all can succeed. In this context, inequality is immoral and irresponsible. The American dream has been eclipsed by the power of wealth, and the

racial wealth gap is growing, with generational inequality becoming even more deeply entrenched. Americans cannot continue to hold deep-rooted beliefs in the principles of individualism, equal opportunity and meritocracy in the face of such growing inequalities.

As states cut back on education as a way of balancing their accounts, education as the so-called “great equalizer” is less able to provide an equal playing field, ensuring that every child – regardless of family of origin – gets an equal chance at success (Johnson, 2006).

“In Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer – and Turned its Back on the Middle Class,” two political scientists, Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, document the fact that during the last few years, the wealthiest Americans have gotten a lot richer while the middle class has suffered: real incomes have fallen, foreclosures have forced millions of Americans from their homes and unemployment is the highest in 30 years. They document the fact that, in 2009, the average income of the top 5 percent of earners went up, while the income of the rest of the population went down. The top 1 percent possessed roughly 8 percent of the total income in the 1960s; today, the top 1 percent “earns” more than 20 percent of the total income. The interesting point they make is that this startling income inequality – the largest of any advanced industrial democracy – is part of a larger, 40-year trend due to deliberate policies that have consistently cut taxes for the rich, made it harder for unions to organize, enabled corporations to pay top executives large bonuses despite company performance and deregulated financial markets that favor banks at the expense of customers. They also point to intentional “policy drift” to refer to a situation where policymakers resist alternatives that might have reduced inequalities. The dramatic growth of inequality is the result of deliberate political choice and business backlash against the form American liberalism took as it emerged after World War II. A conservative counterrevolution and the political awakening of business ensued. Where the policy regime of private provision for a globally dominant industrial economy had previously worked, during the 1970s this regime began to break down as globalization and deindustrialization took hold. The business lobby no longer accepted the contours of the New Deal and the Great Society. Beginning with the Carter administration, the business lobby began to exercise its muscle, defeating reform proposals and instituting a round of tax cuts.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the parties increasingly differed on racial politics. The Republicans became the party of the wealthy and white, while the Democrats became the inheritors of the civil rights movement. If anything, this deep racial divide has grown larger during Obama’s era

– exposing increasing racial inequalities which are likely to become even more pronounced as states begin to trim their budgets and cut back savagely into education and welfare entitlements. Under state budget cuts, students have lost tuition waivers, teachers have been sacked, collective bargaining is curtailed and sometimes abolished, and deep cuts have been made to the funding of K-12 and higher education.⁶

Can education continue to play the role as the great equalizer, sustaining the American Dream and providing the key to equality of opportunity?⁷ Arne Duncan (2011), the Secretary of Education in the Obama administration, addressed the theme of education reform in the United States in a series of remarks to the World Bank. In his remarks, he comments on the traditional values of education as the “great equalizer” and its new role in the competitive knowledge economy of developing human capital. “Education is now the key to eliminating gender inequality, to reducing poverty, to creating a sustainable planet, to preventing needless deaths and illness, and to fostering peace,” said Duncan. “And in a knowledge economy, education is the new currency by which nations maintain economic competitiveness and global prosperity. Education today is inseparable from the development of human capital.”⁸

In his report on US reforms, he rejects the notion that improving economic competitiveness is a zero-sum game and, in effect, loads education with even more responsibility for “achieving America,” as Rorty puts it. Improving education is important to “winning the future,” Duncan suggests, quoting President Obama. He also quotes with approval Thomas Friedman, Nelson Mandela (“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”) and Ben Bernanke (“The best solution to income inequality is producing a high-quality education for everyone”). And he puts the point in graphic terms:

6 See the report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities on state budget cuts at <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=1214>. Gov. Jerry Brown in California aims to cut half a billion dollars from state education funding in 2011; Arizona, \$83.7 million; Georgia, \$187 million from higher education; Texas, \$5 billion from public schools, and so on. In a much publicized episode, Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin, in the largest cut in modern state history, has cut \$900 million in aid to school districts (also preventing any rise in property taxes) and eliminated collective bargaining rights of state employees, leading to historic protests against him. See the full text of his budget speech at http://walker.wi.gov/journal_media_detail.asp?prid=5668&locid=177 and the Senate bill at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/2011/data/JR1SB-11.pdf>.

7 See Bill Gates’ (2011) Ted Talk on “How State Budgets are breaking US schools” at http://www.ted.com/talks/bill_gates_how_state_budgets_are_breaking_us_schools.html.

8 See his “Improving Human Capital in a Competitive World - Education Reform in the United States,” Remarks of US Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, World Bank, Human Development Network Forum, March 2, 2011.

We have more than 2 million children enrolled in preschool programs, 100,000 public schools, 49 million K-12 students, more than 3 million teachers, and 15,000 school districts – all of it largely administered and funded by local governments. I am convinced that the US education system now has an unprecedented opportunity to get dramatically better. Nothing – nothing – is more important in the long-run to American prosperity than boosting the skills and attainment of the nation's students. In the United States, we feel an economic and moral imperative to challenge the status quo. Closing the achievement gap and closing the opportunity gap is the civil rights issue of our generation. One quarter – 25 percent – of US high school students drop out or fail to graduate on time. Almost 1 million students leave our schools for the streets each year. That is economically unsustainable and morally unacceptable.

If “the economic future of the United States rests on its ability to strengthen our education system,” then in the current situation, with state-led budget cuts and the general recession, the American Dream is severely at risk. The authors of “The Global Auction” (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011) suggest that in a more integrated and networked world, the market value of American workers is no longer a national matter, but rather is part of a global auction for jobs. They challenge the conventional wisdom that more education will lead to greater individual and national prosperity, which has been a cornerstone of developed economies – arguing that globalization has led to a new, global, high-skill, low-wage workforce. Their work not only questions the easy adoption of education as human capital development, but calls for a radical questioning of education as the principal mechanism for the achievement of the American Dream.

Of course, the goal of education is not simply about a form of economic instrumentalism that helps the United States “win the future,” to quote from Obama’s education rhetoric. Now, more than any time in the past, and especially at this very moment of capitalist crisis in the West, the old truisms about education as the central part of the “knowledge economy” and as the ticket to economic health no longer wash: even graduates can’t get jobs. Youth unemployment in the Eurozone and the United States is spiraling upward, and the relationship between education and jobs is no longer a comfortable mantra of “education equals jobs.” One might argue that what is urgently needed is a critical democratic education that leads to the development of cosmopolitan citizens able to scrutinize and monitor the workings of capital to help protect the public sector against the ravages of the monopolization of knowledge and the privatization of education.

“Make America Great Again”: Donald Trump and the Rise of Authoritarian Populism

Neoliberal globalisation—the target of so much Left critique over the Reagan-Thatcher, Bush-Blair, and some would say, Obama-Cameron, years—seems now on the back foot, both in the US under Trump, and also in Europe with the emergence of the Alt-right and the likes of Marie Le Pen, leader of the National Front in France, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, the UK Independence Party, Heinz-Christian Strache in Austria and the Vlaams Belang Party in Belgium, to name a few. Right-wing populism is on the rise. It is fiercely anti-immigration and anti-integration, often associated with neo-Nazis and white supremacist groups. It commonly assumes a kind of authoritarianism and anti-liberal stance towards rights, and while it appeals to the ‘common man’ (*sic*)—sometimes explicitly anti-women and anti-feminist—it paradoxically nevertheless does not subscribe to the notion and practice of equality. The far-right is anti-pluralist and anti-democratic believing in the strong state and an authoritarian populism. Right-wing populism has strong links with elements of the far-right not only in terms of ethnocentrism, xenophobia and anti-immigration stance but also over traditional and social conservative values concerning heterosexuality, the patriarchal family, the subordination of women and cultural minorities, often combined with fundamentalist Christian values. Economically, as is evidence in the raft of Trump’s executive orders, there is a strong tendency toward protectionism and an isolationism in foreign policy (Peters, 2017).

“Make America Great Again” (MAGA) was Trump’s 2016 campaign slogan, a phrase used also by Ronald Reagan in his 1980 campaign. It is dominated in Trump’s policy thinking as he tries to undo all of Obama’s policies, in health care, taxation, trade and foreign policy – capped recently by a stubborn defense of his withdrawal from the Paris climate accord at the 2016 G20 meeting. MAGA is a different narrative of the American Dream from liberal internationalism that is based on a mixed or blended discourse derived from “America First”, withdrawal from international agreement in trade and climate change, a resentful attitude to traditional allies, strong alignment with far-right ideas both within the closed circle of his advisors (e.g. Steve Bannon) and allegiances to deindustrialized voting constituencies in the Rust Belt, who suffered from economic globalization when jobs went East. Trump’s narrative of the American Dream is directed against all outsiders—Mexicans, undocumented folk, Blacks, women, Muslims—and functions by casting aspersions and tapping into existing prejudices and disaffection. Trump said in his inaugural address:

“Rusted out factories are scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation. The wealth of our middle class has been ripped from our homes and redistributed all across the world.” But if the narrative is essentially directly inward it is also “America closed” as against “America open” – an attitude which is refracted in the recoil from global moral leadership and from “leader of the free world” (Peters & Chiang, 2017).

At the domestic level Trump has also unleashed “a new offensive against academia.”⁹ He is not a friend of education and science as a means of achieving the American Dream. Trump’s ascendancy is bad news for US and world science with the disappearance of governmental science websites such as the White House pages on climate change and the likely curtailment for alternative energy science funding.¹⁰ Various publications have complained that the president’s view on science are shockingly ignorant.¹¹ At the level of schooling Trump is on record saying he may cut the Department of Education.¹² His appointment of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education did little to impress teachers.¹³ All this indicates an education agenda that will boost Charter schools, defend the ideology of school choice, support the radical Christian orthodoxy to advance private religious schools, and rethink the necessity of the Common Core. Other elements on the privatization and conservative agenda include vouchers, greater teacher accountability, more student debt, and an attack on America’s public schooling system with a commensurate downsizing of the Department of Education. Many educators are worried about the future of liberal arts colleges and STEM education, and the undermining of teaching about evolution and climate change.¹⁴ CBS reports Trump as saying: ‘As your president, I will be the biggest cheerleader for school choice you’ve ever seen,’ promising that in his White House term ‘parents

9 See <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20170113164552838>. universities are already feeling the effects of Trump’s travel ban on their application numbers. Even with a new policy on travel ban placed on six countries, mostly Muslim, it seems clear that international students in US universities will be severely curtailed. Many US universities and universities around the world have been outspoken against the discrimination of Trump’s immigration and travel-ban policies.

10 See <https://arstechnica.com/science/2017/01/have-politics-trumped-science/>.

11 E.g. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/trump-comments-on-science-are-shockingly-ignorant/>

12 <https://qz.com/898330/in-just-one-week-as-president-donald-trump-has-wreaked-unparalleled-havoc-on-american-education/>

13 See DeVos at 2017 Conservative Political Action Conference, C-Span <https://www.c-span.org/video/?424394-101/betsy-devos-delivers-remarks-cpac>

14 <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/trumps-first-100-days-science-education-and-schools/>

can home school their children.”¹⁵ Under Trump the US faces the end of the liberal era of schooling—the end of educational equality—and a reassertion, especially as Trump’s presidency unfolds, of less government involvement and the endorsement of socially conservative values. This is the “Make American Great Again” narrative of the American Dream under Trump but not through meritocracy and not through education and the traditional liberal notion of equality of educational opportunity.

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Livin' the Meritocratic Dream!

Or Why it Makes Sense that Percent Plans in College and University Admissions Represent the Future of Affirmative Action

Cyril Ghosh

Introduction

In the summer of 2017 the Donald Trump administration was reported to be preparing for investigations and possible litigation over affirmative action policies at selected universities and colleges for discriminating against white applicants (Savage, 2017). This gesture is in keeping with the Republican Party's and many Americans' – including, primarily, American conservatives' – general opposition to affirmative action policies. Affirmative action has been controversial ever since it was first implemented in the mid-1960s. Especially in the case of university admissions, supporters point out that these policies enable the establishment of a level playing field – a central tenet of the American Dream. Adversaries, on the other hand, point out that the policy constitutes impermissible discrimination, especially against white men.

Others argue for a reformed version of affirmative action that takes socioeconomic background into account and does not rely solely on race in admissions decisions. Yet others claim that if affirmative action is to be eradicated, the same should be done with legacy admits: the policy at some elite institutions of admitting relatives of alumni. Finally, there are those that advocate for replacing affirmative action as we know it with Percent Plans – which are race-neutral plans that nonetheless have the consequence of ensuring racially and socioeconomically diverse classrooms at state-run institutions of higher education.

In this essay, I suggest that of all these proposals, Percent Plans represent the best alternative to affirmative action policies, in major part be-

cause they are the most aligned with the widely popular ideology of the American Dream and, therefore, has the potential to have the broadest possible support from Americans across the ideological spectrum. These plans, thus, represent the least politically problematic way to resolve a controversial set of disputes about how to ensure diverse classrooms at institutions of higher education as well as about how to spread out educational opportunities widely throughout American society. I suggest in the remainder of this paper that these Percent Plans are much better suited to instituting the American Dream's promise of a level playing field because they factor in socioeconomic class and ensure racial diversity, especially of historically underrepresented racial and ethnic minority students, and they do so in a way that does not accord "preferential" treatment to any particular group of people, which in turn makes them more likely to enjoy widespread support in the American population, and also makes them more likely to reduce the stigma that sometimes accompanies affirmative action policies.

Equal Opportunity and the American Dream

There are many visions of what constitutes the American Dream. The phrase is notoriously hard to define. But there are three central constitutive elements of the American Dream: individualism, equal opportunity, and success (Ghosh, 2013). The Dream promises a life of success for all those who work hard for it, have the talent or merit for it, or who achieve this success purely on the basis of luck. The dream's widespread emotional resonance leads it to be routinely invoked by political leaders in contemporary American political culture – and the language and rhetoric of the Dream is regularly used to refer to a range of things from homeownership to immigration. It is not a surprise, therefore, that especially since the mid-1960s political leaders have dramatically increased the use of American Dream rhetoric (Ghosh, 2013). In part, this is because post-War era economic prosperity reconfirmed the promise of the Dream and in part because the Dream's promise of social and racial justice, codified famously in Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, canonized the American Dream's promise of democratic inclusion for all.

Central to the ideology of the Dream is a belief in meritocracy that makes Americans likely to tolerate pervasive inequality principally because inequality indicates, for many, the presence of social and political structures that reward the hard-working and punish those who are lazy.¹ Survey after survey in the last 25 years or so reveal that most Americans

1 On the concept of meritocracy in the United States, see Samuelson (1997), Arrow, Bowles, and Durlauf (eds.) (2000); also see Lipset (1996).

value the core tenets of the American Dream. They see hard work and effort as the most effective and fairest ways to get ahead in life. In one 2015 survey, 72 percent of the respondents said they are either living the American dream or expect to do so (Baer and Penn, 2015). Barely two years since the start of the financial crisis of 2008, a 2010 *Public Opinion Quarterly* report on the continuing relevance of the American Dream pointed out that, among those surveyed, working hard is the most important element of getting ahead in America (Hanson & Zogby, 2010). In the same year, in one poll two-thirds of the respondents believed they could achieve the American Dream.² According to a 2009 *New York Times*/CBS poll, 72 percent of Americans, even in the midst of a recession, continued to believe that in America, it was possible to start out with nothing, work hard, and become rich, which is, according to the *New York Times*, “a classic definition of the American Dream” (Seelye, 2009; Ghosh, 2013). Equally, a 2005 poll conducted by the *New York Times* found that the majority of Americans remain upbeat about their prospects of upward mobility (Scott & Leonhardt, 2005). The survey revealed that 40 percent of Americans believe that the chance of moving up from one class to another has risen over the last 30 years, a period in which scholarly research has shown that it has not. A 2004 poll confirmed that majorities of those polled in every demographic, geographic, and political sub-group are confident that their children or the next generation will have a fair shot at the American Dream.³ This is consistent with what Jennifer Hochschild reported in 1995: most Americans say their standard of living is better today than their parents’ and imagine that their children will do better still. Fewer than one-fifth of Americans see race, gender, religion, or class as very important for “getting ahead in life” (Hochschild, 1995: p. 19). In 1994, Citrin et al. reported: “The pervasive agreement that getting ahead on one’s own is important in making one a ‘true American’ reflects the country’s persistent cultural emphasis on individual achievement. Polls typically show that two-thirds of both white and black Americans believe that hard work will lead to success and that people should strive hard to get ahead” (Citrin, J. Haas, E.B., Muste, M. & B. Reingold, B., 1994: p. 14). Since 1994, despite enormous exogenous structural shocks, like 9/11, the Global War On Terror, and the current recession, nothing has essentially changed about this pattern of beliefs (Bybee & Ghosh, 2009; Seelye, 2009; Hanson & Zogby, 2010; Ghosh, 2013).

2 Xavier University Institute for Politics and the American Dream, “The American Dream Survey,” (2010).

3 National League of Cities, “The American Dream in 2004: A Survey of the American people” (Washington D.C., 2004).

Such beliefs in equal opportunity or a level playing field, however, has always run up against the US's entrenched system of inherent privileges and advantages for wealthy whites.⁴ Dalton Conley, for example, has shown that the wealth gap between white and black households is the single biggest contributor to black-white inequality (Conley, 1999). According to the Pew Research Center, the median wealth of white households was 13 times the median wealth of black households in 2013. It was eight times greater in 2010. When compared to Hispanic households in 2013, the median wealth of white households is more than 10 times bigger (Kochhar & Fry, 2014).

What is important for our purposes here is that the rhetoric of the American Dream is somehow able to fuse all these various different notions of equal opportunity, meritocracy, and inequality into an amalgamated promise of success even though the data clearly indicates the existence of a system that is biased in favor of affluent whites. In fact, belief in the Dream is so strong that people routinely claim that while it is true that *not* everyone will succeed, everyone has a *chance* to succeed in America. But we all know well that things are not quite as simple as that. In a pure meritocracy, the playing field would be genuinely level. In other words, anyone willing to work hard would be able to do so and would, in the process, achieve some kind of success – often interpreted as upward mobility. However, it turns out, upward mobility is extremely highly correlated with education and access to education is anything but equally distributed in the US. I highlight some of the major features of these inequalities in the next section.

Education and Equal Opportunity

The Pew Research Center reported in 2016 that a college degree is becoming increasingly “the key to financial well-being.” For example, millennial college graduates who work full time earn about \$17,500 more annually than their peers who only hold a high school diploma.⁶ However, even though college graduation rates have increased for all racial and eth-

4 See, for example, the work of a range of critical race theorists: West (1993), Guinier & Torres (2002), Delgado & Stefancic (eds.) (2001). Also see, Conley (1999) and McIntosh (1989).

5 Pew Research Center, “Social & Demographic Trends,” June 27, 2016, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/06/27/1-demographic-trends-and-economic-well-being/>. However, importantly, the Pew Mobility Project also reports that if you were born rich, you were 2.5 times more likely than others to remain rich even if you did not bother to go to college (O'Brien 2013).

6 Pew Research Center, “Social and Demographic Trends: The Rising Cost of Not Going to College,” February 11, 2014, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/02/11/the-rising-cost-of-not-going-to-college/>.

nic groups over the last few decades, whites and Asians are far more likely than blacks to complete college.⁷ According to the Current Population Survey, fewer than 25 percent of blacks aged 25 and up have a college degree while the figure is at 36 percent for whites and 53 percent for Asians.⁸ Whites are also twice as likely to have college degrees as Hispanics.⁹ The story is slightly better, however, for high school graduation rates. In 2015, the US Census reported that 87 percent of blacks and 93.3 percent of non-Hispanic whites had high school diplomas (Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

But schools are notoriously segregated by race and class. Black, Latino, and American Indian children routinely end up attending subpar schools that are severely under-resourced – an experience that sets them on a trajectory of underachievement very early on, and with a deleterious impact on their chances of receiving a college education, the type of college education they would have access to, their career choices, and indeed their lives. One report from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* cites that at the turn of the 21st century, the average white elementary school student attended a school that was approximately 77 percent white (Orfield & Lee, 2007: p. 24) and about 31 percent poor (Orfield & Lee, 2007: p. 19). One 2007 study reported that segregation in public schools remained high for all racial groups except Asians, with white students remaining the most racially isolated, while more than half of black and Latino students' peers were black and Latino.¹⁰ Black and Latino students are disproportionately more likely to attend schools populated by students who come from poor families. Only one percent of white students attend schools where 91 percent or more of the students are poor, compared to 13 percent of black students and 15 percent of Latino students.¹¹

Of the 38 million Americans classified as poor, whites number a little more than half: about 17 million. However, when you look at rates of poverty, the racial differences look somewhat starker. 25 percent of African-Americans and 20 percent of Hispanics live below the poverty line – as compared with 10 percent of whites who are poor (Katel, Clark, and Jost, 2013: p. 129). According to reports from the Century Foundation, in 2003, whites accounted for 77 percent of the students at high schools in which the greatest majority went on to college (Katel, Clark, and Jost,

7 Pew Research Center, "Social & Demographic Trends."

8 Pew Research Center, "Social & Demographic Trends."

9 Pew Research Center, "Social & Demographic Trends."

10 Jost and Clark, "Racial Diversity in Public Schools," 133; also see Orfield and Lee, "Historic Reversals."

11 Jost and Clark, "Racial Diversity in Public Schools," 142; also see Orfield and Lee, "Historic Reversals."

2013: p. 129). One 2004 study by the Urban Institute points out that, in 2001, only about half of black, Hispanic, and American Indian high school students were likely to graduate, compared to 75 percent of whites and 77 percent of Asians.¹²

Meanwhile, it is also well known that only a sliver of the population has access to a high quality education and entry into elite colleges and universities. Standardized test scores are typically expected to be extremely high for students entering these elite institutions. However, one report from 2003 tells us that out of a maximum total score of 1600, about 66 percent of students who scored at least 1300 on the SATs come from the highest quartile of socioeconomic status (Katel, Clark, and Jost, 2013: p. 132). Class, then, determines success to a considerable degree. Approximately 75 percent of students entering tier 1 colleges and universities come from the wealthiest families, according to one Century Foundation report (Katel, Clark, and Jost, 2013: 131). Many of these students are legatees of relatives who have attended these elite schools (Katel, Clark, and Jost, 2013: 142). Equally, given the education-income-wealth nexus, these unequal educational opportunities in turn translate into unequal patterns of intergenerational wealth and income distribution.

As always, it turns out, poor students end up attending under-resourced schools and, as a result, they are less prepared than their rich counterparts for college, including performance on standardized tests. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that students from the most economically disadvantaged backgrounds can be expected to score up to 399 points (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2010) lower on the Math and Verbal sections of the SATs than those from the most advantaged. Poor kids are also significantly less likely to devote their time volunteering for notable causes and/or holding internship positions. If they work at all, they are more likely to be found holding minimum wage jobs that they go to after school – jobs that they juggle with their homework assignments.

Given this context, it does not take a very sophisticated mind to figure out that college admissions policies that predicate a calibration of academic promise on standardized test scores, extra-curricular activities, and other feats associated with “resume-building” miss the point entirely. The system is unequivocally biased in favor of the affluent and in favor of white students. This is not a level playing field. To instantiate any kind of equal opportunity in higher education, therefore, requires an in-

12 Christopher B. Swanson, “Who Graduates? Who Doesn’t?: A Statistical Portrait of Public High School Graduation, Class of 2001,” Educational Policy Center, Urban Institute, <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/57866/410934-Who-Graduates-Who-Doesn-t.PDF>.

tervention by a set of institutions – whether it is the state, the market, the non-profit world, or some cross-sector partnership. But what should such an intervention look like? Many think that affirmative action policies should be the preferred form of such an intervention. Others prefer Percent Plans. In the sections below I point out that affirmation action policies are extremely controversial and have been so since the start. Percent Plans, on the other hand, present a politically feasible alternative as a strategy of spreading educational opportunity widely. Percent Plans also come with the added advantage of being in alignment with the values of the popular ideology of the American Dream. It is for this reason, and some others I elaborate on in the final section of the essay, that it makes sense that Percent Plans are increasingly becoming the preferred way forward as a useful substitute for affirmative action policies.

Affirmative Action in University and College Admissions

Affirmative action policies were put into place in the early 1960s, during the black Civil Rights Movement in the US. In 1961, President Kennedy issued Executive Order No. 10925. This EO mandated that projects that received federal funding should “take affirmative action” to ensure that hiring and employment practices were free of racial bias. Moreover, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, stated that “[n]o person...shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Title VII also prohibited any employment practice that discriminated on the basis of race, gender, religion, or national origin. It did, however, mention some exceptions: under special circumstances it allowed the use of gender, religion, and national origin as legitimate bases for employer selection. Race, though, did not make the list of such exceptions.

By 1965, the Johnson administration issued its own Executive Order (11246; later amended by Executive order 11375). This EO called for the correction of “the effects of past and present discrimination.” It prohibited any federal contractor or subcontractor from discriminating against anyone seeking employment or any employee because of their race, skin color, religion, gender, or national origin. It also created for underrepresented and historically marginalized groups a “protected-class” status.

Affirmative action policies have been controversial since the very beginning and, over the last few decades, the Supreme Court of the United States has steadily eroded the scope of affirmative action policies in university admissions. In one of the early challenges to an affirmative action policy at the University of California, Davis’s Medical School, the Supreme Court, in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978),

struck down the use of quotas in the admission of underrepresented racial minorities. Thus, although the court affirmed the constitutionality of affirmative action programs purporting to give equal access to racial minorities, and in effect allowed for the use of race as one of several factors to be taken into consideration when an institution of higher education makes its admissions decisions, it nonetheless found the use of affirmative action quotas to be impermissible under the law. In 1996, in *Hopwood v. Texas*, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals held that the University of Texas, Austin's law school may not use race as a factor in making admissions decisions. This remained the law of the land for the states covered by the Fifth Circuit for several years. Subsequently, in 2003, the Supreme Court issued two important decisions related to affirmative action policies at the University of Michigan. One of these pertained to Michigan's law school and the other to its undergraduate admissions policies. The former (*Grutter v. Bollinger*) narrowly abrogated *Hopwood* but the latter (*Gratz v. Bollinger*) eroded affirmative action further. In *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003), the Court found the University of Michigan's undergraduate admissions process to be unconstitutional because it used a mechanical calculation that automatically assigned a set of numerical points to applicants who were members of underrepresented minority groups. However, in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), the Supreme Court decided in favor of the University of Michigan Law School's admissions policies and found that student body diversity is a "compelling state interest" that can justify the use of race in university admissions.

At the present moment, however, several states specifically prohibit affirmative action, and have laws intended to decrease "discrimination." These measures are often the result of statewide referenda, such as California's Proposition 209, Washington's Initiative 200, Michigan's Civil Rights Initiative, Arizona's Proposition 107, and Nebraska's Civil Rights Initiative. Ward Connerly, who has successfully spearheaded a nationwide campaign against affirmative action claims that affirmative action essentially constitutes a form of reverse discrimination and a racial "preference" program. Justice Clarence Thomas, the only black Supreme Court justice, concurs with this depiction of affirmative action, claiming that his Yale law degree "bore the taint of racial preference" (Katel, Clark, and Jost, 2013: p. 130). On the other hand, Justice Sonia Sotomayor explicitly recognizes the positive role that affirmative action policies have played in her life, by characterizing herself as a "product of affirmative action." As a Puerto-Rican woman growing up in poverty in a South Bronx housing project in New York City, Justice Sotomayor was not exactly the typical

candidate for Princeton and Yale degrees, and she has always maintained that test scores are often the result of “cultural biases” and that her Princeton and Yale degrees would not have been possible were these institutions looking exclusively, or even primarily, at test scores in making their admissions decisions (Mears, 2009).

To be sure, there is no easy way of identifying which of these two points of view – Justice Thomas’s or Justice Sotomayor’s – is more valid than the other. The Supreme Court recognizes not only that affirmative action was instituted to correct historical injustices, but also that it serves a temporary function in American society. Thus, in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), Justice Sandra Day O’Connor expressed the view that the court expects that “25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest [in student body diversity] approved today” (Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, quoted in Rothstein, Krueger and Turner, 2006). Both critics and supporters of affirmative action agree that many black and Latino students suffer because they end up attending sub-standard and under-resourced high schools. But critics like Ward Connerly think that the solution is to introduce changes at the K-12 level so that the academic standards of elite institutions do not have to be lowered to accommodate students from underrepresented minority groups. On the other hand, supporters of affirmative action claim that if these policies are discriminatory then so is the system of legacy that universities regularly use to admit candidates who are related to alumni and/or to donors, as are standardized tests (because they are biased in favor of middle and upper class students).

Supporters of affirmative action, it must be said, have very strong evidence for their claims. According to Peter Schmidt of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Harvard as of 2004 accepted about 40 percent of the legacies who applied, compared to about 11 percent of applicants overall” (Katel, Clark and Jost, 2013: p. 142). Equally, as a Century Foundation study estimates, if the most selective colleges in the US were to eradicate their affirmative action policies altogether and made their admissions decisions on the basis of test scores alone, about 5,000 fewer black and Hispanic students would make the cut each year (Bell, 2003).

Some people are invested in retaining affirmative action while also reforming it by making affirmative action class-based. Thus, someone like Richard Kahlenberg at the Century Foundation says, “There are students from low-income backgrounds who aren’t given the same opportunities as wealthier students are given, and they deserve a leg up in admissions. Someone’s test scores and grades are a reflection not only of how hard they work and how talented they are, but what sorts of opportunities they’ve

had” (Katel, Clark and Jost, 2013: p. 132). For Kahlenberg, there are legal, moral, and political problems associated with relying exclusively on race (Katel, Clark and Jost, 2013: p. 132). For supporters of affirmative action, however, it should also be noted that the policies contribute to various other causes that have little to do with race. So, for example, according to one view, affirmative action “helps to ensure a democratic political culture” (Katel, Clark and Jost, 2013: p. 131).

Yet, while this may be the case, affirmative action policies and even the phrase “affirmative action” is politically tainted as emblematic of a fundamental cultural dispute between liberals and conservatives in the US. The term is also routinely associated with the idea of preferential treatment. Even those who, in principle, favor some form of affirmative action to correct for historical injustices often shy away from any mention of preferential treatment when affirmative action is characterized using these terms.¹³ For many Americans, this is a knee-jerk, ideologically motivated reaction. The granting of preferential treatment reeks of an abandonment of the American Dream of individual effort, talent, and luck as a pathway to success. There is, as a result, overwhelming public hesitation about anything that reeks of “preference” even though a form of preferential treatment might, at first blush, seem like the right thing to do given the history of discrimination against blacks and Latinos in the US. In this context, a race-neutral policy, such as Percent Plans has a much better chance at being politically popular and at ensuring racial and socioeconomic diversity in the classroom. It is to this discussion that I now turn.

Race-neutral Percent Plans

Percent Plans are race-neutral plans adopted by various states that make sure a genuine form of racial and socioeconomic diversity is maintained in their state-run institutions of higher education. In fact, there is some evidence that these Percent Plans might, in fact, be more successful at recruiting underrepresented racial minority students than a formal affirmative action plan, according to Richard Kahlenberg at the Century Foundation. This is exactly what happened at the University of Texas at Austin.

UT Austin had a race-based affirmative action policy in the mid-1990s. As a result of this method, in Fall 1996, UT Austin’s incoming class was 4.1 percent African-American and 14.5 percent Hispanic. That year’s Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals decision in *Hopwood v. Texas*, however, prohibited the University of Texas from using race in its admissions de-

13 See, for example, Pew Research Center, “US Politics & Policy: Conflicted Views of Affirmative Action,” May 14, 2003, <http://www.people-press.org/2003/05/14/conflicted-views-of-affirmative-action/>.

cisions. This prohibition was temporary, though, because, as indicated above, the ruling was abrogated in the Supreme Court's 2003 decision in *Grutter v. Bollinger*. During the years between *Hopwood* and *Grutter*, the University of Texas adopted and implemented two plans. The first constituted a socioeconomic affirmative action plan that took "special circumstances" into account. The circumstances could range from single parent home, to family responsibilities, to the average SAT or ACT score or socioeconomic status of the school attended, and so on and so forth (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2010: p. 8). The second plan was a race-neutral Top Ten Percent Plan developed by an unusual coalition of civil rights advocates and rural white legislators in Texas. Under this program, students graduating in the top 10 percent in every high school class throughout the state is granted automatic admission into the University of Texas. Given the vast disparities in resources and the socioeconomic conditions of students and high schools throughout the state of Texas, this neutral and egalitarian plan works both as a meritocratic strategy to recruit the most academically promising students (as opposed to academically prepared students) and as a way of recruiting students from across the spectrum of socioeconomic statuses and racial/ethnic groups. As Kahlenberg of the Century Foundation describes it:

The Top 10 Percent plan effectively enables students from disadvantaged schools and lower test scores to be admitted who might otherwise not be. These two programs resulted, in 2004, in a freshman class that was 4.5 percent African American and 16.9 percent Hispanic. In other words, the combined black and Hispanic percentage actually rose from 18.6 percent under the old race-based plan [in 1996] to 21.4 percent under the race-neutral programs. These rates of diversity were also comparable to those found at the University of Michigan Law School [involved in the *Grutter* decision], where underrepresented minorities constituted 14.5 percent of the class in 2000, which was deemed to have achieved a "critical mass" of such students. (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2010: p. 8)

In the years since Texas adopted their Percent Plan, California has banned affirmative action through Proposition 209, and it has implemented a Percent Plan of its own. As a result, there has actually been an increase in the UC system, after an initial setback, in the rates of admission for black and Latino students (except in the elite UC schools like Berkeley and UCLA) (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2010: p. 13). Several other state schools where Percent Plans have been adopted have seen similar trajectories of racial inclusion even though the policies adopted were themselves race-neutral and no racial or ethnic group is given preferential treatment. These

schools include University of Washington, University of Florida, University of Georgia, and University of Nebraska. The University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, another elite school, however, has done less well (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2010: p. 14). Nonetheless, the trend overall appears to be one of greater and wider inclusion of racial minority students in schools and states that have adopted some kind of a Percent Plan (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2010).¹⁴

Following the *Grutter* decision, UT has reinstated a race-based affirmative action policy for admission of students into those seats that are left over after the implementation of the Top Ten Percent Plan. There is a complex set of reasons cited by the University of Texas for the reinstatement of this policy – but a discussion of these reasons is beyond the scope of this paper. What is, however, relevant for us is that this policy has been challenged in Court and the Supreme Court in *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2016) has – for the moment – narrowly upheld (in a 4-3 decision) the use of a race-based affirmative action policy at the University of Texas. But it is widely known that the Court is hesitant about race-based affirmative action programs, as Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's comment about affirmative action no longer being necessary 25 years from *Grutter* (cited above) indicates.

The Way Forward

A college degree has become practically indispensable to achieving middle class success in the US. It is for this reason that Bernie Sanders, during his 2016 presidential bid, called for making college education free in the US (Resnikoff, 2015). One of the things he pointed out in his campaign rhetoric was that the reasoning behind the country moving toward universal access to high school education was that a high school education had become indispensable to the achievement of middle class success. These days the trend has changed far enough that a college degree has become all but essential for the attainment of a middle class life. It thus makes sense to make college degrees universally accessible (Sanders, 2015). Ostensibly in line with this kind of reasoning, Andrew Cuomo, Governor of New York, has pushed for the institution of the Excelsior program in New York State.¹⁵

14 For a detailed description of the “mechanics,” accomplishments, and variations in the Texas, Florida, California Percent Plans, see Horn, C.L. & Flores, S.M. (2003), especially pp. 20–24.

15 New York State. “Tuition-Free Degree Program: The Excelsior Scholarship,” 2017, <https://www.ny.gov/programs/tuition-free-degree-program-excelsior-scholarship>.

It is hardly in doubt that widespread and more equitable educational opportunities are desperately needed in the US. The system is obviously in need of reform and institutional change. As described above, both supporters and adversaries of affirmative action recognize that students from black and Latino families are disproportionately more likely to attend underperforming schools and, as a result, they are typically less prepared than their white peers to do well on standardized tests. Under these circumstances, how can we ensure that the American dream's promise of widespread and equal opportunity remains real for underrepresented racial minorities in college education? We could continue to support affirmative action as it is currently practiced. Or we could try to reform affirmative action to make it more inclusive of students who have experienced socioeconomic hardship? We might also move all the way toward free universal college education. Finally, we may all support a move toward Percent Plans across the nation.

Of all these strategies, the Percent Plans are the most strongly in conformity with the ideology of the American Dream. They appear solidly meritocratic and avoid preferential treatment of any kind, whether they are racial preferences or legacies. These Percent Plans focus on merit but they also assess merit in terms of one's accomplishments within a specific institutional setting and these accomplishments are measured with one's peer group as a point of comparison. This practice is not only a more reasonable measure of how much effort a student has put into her work when controlling (roughly) for the resources she has been given, it also has the added advantage of circumventing the problem of cultural bias that is common in standardized tests. Moreover, as the Supreme Court of the US has held there is a compelling state interest in diversity and Percent Plans actually do, in fact, as illustrated above, ensure racial and socioeconomic diversity in university settings.

Three other reasons make Percent Plans the most attractive of all these strategies. First, Percent Plans are able to avoid some of the most controversial consequences of race-based affirmative action policies. So, for example, as indicated above, many have talked about the stigma associated with being a person of color at an elite institution, especially if they are black, Latino, or Native American. These complainants report that they often face, from their peers, an automatic assumption that they must be attending these institutions not because of their merit but because of race-based affirmative action policies. Justice Clarence Thomas's comments, cited above, is just one case in point. Some even claim that these feelings of stigma and negative stereotyping often leads a non-trivial num-

ber of these students to underperform in and sometimes even drop out of college. According to some estimates, the dropout rates for black students at elite institutions is noticeably high when compared to graduation rates of black students from historically black colleges and universities – a set of findings leading some to suggest that perhaps the most academically promising black students are better served if they attend HBCUs rather than ivy league colleges or other elite institutions.¹⁶

If race-based admissions policies were altogether eradicated and replaced with Percent Plans, some of this stigma is likely to persist. There would, in fact, be an automatic assumption on the part of white and Asian students that students from underrepresented racial minority groups, such as black, Latino, and Native American students are only there because they performed well in high schools where the standard of academic achievement was low. But even then, the “bite” of this kind of stigma would surely be less because it would be clear to everyone that the bulk of the students attending a specific elite institution are only there because they are performed really well in some previous setting and not simply because they have any particular phenotype or skin tone.

Second, Percent Plans are better at eradicating stigma than universal access is. If universal access were to be provided, most people would invariably persist with the assumption that black and Latino students are not academically promising and that they are only there because the state provides the service free of charge. Universal free access to college education is also expensive and can become a drain on a state’s resources. Therefore, if indeed universal access were to be provided, it would make sense to combine this with a version of a Percent Plan that ignores or deemphasizes standardized test scores. If this were not to be the case, and we went ahead with a universal access plan that did not take into account merit, then we would be faced with a difficult situation. Because there are only a finite number of seats in a state school’s flagship or elite campus – admissions officers would end up handpicking the students who would attend the elite campuses and, in so doing, they would be looking at standardized test scores and other things like extracurricular activities to make admissions decisions. In such a situation we would be back to square one, and end up admitting a white-and-Asian-majority student body to elite campuses because they will be more likely to have better scores and “better” resumes than the majority of the students from underrepresented racial minority groups.

16 National Public Radio. “Is It Time To End Affirmative Action?” November 21, 2007, <http://www.npr.org/2007/11/21/16337441/is-it-time-to-end-affirmative-action>.

Finally, race-neutral Percent Plans are more politically feasible and popular than affirmative action policies because they are unambiguously designed to reward effort and merit – an ideal affirmed by the vast majority of Americans. It makes sense, therefore, that Percent Plans are slowly replacing and will most likely supplant affirmative action policies in the near future. Anyone interested in the widest possible inclusion of all racial and ethnic groups and in spreading opportunity widely across the US should thus find Percent Plans encouraging. And those committed to universal access to college education in the US should probably also advocate for some version of Percent Plans to be incorporated into universal access.

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From a City on the Hill to the Dungheap of History

An Interview with Peter McLaren

Mitja Sardoč

What you think is the essence of the American Dream, i.e. what it stands for?

The concept of the American Dream is one of the most recognizable political hieroglyphics of what it means to live in a free market democracy—the standard by which all other countries should be judged. It is emblematic of the successful market democracy built upon the foundations of racial equality, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all. The term also has historically situated value—and if you examine the palimpsest of the American “good life” you will discover ever fading images of a white family, a wood paneled recreational room, a television set tuned to a situation comedy featuring canned laughter, two cars in the garage (a family station wagon and a sports car for the hubby), a home in the peaceful suburbs, amicable neighbors who graciously take in your empty garbage cans for you on days that you forget, and enough savings in the bank account to send your children to a good college—all resting comfortably in the shade of a tree—the tree of liberty, of freedom of expression, of consumer comforts. It is a concept whose roots are firmly planted in the Enlightenment, one that is firmly tethered to the ideals of free enterprise and freedom of expression, and fundamental in shaping the sense of embodied selfhood as American citizens. Those were the 1950s. The concept now serves as a chimera of cynicism, to be manipulated by politicians bought and paid for by transnational corporations—most progressives and radicals in the U.S. recognize this. It is a term that describes frozen ideals rather than contextually specific realities—that the grass is always greener on the other side (and Americans always love to manicure their suburban

front lawns), and that the mission of Americans as divinely ordained innovators and entrepreneurs is to “explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before,” as our good starship Captain James T. Kirk would put it. Kirk’s words echo a futuristic doctrine of Manifest Destiny, the mid-19th century belief that it was God’s destiny for the U.S. to expand its interests and influence and that all of North America was allotted by God to its inhabitants (apparently, the term was created by a journalist, writing in the 1840s to justify the war with Mexico, and since the 1940s and 1950s it has been embodied in the figure of the iconic American cowboy, John Wayne). Of course, the U.S. has taken this doctrine very seriously; our good Captain Kirk is right in saying that “space” is the “final frontier” as the U.S. is already weaponizing outer space as well as exploring it. While Captain Kirk (who is Canadian by birth) represents the way Americans hope to be seen, it was John Wayne who represented Americans to themselves during the heyday of the American Dream. The notion of the American Dream, that ethos that permeates the fibers optics of the American spirit, can be found throughout politics, technology, religion, culture and values. It has, of course, spread throughout the world, most probably by early American Christian missionaries. There is nothing wrong with a dream of global progress, of upward mobility, of financial security, of consumer goods available to all regardless of race, class or ethnicity, etc. The problem is that today, Americans are still bombarded by television commercials showing them images of happy families in three-bedroom houses and with large kitchens, and more and more Americans have been asking: Why are we seeing these images? They make us feel guilty that we have not achieved this standard of living! Part of the history of the idea of the American Dream can be linked to the days directly following the American Civil War which began in 1861 and ended in 1865. Horatio Alger, Jr. wrote a series of novels which became the template for the classic American “from rags to riches” success story, where any hardworking American could pull himself up by his own bootstraps. Technology was rapidly developing and it seemed as though anyone with a creative imagination and steadfast will and determination could move “up the corporate ladder”, taking full advantage of technological innovations to improve his or her station in society. This idea still infects American life, especially with respect to the concept known as “meritocracy” that is taught in schools of education. Despite the glacial pace of racial and gender equality, meritocracy stipulates that in the United States you are awarded a certain standard of living and level of happiness according to how hard you work, and what individual efforts you make to successfully find fortune and fame. The inverse also is prevalent, even today:

that a failure to achieve the American Dream must be considered a personal failure linked to lack of will, laziness and a weakness of character. After World War II, during times of high economic growth, it became objectively possible for large numbers of Americans to achieve a certain level of comfort and financial security—to secure The American Dream—an achievement which is no longer possible for a majority of Americans.

On a 'standard' interpretation, the American Dream constitutes a symbol of progress and has been synonymous with hope in general. Do you think its emancipatory potential and progressive idealism are still relevant today?

In 1931, James Truslow Adams wrote “life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” regardless of social class or circumstances of birth. That was an idea that was not necessarily an American invention, but it nevertheless became the guiding ethos of the country. In the 1950s and 60s the U.S. it was possible for large segments of the US population to achieve a significant degree of freedom and prosperity that made the United States, as the cliché goes, “the envy of the world”. The concept of the American Dream enshrined in the Declaration of Independence—that “all men are created equal” with the right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” was appealing to immigrants who came to the United States from countries that had been ravaged by famine, war, political dictatorships, etc. The words inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty reads: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” The U.S. is a land of immigrants (more precisely settler colonialists who massacred the indigenous peoples and dragged Africans to the divine City Upon a Hill in chains) and there was fierce competition among ethnic groups for access to the American Dream. Some, more than others, would face extremely harsh barriers, such as virulent forms of racism, including beatings, torture and lynchings. The American Dream was built on the foundations of violence, the brutal genocide of First Nations peoples, the brutality of the “middle passage” and the slave economy in the slave-owning states of the Confederacy, the anti-union purges, the persecution of suspected communists during the McCarthy era, the Jim Crow laws in which white politicians mandated the segregation of public schools, public places such as neighborhood swimming pools, churches, public transportation, restrooms, restaurants, hotels, and drinking fountains.

And some would say that today, we still have a type of slave economy (much less brutal than the treatment of African Americans during slav-

ery) where an individual's livelihood is completely dependent on wages or a salary, in order to survive. Here, of course, we get into the Marxist definition of wage labor, and as a Marxist humanist, I could elaborate forever on this concept.

Has the idea of the American Dream evolved?

Yes, the idea of the American Dream has evolved—for instance today Americans appear to be willing to sacrifice their personal privacy to the National Security Agency for security against terrorists. They are much more suspicious of their neighbors, and carry profound racialized resentment—especially against immigrants outside of Europe—especially those from Latin America. And thousands of Americans today are dying each year because they cannot afford health insurance, and for them the American Dream is the American Nightmare. For them the United States represents a vile menagerie of the most egregious vices and crimes against the poor. Since the end of World War II, the term American Dream has been viewed as an objectively real—and to a large extent it was in the 1960s and 1970s objectively obtainable for a large segment of Americans, including factory workers. Factory workers in, say, industries with strong union backing, could often afford a modest summer cottage by a lake.

In the realm of global politics the concept of The American Dream was used to enforce rigor in the way that it challenged, by military force if necessary, the ideologies of other countries who refused to cooperate with the American Empire, countries, for instance, that were socialist or communist.

I don't think that the 'standard' interpretation of the American Dream is relevant today. The entire concept of "American" is, first of all, problematic. The term "American" also includes the countries of South America, or Latin America and also Canada. But the term "American Dream" is meant to confer a special status on the U.S., a term that was given political ballast during the period of economic growth in the United States after World War II until the 1970s, and which anyone with a fine-tuned understanding of the people's history of the United States recognizes as a fraudulent today, as a will o' the wisp fantasy of the bourgeoisie. Contrast the idea of the American Dream with Evo Morales's commentary on the notion of "buen vivir" (or in the Quechua language as *sumac kawsay* or "living well."). The notion of *buen vivir*—which I learned about years ago when I was working with the Chavistas in Venezuela—is linked to the Andean cosmovisión of the Quechua peoples and basically means living in harmony with others and the environment, the community, and

your neighbors. It doesn't mean the same as the U.S. concept of the American Dream, i.e., making a lot of money, and getting rich so you can compete with Mr. and Mrs. Jones's family living next door.

What you think is the essence of the American Dream, i.e. what it stands for?

Well, we need to see how the concept of the American Dream has grievously dropped in status. The status of the American Dream has been addressed in the recent Chomsky documentary, *Requiem for the American Dream*. In this important commentary, Chomsky warns us about the deeply embedded and generationally persistent racial inequality and oppression at the center of the nation's economic, legal and criminal justice systems, its surveillance state run by the media, FBI, NSA and those who oversee the police and control its educational and media systems as part of the deep state. The school-to-prison pipeline mainly reserved for African Americans and Latinos. He talks about unprecedented inequality, and asserts that democracy is a professed value that isn't objectively real, since the government fails to carry out the will of the people. One of the country's so-called founding fathers, James Madison, emphasized the protection of the "opulent of the minority against the majority"—the importance of keeping the power in the hands of the wealthy, whom he considered the most capable of making economic and political decisions for the country. The Constitution of the United States was written to protect the wealthy land owners. The powerful, whose wealth has been concentrated to a fraction of one percent of the world's population, hate the idea of democracy. Chomsky quotes Adam Smith's vile maxim: "all for ourselves and nothing for anyone else." Smith hoped that generosity would prevail among the capitalists. Capitalism has metastasized in a way that enables more profits to be made through betting with the hedge funds than with actually producing anything of use value. The financialization of the economy and the offshoring of production has reconstructed the system of trade so that the exploited workers are now in competition with the super-exploited. We live in a world in which we are born old, never having known youth. Our youth today who are forced to take out loans to pay for their college tuitions carry the weight of a home mortgage by the time that they graduate.

Capital can move anywhere it wants in the world, but labor is increasingly immobilized. Chomsky quotes Allan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, who in 1997 made the following testimony:

Atypical restraint on compensation increases has been evident for a few years now and appears to be mainly the consequence of greater worker insecurity. The willingness of workers in recent years to trade off smaller increases in wages for greater job security seems to be reasonably well documented.

In 1991, at the bottom of the recession, a survey of workers at large firms by International Survey Research Corporation indicated that 25 percent feared being laid off. In 1996, despite the sharply lower unemployment rate and the tighter labor market, the same survey organization found that 46 percent were fearful of a job layoff.

Basically, Greenspan appears to be saying that the success of the economy depends, at least in part, upon the insecurity of the worker. As Chomsky noted, keeping workers insecure is a way to control them. When you speak out against the exploitation of labor in the U.S. you are often called “anti-American.” Only a totalitarian society would use that term to describe activists who are trying to improve the social and economic conditions of workers, and of the poor. In the 1950s and 1960s the U.S., Americans saw the greatest period of economic growth in its history. So, yes, the idea of the American Dream—owning a house, paid vacations, perhaps affording a cottage near a lake—was true to a certain extent during this period of capitalist growth, but in the 1970s the myth of the American Dream persisted even though the objective conditions were no longer there to support it. Public schools, which Chomsky describes as the “jewels of American society” are disappearing, as most funds now in universities come from tuition and not from the state—and this is also true of so-called public universities. We have in the world of business what Chomsky referred to as “regulatory capture” where the businesses that are being regulated have control over the regulators. In other words, regulating agencies become dominated by the industries they were charged with regulating. But the biggest complaint about the erosion of the American Dream is the crippling costs of medical insurance, and even a good insurance policy can lead you into bankruptcy if you have a serious illness.

I grew up in Canada under a partly socialized medical system and am pretty horrified by the system we have here in the U.S. Canada’s system is very much like Medicare, but for the entire population, which is approximately 30 million people. Medical care is free, but not prescription drugs, glasses, and dental care. Most Canadians that I know have supplementary insurance to cover what the Canada Health Care Act does not, or they pay out-of-pocket, but overall the Canadian system is, in my view,

more cost-effective. I am not pleased that Canada is the only country with a universal healthcare system that does not include coverage of prescription medication although some medications are covered by public funds (or through employment-based private insurance) in some provinces for senior citizens and those with disabilities. Drugs tend to be cheaper in Canada since the federal government negotiates drug prices with pharmaceutical companies. There is a lot of disinformation put out about healthcare in Canada by the Republicans, and I'm frequently criticized because I have always supported a single payer system. In Canada the quality of medical care is maintained by federal oversight but it's not part of the arm of the surveillance state, since the government doesn't collect any information about patients' health, that's strictly confidential information between the patient and his or her physician. Private health expenditure accounts for 30% of health care financing. Not enough coverage is given, in my mind, to mental health care. That said, the most essential care is covered—what would be considered non-essential would be, for instance, cosmetic surgery and some forms of elective surgery. What is good about this Canadian plan is that health coverage is not affected by loss or change of jobs, and there are no lifetime limits or exclusions for pre-existing conditions. I support Canada's publicly funded system, although I recognize that different provinces may differ as what is considered essential or basic care. So, as I mentioned, you do seem some variation across the provinces. In the USA, 13.6 per cent of GNP is used on medical care. By contrast, in Canada, only 9.5 per cent of GNP is used on the medicare system, because there is no profit incentive for private insurers. In addition, there are no means tests and no bad-debt problems for doctors under the Canadian system, Billing and collection costs for doctors are extremely low. Olga Kahzan did an article in *The Atlantic* a few years ago, that did a comparison of the U.S. and Canadian systems.

She reported that the Commonwealth Fund released a ranking of healthcare systems in 11 developed countries, and while Canada's system (it ranked 10th out of the 11 systems) did not fare as well as other countries, such as Australia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, the U.S. ranked 11th, dead last, in measures, of access, efficiency and equity, even though it is the world's most expensive healthcare system. According to a report released by the Commonwealth Fund, if Americans had Canada's healthcare, 57 million fewer people would go without medical care because of the cost (although at the time of this report The Affordable Care Act was not fully implemented). Approximately 5,400 fewer ba-

bies would die in infancy, and \$1.3 trillion dollars in healthcare spending would be saved. Although, to be fair, Kahzan reported that 33 percent of Canadians waited six days or more to see a specialist, compared with 19 percent of Americans. The Trumpcare plan has yet to be implemented at the time of this writing, but it looks to be a disaster for approximately 99 percent of the population.

Do you think the understanding of the American Dream primarily in terms of material success has been instrumental in the rise of neo-liberalism? What is the role of the American Dream in neoliberalism's agenda?

The American Dream, to the extent that it was realized in the 1950s and 1960s, was at the expense of the victims of the American Empire. Americans are shielded from this knowledge in the schools. There was a long build-up to the American Dream as a mythology—it's dark side grew out of and is sustained up to the present by the crimes of empire. The U.S. history of imperialism would take volumes of books to catalogue, and we could begin long before the presidency of Woodrow Wilson (who proclaimed himself as the personal instrument of God, just like George W. Bush would do decades later) William McKinley, and Theodore Roosevelt, the U.S. entry into WWI, the rule of the robber barons and the 15,000 mile railway empire of Jay Gould who boasted with conservative mendacity that he could hire one half of the working-class to kill the other half. Enormous tracks of land were stolen from nations, who became client states of the U.S. Unions and radical organizations were attacked during the Palmer Raids, including my former union, the Industrial Workers of the World, countries such as the Philippines were invaded and Colonel Jacob Smith ordered all Filipinos over the age of 10 to be killed. The doctrine of Anglo-Saxon superiority not only helped account for imperialist conquests but created Jim Crow segregations laws inside the U.S. And after WWII, the U.S. has intervened and bombed China 1945-46, Korea 1950-53, China 1950-53, Guatemala 1954, Indonesia 1958, Cuba 1959-60, Guatemala 1960, Belgian Congo 1964, Guatemala 1964, Dominican Republic 1965-66, Peru 1965, Laos 1964-73, Vietnam 1961-73, Cambodia 1969-70, Guatemala 1967-69, Lebanon 1982-84, Grenada 1983-84, Libya 1986, El Salvador 1981-92, Nicaragua 1981-90, Iran 1987-88, Libya 1989, Panama 1989-90, Iraq 1991, Kuwait 1991, Somalia 1992-94, Bosnia 1995, Iran 1998, Sudan 1998, Afghanistan 1998, Yugoslavia – Serbia 1999, Afghanistan 2001 and Libya, 2011, and this is by no means the entire list.

So in your view the idea of the American Dream is largely a myth invented by an imperialist country?

I am sure that other countries have their version of the American Dream, but because of the power of the U.S. culture/entertainment complex, the idea has been imported to countries all over the world, and it has also been imported through military intervention euphemistically referred to as “humanitarian intervention”. Recall the famous phrase by Thomas Friedman in his book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*: “The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas... And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.” Tragically, I have learned in my travels to Mexico, Colombia, and other South American countries that young people who see little or no hope in achieving the financial security and happiness that is associated with The American Dream can find it only through crime, and many young people today dream of growing up and joining the narco cartels. Some of my students in Instituto McLaren de Pedagogia Critica in Mexico, have documented this. This is very true in the United States as well. The great crime families in the U.S. were very much living The American Dream. The Godfather movies which were so popular were very much an illustration of how to achieve The American Dream. The Corleone family in the movies represent the real “First Family” of the United States, as much so as Donald Trump, his wife and sons. Al Capone, the notorious criminal of 1920s Chicago, was aggressively anti-communist, because he feared it would be more difficult for crime syndicates to achieve The American Dream under communist rule. As an objective reality, the American Dream has already been discredited and in its essential features erased by the development of the transnational capitalist class and by what David Harvey calls “accumulation by dispossession” where those in the global command centers of financial power centralize wealth in the hands of a few. And they do this basically by robbing the public of their wealth, their landholdings, whatever they can accumulate. Now how different is this from organized crime? Banks are considered “too big too fail” and receive bailouts, and the American taxpayer pays for it. But the government failed to come to their rescue when the mortgage companies came to dispossess them of their homes during the Great Recession of 2008. When corporate leaders and politicians and crime organizations condemn socialism, they do so because they realize that under real existing socialism they will no longer be able to accumulate all the spoils (surplus value) that a free market capitalism affords them. Here,

they camouflage their actions which, in essence, are really just a high tech form of thievery, gangsterism and outlawry, but this must never be admitted publicly. When you confront them directly, they indulge themselves in expressions of shocked surprise. The goal of the transnational capitalist class is accumulation of capital, plain and simple. Now it is true, that the United States government does have a system of checks and balances that have prevented the country from descending into a political dictatorship in the sense of the term that we reserve for totalitarian regimes and military juntas. But it is still a dictatorship – a dictatorship by the global corporate elite. One of the most decorated U.S. soldiers in modern history, Major General Smedley Butler of the U.S. Marine Corps, who served in Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico and Haiti (earning his Medals of Honor in Mexico and Haiti and is one of only 19 persons to receive the Medal of Honor twice), retired in 1931 and then wrote: “I served in all commissioned ranks from second lieutenant to Major General. And during that period I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism. I suspected I was just part of the racket all the time. Now I am sure of it.”

I always believed the goal of education should be the creation of critical citizenship, and to create class consciousness for class struggle, a struggle to forever end classes, and a struggle that would bring about freely associated labor, and reciprocal relations of solidarity and social justice. This is direct opposition to the role that the state has created for its citizens. The last thing that democracy wants is a critical citizenry. It wants a consumer citizenry, where intellectuals are reduced to metaspectators, and measured by their ability to sift out difference rather than explain dialectical contradictions. Capitalism views the emancipated, cosmopolitan consumer citizen as free to make purchases at the shopping mall, which is the true church of capitalism, and bears the stamp, as do most religious institutions, of the coloniality of power, and we can see asymmetrical relations of power and privilege at work throughout the globe—manifested in the global shopping mall—planet mall—which in some ways is symbolic of the American Dream, of the ability to shop endlessly, to acquire status through particular designer signatures and power, both social power and economic power. I’ve seen this form of both external and internal colonization in countries all over the world where segregation is based on somatic, economic and cultural characteristics—on the rifts and fissures created in the cultural realm by social relations of production throughout the broad expanse of what William Robinson calls the transnational capitalist class. About a decade ago, I met Robinson, a sociologist at UC

Santa Barbara, who invited me to speak at one of his conferences on global studies. I have followed Bill's work since that time, and we have corresponded about how to resist and transform the capitalist system and I believe that Robinson makes some important points, they make sense to me. First, Robinson notes that there is a direct correlation between the escalation of global inequalities and the freeing up of global markets, deregulation, free trade, etc., since the 1980s and on. According to Robinson, this is an empirical fact that belies neo-liberal claims. Witness the incredible escalation of worldwide inequalities, within and among countries—there is some pretty dramatic data from the Oxfam annual reports on global inequalities, released each January the past few years to coincide with the WEF meetings in Davos. Second, Robinson notes that the countries worldwide in this neo-liberal age that have registered the highest growth rates and rising prosperity are precisely those that have *not* followed the neo-liberal prescription of deregulation and a withdrawal of the state, in particular, China. A third point argued by Robinson, is that, historically, those countries that have become industrialized and developed have never done so through free market policies, not the United States, not Europe, not Japan, and now not China. All have followed heavy state intervention to guide market forces, public sectors, protection of industry and so on. There is, in other words, a historical correction between development and rejection of the neoliberal policies, and no historical evidence to support neoliberal policies. Fourth, Robinson makes the claim that many other environmental activists have made, that we are on the verge of an ecological holocaust, as confirmed by 97% of scientists and all the evidence, and any salvation requires a massive intervention of states to redirect (if not suppress) market forces, which is anathema to neoliberals and free marketeers. Even if neoliberalism is shown to increase growth, which is unlikely, the type of unregulated growth it generates is creating ecological havoc. Using empirical data, Robinson argues that there is a direct correlation between liberating capital and markets from state and public control and regulation, on the one hand, and an actual increase in green house gas emissions and in environmental destruction over the past few decades of neoliberalism.

So I don't think the rise of neoliberalism is connected in a linear historical fashion to the concept of the American Dream. I think the idea or the myth surrounding capitalism and the American Dream is still alive today to a certain extent even though it clearly doesn't exist as an objective reality that can be lived by more than a small percentage of the population. It is still very much present as an ideology, an ethos, and seen as a natural condition of the world. Roland Barthes talked about myths as

more than a genre, but rather as a type of speech, in other words, as a way we tell stories about ourselves to ourselves, or to others as if it were the natural way the world works, rather than as a perspective generated by human beings as social constructions but given legitimacy as naturally occurring social relations—a natural state of the way the world is. Myths are expressed through a wide range of media and populated by other people's intentions, desires and prejudices that permeate the culture, mass media and institutional life of societies. But I think of the American Dream more as a zeitgeist that dominates what I call the macrostructural unconscious of the United States, the pervasive set of ideals and beliefs that give intentionality to the actions of the American public and gives direction to American foreign policy. This zeitgeist that inflects our macrostructural unconscious needs to be unpacked critically in order to understand why we acquiesce to the root-and-branch deceptions of our political and religious leaders and to abuses of power by the government and its corporate courtiers and masters of officialdom. It manufactures loyalty and is part of what I call the hidden catechism of American identity. Marx and Engels understood this well when they wrote that the "ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force," exercising "control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who *lack* the means of mental production are *subject* to ... nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas ... the ideas of its dominance." This insight still holds true today and is perhaps more consequential for humanity than at any other time in world history, with the potential nation states now have for destroying the world through nuclear catastrophe and through ecocide. Trump uses his thrasonical hyperbolic rhetoric of the fascist imaginary to suture the notion of the American Dream in a way that plays upon fear and insecurity, heightened of course since September 11, 2001 and after the Great Recession of 2008. The macrostructural unconscious keeps the popular majorities from remembering the genocidal history of the United States; it keeps it repressed or entirely out of view. For instance, in schools we disattend capitalism's economic, cultural, social, and geopolitical attributes. The reason for the existence of the macrostructural unconscious can be related to the primary challenge faced by the ego, which is to resolve the contradiction between the claims of ideology and the actual structure of social power and the need to defend oneself against socially constructed antagonisms. The function of the macrostructural unconscious is to reconcile reality and ideology

at the level of the nation state, and this requires conceptual structures to help citizens adjust to its genocidal history—and the myth of the American Dream, which has become the zeitgeist of our age, has helped us to justify the United States as a great democratic nation despite the fact that it is the greatest threat to world peace in the world. The American Dream has been instrumentalized to serve as one of many coping strategies provided by the myth of democracy as “the white man’s burden”. President Teddy Roosevelt was particularly inspired by this poem by British writer, Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands” (1899), which helped give weight to Roosevelt’s expansionist excursions into the Philippines, at a time when Puerto Rico, Guam and Cuba had been placed under U.S. control. A few lines of the poem read:

Take up the White Man’s burden—
 Send forth the best ye breed—
 Go send your sons to exile
 To serve your captives’ need
 To wait in heavy harness
 On fluttered folk and wild—
 Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
 Half devil and half child
 Take up the White Man’s burden

Today in the United States, racialized violence serves as the domestic expression of the American macrostructural unconscious, whose function is to provide psychic power to the myth of America’s role of taking up the White Man’s Burden, and this requires an untrammelled devotion to the God of violence, and the worship of the military who support imperial wars of aggression in the service of what is known as America’s “providential history”—a version of history taught in spin overdrive in many Christian evangelical communities—that the United States has been chosen by God to keep the world safe for democracy. This myth of American Providential history keeps the American people in thrall to the aggrandizing ordinances of a Trump, for instance. This is why Howard Zinn’s famous book, *The People’s History of the United States*, is banned in many school districts. This is why, for instance, I was placed on top of a list of “the most dangerous professors” in 2006, when I was teaching at UCLA, during a time when a right wing group was offering to pay students 100 dollars for a secret audiotape of my lectures, and 50 dollars for notes they took of what I was teaching in my classes. Personally, I think it would be good

for the country if we faced our crimes of empire. We must not forget that Martin Luther King called the United States “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today” and warned that “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.” We were being warned by King in the 1960s that Americans had already achieved ideological affinity with the dark side of the American Dream. And clearly, the country didn’t listen.

Neoliberal capitalism is an adjustment that capitalism had to make in the face of overproduction and remains a form of state-guided cartelization. If we examine the founding moments of the United States critically we come to realize that the very idea of the American Dream could only have been made possible by the extermination of the indigenous population, the enslavement of African Americans, and the exploitation of rural and industrial workers. In this process we squander human nature, we allow new technologies to displace workers and it’s the case today that many middle-class jobs and college degrees, if the right kind, might give an edge—but only a slight edge—to recent college graduates who are resigned to a grim enslavement to the corporate wage. But what about non-union workers, and the labor laws designed to constrain labor relations and workers’ rights that prohibit the right to organize and act collectively?

Tell me more about Donald Trump and his relationship to the American Dream?

Americans who still worship the American Dream believe deep in their hearts that a billionaire is better equipped than anyone else to guide the economy. They believe that Trump exceptionally gifted as a deal-maker, since he has enormous wealth. Understanding this, Trump is cannily using the concept of the American Dream with white-knuckled rage and weapons-grade vitriol to conjure images from the 50s of what was crafted by the then nascent media apparatuses as a white ethnostate. Trump wants workers to believe that such a long ago defunct world, born from the swamp of laissez-faire capitalism in the pre-imperialist epoch—can be recreated once Trump kicks the “illegal immigrants” out of the country and rewrites his “free trade” deals with Canada and Mexico. This will, he believes, give him the leverage for his imperial coronation. He has already become a cult hero, an ethnographic spectacle for scholars to study, the inflammation of history—dedicated to the vapors of the awaited prophet of the working class—he, the self-fashioned populist strongman born with

a silver spoon in his mouth who prefers a U.S. 3.79 McDonald's "quarter pounder with cheese" to expensive French food. He is, in my mind, a little more than an angry boil on the hairy arse of history (I only saw him once, in person, very briefly, during his appearance at the Museum of Television & Radio [now the Paley Center for Media], where he whined childishly that his show, *The Apprentice*, didn't receive an Emmy Award). He is not a libertarian but a libertine disguised as a populist, with tanks, armies and nuclear weapons at his disposal, engaged in a *bellum omnium contra omnes*—the war of all against all. And he has an administration so skilled at obscurantism that his ideas march unmediated from his mouth to the brains of his millions of drooling twitter followers.

Trump and the wall he proposes to build to keep out "illegal immigrants" from Mexico, betrays the values inherent in the original American Dream. I will always remember what my Chicano comrades would tell me during protest marches in East Los Angeles—"we didn't cross the border, the border crossed us." Imagine Mexicans entering California without documents. Historically, this was their land before the United States invaded it and exterminated the *pueblos originarios*. There is something repugnant about referring to these border-crossers as "illegals" when in fact that term should more truthfully be attributed to the Anglo-Americans who perpetrated genocide in their conquest of the land. This attitude, common among *gringos*, echoes what the great Latin American philosopher, Enrique Dussel, refers to as the "ego conquiro"—I conquer you therefore I am, which is related to the "ego exterminus"—I exterminate you, therefore I am, two forms of consciousness that Dussel claims creates the conditions of possibility for the arrogance of the Cartesian concept, "I think therefore I am." As Luis Martinez Andrade has noted, white people in the peripheral countries of Latin America experience a certain form of "double consciousness"—the pain of not being European and the pride of not belonging to what they believe to be 'inferior' races. Trump likes to justify the unjustifiable and that is part of what some to believe to be the reason why so many Anglo-Americans appreciate what they perceive to be the candor of his politics. But this strange candor associated with Trump's actions are dangerously deceptive since by repeating time and time again that we need to be on guard and vigilant against terrorists and undocumented immigrants, and to create a ban on allowing Muslims into the country, and to rebuild the infrastructure of the country and keep companies from outsourcing their workforce, his critics bring themselves to believe that Trump cannot possibly follow through on his threats, threats that they perceive as simply part of his clown car parade down Main Street, his hair resembling a Walmart lampshade drawn tightly over his head, on the way to the carni-

val. This is what makes him so dangerous, because he does, in effect, have immeasurable power to do significant damage to the country, and to the world. As intellectuals, we lure ourselves into celebrating our own critical reading of Trump, thinking each article we write for an academic journal will turn the tide against Trump, while at the same time making an unconscious double move to normalize Trump's antics because they make such great fodder for our critiques. In doing so we unwittingly provide a smoke-screen that hides the necessity of major revolutionary struggle.

How does this relate to race relations?

The civil rights gains that people of color have made during the 1960s, have infuriated white folks who have been conditioned to hate the unemployed (they're simply "lazy" and get free food stamps paid for by their hard-earned taxes) and immigrants, especially immigrants from south of the border (the "murderers" and "rapists" that Trump wants to keep behind his giant wall). When Obama was elected president, this became the last straw for the white nationalists. The white nationalists believe that it is progressive factions of "the mainstream liberal progressive" media, and the political elite that are responsible for exposing the role that white privilege plays in the country. They blame these institutions for putting white people under siege, and some, remarkably, consider themselves as the new oppressed because people of color and their white allies are demanding resistance to white supremacy, patriarchy and homophobia. When Barack Obama served two terms as president, racism in the United States expanded into new species of vile. Personally, I've received hate mail from white nationalists for my activism, and for being married to a Chinese national who now resides as a permanent resident with me in California, and some of my colleagues—professors of color—have been verbally assaulted in public spaces. Before you think I am unsympathetic to the poverty of white people, I'd like to share with you some work that is about to be published in which I try to capture sympathetically the grievous economic plight of the white worker—which is real—all too real?

Yes, of course.

Here is what I wrote:

The U.S. was shaken out of electoral somnolence, as more Trump supporters than expected crawled out of the woodwork to vote, fomenting a Whitelash of extraordinary proportions. They came from former railroad towns where the Rust Belt meets Appalachia, from dirt poor white neighborhoods adjacent to petrochemical processing refineries,

where parents grew tired of their children coughing up blood-flecked blackened phlegm. To get to the polling stations, they passed through ghost towns in rural Tennessee, where shuttered general stores and demolished dime-a-dance halls held nothing but empty memories of earlier generations. They came from neighborhoods in Iowa where plants were no longer producing tower cranes and had laid off thousands of workers. Supporters of the Orange Leviathan included spindle-shanked retirees in eastern Kentucky living behind the eight ball on straw mattresses in abandoned horse trailers, angry at the immigrants passing them by on the ladder. Even those laid-off coal plant workers forced down railroad tracks with their bindlesticks flung over their shoulders, fighting graybacks and a disposable future with nothing left but a ten dollar bill hidden in the heel of their boot, wore Trump's trademark red cap, emblazoned with the now famous phrase, "Make America Great Again" (Trump had blamed environmental regulation on the loss of coal mining jobs, without mentioning the country's pivot to the exploitation of another fossil fuel, natural gas, that can even be a worse generator of greenhouse gas than coal). Hapless young vagrants and itinerant workers huddled in abandoned coal-loading stations, shooting up OxyContin (known locally as "hillbilly heroin") with nothing left but to Catch the Westbound (as the saying went during the Great Depression), were all behind Trump, even if they were too stoned to cast their ballots. With medically uninsured arthritic knees and aching kidneys, the laboring poor embedded in capital's extractive essence—immiseration and privation—marched to the beat of nationalism, bemoaning the appearance of brown faces in the industrial yards and agricultural fields that spoke a language they couldn't understand. They trekked through the dirt roads of Beauford County, South Carolina, and Duplin County to the north, past acres of pasture-raised Berkshire pigs. They travelled to where they had last registered to vote, even if it meant a trip across the North Georgia mountains, through Clayton and Dillard, all the way to Chattanooga. Truckers for Trump drove their eighteen wheelers through the low country of Louisiana, gator teeth swinging from the rearview windows, so they could put the man in the red cap into office.

For those who were experiencing city life, you didn't have to be on the rocks, or live on the nickel in penthouses made out of cardboard strewn through the streets of skid row, "with cupped hands round the tin can" as John Hartford or Glenn Campbell might put it, in order to be a Trump supporter. Although generally risk-averse, many in the wage-labor-rich

-class, including socially registered suburban dwellers who loathed plebian sociabilities and were often unforgiving of the errors of their own employees, pushed for a Trump win, hoping that a further deregulation of the business world might bring them some fast cash, at least enough to stoke their meager retirement savings before the system eventually fell apart like it did in 2008. Some folks were just looking for a good luck charm in the man with the Midas touch, without anticipating that Trump's economic plan would raise taxes on 8 million low and middle class families while providing massive tax breaks for the rich. It's no secret, especially in the hinterlands of the unemployed, that the internet and its burgeoning platforms of automation are poised to cut half of US jobs in the very near future. All of these Trump supporters, both the bedraggled and bon-vivant, were feeling trapped in Palookaville with Trump their only hope for reaching Xanadu as they followed "the Donald" like a mesmerized Sonny Malone running after a roller-skating Terpsichore played by Olivia Newton John. After all, Trump could sing a good populist tune, and it was music to the ears of those down-on-their-luck and fearful of being left behind. Perhaps on the wings of a foul-mouthed billionaire playboy, factory ghost towns could be replaced by Vegas versions of Fourier's Phalanstères.

For many of those hooked on drugs, it was too late to enjoy a Trump victory, or to see what kind of health care program Trump would put in place of Obamacare. In Stark County, Ohio, people down on their luck shoot up meth mixed with carfentanil, an animal tranquilizer that is normally used on elephants and tigers, and is 100 times more powerful than fentanyl. There are so many overdose fatalities that the coroner's office in Canton has to borrow a 20-foot long cold storage mass casualty trailer, known as the "death trailer", normally used for victims of airplane disasters, since their morgue facility in the county jail complex on Atlantic Boulevard, that holds about a dozen bodies, can't deal with the body count. The coroners in Ashtabula, Cuyahoga and Summit County have to do the same thing—call in the death trailers. In Montgomery County, to the south, the coroner calls local funeral home directors for help.

Okay, what I described above consists of Appalachia and the "heartland" of the country, the Midwest, where I lived and taught for 8 years. Where is the American Dream in these places? Instead you have the American Death Trailer. My family is from Canada where I spent the first 35 years of my life—and my grandparents and great grandparents lived in a part of the Canada that some consider the Canadian Appalachia, Ap-

ple Hill, near Cornwall, along the St. Lawrence River and in the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, not far from the Mohawk Territory of Akwesane. Eventually, my family relocated to Toronto, where I lived until I immigrated to the United States in 1985. I realize that the rural/city divide is like a saber slash across the face of the American Dream. When I think of the American Dream today, and its tragic side, I think of the brilliant play, *Sweat*, by Pulitzer Prize-winning American playwright, Lynn Nottage which addresses poverty in the U.S. and has been described as “working-class naturalism.” Or I think of earlier plays of Eugene O’Neil like *The Hairy Ape* and Arthur Miller’s, *Death of a Salesman*, and *A View from the Bridge*.

What are the statistics on rural and urban poverty in the United States?

A recent survey by the Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation found that two-thirds of rural residents rate local job opportunities as fair or poor, compared with about half of urban residents. Nearly 6 in 10 rural residents encourage the youth in their communities to leave the rural areas and head to cities in order to find more opportunities for a better life. The Great Recession of 2008 hit rural areas very hard, and these areas still have not recovered, with the total number of jobs down 128,000 from pre-recession levels. While it is true that suburban and urban counties have each gained about 3 million jobs, according to an analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics data, these jobs don’t pay much, and large numbers of people are living at the poverty level. The rural unemployment rate 5.3 percent while in the urban centers it’s about 4.8 percent. But in rural areas the workforce is in decline as people just give up or move to the cities, while the workforce has grown in suburbs and cities.

But Census Bureau data reveal that the poverty rate in both cities and urban areas is similar, about 16 percent in cities and 17 percent in rural areas. What made Trump so popular in the rural areas is because residents there believed that the problems that were affecting them the most could be remedied with infrastructure investments, better trade deals, the deportation of undocumented immigrant workers, lower business taxes and more market liberalization, that is, more deregulation of the economy. More rural residents believe that people of color receive unfair privileges, and they believe that the government is giving minority groups a free ride, like food stamps, and so there is great mistrust in the government and more belief in free enterprise. According to the poll, 56 percent majority of rural residents say that the federal government treats city dwellers bet-

ter than rural residents. And rural communities, predominately Republican voters, worry more than Democrats that Christian values are under assault.

Trump's American Dream is very much like that of his father—Fred Trump—who was the focus of a song written between 1950 and 1952, but never recorded, by the legendary American folk singer, Woody Guthrie, who was a major influence on Bob Dylan. During that time Fred Trump was Guthrie's landlord, when Guthrie moved into the exclusively white Beach Haven public housing complex, near Coney Island, after returning from his World War II service in the Merchant Marine. Here is how the song opens:

I suppose
Old Man Trump knows
Just how much
Racial Hate
he stirred up
In the bloodpot of human hearts
When he drew
That color line
Here at his
Eighteen hundred family project (Cited in Moyer, 2016)

Later, in 1954, Fred Trump would be investigated by a U.S. Senate committee for profiteering from public contracts. Old Man Trump also refused to sell homes to blacks. That his son, Donald Trump, has been accused of racial discrimination in operating his properties should come as no surprise. Clearly, with Trump, America wants its empire back. Forget multilateralism and globalization since, in the eyes of Trump and his supporters, such twin evils have taken everything away from America's white working class.

Over the past year Americans from all social class fractions, but especially white constituencies, rewarded Trump with frenzied, awe-struck receptions to his presence in sports stadiums packed to suffocating capacity. The intensity of this reception is unprecedented, only matched by the vileness and viciousness of Trump's speeches. His supporters wait for hours in long lines that snake around city blocks in order to be able to be close to their savior, a billionaire real estate tycoon, playboy and foul-mouthed reality television star. Admixed with trepidation and barn burning enthusiasm, crowds seemed to absorb his energy as he circles the stage, as if animated by a giant solenoid, their cult-like devotion rising to a perverse crescendo of hate-filled delirium baited by the promises of a man

whose cabinet is now packed to the brim with billionaire bankers and hedge fund hucksters.

Maybe we are suffering from some kind of hubristic insanity, the result of the slow erosion of democracy over the decades, where decency suddenly became unhinged, something that was, *mirable dictu*, foreseen over half a century ago by the Frankfurt School theorists. In some recent works, I've compared Trumpism to Bonapartism, to a type of fascism that hides behind the screen of democracy. And, Mitja, since this year marks the 150th anniversary of *Das Kapital*, the most important work of that great world-historic personage, Karl Marx, it would be useful in this current Trump era to draw attention to another of his essays, the 18th *Bru-maire of Louis Bonaparte*. Marx is referring to the coup d'état in 1851 involving the nephew of Napoleon I. This is the focus of Marx's essay, the rise to power of Charles Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, the third son of Louis Bonaparte, the brother of Napoleon I, and his staging of a December 2, 1851 coup. Louis-Napoleon's coup enabled him to remain in office and implement a series of reform programs. His justification for his seizure of dictatorial powers was his universal popularity throughout France. In November 1852 he was confirmed as emperor. Trump is well on his way to crowning himself emperor of the United States. I have never seen anyone so brazen and adept at exploiting the economic anxieties of the American worker, including the middle class, by fomenting hatred of the 'lesser' races (i.e., anyone other than white) and sowing seeds of nationalism. His followers pine: If only Trump could be allowed to persecute the politically correct feminists, gays and lesbians, the elite Washington politicians, and those who believe in climate change and are allowing environment regulation to hold back the economy, if only he could crush Black Lives Matter and Idle No More groups, if only he could destroy the mainstream media that produces fake news, if only Americans could act upon his "alternative facts", then he could make America great again! Millions still swoon over Trump's succulent silk suit populism, gleefully cheering his dark demagoguery, and pompous threats. It remains for many a case of mass stupefaction. White supremacists are in rapture, holding meetings and giving the Nazi salute. "Blood and soil! Close borders! White nation! Now we start the deportation!" the American Knights of the Klu Klux Klan, the American National Socialist neo-Nazis, White Aryan Resistance, and the White Lives Matter members chant, raising their shields and pumping their fists into the air turned toxic with the poisonous acrimony of racism and deep-throated cries for a purified white nation. White nationalist pastors offer the protection of Jesus in their prayers. Does anybody remember the time in U.S. history when 20,000 Nazis filled New

York's famous sports arena, Madison Square Garden, in a rally organized by the German American Bund in 1939? And now, in 2017, American Neo-Nazis can be found tracing their ancestry from all across Europe (as if Germany's Third Reich had won World War II), waving Confederate flags, robes and pointed hoods, warning Anglo-Americans of the perils of "mongrelizing their seed." Will the U.S. become the home of some kind of Fourth Reich? During Trump's inaugural presidential address, at the Capitol's West Front, one of his signature themes—America First!—caused some anxiety among onlookers old enough to remember the America First movement of 1941, a movement headed by aviator Charles Lindbergh that campaigned against U.S. involvement in World War II while blaming Jewish Americans for trying to push the United States into a war with Germany and at the same time expressing sympathy for the Nazis. From the podium Trump exhorted: "From this day forward, it's going to be only America first," he said. "America first." Watching the television footage, it reminded me of a McDonald's hamburger rendition of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. Trump's hypocritical solidarity for the poor can be contrasted with his hyper-solidarity for everything military. He loves generals, he loves to be surrounded by high-ranking military officers and has given the Pentagon *carte blanche* to do what it wants in Afghanistan. Contrast this attitude with that of Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower, America's top general throughout World War II. In 1961, Eisenhower famously warned the U.S. public about the dangers of the military industrial complex:

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence — economic, political, even spiritual — is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together. Akin to, and largely responsible for the sweeping changes in our industrial-military posture, has been the technological revolution during recent decades.

Here Eisenhower calls for an “alert and knowledgeable citizenry”, which sounds like it is right out of the critical pedagogy playbook. Although it merits mentioning that Eisenhower is warning us against a dangerous military industrial complex that he himself was largely responsible for creating. To his credit, however, Eisenhower understood that only citizens who are critically literate and politically astute could hold at bay the rapidly rising military industrial complex. History has proven his warning to have been futile. Students in public schools don’t study this passage and few have ever even heard about this speech, which would sound out of place if uttered by a Republican president today, especially by Trump. Fortunately it’s available on the internet.

This sounds like a deeply divided society.

Mitja, the country is split basically between globalization movements (consisting of the transnational capitalist class, elites, the middle-class and some fractions of the petit bourgeoisie) and the anti-globalist movement that appeals to those who have been brutalized by austerity capitalism, and people with autocratic instincts, like Trump, who are pursuing an isolationist politics. Trump claims to be anti-globalist and certainly in many respects he is. But his policies are reactionary anti-globalist.

What remains part of the left parties, such as the Democratic Party, are solidly neo-liberal and globalist. Which makes it vulnerable to anti-globalist, populist-nationalists like Trump and his minions. As much as the Republicans feel that Trump is out of control with his tweets, he nevertheless is achieving with his tweets what the Republican Party itself confesses to having been unable to achieve—a direct and visceral line on communication to its constituent base.

How can the Democratic Party pretend that it takes the side of the victims of globalized capital when it promotes it? Bernie Sanders is one of the few members of the government who identifies as socialist but he has no viable plan for the country beyond redistributing capital to labor, to make capitalism less brutal, since he must work with other politicians who believe capitalism is untranscendable and untransformable. Which, while still pitiful, is a much preferred option to those offered by Trump. But to suggest to the average American factory worker, the middle class insurance clerk, or the board of directors of hedge fund that the real battle must be waged against the festering system that has grown out of the globalization of capitalism (such as overproduction, deindustrialization, and the expansion of multinational corporations), is to spit into the wind and to get drenched in the process. The left here in the United States is

not only bankrupt—with some emerging strands appearing downright reactionary—it has no viable alternative to capitalism. All that it is capable of doing at the moment is to try to blunt the sharpest and most deadly instruments of transnational capitalism, usually with earnest arguments about the dangers of ecocide and climate change. And it is losing this battle. This is especially troublesome as it is Trump who is seen as the enemy of neoliberalism, and the Republican and Democratic elites as its champion.

Recently, I've written about some of the ludicrous conspiracy theories emanating from the right. These conspiracy theories form part of the dark side of the American Dream. For the last several decades one of the most pernicious conspiracies revolves around the role played by Frankfurt School theorists in the United States. The theory has been picked up by the extremist Tea Party and other alt-right groups, including white nationalists, libertarian Christian Reconstructionists, members of the Christian Coalition, the Free Congress Foundation and neo-Nazi groups such as Stormfront. They maintain that blame for the cultural degradation and corruption of the United States can be placed at the feet of the Institute for Social Research, initially housed at the Goethe University in Frankfurt and relocated to Columbia University in New York during the rise of Hitler in 1935. Philosophers Theodore Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse were some of the luminaries of this group, whose works are still frequently studied in philosophy, political science, literary theory and cultural studies classes. Peddlars of this crackpot theory about the role played by these thinkers include Michael Minnicinio, Paul Weyrich, Pat Buchanan, Roger Kimball and other prominent conservatives. They maintain that these "cultural Marxists" (whom unsurprisingly they are fond of mentioning are all Jewish) promoted modernist forms of cultural pessimism that shaped the 1960s counterculture—and this "cultural Marxism" set the stage for "political correctness" that has destroyed the cultural and moral fabric of U.S. society through the development of feminism, anti-white racism and revolutions in understanding sexuality. But it is the fringe writings of William S. Lind in particular that have had the most chilling effect. In 2011, Lind's writings inspired Norwegian neo-Nazi mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik to slaughter 77 fellow Norwegians and injure 319 more. Lind and his ilk blame the Frankfurt School theorists for a litany of crimes that include the deindustrialization of America's cities, neoliberal free trade policies, affirmative action, immigration, sexual liberation, gay marriage, multiculturalism, political correctness, the welfare state, and the privileging of the concerns of

African Americans, feminists and homosexuals over those of white heterosexual citizens. Anyone familiar with critical pedagogy knows that the writings of the Frankfurt School are foundational to its theoretical framework. Lind and the views of his followers have certainly influenced the thinking of Donald Trump who is notorious for berating political correctness and feminism and for his general disregard for African American groups such as Black Lives Matter. There is a reasonable fear among university professors on the left that Trump could marshal a powerful assault on what can or cannot be taught in university settings.

Violent clashes have occurred on college campuses and other locations between anti-fascist protesters and pro-Trump demonstrators. Many of these pro-Trump supporters claim to be part of the “alt-right.” The alt-right works mainly through social media sites such as Breitbart News and Fox News and peddle conspiracy theories. Steve Bannon, chief strategist and Senior Counselor for the presidency of Donald Trump, was formerly the executive chair of Breitbart News. Basically the alt-right represents a white nationalist perspective against the globalists, immigrants, bankers, elites, the mainstream media and progressive ideas. These groups are not atypical of fascist movements throughout history. They write anti-Semitic screeds against Jewish members of the media, attack feminists and those whom they consider “politically correct” and people of color, especially black civil rights groups such as Black Lives Matter. They create conspiracy theories about almost anything, and incite their followers to engage in a war against gays, lesbians, transgender people, immigrants, and others who are critical of Trump and his administration. Groups of militant nationalists are training for street violence against anti-Trump protesters, serving as what they call the “tactical defense arm” of the pro-Trump, pro-West nationalist groups, such as The Fraternal Order of the Alt-Knights and the Proud Boys, and the DIY Division, a neo-Nazi fight club, all of which reminds me of Alex DeLarge and his “droogs” out of *Clockwork Orange*. Except in this case the gangs are fighting for the creation of a white ethnostate. Violence has also occurred among anti-Trump groups. The most vicious example to date occurred in a baseball field in Alexandria, Virginia, when House Majority Whip Steve Scalise and four others were shot by someone who was virulently anti-Trump. According to a 2016 Pew Poll on partisanship and polarization:

More than half of Democrats (55%) say the Republican Party makes them “afraid,” while 49% of Republicans say the same about the Democratic Party. Among those highly engaged in politics – those who say they vote

regularly and either volunteer for or donate to campaigns – fully 70% of Democrats and 62% of Republicans say they are afraid of the other party.

In a society where 22% of American adults are gun owners, and the average number of guns per American household is eight, is it any wonder that these different versions of The American Dream play out so violently? As a critical educator I would surmise that the lessons learned by Trump supporters throughout their formal and informal education were gravely successful in creating a practiced inattention to history—a motivated social amnesia necessary for Americans to live outside of historical consciousness—unaware of the crimes of their forebears who held slaves, exterminated the indigenous peoples, and who participated in imperialist wars, all in the spirit of Manifest Destiny and the nation's providential mission—in other words, all in the name of America First! The ideological state apparatuses and the corporate catechism embedded in the state's media apparatuses—which confirm Marx's dictum that the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas—are to be congratulated on a job well done. And while I would single out Breitbart News and Fox News as the worst offenders, since they are two of the most egregious examples of right-wing network propaganda, I would also include all the mainstream corporate media as participants, willing or unwitting, and to a greater and lesser degree as responsible for legitimizing Trump since in the final instance they eruditely pander to their masters in the service of their corporate owners: the capitalist class. As Thomas Jefferson (who was also a slave holder) noted: "The only security of all is in a free press."

So what can be done?

I would begin an answer to your question with another question:

Can whatever is left over of democracy after it has been ravaged by the corporate capitalists, be salvaged and made beneficent once it becomes liberated for social use by a United Front of the working-classes? The transnational state has made democracy into roadkill. Just leave it on the side of the road. That is always the question, but strategies, tactics and systems of intelligibility that once worked—that is, before the societies that past revolutionaries forged turned into their opposite—need to be rethought on different terms today. We need to work with inventiveness and piquancy, conviction and commitment and the strength to endure the challenge of Golgotha and be born anew. In my own work as a Marxist humanist who draws from Catholic social teachings that are being developed in liberation theology, this means developing a philosophically grounded perspec-

tive of an alternative to capitalism, grounded in Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program*. I am also examining the Christian gospels and the teachings of Jesus as an expression of communism. This has stirred up quite a controversy here and I won't digress into that debate for lack of space. What I feel deserves emphasis today is public pedagogy, a term developed by Henry Giroux. By that I mean actions by public representatives in public venues—that includes reporters, professors, and intellectuals of various stripe and sundry—mustered by political courage and steered by critical analysis on behalf of the oppressed majority. For me, the purpose of such public pedagogy would be, as the saying goes, “to speak truth to power,” that is, to challenge political orthodoxy when such orthodoxy is used as a weapon to stifle dissent and reproduce policies and practices that keep the ruling class in power at the expense of the popular masses. “In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act” is a phrase attributed to George Orwell. Paulo Freire has said that there is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is, as Freire notes, to transform the word. Orwell also said that “freedom is the right to tell people what they don't want to hear.” At this particular historical juncture, it's important that we re-tread our habit-sodden pedagogies and start to develop activist pedagogical approaches to challenge the lies and deceit of the Trump administration. This can be accomplished in many ways: creating blogs, and publishing policy critiques through social media and, to the extent that it is possible, publishing through the mainstream media, and joining and/or forming revolutionary social movements. To the extent that some news outlets are challenging the Trump agenda, he tries to shut them down by ridiculing their reports as “fake news” and polls have shown that vast numbers of Americans who support Trump tend to increase that support the more that Trump is attacked in the mainstream media. In other words, his followers haven't thought very carefully about how he has rationalized his policy proposals. He has also threatened to change existing laws on libel, so that he will have the ability to sue media outlets who publish stories critical of him, his acolytes or his administration. And he is seeking to institute harsh penalties for government whistleblowers. Trumpsters see the mainstream media as supporting the views of the elite Washington political establishment and the views of “Hollywood” which they loathe because they see Hollywood as one of the sword arms of cultural degeneracy and anti-Christian bias.

With its crises of overaccumulation and declining rate of profit, capitalism feeds global destruction, through war, through ecocide, through genocide, and epistemicide that follows the most brutal forms

of colonization. As individuals, the patriciate of the transnational capitalist class are as likely to be as honest, fair-minded and upstanding as any other group you might meet at the local pub. Again, and this deserves to be emphasized, it is not the individuals themselves, but the system of asymmetrically structured social relations of exploitation reproduced by capitalism, that is the problem. The problem is not the capitalists—who doesn't know some very nice, caring, and benevolent capitalist in their family?—but capitalism. You cannot succeed in the capitalist world without exploiting workers. But no capitalist will admit to this because nobody wants to believe that they are participating in an immoral and repugnant system that leads to immiseration, pauperisation, casualisation, the gutting of the welfare state, neo-imperialism, etc. But some of capitalists (what Trump refers to as the “winners”) are clearly more successful than others. But even the “winners” face an uncertain future (albeit a more certain future than ours, to be sure) since capitalism cannot avoid systematic crises, which have been witnessed in the 1930s, 1970s, 1980s, and 2008, and they will be witnessed again by succeeding generations unless we put a stop to it through our collective efforts at resistance followed by a plan for emancipation. Clearly we need to reprimatinate the locus of self-questioning advocated by my mentor, Paulo Freire, and other educators who have an understanding of global political economy. Whatever strategy we employ to fight the continuation of Trump's neoliberal agenda will require the participation of the global working class.

How would radical pedagogy tackle the failure of upward social mobility (the ‘opportunity gap’) that constitutes the very promise associated with the American Dream?

Education is embedded firmly in the notion of the American Dream which is why education has always been in bed with the value form of the commodity and also, of course, in the social production of labor power. Every decade capitalism demands that successive generations of workers relegitimize the structural contradictions of the internationalist capitalist system as the limits to human possibility. In this way workers will be always already susceptible to the notion that there is no alternative to capitalism. One way the transnational capitalist state accomplishes this is to fashion pedagogical approaches that re-encrypt justifications for capitalism throughout the education system. And, as Glenn Rikowski notes, schools are interested in manufacturing and reinforcing the skills, personal attributes and other labor power attributes of students as potential

workers—as part of bolstering the capitalist labor process itself. Institutions of education demand compliance as an axiomatic attribute of the student’s labor power, since capitalism needs agents with specific types of labor power attributes that can remain mystified as to the ways in which they help capital grow and expand not for the worker but for the capitalist. Education becomes an instrument of divine pettifoggery—insinuating the idea that with hard work and imagination, workers can construct themselves in a myriad of playful and sublime ways. Labor power utilization by capitalists demands acquiescence to a certain type of training or pedagogy, that could be described as a pedagogy of domestication, as education takes on a particular commodity form. Today, business models of education are specific commodity forms supported by the transnational capitalist class and they are expanding at a ferocious rate and in the U.S. they promote private or charter schools to replace public schools. In the U.S. competition is fierce for jobs that pay living wages as job creation for high school graduates is mostly in the service industry in which there are no medical benefits and little pay. Schools have been insinuated into the logic of neoliberal economics administered by means of a market metric macrophysics of power and set of governing tactics that submits everything in its path to a process of monetization and that simultaneously transforms everything and everyone within our social universe to a commodity form

Betsy DeVos, Secretary of Education, is a Michigan-based philanthropist who, along with her husband Richard DeVos, supports the privatization of public schooling and is noted for her attacks on the LGBTQA community, including undermining their hard-won anti-discrimination protections in the state of Michigan. Proselytizing for private schooling is a growth industry, and Betsy DeVos has been at the forefront. But the increasing antipathy expressed by their bloviating flag-bearers towards public schooling reveals a motivated amnesia surrounding the history of the relationship of public education to the expansion of democracy throughout United States. The health of the public education system should be foundational to the generative process of being and becoming fully human, and this is true not just in the United States, but in most democratic countries. Betsy DeVos’ plan to spend \$1.4 billion on the Trump administration’s expanded school choice agenda, was called an “assault on the American Dream” by John B. King, Jr. who served as Obama’s Secretary of Education and now leads a think tank, Education Trust.

We need to expand the scale of struggle. It is natural that we should want both to conserve and to create cosmovisions and social relations of production in which the fetish of the commodity no longer rules. After

all, the winds that flow within the self sometimes come from other, less commodity-driven worlds—is this not part of our divine entelechy? Capitalists prefer to hide behind their innocent and guileless minds, claiming that they remain untouched by the unctuous urges that affect so many persons of power. After all, who would want to belong to a cabal that thrives upon aggressively exploiting workers? I hear a lot from liberals and fellow Catholics that in order to change the world we need to change ourselves. In one sense this is self-evident sophomoric advice. But maybe the best way of changing ourselves is working to change the society—beginning with action and then reflecting upon such action. We need to avoid an antiseptic cleavage here, between self and society. Some students and colleagues, have, over the years, told me that they won't be ready to change the world until they've mastered the classics in sociology, psychology, pedagogy, political theory, etc. Well, the word 'master' is relative, but the task of reading and understanding everything that might make you a good change agent could take several lifetimes—and in the meantime these folks want the world to hold still or wait until they are ready. This is falling prey to what Sartre called, the "liberty of indifference." Let the world be damned until I fashion myself accordingly—and this whole idea of self-fashioning reeks to me of too much emphasis on autoplaticity, a bit like Foucault's practice of the self—forging individual identity out of the conflictual social relations of power/knowledge, and at the most resisting being made into a docile, compliant subject. And maybe there is an echo of this in Saint Augustine's wayward prayer, Lord make me pure but not yet! (When I was a doctoral student in Toronto, I audited a class with Foucault, and while I was giving him a tour of some of the best bookstores in the city, I asked him his opinion of Toronto and he replied—"it's not decadent enough for me." He was brilliant, a wonderful teacher, but I couldn't find a hint of any politics of transcendence in his work). I don't think you can change the world only to suit yourself, that is, to suit your idiosyncracies, needs and desires—you need to take into consideration the needs of the people, all of their basic needs for food, shelter, dignity, health. And course, what is "basic" in terms of basic needs is also a relative term. While we can't stop the continuum of history, we can certainly put up a roadblock, perhaps evening hiding ourselves away in the cave of Adullam with a band of renegades to give ourselves a better understanding of the bias against the poor in today's social universe so that we can submit ourselves to a political disposition, one revolutionary enough to embrace a politics of emancipation. I have written recently on Christian communism, and made a case for "comrade Jesus" and for Marx's sympathy for some of the gospels (not surprisingly, and quite rightly, he was an-

ti-clerical and vehemently opposed to religious institutions that served as opium for the people. Who could blame him?) Rosa Luxemburg quotes passages from Saints Basil the Great, John Chrysotom and Gregory the Great in her essay on Socialism and the Churches. And of course, as Andrew Collier notes, while it would be foolish today to wish a “Reign of the Saints”, favoured by Calvin, Munzer, Wyclif and the Fifth Monarchy Men, those professing to be, say, Christian, are obliged to support secular movements that their principles would lead them to support—and, of course, politically I follow a Marxist humanist path and one that I am trying to intersect with the tradition of liberation theology. My ideas on liberation and emancipation appear perhaps hopelessly quixotic. But to me, liberation and emancipation are two different processes. It’s more than the multitude versus the people—*pace* Hardt and Negri. We can sometimes liberate ourselves from oppression but to emancipate ourselves we need a viable alternative to the current capitalist system that transcends liberal nebulosities. We need, in other words, a socialist system. And the most pervasive argument against socialism in the U.S. is that it contradicts our human nature and that it also leads to totalitarianism, lack of freedom, and violent state repression. Which has been the most powerful tactic on the part of Republicans for making the case that there is no alternative to capitalism. Too often we remain locked in abstract universals, and we need to concretize our dialectics so that they have a formidable impact on the realm of actuality, but this is not as easy as it might seem.

In the decades following the civil rights movement in the United States, university intellectuals were drawn to post-structuralist thinkers and anti-humanist intellectuals and universities became filled with their miasma of different indifference. The neo-baroque rhetorical formations and fanciful logic of postmodern theory has, in our contemporary space, replaced reason with opinion, explanation with observation, knowledge with opportunity, facts with the way one thinks about them, and understanding of an idea with its tacit approval—all of which has been slanderingly reflected by social media into a defense of the notion of “fake news”. Fake news corrodes the factual basis of democratic debate by insinuating that there exists no truth, there is only an ever-emptying cistern of opinion and all opinions are always already populated with the intentions of others—everyone is either a lout or a madman—and these opinions in themselves are merely illusion in the Nietzschean sense. It puts everything into a state of a cynically reasoned agnosticism, giving ballast to a person whose sense of self feels under siege, yet who lacks an explanatory language of analysis, but still believes one can “imagineer” one’s existence outside the conundrums wrought by capitalist relations of exploita-

tion. Fake news also creates an antipathy towards reason and debate, and a penchant for preferring the exchange of opinions over submitting to a debate with adjudicators and public deliberation. Researchers have also identified what they call the “illusory truth effect”, which basically asserts that the more familiar a story or event becomes, the more a person is likely to believe it is true.

We need to remind ourselves, again after Marx, that the opinions of those in power are those that dominate and influence the political system. For poststructuralists, structures are not real but exist only as mental categories; they are simply language-effects contaminated by regimes of truth. Now there are some useful ideas that emerged out of this debate, but unfortunately at the same time there was a move away from class struggle, socialist humanism or Marxist humanism, and an emphasis placed on the politics of difference, epistemological idealism and the perverse aesthetics of self-display. These resplendently conjured radial antihumanist forms of thought, freighted with ultra-interpretivism, and frothy aerosol discourses that largely abandoned the dialectic are, fortunately, in decline, largely as a result of the Great Recession and the global justice movement. We can certainly claim to know truth, even indulging in granular understandings of social life in its minutiae, certainly we can, but we cannot *exhaust* the truth.

Is the answer to make us all into Marxist humanist critical pedagogues?

Critical pedagogy does not have *ipso facto* transformative power. It is not some negative moment of pure white hot antagonism, opening a positive logic in the politics of knowledge. It is not separated from dialectics—but on the contrary is shot through with a dialectical humanism, creating a condition of possibility for bringing about a new social universe; it is also accompanied by a broad decolonial approach to the emancipation of “the people” very likely with people of color leading the way. Those of us who remain outspoken in our politics will always face a retribution-fuelled academy and society-at-large. Clearly we need to resituate teacher and learners as productive agents who understand that there is a critical agency that they can develop that lies beyond the mystifications of class contradictions and attempts by bourgeois intellectuals to deconstruct the material basis of class relations. Reading in the critical tradition is one way to help teachers re-understand their roles. What I am advocating is that we move beyond what Italian Marxist theorist and politician Antonio Gramsci referred to as *passive revolution*. William Robinson describes Gramsci’s passive revolution as dominant groups undertaking “reform from above that

defuses mobilization from below for more far-reaching transformation". So we need to think beyond limited economic redistribution and a restored role for the state, according to Robinson. He makes a good point that we should be less concerned with regulating accumulation and more focussed on administering its expansion in more inclusionary ways. Or else we are left with producing a new wave of capitalist globalization "with greater credibility than their orthodox and politically bankrupt neoliberal predecessors". Reproducing neoliberalism is bad enough, we don't need more legitimate forms. We need to move past the bourgeois limits of redistributive reform. Robinson is correct that we need substantial structural transformations. And these structural transformations need to address the root causes of poverty and inequality. It's foolish to think that the transnational capitalist class won't use its structural power in the global political economy to defuse any challenge to its rule. We need a stronger rupture from the politics of liberal accommodationism. We need to do more than change our ideological wardrobe.

Revolutionary critical pedagogy, which I developed in my book, *Pedagogy of Insurrection* is a transmodern response to U.S. imperialism, the coloniality of power, racism, sexism, white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism and economic inequality that locates its politics of liberation on the subaltern side of colonial difference in solidarity with minoritized and oppressed groups. It looks to develop a consistent plan to develop a social universe outside of capitalist value production and in the pursuit of cognitive democracy, and economic, racial, gender and sexual equality. Those of us who are involved in this project try to envision a pluriversal world consisting of a multiplicity of political projects that are bound together through horizontal forms of dialogue and self-managed socialized production and distribution systems operationalized by communities of solidarity and reciprocity—but which have not abandoned the importance of class struggle and projects of emancipation that carry universal relevance. Reorienting the default mode of our neural pathways so we can discover more creative ways of constructing fully informed citizens able to resist the neoliberal empire, does not mean we are looking for a customized, one-size-fits-all blueprint. What we require is a new dialectical vision and a new consensus of how to move forward, a wider-than-customary range of alternative ideas, not alternative facts. Critical consciousness or the creation of the self-knowing subject is not a precondition for transforming the world but an outcome of a praxis of solidaristic engagement with others in which we are braided together as social actors, healing our damaged subjectivities while searching for ways to fight poverty, to achieve economic and national sovereignty, to rid the world of the hunger and

the destitution that has arrived at our doorsteps, and to create a viable alternative to capitalism which has the possibility of achieving hegemonic ascendancy, where direct production meets the needs of all citizens for food, clothing, shelter, medical treatment and human dignity. Begin now! Start working to build the social movements! The New American Dream that I envision is nothing short of co-creating with our international comrades global democracy—The Internationalist Dream.

It's important to remember, Mitja, that the process of propaganda, developed by Edward Bernays, the nephew of Sigmund Freud, was perfected in the U.S. and Britain (Hitler, for instance, greatly admired British propaganda) although the term is usually associated with closed societies, that is, with totalitarian societies. Propaganda in the U.S. is generally camouflaged by euphemisms, such as public relations, advertising, public diplomacy and advertising. Mark Crispin Miller has written extensively on this. The CIA helps to fund certain films, and has infiltrated many news media organizations. Even abstract expressionist art in the 1960s was funded by the CIA because they saw it as political ambiguous, and not starkly political like the social realism of Soviet propaganda art. The U.S. has one of the most sophisticated propaganda complexes the world has ever seen, far surpassing what any totalitarian regime could establish. Recently, as a way to sell the idea that the American Dream is still realizable for hard working and determined Americans who have the courage to overcome racial, ethnic, and gender barriers, etc., The Public Broadcasting Service for South California has developed a numerical "score" for people who take their American Dream "quiz" and you receive a percentage number of where you stand in having achieved the American Dream. Here is what the website says:

Spend five minutes taking this quiz, and you'll find out what factors were working in your favor and what you had to overcome to get where you are today. At the end, you'll receive an overall score and a personalized summary of the results (and probably a big dose of pride and gratitude).
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/chasing-the-dream/your-american-dream-score/>

Perhaps we should let the artists lead the way because they often give us things that we do not know that we need. In Oakland, California, a Museum of Capitalism has recently been established by a group of artists, and the inaugural show features works by over sixty artists, who have produced powerfully inventive explorations of capitalism, including critiques of the contradictions that bedevil the capitalist system, along with ideas of what a social universe not dominated by capitalism could be like. The ex-

hibit features a machine with a hand crank that shoots out pennies at the same rate as the minimum wage; there's a series of miniature toy figurines based on the 2008 bailout of Bank of America, Citigroup, Wells Fargo, and other banks, by the Obama administration's Department of the Treasury. These were banks bailed out with taxpayer dollars; they were deemed too big to fail. But taxpayers who lost their homes as a result of the Great Recession were ignored by the government. This is similar to socialism for the rich and unremitting exploitation of the poor. There is also a special exhibit about American imperialism. The exhibit includes an interactive installation by Christy Chow of Hong Kong, in which visitors jump on a treadmill while they watch the grueling process of assembling a garment in a Chinese factory. Gabby Miller, a Vietnamese-American artist, displays a steel container used to send supplies by boat, reminding viewers of the containers used by the American military to send supplies from the port of Oakland to South Vietnam during the U.S. invasion of Vietnam. There is also a feature documentary about a theater collective known as Rimini Protokoll infiltrating the annual shareholders meeting of German carmaker Daimler, where the theater group sells "tickets" to a performance, where the tickets consist of small amounts of Daimler stock, inviting participants to attend the annual shareholders meeting.

I like to think that the world as we experience it is always in a superposition, a term used in quantum mechanics, meaning a fuzzy liminal state that becomes real only when we participate in making an observation. Likewise, no world is complete until we participate in it and no world will change until we engage in struggle with it.

That we need to retrain ourselves as activists is clear. Too many of us remain desperate, convinced that no matter what we do, our unjust world will not yield to our mighty efforts. We become lulled to inaction by an elegiac cry in the icy solitude of the sepulcher where revolutionary souls are encysted in the crusted dampness of political despair or paralyzed by certitude and self-righteousness and a fervent belief in the apodicticity of action that in time—in the case of the United States roughly 241 years—sets crisp barriers to insight and *de facto* chokes our voices with the winter catarrh of defeat. We enter a strange cavern of subtle reality, where contours of everyday life are infinitely adjusted and where possibilities can never be realized. We enter the American Dream.

The Slovenian Counterpart to the American Dream

Srečo Dragoš

Introduction

Once the American Dream was utilized by the lower classes to increase their upward mobility, it turned into a commodity of a zero-sum game in two senses – social and systemic. It became a socially limited commodity because it was hijacked by the upper classes, as only the richest could bring it to realization, and only at the expense of all others who had still not woken up. The assertions that the war against poverty was lost because of the inefficient and wasteful state, the excuses about the (sub)cultural essence of poverty which cannot be mitigated by financial means (because it is determined by the value system), exaggerations about the superiority of market regulation over state regulation of the market, concerns for the interests of tax payers, allusions to the dangers of communism – these are the main arguments used to demonize every type of the re-distribution of goods, resources and opportunities. The systemic aspect of the American dream, on the other hand, lies in its scope. It started with requirements for the urgent changes in the system that would lead to changes in society, but was later turned into the (global) trademark of the American way of life employed to ward off the extra-systemic impacts of accumulated contradictions.

In the first part of this article we look into the utopian element of the American dream that is subject to long-term ideological repercussions as formulated by Karl Mannheim. In the second part, we recapitulate the essence of the American dream with an intention to make easier the understanding of the sequel to the American dream (part three), from the point

when the things went wrong. In the last part we analyze the perception of the American dream from the viewpoint of the periphery (Slovenia) and end with the conclusion that such perception is guided by voluntary factors rather than determinist ones.

Long-term Ideological Repercussions

The emancipatory idea embedded in the American dream became a typical example of the ideologization of an idea in the process of its transition from the utopian to the governing form. The transition took place in three stages, all of them anticipated by Karl Mannheim as early as 1936.

According to Mannheim, the first stage of ideological mentality is sincere but unrealizable. He illustrates it using the analogy of Christian love for fellow human beings. It is an idea that is forever “transcendent and unrealizable” in any society that is based on serfdom, plundering or inequality. In such contexts, Christian love forever remains an “ideological” notion, including in cases where the motives and conduct arising from it are entirely benevolent. The reason is that Christian love cannot be entirely and consistently put into practice in a society that is not based on the same principle (as Christian love itself). Therefore, the protagonists are forced to make compromises to avoid destroying social structures, and in so doing they inevitably shift away from their noble motives (Mannheim, 1978: p. 194). In contrast to the first stage, the second stage of ideological mentality is characterized by the fact that – historically – it could reflect on the incongruence between the inherent ideas and the actual conduct, but despite all it prevents itself from doing so because of “certain vital-emotional interests.” The third stage involves ideological manipulation, which should be “interpreted as a purposeful lie. In this case, we are not dealing with self-delusion but rather with purposeful deception of another.” (ibid.) By concealing the real social condition from itself and others, the ideology shifts away from reality with an intention to stabilize it (*status quo*). Or – in psychoanalytical parlance – what is involved is the ideological transition of illusion towards phantasm.¹

1 This is meant in the Freudian sense of touch with reality, in which perception is defined as real with regard to the developments and perception of changes initiated by developments. In an opposite case, where such developments do not create any change, we have to do with the perception that is not real, meaning a phantasm. According to Freud, the difference between illusion and phantasm is functional because for an individuum such a sign of reality is invaluable and at the same time it is a weapon against it and against his/her own, often implacable instincts. For that reason the individuum invest much effort into taking out, or projecting that what causes him/her inwards problems. (Freud, 1987: p. 193).

In contemporary societies, the mentioned stages of ideology appear in various historical forms which Mannheim divided into four main categories. (*ibid.*: p. 209–243):

1. Orgiastic Chiliasm,²
2. The Liberal-Humanitarian Idea³
3. The Conservative Idea⁴
4. The Socialist-Communist Utopia.⁵

The above typology is useful for understanding the American dream for two reasons.

First, Mannheim draws attention to the historical tendency to “bring down” or ground the utopian ideas, which originally transcend the real world. While initially the utopian idea is absolutely irreconcilable with reality (form 1), it later begins to move in the opposite direction, says Mannheim. Put differently, instead of aiming to oppose, it seeks to eliminate

2 According to Mannheim, the first representative of that most extreme form of utopian mentality was Thomas Müntzer (a radical German theologian of the early reformation period). In Mannheim words, he was “a social revolutionary from religious motives.” (Mannheim, 1978: p. 209). The idea of the millennial kingdom on earth became a revolutionary idea when Chiliasm became associated with the aspirations of the subordinate classes.

3 This type of mentality also includes the gap between the real and the utopian, but the two are not irreconcilable so reality is not expected to fully adapt to the utopia (as in the first type). The goal here is to correct rather than substitute the existing reality, using the imagined and better concepts. To be more precise, in the liberal-humanitarian ideology the main function of utopia (of liberal postulates) is to function as a corrective “standard” that enables us to judge the developments around us (Mannheim, 1978: p. 217). In circumstances in which such utopias can be realized politically (as in France), it takes on a conspicuously rational form. But wherever the circumstances were not conducive to its realization (e.g. in Germany), the liberal-humanitarian ideology became introverted. “Here the road to progress was not sought in external deeds or in revolutions, but exclusively in the inner constitution of man and its transformations.” (*ibid.*).

4 The conservative mentality does not contain the utopian element because, in an ideal situation, it is completely in harmony with the reality which it masters; therefore, it lacks the ability to reflect on the historical processes, as the former is a result of “a progressive impulse.” Only with the help of the opposition and its “tendency to break through the limits of the existing order causes the conservative mentality to question the basis of its own dominance, and necessarily brings about among the conservatives the historical-philosophical reflections concerning themselves. Thus, there arises a counter-utopia which serves as a means of orientation and defence.” (Mannheim, 1978: p. 227).

5 “Henceforth, a desperate struggle takes place, aiming at the fundamental disintegration of the adversary’s belief. Each of the forms of utopian mentality which we have treated thus far turns against the rest of each belief it is demanded that it corresponds with reality ... The economic and social structure of society becomes absolute reality for the socialist” (Mannheim, 1978: pp. 237–238). The point is that the difference between the real and the utopian is the greatest, irreconcilable and unchangeable in the first form of ideology, and the smallest and most conflicting in the fourth type; in the third type it is (temporarily) neglected, and in the second it is instrumentalized to correct the reality.

the tension between utopia and reality while using the model provided by conservatism (*ibid.*: p. 243). However, Mannheim also points out that the entrance of the liberal ideology/utopia into the social sphere was not sufficient in itself to transform that sphere – suitable historical circumstances were also needed. Accordingly, the liberal ideology could evolve into explicitly rational forms only in countries where it could also be realized politically (e.g. in France), while in countries where the circumstances were not conducive (e.g. in Germany), the liberal-humanitarian ideology became introverted: “Here the road to progress was not sought in external deeds or in revolutions, but exclusively in the inner constitution of man and its transformations” (*ibid.*: p. 217).⁶ Today we can safely assume that, had Mannheim been writing the book half a century later, he would be able to support his thesis with another, even more robust and obvious example – the advance of neo-liberalism.

Secondly, all those conflicting ideologies are closely connected with the social classes among which they originated. Since over time they discarded the original utopian elements, they have been moving ever closer to a conservative stance (*ibid.*: p. 244). Mannheim derived from this the law of long-term ideological repercussions, which he formulated as follows:

It appears to be a generally valid law of the structure of intellectual development that when new groups gain entry into an already established situation, they do not take over without a further ado the ideologies which have already been elaborated for this situation, but rather they adapt the ideas which they bring with them through their traditions to the new situation. (*ibid.*: p. 245).

As an example of this law Mannheim gives the liberal and socialist ideologies which emerged as historical alternatives in the conservative circumstances. The development and the consequences of this process can-

6 Miklós Tamás, the Hungarian philosopher, stresses the same in connection with the present neo-liberalism, eighty years after the first publication of the said Mannheim work. In Miklós's words, today “we see desperation, people are retreating inwardly, resorting to individuality, while various therapeutic methods are proliferating /.../ This had already happened at the time of the final stages of the Roman Empire. Stoic philosophy is a very good example of that state of mind, What did the Stoics say? That it is insensible to meddle with things over which you have no influence, so the only sensible thing one can do in such a situation is to cultivate individuality. The contemporary counterpart of that stance is investment into oneself, care for oneself.” It is nothing new, indeed. It is very similar to the situation that prevailed towards the end of the Roman period, “when truly horrible tyrants were in power and the stance that prevailed was that nothing could be done because the tyrants were too powerful . so let's rather go home and be good, let's be open within our limitations /.../ it's not consumerism, it's an escape. In the past it was termed the inner exile caused by the lack of freedom.” (Miklós Tamás, 2017: p. 37).

not be understood in terms of binary categories (e.g. victory/defeat, new/old, better/worse),⁷ so we must take into account the long-term ideological repercussions. Both liberalism and socialism transformed their initial ideas to achieve greater consistency with the situation in which they were trying to gain ground, and the adjustment was realized at the expense of utopian elements. Mannheim even predicted that because of that we “approach the situation in which the utopian element, through its many divergent forms, has completely (in politics, at least) annihilated itself.” (ibid.: p. 246). Indeed, half a century later, we were witness to one of the most conspicuous examples of that law. With the downfall of the Berlin wall, the ex-socialist countries became the entry platform for capitalist ideologies, since the liberal-humanist utopia⁸ of the latter was considered one of the most progressive. It was more appealing than the failed socialist utopia – but only in its early stages. By adjusting the liberal ideology to post-socialist circumstances, those countries soon ran into (neo)liberal paradoxes which would have been unimaginable just a short time ago (see, e.g. Shields, 2014). Trust in fundamental institutions and in the protagonists of the new social order began to dissolve; inequality and poverty began to increase, the key resources of national economies were sold off at low prices and, faced with the economic collapse caused by the financial capital originating in the West, the former socialist countries had to adopt the same methods to remedy the situation as any other western country. In the name of the liberal principles and the free market, they resorted to state intervention to rescue private banks – the measures financed by the exorbitant sums of taxpayers money⁹ were implemented without a debate,

7 One of those is the philosophical thesis of Peter Sloterdijk, who draws attention to the unexpected effects of social changes using the binary perspective on history: “Ever since Romanticism, the period that followed the French Revolution, the general feeling is that the things developed contrary to people’s expectations. The will and the deed are one thing, and the effects of the unfolding events another. If the difference between the two is too great, we find ourselves in the tragic or romantic situation. It is tragic when we have to reconcile to the failure of human projects, and romantic because people again begin to feel the power of fate. In such a situation, history can be defined as a sphere where actual events always contradict the expectations.” (Sloterdijk, 2017: pp. 49–50). The advantage of Mannheim’s law of long-term ideological repercussions is that it explains how and why that happens, and this cannot be perceived in binary categories.

8 Those are: individual freedom, greater social equality, (meritocratic) justice and welfare for all, the autonomy of market laws that leads to greater productivity than in the central-planning system, national sovereignty and affirmation.

9 Slovenia used more than five billion euros of taxpayers money to stabilize the banking sector (the rescuing of the largest Slovenian bank alone, NLB – Nova Ljubljanska banka, cost 4.5 billion euros). However, using state intervention to contain private financial losses is not the only paradox of neo-liberalism in this case. It turned out that the international expert estimates of the losses incurred by the Slovenian banks were much exaggerated, as much as by 2.5 billion euros in the case of the two largest Slovenian banks (Kos, 2016).

were taken in the name of “objective necessity,” and fell short of expectations. Put differently, it was the method comparable to the one used during the most severe periods of the central-planning socialist economy. But that was not the end of the ideological transformation. The liberalism of today is different from the one that was in place during R. Reagan and M. Thatcher. At that time, the fundamentalist principle of the market law was promoted by invoking general improvement of the economy and welfare for all, including lower classes. Today, the situation is diametrically opposite. Instead of optimism and improvement of the situation for all classes, the necessity of neo-liberal principles is justified by pessimism (over the state of globalization) and by promises that nothing will change.

In the post-industrial era and in particular since 2008's financial crisis, the neoliberal message has become simultaneously more mainstream and less optimistic. Contemporary neoliberals present the principle of the market as the last hope for G20 countries to maintain the status-quo. (Gould & Robert, 2013: p. 82)

In short, neo-liberalism is no longer what it used to be. The utopian element of neo-liberalism¹⁰ degenerated into a banal concept of the safety valve that should protect us from losing what we already have. In this case too – in harmony with the above-mentioned Mannheim law – the case in point is a shift towards even greater conservatism.

The American Dream is not an exception. It went through all three (Mannheim's) stages of ideology and much like other ideological-utopian constructs succumbed to the law of long-term ideological repercussions. The next section describes how that process unfolded and what the crucial turning point was. This will also help us understand the Slovenian version of the American Dream (addressed in the last part of this article).

»I have a dream...«

Once the American dream reached the ultimate stage of religious and political consensus among the American people, which happened during the 1950s and the 1960s, it became globally convincing more than ever be-

This money was therefore unnecessarily invested in the banking sector. There is a strong suspicion that the incorrect, exaggerated estimates of the loss, which were used as the basis for state intervention, were intentional and made in favor of the future international buyers of those banks. In fact, once the banks are stabilized through state intervention, they need to be sold according to the European rules. The sale, however, cannot recover the money invested in the banks, meaning that the taxpayers were penalized two times. (Kovač, 2017: p. 33).

¹⁰ The utopian element of neo-liberalism is its blind trust in the free market which purportedly can ensure the realization of the iconic phrase “a rising tide lifts all boats” often repeated during the 1980s and first used by John F. Kennedy in 1963 (Gould & Robert, 2013: p. 80).

fore (or later). And not solely because the most prominent protagonist of that dream – Martin Luther King, Jr. – was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (in 1964). Equally deserving were the then political leaders of the US (Vice-president R. Nixon, and President L. B. Johnson), who co-opted the content of the American dream for the official doctrine of domestic politics. At the same time, the US began to spread the concept outside its borders. It was even used as the main and unique American weapon against the Soviet Union, and it proved to be absolutely indestructible. It was an extremely imaginative move amidst the military stand-off at the time, when both sides realized that there was no winner in the nuclear race and that the congested street along which they thronged was a cul-de-sac.

The attack on the impoverished Soviet Union using the American dream weapon – which carried a blatant message that promoted material welfare and freedom for all citizens and on a much higher level than anywhere else on the planet – was the second¹¹ and the last magnificent contribution of the US to international relations. The American dream, the progressive human “bomb,” was and still is the most effective of all bombs invented by humans. At any rate, from the moment it was first used to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, it proved indestructible for the Soviet Union.

The American dream was first directly used as an intelligent weapon against the enemy in 1959, when Richard Nixon arrived in Moscow to open the exhibition which celebrated the American material achievements. The main exhibit was a life-size model of the apartment of an average American worker. It included real carpets, a real TV set, a central heating and a fully equipped kitchen including a washing machine, a dryer and a refrigerator. Nixon personally guided Nikita Khrushchev through the exhibition, and Khrushchev was obviously astonished, envious and skeptical about the things that were shown and told to him. For example, when he stopped in front of the electrical lemon squeezer and acrimoniously commented that he could not imagine anyone in their good mind using such a redundant device, Nixon explained that “everything that helps women reduce their work is undoubtedly useful.” To which Khrushchev responded: “We do not perceive women as workers – as you do, in the capitalist system” (Botton, 2005: p. 37).

But Nixon was right. The American standard of living had been unattainable for the Soviet Union. In connection with this, at the said exhibition Nixon also forecast a completely new form of political action which half a century later became known as “soft power” (an ability to exert in-

11 The first was the US role in the WWII.

fluence by using non-military means; Nye, 2002).¹² The best illustration of the soft power approach is a transcript of the dialog between Khrushchev and Nixon published by the media that covered the said exhibition (among others also the socialist newspapers in Slovenia). The conversation that took place during the brandishing of American consumer goods was as follows (Katoliški glas, 1959: p. 1):

Khrushchev: You Americans think that our people will be surprised. It's not like that. We already have similar things in our new apartments...

Nixon: It's not our intention to surprise anyone. We only want to show the difference. The world needs free exchange of ideas. We must trust people, leave them freedom of choice.

Khrushchev: (acknowledges, but remains silent).

Nixon: We should not maintain, opposing each other, that our system is the only one. We must talk, but not starting from the position of supremacy, or inferiority, but rather from that of mutual respect. Isn't it better to talk about washing machines rather than rockets?

The significance of that pompous and triumphant entrance of the American dream onto the international stage does not lie in its success. It is important because it occurred at the right time, because the material basis for its realization was in place and because it was not (yet) an illusion, although less than three years later everyone was again talking about rockets rather than washing machines.¹³ On the internal political stage the situation was different. The American dream lasted for some time, and its fading was a long process. Its "killers" did not come from the outside, as in the case of the Cuban crisis, but from the inside.

At the time of its climax (with Dr. Martin L. King, jr.), the main elements of the American dream were as follows:

12 In contrast to the traditional (hard) power, where confrontation is based on the military and economic capacity, soft power draws on the openness towards others, on the material welfare, culture, values and models which have power to convince thanks to their appeal rather than inherent threats and compulsion. "The development of soft power need not be a zero sum game. All countries can gain from finding attraction in one another's cultures" (Nye, 2012).

13 When in 1962 the Americans discovered Russian nuclear missiles in Cuba, the promises of soft power swiftly dissolved. It was replaced by the traditional hard form of power. "If my calculation is correct, over the past thirty years the USA initiated or caused in one or another way thirteen wars," says Oliver Stone (Maličev, 2017: p. 5). The political difference between the 20th and the 21st century lies in the potential of the American policy of hard power, whose scope is today smaller than ever before and continues to decrease, while its soft power potential was entirely wasted.

- the implementation of the classical bourgeois principles of the French revolution: freedom, equality, brotherhood;¹⁴
- anti-racism;¹⁵
- the religiously inspired struggle for the rights¹⁶ that remains within the system.¹⁷

The role that in the European version of the implementation of the above-said principles was fulfilled by trade unions was in the US taken up by the American dream. Thanks to its sobriety (the third element), the official national politics found it acceptable, since without it the political system would have been exposed solely to the more radical variant of the Black Power. At the same time, the government was obliged to implement the principle of equality (the first element), along with all other ingredients of the American dream, rather than leaving equality to the random market regulation. For Martin L. King, emancipation was a triangle resting on tightly joined angles, and if one of them was neglected the entire triangle would collapse.

At one angle stands the individual person, at the other angle stands other persons, and at the up top stands God. Unless these three are concatenated, working harmoniously together in a single life, that life is incomplete (King, 1954).

In short, without reducing social inequalities neither the individual nor society is free and this is in contradiction with the God's will. Therefore, the American Dream does not distinguish among religious, social and political reform. The goal is the emancipation of all citizens, and particularly those who are most excluded in the richest country.

If we spend thirty-five billion dollars a year to fight an ill-conceived war in Vietnam and twenty billion dollars to put a man on the moon, we can

14 "I have a dream that /.../ all men are created equal. I have a dream that /.../ the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state /.../ will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice« (King, 1963).

15 "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (King, 1963).

16 "Martin's voice was more than the communication of intellectual ideals and spiritual vision/.../ Martin was first of all a man of faith, a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus« (Young, 2001: p. viii). »As the weeks and months wor on, it became clear to me that we had found our Moses, and he would surely lead us to the promised land of liberty and justice for all." (Parks, 2001: p. 4).

17 "Martin led to fulfill the American Dream without resorting to the destruction of either persons or property" (Young, 2001: p. x).

spend billions of dollars to put God's children on their own two feet, right now" (King, 1967).

At that time, King's argument was still considered indisputable. We should keep in mind that halfway through the previous century, fight against poverty attracted both political and practical attention in the US and in Europe. It was an optimistic signal for the humankind that basic existential problems could be resolved (at least in the most developed countries). It was also a good illustration of the fact that intra-systemic changes are possible when the pressure from the bottom coincides with the sensitivity of the elites who then provide support from the top. Unless both of those conditions are fulfilled, the change can only be effected through alternative means, that is, outside the system (or by working against it). At the time of M. L. King, the American fight against poverty – which was an essential angle of the American Dream – was not questionable in the sense of bottom-up pressure or top-down support, as both conditions were fulfilled. It seemed that all that needed to be done to turn the American Dream into an export product was to convince Khrushchev. The discrepancies as to the details of the implementation manner did not seem fateful (yet).

The Turning Point

The answer to the question of how to eliminate poverty depends on the (combination of) related concepts¹⁸ and on the explanation, or rather theories of why poverty exists in the first place. In the absence of extra-systemic alternatives, the fate of poverty is dependent on the consensus about it. At the time when the American Dream gained ground, three main approaches to its elimination existed (Table 1).

With a view to enabling the poor classes to implement the American Dream and to extending the concept to the neglected areas, in 1964 a new law was passed (the Economic Opportunity Act) accompanied with relevant institutions (e.g. the Office for Economic Opportunity). Their function was a top-down coordination of the fight against poverty. Various employment programs for the poor class were put into practice, aiming to motivate, train and enable them to develop the skills necessary to compete effectively on the labor market. The "personal growth" camps, youth

18 There are four main concepts of poverty (on which the definitions of poverty also depend, as do measurements of poverty, the determination of the existential minimum, basic needs and relative deprivation) – absolute, relative, and subjective concepts, and social exclusion (Turner, 2006: pp. 462–464; Haralambos & Holborn, 1995: pp. 123–173; Haralambos & Heald, 1989: pp. 142–171; Outhwaite & Bottomore, 1998: pp. 502–504; Levitas, 2007; Dragoš, 2013).

centers, specialized organizations (e.g. Neighborhood Youth Corps) or-
ganizing temporary work etc. (Haralambos & Heald, 1989: pp. 167–171)
were aimed at the young people from poor quarters. The goal of those en-
deavors was to neutralize the culture of poverty as conceptualized and re-
searched by the anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1959) and to socialize the
poor classes with an aim to encourage them towards higher ambitions, in-
crease their motivation, initiative and working habits.

Table 1: Fighting poverty – how to win?

The main problem causing poverty	SOLUTION
a) sub/culture of poverty (Oscar Lewis, 1959)	reintegration of the poor as re-culturalization
b) material deprivation of the lower classes (Lee Rainwater, 1970)	More resources for the lower classes, but not at the expense of the higher classes (= a compro- mise as in the aphorism of the rising tide that lifts all boats)
c) stratification whose function is to make the rich richer at the expense of all others (Herbert J. Gans, 1968)	The restructuring of the whole system is a pre- condition for the redistribution of resources from the higher classes to the lower classes

As to the approaches to poverty shown in Table 1, variant a) pre-
vailed over variant b), while variant c) was never really put in practice.
Lewis’s concept of the culture of poverty became a political excuse for
the ideological turn in the fight against poverty. The social problem of
poverty began to be considered in the light of the personal characteris-
tics of poor people, which seemed logical, particularly in the American
culture. If poverty is dysfunctional due to the (sub)culture of the poor
people, which is essentially different from that of the majority, then
nothing can be changed by means of money but only through re-sociali-
zation, since the main problem is values and wrong upbringing. Accord-
ingly, all measures except direct financial support were preferred. Mon-
ey donations to the poor people became the “least popular strategy in
the fight against poverty in America” (Haralambos & Heald, 1989: p.
168).

In this predicament that originated in the 1960s, the government’s
method of fight against poverty was opposed by both the political right
and left wing. The right-wing criticized it on two counts. They main-
tained that the taxpayers money spent to fight poverty was wasted be-
cause the measures did not lead to the desired result; had that money
been re-directed to the market, it would have been spent in a much more
efficient and just way.¹⁹ Furthermore, the obvious fall in the propor-

19 A typical example of this regrettable argument is as follows: “The benefits go to people
who, for a host of reasons, are relatively unproductive, while the funds to pay for them

tion of poor people boasted by the government was not to be seen as its achievement, since it did not occur because of the government's measures but despite them. The critics were referring to the data showing that poverty began to decrease as early as 1959 (the peak of the economic cycle), that is, even before the government program to fight poverty was in place; had the government not intervened, the decrease in poverty would have been even faster. The left wing's criticism took the opposite path, although the arguments were similar. They objected that the measures taken were inadequate because they were insufficiently radical and therefore without effect, and on top of that they were wrong since the poor people reaped less benefit from them than those who were concerned with their implementation, i.e. the educated middle class experts and the growing market of humanitarian organizations and services which made profit from poverty (Bachmann, 2001: pp. 164–165). One of the most criticized approaches was the government's effort towards the working resocialization of the poor people.

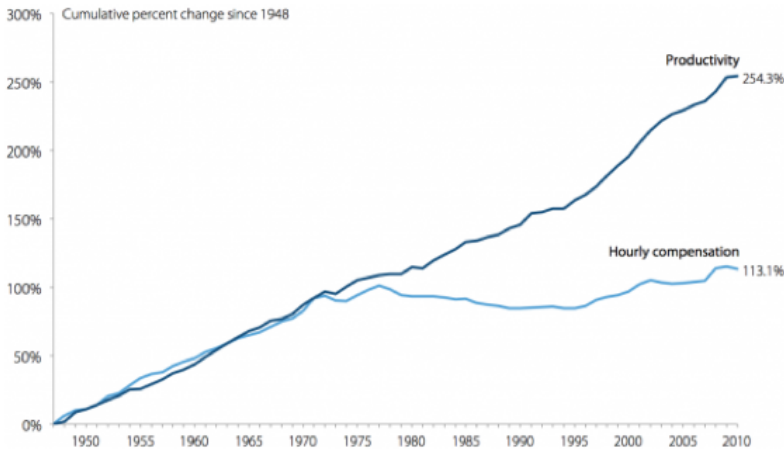
Some of the neediest poor such as unskilled people in rural pockets, rarely found it possible to enroll in job training, and at least two-thirds of the hard-core unemployed (ghetto blacks and early school drop-outs) failed to get stable work even if they completed courses (Patterson, 2003 p. 124)

The triangle of the American Dream to which Martin L. King referred (an individual – other people – the God) eventually began to disintegrate, since one of its angles – the social dimension – was weeded out, by both the left-wing and the right-wing. And what was the effect? In the US, inequality is on the rise, as is the percentage of the poor people and of the extremely rich. From that point on, the triangle of the American Dream, resting only on the two remaining angles (an individual – the God), went from bad to worse. The turning point was the decade of the 1970s, when the American Dream turned into a phantasm.

come, through taxation, from people who are relatively productive. /.../ Thus the welfare system tends to encourage unproductiveness and discourage productivity. /.../ Let officials design policy—that is, do away with policies—according to the classical Liberal principle that 'the force of law should never be used to benefit some people at the expense of others', not even if those benefiting are poor. Let care of the really needy be returned to individual responsibility—to genuine, private charity and efficient, private organizations" (Baetjer, 1984).

Table 2: The erosion of meritocracy as an important element of the American Dream (among other things)

Growth of real hourly compensation for production/nonsupervisory workers and productivity, 1948–2011



Note: Hourly compensation is of production/nonsupervisory workers in the private sector and productivity is of the total economy.

Source: Author's analysis of unpublished total economy data from Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Productivity and Costs program and Bureau of Economic Analysis, National Income and Product Accounts public data series

Table 2 clearly shows that from the beginning of the WWII until the mid-1970s, the increase in wages corresponded to the increase in productivity, while from that time on the two curves have been increasingly drifting apart (Akadjian, 2015). The discrepancy between the payment in financial and non-financial sectors reached its peak (in favor of the former) which is comparable only with the situation during the years preceding the great depression between the two wars (FCIR, 2011: p. 62). Despite all, the war of words over whether the economic growth or the welfare state/social state is more important for the reduction of poverty still continues, the same as in the 1960s. The dilemma is completely wrong, both empirically and logically. It is empirically wrong because in all developed and rich countries headed by the US, it has been accepted that inequality and the poverty rate do not depend any longer on the total wealth of the country or the state of its economy, but on other, mainly political factors (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Secondly, if we choose the wrong answer

trying to solve the wrong dilemma, prioritizing market laws over the state re-distribution, then we concede to the fact that the existence of the poorest classes and all others who are excluded from the market against their will completely depends on the economic boom/recession cycles. Even the believers who are convinced that the economic growth automatically reduces poverty must know by now that recession in fact increases and deepens poverty unless the state intervenes – and it is no longer a matter of politics or care for the poor people. One consequence is that even before the last economic crisis, meaning during the period when the economic indicators were at their highest, the number of poor Americans was growing as did the number of people without medical insurance (The Other Planet, 2004); “Today, the United States is by far the most unequal rich democracy in the world” (Akadjian, 2015). For that reason, the American Dream can no longer make happy even those who invented it. Despite the general economic growth, the Americans are ever unhappier (Sachs, 2017).²⁰ As Table 3 clearly shows, they have a good reason for that.

Table 3: Share of total household wealth growth 1983 – 2010
(based on Mishel et al., 2012: p. 380 ss)

US households by:		% of wealth growth 1983 - 2010	
quintiles	deciles centile		
1. quintile: the wealthiest 20 %	1. decile: The wealthiest 10 %	upper 1% ("top 1")	38.3
		2 – 5 %	35.9
		6 – 10 %	16.0
	2. decile: the second 10 % of the wealthiest		10.9
2. quintile: second 20 % of the wealthiest			4.3
3. quintile: median 20 %			- 1.5
4. quintile: last but the low- est 20 %			- 1.3
5. quintile: the lowest 20 % of the poor			- 2.6
Total			100

²⁰ “The central paradox of the modern American economy, as identified by Richard Easterlin (1964, 2016), is this: income per person has increased roughly three times since 1960, but measured happiness has not risen. The situation has gotten worse in recent years: per capita GDP is still rising, but happiness is now actually falling” (Sachs, 2017: p. 179).

In about a quarter of century – between 1983 and 2010 – the average wealth of American households increased by incredible 179,400 dollars (from 284,400 to 463,800 dollars), and that growth is the source of the welfare paradox. Why did the increase in wealth crush the American dream? The answer lies in the rise of inequality, or rather, in the question of who at all can afford the American dream. As Table 3 shows, during the period in question, 38.3 percent of the wealth growth in the US went to the family budgets of just 1 percent of the richest households. The next 4 percent of the richest, following that Top 1 Percent, accrued only 35.9 percent of the total growth during that same period. The accumulation of wealth in the hands of the richest tenth of households which appropriated as much as 90.2 percent of the total growth of wealth was possible because for the majority of the population, which belongs to the lower 60 percent, the situation seriously deteriorated (in 3. to 5. quintiles). The most seriously affected was the lowest and the most vulnerable fifth of the population (-2.6).

Even if the inequality of distribution is viewed against the more precise data relating to various areas of the quality of life, and even if it is relativized through comparison with other parts of the world, the result would be the same, which is obvious from the index compiled by Oxfam (2017). The US is a botched state comparable to India or Nigeria.²¹

If the American Dream is again to become a convincing notion for the majority of the US citizens, it should make people happy instead of frustrating them by being unrealizable. One of the main moves (among the five most urgent ones) which could increase social capital and consequently the satisfaction of US citizens, “should be a set of policies aiming at reducing income and wealth inequality” (Sachs, 2017: p. 183). It is disputable, however, whether those expectations are real given that the improvements should take place *within* the existing system. We should not forget that it was one of the main emphases of the American Dream as formulated in the mid-20th century. For several decades now, the problem of inequality, poverty and the scope of the welfare state is not the lack of information, empirical data or expertise. The main problem lies in the interests and in the functional role of poverty, without which the system (of neoliberal capitalism) would have to operate in an essentially different way. Since the benefits of poverty include the economic, status, political and cultural gains (Gans, 1971: 2012) – enjoyed by the system as a whole but not also the poor classes – it is hard to imagine how improve-

21 “Index finds that 112 of the 152 countries surveyed are doing less than half of what they could to tackle inequality. Countries such as India and Nigeria do very badly overall, and among rich countries, the USA does very badly” (Oxfam, 2017: pp. 1–2).

ments could be implemented within the existing system (without changing it). On the other hand, it is possible to imagine changes inside the system which, at the time when the situation turns for worse, would alter the system to such an extent that it would slip into a new one.²² This is an ugly *deja vu* of the events preceding the WWII (the slipping of the Weimar Republic into the Third Reich), and of the more recent events, e.g. Erdogan's Turkey or so called "Arabic spring" (Šterbenc, 2011; Žužek, 2015).

A View from the Periphery (Slovenia) on the American Dream

Slovenia is one of the youngest, smallest and least important countries.²³ It's an ex-socialist country that continues to be a typical peripheral country in the region (the Balkans, the Southern Europe) that is itself a conspicuously peripheral one in the European and global context in terms of geography, politics, the economy and all other senses. For this reason, the Slovenian view on the subject of this article may be educative, since it is typical of most developed countries,²⁴ which serve as a model for the underdeveloped countries. If the American Dream has been waning at its source, in the US itself, how does it look from the peripheral area of the periphery, i.e. Slovenia? Let's suppose that a bright star in a night skyscape is a metaphor for the American Dream – does its brightness fade proportionally to its distance, or perhaps the star has already died and it can be admired only from faraway places because its light has only now reached us?

22 "It is neo-Fascism since a significant part of the phenomenon consists of neo-liberal ideology that promotes the curbing of the social state. Fascism is present in the sense of control over the losers, who need to be punished, and the pan-optic state needs to be developed to exert control and punish every form of non-conformism and to closely monitor the doings of the unemployed, the Roma people, migrants and other minority groups.

This form of neo-Fascism is today most strongly present in Hungary, where the things are moving into a formidable direction. A similar trend can be observed in other countries and in various forms, for example, the Golden Dawn in Greece. Similar groups can be found in Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and even in Scandinavian countries. These are groups of criminals who will readily attack migrants and other minorities. The rhetoric of the American Tea Party is also ominous. There are so many crazy right-wing movements today that one can speak about an international trend." (Standing 2017).

23 Slovenia became a sovereign country in 1991, after the dissolution of the socialist Yugoslavia. It has two million people and occupies the territory of 20,273 square kilometers (0.21% of the US territory). It's a coastal Alpine country in the southern part of Europe, bordering on Austria, Italy, Hungary and Croatia..

24 Although Slovenia is the least influential country, it belongs in the group of the richest countries of the world (it is also an OECD member). Although the Slovenian GDP is almost half of the US's GDP, (on the average) the quality of life in Slovenia is better than that in the USA (see Table 4).

The opinion surveys in Slovenia show that the majority of the Slovenes tend to agree with the general assessment that everything is wrong in Slovenia,²⁵ but despite that they would not exchange the Slovenian situation for the American one.²⁶ The subjectivity of the public opinion is not in discord with the facts though. Despite all historical drawbacks experienced by the Slovenian ethnos, and despite all the tensions in the Balkan neighborhood, it is still considered that the quality of life in Slovenia is better than that in the US, especially in terms of the key criteria that define the American Dream. For example:

- In Slovenia, social inequality is noticeably below the average in OECD countries, and also below the European average; in this sense, Slovenia is comparable to the Scandinavian countries, while in the US inequality is high above the OECD average, while according to the European standards it is scandalous.
The same can be said about the percentage of the poor people in the total population as a whole and within individual categories (among children, the young people, grown-ups, older people) – Slovenia is far below the OECD average, and the US high above it.
- As to life expectancy, as late as 1970, Slovenia was below the OECD average and the US above it, while today the situation is opposite – life expectancy in Slovenia is 81.2 years, and in the US it is 78.8 years.
- The percentage of people who are very concerned about their jobs and are afraid that they may lose a job and not find another one is lower in Slovenia than in the US, despite the fact that the unemployment rate in Slovenia is higher than that in the US.
- The percentage of immigrants in Slovenia (assessment based on the birthplace criterion) with regard to the total population is higher than in the US.
- The percentage of prisoners and people who were at any time questioned or detained by the police or were judicially processed is extremely low in Slovenia, as opposed to the US where it is extremely high (all from OECD, 2016).

25 According to the latest happiness index, Slovenia occupies the scandalous 62nd place among the 155 world country (Helliwell, 2017: pp. 20–22). Just in passing, let me mention that the Netherlands occupies the very high, sixth position. The former politician, Mrs Louise van der Laan, who has been living in Slovenia for many years now, thus assessed the situation: "It is truly unbelievable. You live in a country that has everything and despite that you constantly complain." (Bulatović, 2017).

26 See the results of the Slovenian opinion survey, especially responses to the questions about the responsibility of the state for the quality of life (questions R5 to R8c in SJM, 2016: 23–32) and about the perception of socialism, capitalism and (in)equality (questions S24 to S65 in SJM, 2013: pp. 58–69).

The comparison of other indicators of the quality of life is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Quality of life in United States (US) and Slovenia (SI)²⁷

AREA	INDICATOR	US	SI	RATING
Economy	<i>GDP</i> (Gross domestic product per capita, PPP \$)	52,5	28,9	US is better
	<i>Taxes on income, profits and capital gains</i> (% of total tax revenue)	52,8	10,4	
	<i>Employment</i> (% of the population ages 15 years and older that is employed)	58,8	52,1	
Inequality	Gini coefficient	41,1	25,6	SI is better
	<i>Coefficient of human inequality</i> (= average inequality in three basic dimensions) ¹	12,9	5,8	
	<i>Inequality in life expectancy</i>	6,1	3,6	
	<i>Inequality in education</i>	5,6	2,6	
Education	<i>Population with at least some secondary education</i> (% ages 25 and older)	95,3	97,3	SI is better
	<i>Government expenditure on education</i> (% of GDP)	5,2	5,7	
	<i>Education quality</i> (% satisfied)	68	73	
Health care	<i>Mortality rate: infant</i> (per 1.000 live births)	5,6	2,1	SI is better
	<i>Mortality rate: under-five</i> (per 1000 live births)	6,5	2,6	
	<i>Physicians</i> (per 10.000 people)	24,5	25,2	
	<i>Public health expenditure</i> (% of GDP)	8,3	6,6	
	<i>Health care quality</i> (% satisfied)	77	80	

²⁷ Based on Human Development Report, 2016: pp. 198 ss.

* Basic dimensions of human development are: a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living; higher coefficient = greater inequality.

AREA	INDICATOR	US	SI	RATING
Individual well-being	Standard of living (% satisfied)	74	67	SI is better
	<i>Ideal job</i> (% answering yes)	65	65	
	<i>Feeling safe</i> (% answering yes)	73	84	
	<i>Freedom of choice: female</i> (% satisfied)	87	89	
	<i>Freedom of choice: male</i> (% satisfied)	86	88	
	<i>Renewable energy consumption</i> (% of total final energy consumption)	7,9	19,3	
	<i>Gender development index</i> (ratio of female to male HDI values)	0,993	1,003	
Community	<i>Community</i> (% answering good)	81	87	SI is better
	<i>Prison population</i> (per 100.000 people)	698	73	
	<i>Homicide rate</i> (per 100.000 people)	3,9	0,7	
	<i>Actions to preserve the environment</i> (% satisfied)	60	71	
Trust	<i>Confidence in judicial system</i> (% answering good)	59	24	US is better (except at the last in- dicator)
	<i>Trust in national government</i> (% answering yes)	35	20	
	<i>Actions to preserve the environment</i> (% satisfied)	60	71	

Why, then, should the Slovenes dream the American Dream rather than the Americans dreaming the Slovenian Dream (or at least the Canadian Dream, to take a spatially closer example)? There are at least three categories of reasons: historical, political-cultural and marketing reasons. The first two are related to the immense difference in social power possessed by Slovenia and the US in international relations. The third reason is quite banal – the American Dream is one of the globally most recognizable American export products, while there is nothing that could be branded the “Slovenian Dream.” The most serious attempt in this sense, aimed at establishing a Slovenian national ideology that would play the same role as the American Dream did in the US, is “the second republic.” It is a political phantasy of the most powerful opposition politician in Slo-

venia, Janez Janša (2014), which, luckily, continues to fail to gain support, since in its essence it is a crypto-Fascist project (Mihelj, 2011). In short, the American Dream, or rather what is left of it (neoliberalism) is present in Slovenia, and in various areas.²⁸ Below we will look into the most important one, which is the area of social policy.

The latest reform of the fundamental institutions of social protection in Slovenia²⁹ introduces the concept that has been spreading across Europe during the past decade under the name “new public management.” It is a new neo-liberal trick (Gould & Robert, 2013; Green-Pedersen, 2002), which is in Slovenia introduced by the ministry responsible for social policy.³⁰ The reform is implemented with the help of US experts as direct advisers. In this concept, the social work has been instrumentalized and turned into an extension of social policy which, in turn, has become an instrument in the hands of economic policy – or to be more precise, the part of economic policy concerned with the regulation of the labor market. And what is a consequence of that approach? Once social policy, which had already subjected social work (Dragoš & Leskošek, 2016) becomes subjected to wrong economic policy, social work is expected to accomplish things that can no longer be considered part of social work. Social workers are required to condition social benefits on specific prerequisites, effectively forcing their clients into accepting the worst forms of employment relations, when, for example, there is no suitable job on the labor market for the client in question, or the job is rejected by everyone because it is a junk job not providing even for a bare existence. In the new parlance, this approach is described as “empowering target groups to approach the labor market,” as can be seen from the reform documents published by the government (Predlog ZSV 2017:6). Social workers are now required to provide “motivation” for the user of social work in the sense that the user will be “compelled to search for better options” (ibid.: pp. 2–3). It is a toxic effect of the American Dream. In Slovenia, it is disseminated by the political elites, from top to bottom, despite the three important factors.

- Civil society strictly opposes it, because (in contrast to the political elites), it attaches high value to the social role of the state and decisively rejects the rise in inequality; this has been so throughout the past several decades, ever since the opinion polls in Slove-

28 For the area of economy and labor relations, see: Leskošek et al., 2013; Poglajen, 2017.

29 These are 62 centers for social work that were established as early as the 1960s; at that time, the network constituted the best system of social protection in all ex-socialist countries.

30 The Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Affairs.

nia were launched in the 1960s. In this sense, the Slovenian public is constantly, consistently, surprisingly and refreshingly resistant to the enforcement of neoliberalism (Dragoš, 2016).

- The “rationalization” of the social state, which is an euphemism for slashing the budget for the social sector, is not in any way connected with the material condition or capacity of Slovenia! As already pointed out, Slovenia is one of the richest states (OECD) which despite that fact even now – meaning before the neo-liberal reform – allocates one of the smallest share of the budget funds in Europe to the social protection of its citizens (relative to its GDP), while it is among the best in Europe according to the criterion of the utilization (effectiveness) of those funds (Dragoš & Leskošek, 2016: pp. 98–99). Furthermore, we should not neglect the fact that following the end of the latest economic crisis, for several years now the rate of economic growth in Slovenia is (again) one of the highest in Europe, while other macro-economic indicators are also improving.

Table 5: The share of the poor people in ex-socialist countries from 2005–2014 in percentage points (in brackets) and percentages (calculations by S. Dragoš based on Eurostat, 2016).

2005 to 2014:		Changing share of the poor people in (percentage points) and %	
EU27 (+0.7) = +4.2 %			
Euro19 (+1.6) = +10.3 %		Increase	Decrease
Extent of poverty	Large^d	Estonia (+3.5) = +19.1 %	Macedonia (-4.9) ^b = -18.1 %
		Bulgaria (+3.4) ^a = +18.5 %	Lithuania (-1.4) = -6.8 %
		Latvia (+1.8) = + 9.3 %	Croatia (-1.2) ^c = -5.8 %
		Serbia (+0.9) = +3.7 %	
		Romania (+0.8) = +3.3 %	
	Smaller^e	<i>Slovenia</i> (+2.3) = +18.9 %	Poland (-3.5) = -17.1 %
		Hungary (+1.5) = +11.1 %	Czech Republic (-0.7) = -6.7 %
			Slovakia (-0.7) = -5.3 %

a Data for 2006–2014.

b Data for 2010–2014.

c Data for 2010–2014.

d Poverty scope is higher than EU (27) average in 2014.

e Poverty scope is lower than EU (27) average in 2014.

- Despite the above-mentioned favorable indicators of the development stage of the social state in Slovenia (compared to the US), compared to other European countries Slovenia is in the lower group, while the growth of the share of the poor people is one of the highest compared to other ex-socialist countries (Table 5). All those facts

have not prevented the government from continuing with the reform plans.

Compared to other ex-socialist states, Slovenia's contribution to the social protection is indeed higher, but only on average which obscures comparisons. A more realistic picture of the social image of Slovenia compared to other ex-socialist states is revealed in Table 5. It shows the relation between the extent (share) of poverty in individual countries and the attitude of the state politics towards the issue. The countries are first divided into the group with a large extent of poverty and the one with a smaller extent of poverty – the criterion for grouping is the European average. At the same time, the countries are grouped according to their approach to poverty and the criterion of whether poverty increased or decreased during the last decade, that is, from the beginning of the last economic peak in 2005 to the end of the last crisis in 2014. The comparison of data shows that the second highest figure (5) in the lower left quadrant of the table is associated with Slovenia. It denotes the increase in poverty among the Slovenes (and especially Slovenian women). In the last decade it increased by as much as 18.9 percent. The only country that is a bit worse than Slovenia in this respect is Estonia, where the poverty increased by 0.2 percent more than in Slovenia, while in all other countries the increase in poverty was much slower (except in Bulgaria, where the rate of increase was the same as in Slovenia). Moreover, more than half of the ex-socialist countries listed in the right part of the table, managed to decrease the share of poor people, with Poland and the Czech Republic being the most successful. The alleviation of poverty in Poland transformed the country from the social loser to the winner. In 2005, the share of poor people in Poland was high above the European average (higher by 5 percentage points than the average), while in 2014, that share dropped below the European average. The Czech Republic is the most exemplary case on the European and global scale. Although poverty there dropped by “only” 6.7 percent, it is necessary to take into account that the Czech Republic originally had a very low poverty rate which was reduced even further, without ever risking the opposite upward trend characteristic of Slovenia. The Czech Republic had 10.4 percent of poor people in 2005, but as early as the following year, that share dropped below 10 percent, and the downward trend continued throughout the decade, including during the crisis years. In 2014, the Czech Republic had only 9.7 percent of poor people, which is the second lowest share of poor people in Europe. The lowest share (7.9%) has been recorded by Island (Eurostat 2016), the country that was even more severely affected by the economic crisis than Slovenia. In

short, the ex-socialist countries fare worst in this respect in Europe, and Slovenia is the worst among them (according to the criterion of the relative increase in poverty). This is particularly true in the housing sector, as is evident from Table 6.

Table 6: The share of population living in inadequate housing – the comparison of ex-socialist countries (and Greece, as the greatest European loser; Eurostat 2016a)

%	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
EU (27)	/	18.0	17.0	16.0	16.1	15.6	15.1	15.7	15.7	/
EU (18)	16.5	16.1	15.8	16.0	16.4	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	/
Greece	20.4	19.4	18.6	17.6	17.1	15.3	14.7	14.0	13.7	/
Bulgaria	30.7	14.8	30.4	23.9	15.4	14.9	13.8	12.9	13.2	12.9
Czech Republic	21.2	15.6	13.8	14.6	11.8	11.9	10.5	10.0	9.2	/
Estonia	23.7	21.6	17.1	20.2	18.8	19.2	19.4	17.5	15.9	/
Lithuania	32.4	26.5	25.7	25.9	24.7	26.0	28.2	27.7	27.5	24.4
Latvia	28.5	25.2	25.1	21.2	19.2	19.0	17.6	19.9	18.9	/
Hungary	27.0	19.2	30.8	14.5	24.2	22.1	24.7	26.7	26.9	25.4
Poland	41.4	37.5	22.8	17.6	15.6	11.5	10.5	10.1	9.2	/
Romania	/	29.5	24.3	22.0	19.1	18.0	15.4	15.0	12.7	/
Slovakia	6.6	6.1	9.1	6.6	5.8	7.8	8.8	7.5	7.0	/
Croatia	/	/	/	/	19.8	15.2	13.3	13.1	11.7	/
Slovenia	21.6	17.5	30.2	30.6	32.4	34.7	31.5	27.0	29.9	26.9
Macedonia	/	/	/	/	24.7	16.6	14.4	14.3	15.2	/
Serbia	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	21.6	26.2	23.4

The share of inadequate housing is the highest in Slovenia compared to all other ex-socialist countries – in 2014, 29.9 percent of the housing stock was unsuitable for living. Seven years earlier, seven countries had higher shares of inadequate housing than Slovenia, and according to that indicator Slovenia was exceptionally below the European average (by half percentage point), but as early as the following year – meaning even before the beginning of the last economic crisis – the share of inadequate housing rose by substantial 72 percent, exceeding the European average by approx. 13 percentage points. Once again it is necessary to mention the two record holders – Poland and the Czech Republic. During the selected period, the former reduced the percentage of inadequate housing from 41.4% to 9.2%. The Czech Republic, which in 2006 was comparable to Slovenia according to this criterion, eight years later had the share of adequate housing that was 20.7 percentage points lower than that in Slovenia.

Even Greece, the biggest European loser, managed to decrease the share below 14 percent. Slovenia, on the other hand, is shifting away in the

wrong direction even from the Greek standard, although it never even approached it, because it never invested efforts in that direction.

The main reason for the housing disaster is the American Dream. As soon as Slovenia gained independence, the entire housing stock in Slovenia, which during the socialist era was declared as “collective/social” property, was privatized. Since Slovenia succumbed to the propaganda from the late 1950s, when Nixon in Moscow was showing off to Khrushchev a typical worker’s apartment (described in the second part of this article), it was convinced that the solution to the housing problems of the population could be resolved solely by the market initiative. The latter is, naturally, impossible without the private property. With the re-categorization of the housing stock (the right to housing) during the era of transition into a tradeable good, Slovenian ended up with one of the highest share of privatized housing in Europe and the lowest share of rented and social housing. This situation is also responsible for the above-the-average financial dependence of children on their parents, the below-the-average birth rate and large dissatisfaction of the Slovenes over the housing situation in the country (Mandič, 1990; 2016).

Conclusion

The utopian elements of all ideologies – from socialist, Marxist, conservative and liberal to neo-liberal – are subject to the law of long-term ideological repercussions as formulated by K. Mannheim. The American dream originating in the mid-20th century, which is the second and the last great contribution of the US to the world peace, is not an exception. The race towards a higher quality of life instead of a larger number of nuclear bombs looked like a good promise for the prevalence of soft power politics in international relations, with the US as its initiator at the time. However, by neglecting one of the angles of the American dream “triangle” defined by Martin L. King (an individual – attitude towards others – the God), the triangle collapsed and the American dream turned into a neoliberal phantasm. The global impact of that extremely toxic product is directly proportional to the distance from the source. The American dream is more convincing in less developed countries than in countries in which it originated. The case of Slovenia, a typical peripheral country, clearly shows that the reason for this phenomenon cannot be reduced to material or cultural factors. Indeed, Slovenia’s peripheral position highlights the paradox of why the Slovenian elites are more susceptible to the American way of life than, for example, the American elites to the Slovenian way, although the quality of life in Slovenia is higher than that in the US. The comparison of Slovenia and other ex-socialist countries shows

that the appeal of the American dream is easier to explain with the help of voluntarism than determinism.³¹ The differences in the perception of the social state, inequality and poverty are not a result of culture, or of the economic development or economic cycles,³² but of the susceptibility of the political elites to the American dream in its residual (neo-liberal) form which was disseminated around the world in the past half of the century.

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31 Determinism is here used in the sense of factors which the country cannot (essentially) influence.

32 The case of Slovenia proves this. Of all socialist countries, it was the least authoritarian, the most economically developed, the most open and the most free country with the highest quality of life (according to all criteria). It should also be noted that the theoretical concept of the welfare state – the most important social invention of the 20th century – was developed in Slovenia at the same time as in the Scandinavian countries, which is to say, early enough, between the two wars (the author was Andrej Gosar, 1933, 1935; Dragoš, 2015).

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Manufacturing and Selling a Way of Life

A Historical Analysis of Modern Communication and New Forms of Conformism

Igor Bijuklić

Introduction

In the following article I will try to analyse and interpret a not well known and neglected change that occurred in the tradition of American liberalism, which had a profound impact in the formation of the United States as a modern nation in the 20th century. Although liberalism defined the Constitution and political order of the first modern republic, it underwent through a fundamental change in the so-called Progressive Era (1880-1920), when new ideas of scientism started to emerge in times of threatening social turmoil and fragile political institutions. The belief that science, especially as scientific techniques and social engineering could also take control of human affairs, conduct and thought and make them predictable, dominated public debates on crucial political and social issues like labour unrest, poverty and immigration that were shattering *the land of promise*. Moreover, the aforementioned idea became constitutive for the emerging American social sciences and for a number of entirely new disciplines like Scientific management (F.W. Taylor) or Behaviourism (J.B. Watson), which were promoted and accepted as a new technical answer for human affairs and prosperity. Their influence in the political realm of the 20th century was and still is without any doubt significant.

These technocratic ideas were not entirely new considering the vivid tradition of the American technical utopia (E. Bellamy) in 19th century, which echoed, unlike the later dystopian works, a celebration of the coming technical society. »American technical utopia does not speak either against the existing state of affairs nor does it warn against the fu-

ture dangers. On the contrary. This utopia speaks in line with the existing situation and push it to the extreme / ... / into even more technical progress that will bring to salvation the American society« (Turk, 2011: p. 222). Most important, the American technical utopia was widely acclaimed far beyond fictional literature. In the same way as it was written and offered, in the form of a technocratic reformistic program, it was also accepted and popularised. The true novelty of the technocratic movement lies in the fact that in a time of crisis they succeeded to inspire new organisational principles that aimed at organising a nation as a whole in an unprecedented manner and scale. Although explicitly antipolitical, these principles were generally justified and promoted as the salvation of the republic and its founding ideals. Apparently the American creed so eagerly oriented toward the future, toward the promise of prosperity by constantly ameliorating and advancing its own living conditions, was voiced loudly enough to demand a sacrifice even of its own founding ideals. For Croly, as one of the referential representatives of the era, the first task his fellow Americans are facing in front of keeping the Promise of prosperity alive is »to emancipate from their past« (Croly, 1909: p. 5).

The rupture in the tradition of American liberalism will represent our historical frame. In the first part of the following analysis, I will consider especially ideas and concepts that introduced communication as a new potential organizational tool and how their primary assumptions and purpose subverted the elementary understanding and relations of the political realm in order to enhance the actual state of affairs – to make an industrial society function with adequate smoothness. In the central part of this analysis, I will continue with focusing on selected Progressive discussions on efficiency that treated an emerging society of labourers and consumers in terms of unity and sameness as necessary conditions for social progress and how they planned to secure it in a systematical way. In the last part, I will try to show how the specific organisational principles of the social realm along with its antipolitical characteristic paved the way to a new form of perfected conformism and, consequently, how the basic conditions of human existence were altered in an unprecedented manner. The present attempt to analyse how conformism ceased to be something imposed solely from the outside, but rather unfolds as something that is reproduced in a mutual cooperation as a socially constitutive and functional behaviour, perhaps offers a possibility for a different perspective on the issue and helps to understand more thoroughly the most immediate components of the so-called American way or The American dream beyond their mythical character and meaning.

Communication as a Form of Social Ordering

During this period of crisis, another specific debate came in the forefront, which brought together all the prominent Progressive intellectuals of the era, from John Dewey, Charles H. Cooley, Robert Park to Walter Lippmann. The point at issue was unfolding around the question of how to find a new cohesive force that would unite a heterogeneous population of millions of immigrants. Especially considering that the traditional community's way of life and local town-meeting practises in the vanishing nation of villagers and farmers could not be practised nor be cohesive on the scale of the new continental nation, now interconnected and interdependent for the first time with various means of communication like railroads and telegraph. The disintegration of traditional community's way of life and the total absence of any other binding tradition, not to mention the threatening pre-revolutionary conditions, offered an opportunity for Progressive ideas to fulfil the gap and solve a potentially fundamental political question of organising a national state in the only way they could imagine. Namely, as a matter of applying new scientific techniques, as a task of social engineering that would elevate the state of human affairs and cultivate human nature with the same fruitful results as natural sciences achieved before them with dominating nature.

The primary attention in the discourse of social sciences was thus given to the notion of communication attributed with a fundamental socio-formative function, that of creating a substitutive bond, a certain unity of life, behaviour, thought, idea. Not communication as a primarily human capacity of speaking, dialog or exchange of opinions, but as an *instrumentum* of assimilation and psychological standardization, a controllable and manageable process, which »creates and maintains society« (Belman in Rogers, 1997: p. 196). The urge to invent and propagate adequate social forms of life in order to enable an industrial society to function effectively, be able to multiply and accelerate its own processes in order to achieve affluence, was rooted in the traditional creed that praised America as the land of prosperity and comprehended as its continuation by completely new means. Social sciences established communication as their concept mostly by recapitulating the old usage in modern natural sciences where the notion appeared in discussions on magnetism, more accurately, how distant bodies are affected or attracted at distance in a transmission of forces. Understanding and researching communication as a separated and available object with its own inherent laws that, once discovered, would make it disposable for steering social processes, like analogies about communication as a society's nervous system suggest, es-

established the conditions for an instrumental development of communication as control, command and planning that was not bound by political or communal human activity of speaking. This specific conceptual construction preceded and influenced the foundation of mass communication theory and research in the 30's, which was understandably preoccupied with measuring effects in order to find out how to ensure that a certain message would cause predictable effects in mass audience, while completely »lacking political self-consciousness« (Peters, 1986: p. 1).

The idea of communication as a disposable instrument for manufacturing social harmony, which was initiated as an engineering approach in the emerging social sciences, most elaborately in the Chicago school of sociology, was condemned to destroy what was determined to accomplish. Although they had in front an ideal of a restored community, they wanted to enlarge it on the national scale, beyond the face-to-face personal interaction or beyond the »primitive direct man-to-man democracy« (Lippmann, 1917: p. 142-143) seen as hostile to large organisations. These intentions found their ground and support also in the political discourse of the time, especially in Wilson's introduction to a series of progressive reforms »The New Freedom« (1913), where personal relations between men are recognized as belonging to the past while in the coming era of the »new social age« relations of men will be »largely with great impersonal concerns, with organisations, not with other individuals« (Wilson in Wallas, 1967: p. 3).

The classic liberal theory was conditioned by the political project of sustaining individuality. The political project of Progressive intellectuals was the reverse: to create community. /.../ The solidarity and intimacy of the small community was their model for the reconstruction of American life. What emerged from this project, was a new kind of liberalism: one that still saw the face-to-face community as the cradle for democracy and yet adapted to the complexity of modern conditions (Peters, 1986: p. 67).

Obviously enough, this project soon collided into an unresolvable contradiction. In the newly emerged perspective of the continental nation as one whole, forms of locally confined communal life, which indeed offered practical possibilities for public appearance and direct participation in political institutions, became something obsolete. Although the reconstruction of community was the »tenet of Progressive thought« (ibid.: p. 64), there was no turning back to tradition, which became mute in front of present problems. This new »Great community«, as Dewey (1927) calls it, had to be knitted together anew in an artificial way. Not

by enabling people's common activity in public affairs, but by creating a binding public experience transmitted via communication. Such a community, which would exist in transmission, had the potential to extend as far as the communications channels would stretch. Although Dewey, unlike Lippmann, was probably one of those most reserved toward the technocratic ideas of regimenting the public from expert minority, this is the main reason for exposing him as an example, he still confidently relied on the new governing potential of social sciences to solve the problems of men. In this approach, he was not far away from social engineering ideas and sociocracy. On the contrary, his ambitions just went in the opposite direction; to enable everybody as a social scientist, which would enable anyone to raise to the level of an »expert and governor of society« (Peters, 1989: p. 252). In fact, his notion of cohesive public experience is nothing else but the experience of social sciences, in his time already established in the public discourse as those professionally devoted to methodical discovery of social laws and capable of describing and predicting social reality. For this reason, they were promoted above all tradition, as a new public philosophy that would function as an organ of enlightenment, which is one of the fundamental turns in the Comtean positivism. Their enlightenment was in fact a paradigmatic closure with political consequences, namely, by turning their theorems and assumptions, for example, that people are by nature *animal laborans* or that productive society is the only possible form of common existence, into constitutive facts, determinative for the whole sphere of human affairs. The second function, which touches directly our topic, is even more explicit in its socio-formative intention, namely, to »invent values, ideas and practices - in short, intelligence - to enliven and unify the Great community« (Dewey, 1927: p. 181).

If Dewey was criticized for being the spokesman »for the crass industrialism in American life« (Peters, 1986: p. 115) it is because his project of bringing public and community back to life is more an apology to the actual state of affairs than a new perspective that would reopen a possibility for the public sphere where people could indeed practice their »capacity of being citizens« (Arendt, 2006: p. 245). Although Dewey was preoccupied, at least nominally, with the problems of democracy and its decaying conditions, his starting ground was not in the tradition of political thought, but in the emerging Progressive social theory and its expectations that communication would fulfil a new function of »providing the means for society to gain consciousness of itself as a totality, to create a grand unity of all its members« (Peters, 1986: p. 54). In one aspect, the idea of human organisation they were striving for was evidently entrenched in what they saw around them, a rising land of steam, steel and

electricity endlessly multiplying its productive force and at the same time already showing its self-destructing ruptures. Graham Wallas (1967) perhaps describes best how Progressive intellectuals saw the emerging new actuality that was offering them the chances to demonstrate the potential of their new methods of perfecting it. Wallas did not coin his term »The Great Society« just as a result of his analytical attempt to describe a technical society after the second industrial revolution, but also as a part of the following programme legitimised and derived from his analysis. His argument is clear, precisely because »The Great Society«¹ was intellectually a creation of engineers, specialists and specialised sciences dealing with forces of nature, therefore it could be brought under complete control, considering its remaining unsolved question of the human nature, only by those means that contributed most to its primary creation. He resorts to social psychology as the most promising scientific technique of organising the Great Society. Its promising applied knowledge could be made useful for steering those who had to be organised anew, »to forecast, and therefore to influence, the conduct of large numbers of human being organised in societies« (Wallas, 1967: p. 20). This typical turn in purpose toward serving the needs of an industrial society can be traced in many founding works of modern psychology of the time, where the founders voluntarily abandoned their purposes and put themselves as employees working under the mandate of society like in case of Watson (1930), Münsterberg (1913), Trotter (1919), Le Bon (1895), etc.

This excursion perhaps helps us to understand more thoroughly the content of criticism pointing at Dewey's reformist position that is in fact valid for all Progressive thinkers. Their primary preoccupation was not to restore community as a potential political entity known in the American revolutionary tradition. »The Great Society«, was the »fact of modern life« (Dewey, 1927: p. 127). Consequently, their primary concern was to meet the needs of a new age and equip an industrial society, in order to enhance its own processes, with a cohesive force that was the exact opposite of a political community, where people can gather as plural and different, expressing their uniqueness and exchange their perspectives on the common world. To be exact, the type of cohesion they had in mind far more resembled the primary group or the family community where relations are based on love, intimacy and cooperation, where acting and thinking as one is undoubtedly one of its basic constitutive characteristics. Perhaps Cooley and his work »The Process of Social Change« (1897) is the finest example how Progressive thinkers imagined human relations or, in other

1 This term with its implications was later reiterated as referential by both Dewey and Lipmann in their central discussions.

words, which form of organised coexistence and consequently way of life they assumed as principal that should embrace all others.

Only as the processes that prevail in the primary group become generalised to the social processes of the national whole could a nation be truly humane and democratic. The notion of communication is one part of the extension of the private realm to the public realm that is a hallmark of modern society and politics, and is a key part of an intellectual program to redesign public life on the model and rules of intimacy (Peters, 1986: p. 87)

His term »cooperative whole« (Cooley, 2004: p. 23) is describing this new form of organised coexistence, basically referring to a multitude of people primarily organised as an (industrial) work force, that can act simultaneously as a coordinated physical strength and »behave as they were one« (Arendt, 1996: p. 124). Arendt's (1996) concept of society² as a specific and historical form of human organisation, helps to explain the complete neglect and incapacity to recognize the private and the public as two opposing spheres of human existence. The historical loss of this distinction lies in the foundation of the social realm in modernity, precisely when the activities, organisational forms and relations typical for the *oikos* began to gain public character and established themselves in the public realm. The fundamental principles of social organisation are thus derived from activities subjected to necessities posed by the biological aspect of life itself, principally that of production and consumption. The despotical reign by which necessity rules in the form of socio-economic interest now levels every member of society without exception in a new egalitarian condition, for »society always demands that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest. Before the modern disintegration of the family, this common interest and single opinion was represented by the household head who ruled in accordance with it and prevented possible disunity among the family members« (ibid.: p. 42). If we consider once again the Progressive reformist tenet from the point discussed above, strictly speaking, they were not discussing an already existing society, but rather creating one on a numerically large scale using sophisticated technical means of communication intended to enlarge exactly those organisation-

2 Arendt formulated the concept mostly by reviving Aristotle's practical philosophy, which stands out specifically from the rest of the western tradition of political thought exactly because he treats in the most elaborate and explicit manner possible the difference between *polis* and *oikos* and at the same time, criticizing Plato's *Statesman*, warns against the old tendency and temptation, to equate these two strictly different kind of communities.

al principles and relations once typical for the household (*oikos*), like intimacy, harmony and cooperation, that, once transformed and amplified in the public sphere, compose the essence of the social.

Arendt's insightful analysis offers two conclusions. Firstly, the rise of the social and, on the other hand, social sciences coincide both historically and by their mutual interest. More precisely, society can reasonably count and rely on scientific findings and social laws that legitimise its doings and confirm its existence, while social sciences follow their vocation to develop a social engineering technique, which would help to organise and steer social processes in the same way as civil engineers before them succeeded in dominating nature relying on natural sciences. Secondly, since the despotic rule of the social interest manifests itself in imposing countless regulations, norms and rules of socially acceptable behaviour in order to integrate its members merely as functions of its own processes and consequently excluding »spontaneous action and outstanding achievement« (ibid.: p. 43), it appears that the phenomenon of conformism is in fact inherent and constitutive for social types of organised life.

From this point of view, the open distrust and hostility toward the traditional self-sufficient community way of life expressed by Progressive intellectuals every time they were trying to meet the needs of a new age becomes much clearer since they perceive it as an actual obstacle in the establishment of society as one organisational whole. This historical development resulted in the fact that »the realm of the social has finally, after several centuries of development, reach the point where it embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength« (ibid.). Considering Arendt's analysis that the rising of the social is accompanied with intrinsic measures of conformism in thought and behaviour, a different reading and understanding of the Progressive discourse becomes possible, beginning with the insight into the type of cohesive bond that on the one hand, was promising a revival of democracy and community, while on the other, its assumptions reveal the exact opposite.

The element that would be constitutive for Dewey's »Great Community« is not a plurality of thought, but the invented ideas, values and practices, which should be possessed by all, as they were commodities. What they must have in common possession is »like-mindedness as the sociologists say« (Dewey in Peters, 1986: p. 78). Cooley's articulation goes into the same direction as communication is »capable of fusing men together in a fluid whole« (Cooley in Peters, 1986: p. 56), where a propagation of movements, thought and action take place, entire populations can now »be included in one lively mental whole« (Cooley in Peters, 1986:

p. 65). The emerging capacities of fusing people together, although only as mere recipients, were not problematized as such, as long as the »one mental whole« would be organised according to principles of intimacy and compassion. The fact that communication can eliminate all distances and enhance the possibilities that vast populations could be »put in one room« and reached with one single voice, was recognised as an actual threat, especially considering the spread of revolutionary turmoil and subversive ideas, but at the same time offered an opportunity to address and exploit the new conditions in the right way, to ensure a stable and efficient organisational order on a large scale. Considering that the »search for order«³ was the final preoccupation in the Progressive era, it becomes evident why legitimisations⁴ of manipulation techniques, which followed as methods of ensuring social order in the 1920s, could be done publicly in such an explicit way and meet no serious critical resistance. On the contrary, they were greeted with great expectations. These foundations laid by Progressive social theory determined also the eventual meaning of mass communication, the dominant concept in the field of communication research from the 30s and 40s onward, namely, as a »process by which large populations come to think or feel the same thing at the same time. In other words, mass communication is a process by which a common consciousness is secured in a numerically large social order« (Peters, 1986: p. 48).

Unity as a Matter of Efficiency in a Society of Labourers and Consumers

Lippmann (1960) in his apologetic work »Public Opinion«, while legitimizing new instruments of manufacturing consent or one general will, reminds us once again of the decisively important context in which intentions toward perfecting the »socialisation of man« were not just a brief chapter in new engineering ambitions of social sciences, but became a central issue in the so-called building process of a modern nation, which demanded a redefinition in the meaning of politics, citizenship and government. The emerging theorems like that of »manufacturing of consent« or »crystallizing public opinion«, which pursue an organised uniformity of will and behaviour, suggest how consent and opinion became disregarded as something that comes out as a result from people's political activity and instead becomes perceived as something that can be produced and engineered. It is almost impossible to imagine a greater rupture in po-

3 See Wiebe (1967)

4 See Walter Lippmann »Public Opinion« (1922), Harold D. Lasswell »Propaganda Technique in World War I« (1927), Edward L. Bernays »Propaganda« (1928).

litical theory and practice. Moreover, it is quite revealing that all technocratic ideas of this type entering the political realm were self-decorated exploiting the word »democracy«: »The conscious and intelligent manipulation of organized habits and opinion of the masses is an important element in democratic society« (Bernays, 1928: p. 9). When activities and interests, characteristic of the private sphere, were established as a matter of public concern, traditional delimitations between realms of different human activities broke down. Once the specific human activities of work and production ceased to be restrained in the private sphere and started to determine the general relations between people, it became possible that the whole human organisation can be dealt with and subdued to a continuous technical perfectioning of its own process's efficiency. On the other, the centre of gravity in interpersonal relations profoundly shifted toward associations where people gathered solely with the purpose to satisfy the necessities of life. Gigantic collectives of labourers and jobholders became the type of association that occupied the public realm and transformed it by unleashing an unprecedented multiplication of productive forces into a boundless realm of sustaining life. »The sameness prevailing in a society resting on labour and consumption and expressed in its conformity is intimately connected with the somatic experience of labouring together, where the biological rhythm of labour unites the group of labourers to the point that each may feel that he is no longer an individual but actually one with all others« (Arendt, 1996: p. 227).

The rationale Lippmann (1960) is following in the background of his legitimisation of psychological techniques for mass manipulation⁵ is in fact the same as that advocated by Progressive social scientists in the case of social integration. For them the ever-increasing complexity in diversity of people automatically demands a greater unity and simplicity of common ideas⁶. The issue was not just how to invent a new cohesive force in conditions where immigrants⁷ started to compose large proportions of the population, but how to make them efficient primarily as a workforce and

5 The founding legitimisations of modern propaganda, public relations and other techniques of control in the 1920s were already leaning on psychological and sociological theories and discussions on how to create a harmonic, integrated and effective society. In fact they consciously shared the exact same purpose.

6 According to Aristotle (2010), demanding or striving for too much unity in the city-state would result that it would resemble more a big household than a state of plural and different citizens.

7 The third immigration wave called also the "New immigration wave" brought to the United States more than 23 million immigrants from 1880 to 1923. In this period immigrants from mostly southern and eastern Europe with religious, cultural and ethnical background different from the Anglo-Saxon protestant majority started to arrive for the first time in large numbers.

later, following this blueprint, in their entire social existence, as consumers, as soldiers, as voters, etc. Unity as a standardization of thought and behaviour was seen as *condition sine qua non* for methodical efficiency as promoted by the widely acclaimed Taylorist system⁸. The dominant perspective that still today declares how immigrants have shaped the greatness of the United States is almost completely neglecting the previous and far more decisive part of this process. Namely, how an industrial⁹ society imposed demands on mostly preindustrial immigrant populations in order to shape them as functional to fulfil the quest for national prosperity, which at that time already lost its liberal individual character and was elevated to a unitary national aspiration and purpose.

Bernays (1928) offers perhaps one of the most explicit insights into what kind of social existence or way of life should constitute the new order. In his introduction to modern propaganda and PR as techniques of intelligent men »by which they can fight for productive ends and help to bring order out of chaos« (Bernays, 1928: p. 159), he reveals a specific consent imposed to all of its members. »We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we never heard of. This is the logical way in which our democratic society is organised. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society« (ibid., 9). To summarize, an accomplished society that can finally explain its existence and purpose in terms of an efficiently running machine, which tends to perfect its functioning as a gigantic household according to organisational principles of love and harmony, must reasonably give up physical coercion. Instead, the modern society demands from every of its belonging »parts« to cooperate actively in their own adjustment, to participate in being molded, seduced, manipulated, etc.¹⁰ Also Lasswell dispels any doubt about this: »If the mass will be free of chains of iron, it must accept its chains of silver« (Lasswell, 1927: p. 222).

8 The ambitions of Taylor's scientific management went far beyond organising the human element in various forms of industrial production processes. Considering his methods, which were intended for every conceivable human activity and social function, he was clearly developing a general social practice based on an applicable science: »methods developed for dealing with natural laws and materials, were also used to deal with everything else, not just with humans, but social relations in general« (Marković, 2006, 44).

9 See King (2000)

10 Straightforwardness and sometimes harsh language common for Progressive thinkers is not a matter of simple impudence, but reveals in its depth the way in which they disclosed the world around them. As engineers of the social realm they do not see individuals that can independently develop their capacities, but raw material, psychological structures that can be molded and formed for the »right cause«.

In a society of dependent jobholders, the promised reward of a new era of national prosperity made this kind of requested cooperation seem acceptable, since it could, along the need to satisfy the necessities of life, easily turn out as one's own interest. Considering that the American dream became popularised as a national motto only in the late 1920's and since its content is comprised mostly of promises of upward mobility and economic advancement, it seems more appropriate to interpret it together with the missing component discussed above. Conditions where a new national prosperity was entrusted to a scientific design, engineer's plan and methodical efficiency, which were not focused on the material side of production, but on adjusting the human element to correspond to its necessities, became determinative also for the belief called the American dream. Since this belief did never belong to those already fulfilled, but to the masses of poor and miserable, it was never just a plain promise and hope, but most of all a demand. If the American dream took the form of an »explicit allegiance« (Cullen, 2003: p. 6), then it was an allegiance to accept an already designed serving way of life.

At this point we have reached a central turn in our analysis. Referring to Arendt's (1996) findings that the modern phenomenon of conformism appears to be inherent to society exactly because its specific organisational principles exclude, by rule, the human possibility of individual spontaneous action and independent judgement and replace them with predictable behaviour usually handled by external causes, we can continue by adding one crucial remark. Since behaviour replaced action, the process of conforming never unfolds only one-way, as if it was solely imposed on those supposed to be conformed. On the contrary, modern conformism apparently unfolds as a cooperation, where those supposed to be conformed participate in it and hand over themselves voluntarily to those who are supposed to conform them. The remaining crucial issue that needs to be clarified in the following paragraphs is how this whole process has become obscured on both sides up to the point where all of its constitutive features like order, obedience, servitude, passiveness have lost their explicit character and have become unrecognizable. This fatal opacity, when coercing and to be coerced are embedded in someone's way of life, enables conformism to reach an unprecedented level of totality and perfection.

While the improvement of living conditions by means of labour and production in the liberal tradition was still confined in the domain of every individual, in the Progressive era it became elevated to a national purpose, as a common endeavour defining the whole nation, which appeared to them as a gigantic collective. Consequently, Taylor's (1947) ground-breaking scientific management, which tries to end once and for

all the antagonism of interests in order to bring a harmonious cooperative collectivism into existence, is not addressing this or that industrial plant, but calling for a national efficiency, which means »the development of each man to his state of maximum efficiency« (Taylor, 1947: p. 9). Although Taylor offered a systemic solution to the question of national prosperity through maximizing the national efficiency in production and by application in all other social activities¹¹ and human relation in general, a paradigm that was fully embraced as a sovereign value soon after the America's entry in World war I, there was still an unsolved void left on the other side of the same process, on the side of consumption. At this point, as Ellul (1973) shows in his analysis, uniformity was recognized as an economic potential: »Mass production requires mass consumption, but there cannot be mass consumption without widespread identical views as to what the necessities of life are« (Ellul, 1973: p. 68). The demand to enhance a national efficiency in consumption coincide with the emerging field of scientific techniques like modern propaganda, advertising, PR etc., which took over this task. However, the need of organising and accelerating consumerism was not confined solely to commodities, but was extended to results of intellectual or educational activity like ideas, practices and finally to ways of life, which compose the true decisive dimension of the consumerist society, since disseminating a functional way of life that would correspond to society's needs became more fundamental than selling any kind of commodity. At the same time, consumption ceased to be a mere necessity of life. Many started to see consumption as a means of richer life in the broadest meaning. Thus the question was not only »how to consume, but how to desire to consume the "right" things, how to make consumption genuinely satisfying. Short-term gratification could be derived from the accumulation of material goods, but long-term happiness required the satisfaction of man's deeper longings – a sense of individual worth and dignity and, perhaps above all, a sense of spiritual harmony« (Qualter, 1973: p. 160).

Conformism Dissolves into Selling and Buying

If even the realm of highest human capacities can become a matter of consumption, as something that might belong to a person by purchasing it, then we are facing a new radical form of passivity. Results of human spiritual or cognitive capacities cease to reside and arise in someone's individual or communal activity. Per example an idea, opinion, practice or worldview can be equally produced and sold by specialists as if they were

11 See Taylor (1947) *The Principles of Scientific Management*: p. 5-8.

commodities and those who purchase them do not act differently than when they are looking around for the most promising and satisfying provider. The radicalness of this new kind of passivity lies in the fact that when the purchaser starts to rely entirely on the supplier, in order to be supplied with something that once resided in his most human capacities, he ceases to be genuinely active in any regard. Instead, his behaviour is a mere reaction to external causes and can easily become conditioned by a variety of stimulus. After some time, his passiveness makes him also incapable of any spontaneous activity and in the end he cannot recognize anymore the need to be. The consumerist society appears to be the latest stage in the development of the social realm, since the public sphere where people could actualise their political mode of being, appear in front of others and distinguish themselves with outstanding achievements, disappeared completely, while the only notion of "public space" that society was able to recognize and preserve was that of an exchange market.

The activities of manufacturing and consuming, selling and buying, traditionally valid for exchanging of goods and commodities, also started to determine the sphere where people could primarily exercise their capacity of speaking and to exchange, judge and form their own opinions in dialog and discussion with others. Bernays (1928) already demonstrates that there is absolutely no difference between a political idea and a commodity, both are products that can be arranged and sold while everything that is left to the *demos* is a customer's choice. But only in a mediated society, once amplified with patterns of mediated experience, when experience of the world became something made by someone else, produced, accustomed and delivered to every household, this kind of bargain and trade with ideas unfolds mostly one-way, impersonal, at distance, on the terrain of a dispersed and atomised mass audience. The mass-man of today is produced differently than in totalitarian strategies of manifest mass movements, he or she is self-produced, while consuming mass products at home, in solitude, as Anders (2014) showed in his insightful analysis. Conformism lost its decisive characteristics precisely because it unfolds as regular consumption, as a provision, as a satisfaction of everyday needs, as a leisure time amusement. And most important, it unfolds in our privacy, where we are most vulnerable.

Product suppliers, especially in the case of phantasm-products promoted by media, do not recognize that through their supply they make us deprived and incapable of experience, depriving us of freedom to formulate judgments, that they shape and dominate us. Rather, they think they're supplying us and that is all. And we consumers too are blind be-

cause we do not recognize that our suppliers make us deprived and incapable of experiencing. Rather, too, we just think that we are only being supplied /.../ each one always belongs at the same time to both groups, since within the conformist society there is nobody who in one way or another is not conformed somehow (Anders, 2012: p. 180, 185).

Let's consider once again what kind of relation is experienced and what happens with the capacity of human thought, judgement and action once it becomes merchandised. Per example what does it mean to sell someone the idea of going into war, and that someone should buy and own it. If we take into account as referential a comparison with business, trade exchange, commodity market etc., then selling and buying usually comprise a certain item that has already been made and finished by someone else and the customer receives and owns it exactly as such, as already finished in purpose and function by someone else. The item is also made in such a way and arranged in its appearance to appear more attractive to the costumer, to meet his needs or expectations or at least give such an impression. The customer's main activity is to choose among them. But whatever choice he makes, when it is bought and becomes someone's possession it starts to determine in one way or another the owner's conduct. The product starts to produce the owner himself. If an idea of going into war is sold as something already finished/decided and becomes adopted by those who bought it as their own, it is not because an individual was persuaded by arguments in a discussion, but because he sold his capacities to think and formulate his own judgements, renouncing in advance the steps necessary for partaking or making any kind of decision. When ideas like these are sold, bought and possessed on a massive scale, we face a new phenomenon of a »buying public«, which excludes itself completely with the conditions *to be* participating or *to be* actively present in shaping and judging common affairs.

These expressions resembling a merchandising process are not just a way of figurative speaking. Park's (1922) study of the immigrant press and its control already demonstrates that advertising became one of the most promising methods for the socialisation of men: »National advertising is the great Americanizer. /.../ American ideal, law, order, and prosperity, have not yet been sold to all of our immigrants. American products and standards of living have not yet been bought by the foreign born in America. How can they buy them when they know nothing about them« (Park, 1922: p. 450). Similarly, Creel (1920) summed up the activities of his wartime Committee on Public Information that persuaded the American public to support the decision for war and to actively engage in

the war effort as a »plain publicity, a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world's greatest adventure in advertising« (Creel, 1920: p. 4). When Bernays (1952) defines Public Relations as a method of adjusting dependants to the environment on which they depend, and assists his corporate clients in selling their interest as public, he starts with the question: »How can American business successfully sell its definition of the American way of life to the American people« (Bernays, 1952: p. 337). Quite expectedly that this kind of advertising could never be explicit as advertising, but is carried out disguised in many forms and perhaps perfected itself in the cultural industry.

Conclusion

What kind of life should become the American way of life, considering its nature of a collective imagination that can be intentionally produced in massive quantities rather than belong to individual spontaneity? An arranged one that is sold as a perfected worldview in which the path to someone's interests, fulfilment and self-realization are presented (promised) in such a way to coincide with perfect harmony with the commands and demands of a productive and consumerist society. Finally, this overlapping of interests ceases to be only imaginary in the exact moment when the imposed regulations of conduct are bought and turned into someone's way of life, when the social interest, as Arendt (1996) explains it, starts to appear as the only particular and common affair left. Regardless of whether or not the American dream is materialised or remains simply a dream that sustains hope, it unfolds at a certain cost, that of conforming someone's own existence into a household kind of serving life dedicated to boundless accumulation and acquisition. Modern forms of conforming and self-conforming do not take place due to any political ideology, but represent a perfected form of servitude to the impersonal despotical reign of the social interest that unfolds in front of us as if it was unquestionable, as if its processes were unstoppable.

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Perversion of the American Dream

Darko Štrajn

And when I got to America, I say it blew my mind.

Eric Burdon and the Animals (1968), *New York 1963 – America 1968*,

Every one of Us (Album)

Introduction

It seems that neoliberalism¹ perverted the American Dream in a manner, which could be compared to what relatively a bit gentler and kinder consumerism did to the Enlightenment in view of Adorno's and Horkheimer's critique. However, the result – a turn from the idea of freedom to the social reality of domination – is not only a consequence of the impact of some external forces. Throughout the “Dialectic”, the authors are signalling that the turn comes from within, what they clearly point out in the preface from 1944, saying that “the germ of regression” is contained in the enlightenment thinking. “The aporia which faced us in our work thus proved to be the first matter we had to investigate: the self-destruction of enlightenment. We have no doubt – and herein lies our *petitio principii* – that freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002: p. xvi). The thinking contained in any “formula” of the American Dream works through very similar logic. Finding a way to a new freedom in a society presupposes some re-thinking, or in Derrida's perspective: the deconstruction of the enlightenment itself. Likewise, the American Dream requests a deconstructive reformu-

1 What is and what is not neoliberalism is not an object of analysis in this paper. I think that after the combined knowledge and analysis of authors like Naomi Klein, Thomas Piketty, Paul Krugman, Michael Peters, and many others, the relevance of the notion for economic system, political order, culture, ideology and domination is clear enough. Therefore, I would agree that it is very important to take a look at neoliberalism in its broader effects. “/.../ in order to more fully grasp the effects of neoliberalism, the debate must take into account culture, understood here as a symbolic system articulated through systems of dispositions” (Hilger, 2013: p. 76).

lation – both in thoughts and in (political) praxis. The American dream and the enlightenment overlap in more than one sense and they certainly both include in their core an idea of the emancipative role of education.

American Dream is not just a Trope

When the topic of a discussion is a syntagm, which is actually a condensation of multiple meanings, it is difficult to conceive any final definition or clarification of it. The idea – assuming that it is not only an empty signifier – of the American Dream is undoubtedly such a syntagm. In Cyril Ghosh's words, "/.../ the American Dream is an 'essentially contested concept' that does not lend itself easily to definitions" (2013: p. 2). At the same time an abundance of "definitions" is extant. These different definitions permeate many discourses, from political rhetoric to literary narratives, and undoubtedly many casual daily conversations. Educational discourses make no exception among them. Therefore, in spite of the difficulties of defining the idea, it looks as if the meaning of the notion of the American Dream is generally known. Ghosh finds out that in spite of many references especially in the American political theory, there is a "scholarly vacuum" as far as the analysis of the concept is concerned. "Perhaps political theorists, like most people in the United States, assume the concept to be self-evident to the point that it requires, or even merits, no further clarification" (ibid.: p. 6). In probably the most exhaustive book on the meanings of the American Dream written so far, Ghosh persuasively demonstrates that the concept of the American Dream is not just a trope and he argues that the notion is an ideological term. "It is important to recognize that the American Dream is a quintessentially twentieth-century iteration of the vision of New England settlers" (ibid., p 7). The author then continues by emphasizing that "imbricated relationship between the ideas of work, virtue, and happiness" has been around since the start and that the American Dream is "an artefact of the twentieth century" (ibid.). Some verified historical facts clearly confirm this claim, considering that it is known who first uttered the word and when.² Throughout the book, Ghosh recalls and explains, but he also sometimes disputes, widely known facts and beliefs about the historical roots of the American Dream. Thus, he actually demonstrates that the analysis of the idea finally becomes an analysis of the American political culture. Individualism, equal opportu-

2 Ghosh and, indeed, many other authors as well as encyclopaedias and histories report that the historian and Pulitzer Prize winner, James Truslow Adams, is supposed to be the first, who in 1931 defined the term in a sense that everyone should be given the opportunity for attaining a rich life regardless of social class or circumstances of birth. Before him in the 19th Century, the popular writer Horatio Alger in his extensive fiction produced the myth of "rags-to-riches", but in fact he did not invent the idea of the American Dream.

nity, and success as “the constitutive elements of the Dream” (ibid.: p. 131) are basic concepts, which form an “elastic” ideology supporting different political ideals. Although it is difficult to add much to the Ghosh’s work in its own framework, I think that the mythology of American Dream could be viewed through the concept of “invented tradition”, which was itself invented in a seminal volume, edited by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). In view of the logic of invention of a tradition, Ghosh’s “iteration” appears additionally structured as each instance of the iteration contains at least a nuance of a projection from the present to the past. Hence, “the vision of New England settlers” is always re-contextualised and re-constructed in some new modifications of the American Dream; in a final analysis, it is almost impossible to determine exactly what the settlers actually had in their minds. The re-inventions of the American Dream represent a work of ideology in its “standard” connotation as a daily production of a set of beliefs, ideas, etc., which make part of the dominating (false) perceptions of reality. Still, I think that one seemingly not so important distinction has to be made, concerning the notion of ideology. The distinction is not about Ghosh’s “not comprehending” the concept of ideology, since he actually refers to the history of the word ideology and he recalls Terry Eagleton’s (1991) six “bundles of meaning of the word” (Ghosh, 2013: pp. 13 and 26). Although I do not have any problem with understanding what the author wants to say, I still find his taking of the American Dream as an ideology somewhat superficial. Throughout the text, Ghosh speaks about “the ideology of American Dream”, which in my view exaggerates the magnitude of different compositions of meanings, which travel from one discourse to the other. Hence, the American Dream cannot be itself a full-blown ideology. Of course, I do not dispute its relevance and applications in a vast number of ideological discourses. Nonetheless, it is important to insist that the concept or some metaphoric uses of it constitute many reflexive and intellectually mature texts, which not necessarily ascribe ideological meanings to it. The American dream, for instance, can play a hegemonic role in some emancipative discourses and doctrines, which is especially the case in the area of education.

Almost independently from the many differences between various concepts of ideology, the notion of it is linked to the idea of community as a form of “togetherness”. In a different indirect sense it is connected to the construction of identity. Each ideology, which succeeds to compose itself into a system of “self-evident” beliefs, which underpin a community, cannot rid itself of the individual. The concept of *idiorrhythm*, due to a discovery of Roland Barthes’ lectures from the 1970s, is opening a whole new field of thinking about the relationships between a society and indi-

viduals. “/.../ idiorrhythm is almost a pleonasm: the interstices, the fugitivity of the code, of the manner in which the individual inserts himself into the social (for natural) code” (Barthes, 2013: pp. 7–8). Barthes brings to light a specific interaction between seclusion and community, and thus on the basis of his analysis of literary texts, suggests the idea of idiorhythmic movement as constitutive for a formation of togetherness. The imaginary, which is essentially contained in the language form of references to the American Dream, is one version of addressing the problem of dealing with idiorrhythm. The individual is in a paradoxical way summoned into individualism by subjecting himself to hard work, which – even if it’s done in solitude – involves other individuals or a society. All these – and many other – conceptual “elements” amount to the idea of culture. The American Dream thus makes a significant part of a specificity of American culture. However, we may ask whether this means that the American Dream constitutes the imaginary world of Americans only or it (also) enters through cultural exchanges into phantasmatic universes of other cultures? Since the first migrants to an unknown world, which has been known under the name of America, were Europeans, who escaped poverty, religious persecutions, late feudal oppressions, ethnic violence, anti-Semitism etc., it might well be said that the American Dream has its roots in an essentially “European Dream”. Therefore, the American Dream could be interpreted as a continuation of ideas, which had their roots in those European peoples, whose emigrants built the foundations of American society. Whatever we can imagine about the processes of the formation of American culture – of course, including all the dark sides like the extermination of Indians and the slave trade with Africa – the idea of the American dream has been generated through multicultural interactions.

American Transcendentalism

The concept of culture by and large evokes the opuses of intellect in philosophy, arts and sciences. Culture in a broader sense is ultimately unimaginable without such components. What does this imply for the notion of American Dream? In view of this question the importance of the distinction – which I proposed through my reading of Ghosh’s book – concerning the role of ideology in regard to American Dream, becomes more visible. Sophisticated contributions in humanities and art are rarely identifiable with ideology in any sense, which is accepted by relevant scholars. Far from being just an object of illusions of everyday consciousness, the American Dream possess a body of highly articulate ideas and it is represented by many works of literature and art – emphatically including the

art of cinema. As all this is a too huge subject to be seriously tackled in the frame of this article, I shall only give a few hints in order to suggest to the reader the complexity of the American Dream as a historical agency and as an idea.

In terms of thinking about mobilising any imaginable emancipative potential in any given configuration of the American Dream, the recalling of the dimension of “high culture” is indispensable. Stanley Cavell pointed out that the intellectual link between European philosophy and the American thought exists, which he showed in his interpretation of Emerson and Thoreau and in quite a few of his books and lectures throughout his life’s work. For instance, in his philosophical autobiographical exercises, Cavell reminisces about his reading of Emerson by stating how correct he was to see that Descartes’s “I think therefore I am” has been incorporated in Emerson’s “Self-Reliance”. In Cavell’s view this was “the philosophical discovery of self-consciousness which is to give us our last chance to prove our existence” (1994: p. 32). Cavell clearly emphasised Emerson’s democratic thinking exactly in what is generally perceived as his perfectionism.

/.../ ‘the main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the up-building of a man’ – [and this] is not an elitist call to subject oneself to great individuals (to the ‘one or two men’ in a century, in a millennium’) but to the greatness, the thing Emerson calls by the ancient name of the genius, in each of us; it is the quest he calls ‘becoming what one is’ and, I think, ‘standing for humanity’ (2003: p. 184).

Cavell also founded the philosophy of film, which, arguably, became only in 21st century a fully developed scholarly field. One of his books on the subject of film is highly motivated by some elements of the American Dream, although he does not explicitly say so. However, the main motive in his identifying the Hollywood film genre of the “comedy of remarriage” is the pursuit of happiness, which is along with life and liberty the most emphasised notion, taken from the American Declaration of Independence. “It is not news for men to try, as Thoreau puts it, to walk in the direction of their dreams, to join the thoughts of day and night, of the public and the private, to pursue happiness” (Cavell, 1981: p. 65).

Hollywood mainstream cinema has not been recognised by the Critical Theory – including the above-cited *Dialectics of Enlightenment* – for its implicit social criticism. This happened thanks to Cavell’s work and to a new perspective, which was provided by Young German Cinema and especially Werner Fassbinder, who found inspiration for his own melodramatic films above all in Douglas Sirk’s films. In this particular

instance in a number of Fassbinder's films the American Dream was appropriated in "un-American" contexts, but it demonstrated many existential and emotional traits in any individual's pursuit of happiness. Another contributing factor in deciphering the social relevance of Hollywood melodrama was the feminist movement after the 1960s and the scholarship that went with it. Many films in the genre of melodrama exposed the obstacles for an individual on her way to happiness. In these films, it was very notable that the female characters were vigorously put into the centre of highly emotional narratives. Some of the most visible melodrama directors in the different periods of Hollywood cinema were "imported" from Europe (Josef von Sternberg, Fritz Lang, and especially Douglas Sirk) and they shed a distinct light on the features of the American Dream by confronting it with the social, economic and moral parameters of American realities in different periods. Hollywood also created a sub-genre of the drama of adolescents in the 1950s. The "paradigmatic" film in this sub-genre, Nicholas Ray's *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), revealed critically how American conservatism and patriarchy in conjunction with class distinctions create insurmountable impediments for a realisation of an individual's (American) Dream. Other films from the same period entered the world of education as, for a good example, Richard Brooks' *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), in which desperate social circumstances undermine the mission of education.

American cinema is undoubtedly strongly associated with the American Dream in many ways. It popularizes the notion, many films show a critical or even subversive attitude towards it, and some try to deconstruct the various phases of American history, in which "something went wrong". Hence, American cinema keeps the American Dream alive by mostly suggesting that its "original" purpose is threatened or perverted. In some of the sophisticated, but still surprisingly quite popular, films of David Lynch, the American Dream seems irretrievably lost and totally falsified by the (post)modern outcomes. One of his later films, *INLAND EMPIRE* (2006), exposes the wrecks of the American Dream in his visual poetics of loss and elusive meanings as well as in the characters of destructive and destructed individuals. Bert Cardullo sees in the bulk of Lynch's work a deconstruction of the aesthetic codes of American transcendentalism. Yet, it seems that Lynch does not attempt to totally renounce this distinctive tradition, since in his film *The Straight Story* (1999), the formula of American transcendentalism is fully employed.

For American transcendentalism, as sponsored by Ralph Waldo Emerson, emphasized the practice of self-trust and self-reliance at all times, at

the same time as it preached the importance of spiritual, or spiritually expansive living, by which it meant living close to nature – a nature where God's moral law could be intuited by divinely receptive man – rather than submitting to religious dogma (Cardullo, 2004: pp. 153–154).

Only a few hints about the more or less sophisticated part of American culture do not suffice for a claim that due to such foundation the American Dream still contains some emancipative potential. Beside one, indeed very important, current of philosophy and mainstream cinema, which I mentioned as good examples, many reflections of the American Dream in literature, painting, theatre and especially in the radical art of the 1960s etc., should be taken into account, which was actually done by several scholars and journalists many times over. I only tried to sketch some points, which should not be forgotten, especially when we are facing new political and cultural realities in the context of the transformations of American society, in which the neoliberal ideology keeps prevailing.

Social Criticism

A figure of public intellectual, comparable to the European and notably French culture and politics, never really took root in the USA. With some exceptions in a brief period of the 1960s students' rebellions, the American social criticism was mostly confined to academia. However, American social sciences did not ignore social realities in spite of the fact that many scientists (in the fields of economy, empirical sociology, behaviourist psychology and some applied studies) served the dominant ideology quite well. Many authors from the period after the 1960s until the present manifestly build their critical argument around various versions of the "equal opportunities" premise, according to which ".../ the American Dream is a vision of a life in which one's status at birth does not determine one's station in the rest of one's life. Instead, one's own ability, god-given talent, and hard work determine what kind of life one gets to live" (Ghosh, 2013: p. 28). Nevertheless, the criticism within many scholarly observations – from distinctly sociological to interdisciplinary ones – deepened the view upon American society by analysing a range of phenomena, which become visible only through a complex analysis based on psychoanalysis, or on anthropological insights, or on the feminist versions of the "gaze of the other".

The cultural criticism of Christopher Lasch, especially his seminal book *The Culture of Narcissism*, first published in 1979, decisively determined the learned social perceptions of American society in the aftermath of the 1960s revolution for the decades to come. A time of neoliber-

al theory (indeed ideology from its inception), which in 1973 already did its blood stained job in Chile after the coup against the Allende government, still lingered in the USA in a state of mainly just voicing the criticism against the "nanny state". Of course, in the area of economic and financial realities, structural moves were already on the go, along with the diverse promises of technological developments. Therefore, Lasch's depiction of the American society and culture could be defined in retrospect as a secular prophecy, based on a diagnosis of a change of the very form of society and of the social mechanism, which accommodate singular agencies including the category of individual. Lasch indicates a demise of the Protestant virtues, what can be interpreted as an inner transformation of the basic notions of the American Dream. "As the future becomes menacing and uncertain, only fools put off until tomorrow the fun they can have today. A profound shift in our sense of time has transformed work habits, values, and the definition of success. Self-preservation has replaced self-improvement as the goal of earthly existence" (Lasch, 1991: p. 53). The book reflects changes in the American form of subjectivity that becomes determined by the concept of "borderline personality". Lasch comes close to what appears some seven years earlier to Deleuze and Guattari (1983) as a dynamic between capitalism and schizophrenia, since in their words ".../schizophrenia is the product of the capitalist machine" (p. 33). Lasch's intention is more descriptive, nevertheless, he gives a concurring diagnosis. "In our time, the preschizophrenic, borderline, or personality disorders have attracted increasing attention, along with schizophrenia itself" (p. 41). Lasch's finding that the old ideal of a self-made man transformed into a narcissistic appearance and an empty performance, signals what became a perverted form of "success" under the rule of neoliberalism. American consumerism prepared the terrain for the advent of it. "The happy hooker stands in place of Horatio Alger as the prototype of personal success" (p. 53). Lasch's work, especially in view of later developments, marked quite a few turning points as far as the very sense of the American Dream is concerned. On the fundamental level, his diagnosis of the state of affairs, is crucial for understanding the operating of "desiring-machine". Lasch actually proved that the cult of celebrity massively structures and configures the concept and the idea of success.

In the whole chapter on education, Lasch finds it appropriate to ascertain that schools actually produce "new illiteracy". Contrary to the liberal ideal and expectations, the democratization of education ".../ has contributed to the decline of critical thought and the erosion of intellectual standards, forcing us to consider the possibility that mass education, as conservatives have argued all along, is intrinsically incompatible with

the maintenance of educational quality” (p. 125). In his later work Lasch himself became aware of the gist of his discoveries. In 1991 he deals with the contexts of transformations, which he exposed in his most influential book two decades earlier. “The condescension and contempt with which so many historians look back on nineteenth-century populism imply that the twentieth century has somehow learned how to reconcile freedom and equality with the wage system, modern finance, and the corporate organization of economic life. Nothing in the history of our times, however, justifies such complacency” (Lasch, 1991a: p. 225).

The key contradiction “hidden” within the American Dream is rooted in many diverse visions of individualism as a foundation of freedom. Michael Peters in retrospect confirms Lasch’s critical observations another two decades later at the time of financial crisis. Referring to James O’Connor and his analysis of corporate capitalism, Peters affirms that,

/.../ while capitalist accumulation created the basis for the development of modern ideologies of individualism – anti-statism, privatisation, autonomy, self-development, and laissez-faire – American individualism became self-contradictory and illusory as corporate capitalism developed. Centralised state activity and corporate capitalism replaced privacy and freedom from interference with passivity, dependence, the colonisation of individual wills (2011: p. 36).

Where is the American Dream in such circumstances? While it is clear that the spread of neoliberal ideology and the according organisation of economy in global dimensions blurs differences between the American and other collective dreams elsewhere, it is also evident that in its perverted meaning this dream, this point of identification, misperceived as an metaphoric construct, helps through media, advertising, political propaganda – most recently in the form of “fake news” – operating the “desiring-machine” in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s sense. It would take much more than this article to explain and understand the “dialectics” between the individual’s and the collective’s dreams. How much the dreams of an individual are inscribed in the shared dreaming and vice versa? Therefore, we can guess that the American Dream at its present state demonstrates that illusions and imaginary self-fulfilment produce the encoded “realities”, which make an individual a part of a collective. An individual then “feels” as an individual in the context, in which his individuality and freedom are absorbed. The Emersonian spirit of self-accomplishment is long ago gone from this metaphorical dreaming, which became “external” for individuals subsisting on imaginary reality. The latter has its roots in consumer society, which is by far the greatest contribution to the world history by the

USA. Chocolates, cigarettes, canned food and Coca-Cola, which American liberators benevolently distributed to the exhausted European population at the end of WW 2 – sometimes they even traded such goods for the emotional comfort from local girls – opened the epoch of the apprehending of the ‘American way of life’ elsewhere. The logic of the American Dream gradually penetrated the whole ‘free world’ and, likewise, it had its effects behind the Iron Curtain too.

Entanglement of Education in the Operating of the American Dream

Joel Spring (2003) contributed an excellent critical analysis as well as detailed history of the relationship between education and consumerism. In his analysis, he turns attention from pleasure to hard work as the core of consumerist ideology. I think that this shift in the criticism of consumerism, namely, the shift from attacking the mass hunt of “pleasure” to the exposing of enticement to hard work and restraint from pleasure, determines the logic of misperception included within the ideology of consumerism. Actually, the renouncing of profane enjoyment, which is offered by shopping and leisure in the consumerist model, succumbs to the very ideology that it condemns. Such a renouncement behaves as if a subject like a consumer not dependant on his own labour – or in a range of cases on the labour of others – exists. The celebrity cult and its structuring effects in social-psychological significance, indicated by Lasch, do not do away with the “need for hard labour”, as a primary imperative within the American Dream in order to reach success. American schools as seen through Spring’s lens were involved in co-creating consumerism in their curriculum – as, for instance, with the syllabus of home economics – as well as in their functioning within the consumerist context. “The emergence of the high school as a mass institution created a common experience for youth across the nation. This common experience inevitably created a common culture related to the high school experience” (Spring, 2003: p. 79). But in a final analysis “The American dream became a nightmare about working hard to attain the unattainable goal of consumer satisfaction” (ibid.: p. 61). However, in its perverted state under neoliberalism, the American Dream obviously still exerts and even amplifies its power over fantasies and expectations of ordinary Americans. In the era of globalisation the same pattern of “subtle” domination is spreading all over the world. The large sections of the diminishing middle and especially lower classes succumbed to the politics of rude spectacle and obvious fraud. This phenomenon is difficult to understand and/or interpret exactly due to its simplicity and transparency. After the presidential elections of 2016 in the USA,

it seems that for a wide range of American electorate the incorporation of the illusion of proof that the category of ultimate success exists, makes a great deal of citizens cling to the American Dream in spite of the obviousness that it became empty of all such content as equal opportunity, the pursuit of happiness and a substantial individual freedom.

The growth of the social inequality has gathered pace all the time from the incorporation of the neoliberal ideology in the polity. Education always happens to be an arena of social conflicts and/or consensus. The terms of the accessibility of quality education on all levels and especially on the level of higher education reflect the proportions and relations in other societal fields. As much as the analysis of discourses, imaginary realities, misperceptions etc. in the world of simulacra, as Gilles Deleuze described it already in 1968, is important, the problem of accessibility of knowledge and, consequently, social status, boils down to simple facts, data and numbers. Trends were quite readable already in 1994, when Russell Jacoby published his analysis of changes in higher education. The growing gap between generally rising tuition fees at different institutions of higher education pointed to a "restratification" across higher education. "The striking range of tuition – from \$20,000 at the elite private schools to several hundred dollars at community colleges – spells economic stratification" (Jacoby, 1994: p. 21). After two decades Jacoby's totals seem quite low compared to the prices of tuitions nowadays. These facts and data represent thoroughly changed styles, aims and senses of education. "Like the other simplicities, however, the leisure and cultural room necessary to listen is increasingly rare, if not obsolete; the space crumples under the barrage of money, pressing needs, and even violence and arms. We are all too busy, preoccupied, worried, and afraid" (ibid.: p. 196). Such observations by a long time university teacher with a sharp sense of reality can be taken as symptoms, which later on only became worse. The ruining of the old fashioned academic tranquillity comes together with the whole package of the neoliberal transformation, which means that ".../ neoliberal policies have overridden the idea that knowledge is a public good to promote the wholesale commercialisation of the production of knowledge". Such successes of the neoliberal permeation of education have consequences in other respects as well, since ".../ managerialist ideologies have impacted the administration of education" (Peters, 2012: p. 35). Anyway, the notion of education within the discourse of the American Dream loses exactly what was its democratic promise of the equal chances for the willing individuals. Although the above mentioned stratification of the educational opportunities within the bourgeois order always took place, there were periods, when the achievements of policies that stimulated so-called so-

cial mobility through education were significant. Of course, such achievements belong to the times of the welfare state, when the dream and reality seemed to approach each other. In retrospect, the social accomplishments of the USA in the first two decades after WW 2 seem even bigger than they did at the time when they took place.

Most of the presentations of the trajectories of developments since then give a striking picture of ever bigger inequalities, which, even after the demonstrable absurdities especially in the context of the so-called financial crisis, do not show any signs of culminating. The trajectories, presented as diagrams, charts, and graphs visualize what I tried to call the perversion of the American Dream through the influence of neoliberalism. Evoking and comparing different ages instigates poetic impressions and stimulates hybrid narratives even in the frame of social sciences. David Putnam's book *Our Kids* is a perfect case of this as a kind of sociological novel, which includes elements of autobiography and of a possible script for a documentary film. Starting from the description of his hometown Port Clinton in the 1950's Putnam offers an idea of the times when ".../ social class was not a major constraint on opportunity" (2015, Introduction³). Although there were differences between different regions of USA, Putnam authenticates by the authority of his scholarship and his good memory the claim that, "In fact, during this period the dinghies actually rose slightly faster than the yachts, as income for the top fifth grew about 2.5 percent annually, while for the bottom fifth the rise was about 3percent a year" (*ibid.*, Chapter 1). Putnam's confirmation of his claim in the form of narrating about life stories of his school friends sounds almost like a fairy tale about the old times, when dreams came true. However, the "fairy tale" rings much more true, when Putnam applies the same "method" to later periods as he writes about individuals, who happened to be borne after the deepened class differences changed prospects for individuals from different social backgrounds. These changes are reflected also by the changes in the appearance, positioning and the social composition of town quarters. Data and diagrams further confirm the loss of what was a culture of a social harmony. Putnam's "novel" should be praised for its clear depiction of the fate of the American Dream. The end of the American Dream is not the end of education, but it is the end of its role within it.

Conclusion

Putnam does not give any Leninist answer to the Leninist question, which he uses as the title of the last chapter of his book: "What is to be

3 Since the Putnam's book was available for me in the Kindle edition, which lacks pagination, I am indicating only chapters, from which the citations are taken.

Done?” As the American counterpart of Pierre Bourdieu, regarding the theory of social capital, Putnam envisions mostly long-term policies, which should produce a restructuring of the complex schemes of economic, educational and cultural contexts on micro-level. “As our cases illustrate, it took several decades for economic malaise to undermine family structures and community support; it took several decades for gaps in parenting and schooling to develop; and it will take decades more for the full impact of those divergent childhood influences to manifest themselves in adult lives” (ibid., Chapter 6). Politics is one among the dimensions in which Putnam’s discourse is visibly invested. He joined the ranks of those American social scientists who uttered loud warnings against possible dire consequences of the deepening economic gap and the consequences of politics, which ignore the environmental crisis and other challenges. “Inherited political inequality brings us uncomfortably close to the political regime against which the American Revolution was fought” (ibid.). Considering that his book was published before the unexpected political turn in the USA in 2016, the implementation of policies, which could help to reduce the effects of the erosion of equal opportunity, seems unlikely in any near future. Among many reasonable suggestions and some debatable ones, Putnam puts stress on two interconnected areas, which require a long-term change. One is democratic participation and the other is education. His projection resembles somewhat the British Labour’s Third Way programme, which contained a rather difficult-to-implement combination of policies. Contrary to the British gradual conservative repudiation of Blair’s government improvements inside the framework of the neoliberal system, the American conservative answer to the ideas of a reform to counter growing inequalities was quick and – as it seems in the first half year of Trump’s presidency – harsher than anybody could imagine. Therefore, Putnam’s suggestion of an improvement of schools sounds grimly utopian although it is totally non-confrontational against the system. “Many teachers in poor schools today are doing a heroic job, driven by idealism, but in a market economy the most obvious way to attract more and better teachers to such demanding work is to improve the conditions of their employment” (ibid.).

Still, many dispersed movements in the American education, which include “many teachers, who are doing a heroic job”, and who are allied to the theories of critical pedagogy, represent some hope for a re-interpretation, re-formulation and maybe even a re-invention of the American Dream. Eventually, these movements point towards resistance against neoliberalism.

Two subnarratives in the neoliberal citizenship story are that there is not enough public money to pay for social programs and that taxation to fund social programs is unacceptable. /.../ This narrative creates the economic citizen, obedient to the market and policies that create market-friendly environments where there were once spheres of publicness in the full sociocultural sense" (Schultz, 2013: p. 99).

Lynette Schultz further on calls for a new citizenship, which requires "/.../ the individual to be both the creator and the subject of the publicness of society" (ibid.: p. 106). As far as the American Dream is concerned, this means that we are back to the square one: the individual pursuing happiness! However, in the meantime there was women's liberation movement.

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The Morphological and Archetypal Traces in the American Dream: Exploring the Potential of the Narrative Structure and Symbolism

Maja Gutman

Identifying the Narrative Functions of the American Dream

However stable the generic concept of the American Dream might be, it would be lost in the outskirts of folk wisdom if it would not have been brought to public discourse by politicians and social engineers at the beginning of 20th century. The American Dream appears to be a conceptually well-defined belief that has reached the level of its full application, also known as 'the engineering of consent' (Bernays, 1955). According to Ghosh, more than two thirds of Americans in the time period 2005-2010 believed they have already lived the American Dream or that they were on a good path to achieving one (Ghosh, 2013: p. 2). The same author defines the American Dream with three constitutive elements: individualism, equal opportunity, and success (Ghosh, 2013: p. 33). This definition can be further expanded to the notion of a construct; it can be hypothesized that the American Dream, as a construct, imposes a particular version of prescribed reality, amplified and distributed by various media outlets which indorse specific cultural forms (being rhetorical, visual and most importantly, narrative) that subsequently circulate in the sphere of popular culture. The implementation of this construct and its relation to narrative theory and psychoanalytic findings is discussed in the last section of this paper. However, before any conclusions about the commercial potential of the American Dream can be reached, it is worth taking into account the narrative aspect of the examined concept.

As content-specific and persistently stable through time, the American Dream reflects a dominant system of beliefs. It can be argued that it has, ever since the rise of the industrial era, significantly shaped the ideology, and, consequently, the lifestyle of a western man. The ideal that nourishes the pursuit of happiness has surpassed the test of time, thus giving one a pertinent reason to understand it beyond the notion of a cultural construct. The next logical step in this examination would be to search for narrative elements that form the structure of the American Dream and identify any potential patterns that might occur. In this sense, the popular culture can be understood as an expressive platform, where the full ramification of the concept can be observed and analysed. In order to find parallels with basic plot components and pairs of function, the morphological analysis of the American Dream narrative will be implemented. This analysis will follow the narrative structure, as proposed by Propp in his seminal and widely discussed work *Morphology of the Folktale* (Propp, 1968). To be able to apply Propp's folktale morphology, 6 typical stories depicting the American Dream have been chosen; each story represents a well-known personality that made her success in the United States. All 6 personalities have been frequently depicted by lifestyle media as an epitome of the American Dream. The stories were captured from various online sources that matched the search query¹ and then cross-checked with more extensive biographical versions from other relevant sources.² In this fashion the maximum granularity of each biography was reached. All 6 stories were analysed according to Propp's enumeration of basic functions of the *dramatis personae* (Propp, 1968: p. 25).

Applications and Results

As already known, Propp defined 31 narrative units or components that form a narrative. These basic narrative features were manually extracted from biographies of well-known personalities, whose life, according to lifestyle media³, epitomizes the concept of the American Dream. The purpose of the analysis was to: (i) search for typical narrative features that oc-

1 Many queries were used, however, the simplest one yielded best results.

2 There was a pertinent reason for using Wikipedia. As an open and free online encyclopedia it represents the collective perceptions of the concepts, ideas and, in this case, biographies. Since biographies on Wikipedia are not limited to one author, they more authentically represent the collective work of participants (including biases and misconceptions). These contributions can be perceived as a modern collective storytelling, where biases are inevitable. However, the crucial milestones in a person's life were verified through other sources, such as official biographies. For a detailed list of biographies, see the References.

3 'Lifestyle media' is defined as media content on any type of media (traditional media, new media) promoting various versions of lifestyles that largely correspond to dominant neo-liberal system of beliefs.

cur in the media depiction of the American Dream; (ii) to identify typical elements, and (iii) to detect any particular order that they may follow. A detailed description of Propp's function of *dramatis personae* can be found in the Appendix. The results of the structural analysis from various online and offline sources can be seen in *Fig. 1*; the reader will be able to follow the major milestones (in each biography) that were identified in accordance with descriptions given by Propp. The narrative functions corresponding to major life events of each personality are specified in square brackets; the lower level orders of functions are specified in parentheses.

The first analysis begins with the personality of Oprah Winfrey. The multibillionaire talk show host and media proprietor was “born out of wedlock⁴” to teenage parents who separated [Absentation], leaving Oprah to be raised by her grandmother. Her childhood years were marked with running away and stealing [Violation of Interdiction], followed by hardships, like molestation and a strict upbringing. The period of her childhood can be attributed to the [First Function of the Donor, to D⁸ in particular and to D¹]⁵ – her biography states, that her grandmother would hit her with a stick when she did not do the household chores.⁶ In her early adulthood Oprah faced two deaths of her family members; her half-sister who died of drug addiction and her half-brother who died of AIDS-related causes. Both causes of death can be implicitly interpreted as a metaphor for [Villainy] or [Mediation — B⁴]. After years of abuse [The First Function of the Donor – D⁸], Oprah left home [The Hero's Reaction (E¹)], followed by [Departure]. A year after, she faced another death, this time of her premature born son [Mediation, the Connective Incident – Misfortune B¹]. The story about her misfortune was sold to the *National Enquirer* by one of her family members and Oprah later stated she felt betrayed [Delivery, a person betraying].⁷ Her gradual success in the television talk show genre marked a long and laborious career path; these parts of her biography match with the elements of [Struggle] and [Difficult Task]. In addition, the numerous anecdotes that formed her years of persistent work on various television networks across the United States correspond to the function of [Difficult Task – (Test of Endurance)].⁸ Her efforts and hard work [Solution] consequentially led her towards [Victory], which is evident in a series of achievements, such as “becoming the

4 <https://www.thestreet.com/story/11173382/3/10-people-living-the-american-dream.html>

5 Various forms of this function are specified in the Appendix.

6 See section Early life at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oprah_Winfrey

7 Ibid.

8 See Appendix: XXV. Difficult task.

first black female news anchor before the age of 20”, launching widely accepted talk shows, etc. Victories, that can be labelled as success, eventually brought her [Recognition]; this function is epitomized in her devoted fan base, various film and media awards, and titles, such as “the richest African American of the 20th century,” “one of the most influential people from 2004 to 2011 by *TIME*” and other recognitions like the honorary doctorate degrees from Duke and Harvard.¹⁰ These series of victories and recognitions were subsequently followed by [Transfiguration] – more precisely, the lower level order (T³ – The hero builds a marvellous palace) that matches entirely with the following biographical fact: “Winfrey currently lives on “The Promised Land”, her 42-acre (17 ha) estate with ocean and mountain views in Montecito, California.”¹¹

While Oprah’s story includes most of the functions proposed by Propp, their correlation is not sequential, meaning that the story does not follow the chronological – linear order. Some functions are randomly regrouped, while others follow the original Propp’s structure, for example: difficult childhood is followed by [Departure] and [Hero’s reaction] as these two functions are evidently causal and cannot be reversed. The same principle applies to other functions, for instance [Villainy] and [Departure] or [Mediation] and [Departure]; without the previous narrative elements that caused it, the Departure would naturally not be logical.

The following example of an American rapper and businessman Jay-Z exhibits a similar pattern. In the introduction of the book *Empire State of Mind: How Jay-Z Went From Street Corner To Corner Office*, the author outlines key features, universal to the concept of the American Dream:

The following pages will explain just how Jay Z propelled himself from the bleak streets of Brooklyn to the heights of the business world. In making that journey, he’s gone from peddling cocaine to running multi-million dollar companies, with worldwide stops and sold-out concerts along the way. Once Jay Z got going, it took him less than ten years to complete that voyage, thanks to innate talents honed through hustling. His story is the American dream in its purest form, a model for any entrepreneur looking to build a commercial empire.¹²

The rapper is presented to the reader as an archetype of a hero, a 21st century prototype of a self-made man, who paved his own way to fame

9 <http://www.businessinsider.com/rags-to-riches-story-of-oprah-winfrey-2015-5>

10 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oprah_Winfrey, see section Personal Wealth and Rankings.

11 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oprah_Winfrey, see section Personal Life.

12 Greenburg, O. Z., 2011: p. 1.

and fortune. The examination of significant biographical moments resonates with Propp's narrative functions: as a child, Jay-Z grew up without a father, who has abandoned the family [Absentation]. His teenage years were mainly marked with criminal offenses and poor performance at school [Interdiction], [Violation of Interdiction]. After the sudden loss of his close friend who died of murder [Villainy], the rapper experienced a tough and at the same time defining period [Meditation, The Connective Incident – Misfortune is announced B⁴)], followed by fan critics and battles with other rappers [Struggle]. During the time of personal confrontations – the death of his friend, harsh critics and the memories of a difficult upbringing [Struggle] – the rapper created a confessional album [Beginning Counteraction], [Difficult Task], which soon earned him platinum record selling status in the United States¹³ [Recognition]. The first part of his life story might appear causal, but it is worth pointing out that later events unfold in rather a circular than a linear fashion: for example, certain periods of success [Victory] and acknowledgments [Recognition] overlap the open battles with other artists from the entertainment industry; for example, in 2005 the rapper literally entitled one of his concert "I declare war;"¹⁴ this momentum can be attributed to the function of [Struggle (The hero and the villain join in direct combat)]. Nonetheless, the periods of commercial success [Victory] are intermingled with public disclosure episodes, in which the rapper was publicly exposing his opponents in his lyrics during the concert¹⁵ [Exposure]. As already noted, the acknowledgments [Recognition] do not necessarily follow the previous functions, for instance [Solution]. The pairs of functions can be detected, but are, from the perspective of linear storytelling, interrupted by other functions or even pairs of functions. This means that the biography does not include only one typical example pair of functions ([Struggle]/[Victory]), but several functions that might reoccur over the course of his life. For example, in 2013 the rapper received 9 Grammy Award nominations [Recognition], a year later (2014) he experienced the intermediate episode of allegations that can be attributed to [Unfounded Claims], and in 2016 he won a 2-year long battle [Struggle] against copyright infringement allegations in a lawsuit against his opponent¹⁶ [Victory]. In conclusion, one can follow the aspect of metaphorical transfiguration in the artist's lyrics and literal transfiguration in his socio-economic transition

13 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jay-Z#Early_life

14 Ibid.

15 <https://web.archive.org/web/20080812040043/http://www.mirror.co.uk/celebs/latest/2008/06/29/jay-z-s-glastonbury-wonderwall-dig-at-noel-gallagher-98487-20625795/>

16 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jay-Z#Early_life

from underground freestyle rapper to mainstream music mogul [Transfiguration]. This example points towards the notion of reoccurring functions that can be linked into causal chain, but do not rigorously follow the narrative structure, proposed by Propp. Functions, however, remain present in the story.

The next example is a life story of an American businessman and motivational speaker Chris Gardner. Like other characters, Chris also had a difficult childhood. Growing up without a father [Absentation] he was forced to rely on his mother, who spent most of her time in state penitentiaries [Absentation], so young Chris spent his childhood moving from one foster home to another [Departure].¹⁷ In his early adolescence, he began to experiment with drugs [Violation of Interdiction]. His early adulthood was marked with a series of low-paid jobs that caused an existential crisis of his own family [Lack, α^3]. At the time, Chris had a crucial encounter with a wealthy man, who told him he accumulated wealth through stock broking and that he can do the same [Mediation, the Connective incident – The hero is dispatched directly by promises]. Chris later claimed on many occasions, that this situation presented a turning point in his life – it was that encounter that influenced his decision to become a stockbroker [Beginning counteraction]. The decision was followed by concrete action; he attended unpaid training programs to be able to master his trading skills [The first function of the Donor]. Soon after he got accepted to the program, his supervisor lost his position, which affected his training. The lost opportunity left him with a substantial debt and he had to spend several days in prison. In addition, his girlfriend moved out of the apartment, taking their son with her [Absentation, β^3]. Chris applied to another unpaid program [Difficult task – Task of endurance]. Soon afterwards, his girlfriend left their son with Chris, who took the full custody of the child [Difficult task – *Test of strength, adroitness, fortitude*]. Earning below the level of survival, Chris was forced to choose between shelter and food for his son [Difficult task – Ordeal of choice]. He chose food, so he spent months leaving from shelter to shelter with his son, literally struggling with destitution [Struggle]. To get them both out of despair, he relied on optimism and hard work [Liquidation – K^6]. It is worth pointing out, that this part constitutes two core values of the American Dream: an enthusiasm and work ethic. Both values represented in this example can be aligned with the Proppian lower level order of the Liquidation function, namely the K^6], described as “The use of a magical agent overcomes poverty” (Propp, 1968: p. 54). In this particular case, the magical agent

17 <http://www.chrisgardnermedia.com/chris-gardner-biography.html>

works as a metaphor for enthusiasm and work ethics. The story of Chris Gardner concludes with the successful completion of the training program; the hero overcomes the poverty [Solution]. Shortly afterwards he started his own business which eventually brought him a multi-million dollar success [Victory]. Consequently, various awards and honours followed soon after [Recognition].¹⁸

The fourth case also demonstrates a significant number of narrative functions, attributed to the biography of Arnold Schwarzenegger. As a child, growing up in a small Austrian village, Arnold experienced emotional withdrawal from his father, who had a preference over his older son; this feature can be implicitly linked to emotional [Absentation]. Arnold's relationship with his father was particularly difficult as he experienced physical and emotional abuse [Villainy]. This strained relationship later marked all aspects of Arnold's life. He remembers his childhood as a traumatic and at the same time defining period:

My hair was pulled. I was hit with belts. So was the kid next door. It was just the way it was. Many of the children I've seen were broken by their parents, which was the German-Austrian mentality. They didn't want to create an individual. It was all about conforming. I was one who did not conform, and whose will could not be broken. Therefore, I became a rebel. Every time I got hit, and every time someone said, 'You can't do this,' I said, 'This is not going to be for much longer, because I'm going to move out of here. I want to be rich. I want to be somebody.'¹⁹

His father insisted for Arnold to become a police officer and his mother wanted him to study trade finance²⁰ [Interdiction, an inverted form], but Arnold had plans to become a bodybuilder [Violation of Interdiction]. At the age of 15 he visited the gym in Graz, where he met a famous Austrian bodybuilder who invited him to train at the gym; the experience turned out to be a defining moment in his life [Mediation, the Connective incident – The hero is dispatched directly by promises]. Soon after, Arnold left for Munich [Departure], where he won his first contest [Recognition]. Early acknowledgements encouraged him to train intensely in order to shape and build his body. Consequently, at the age of 15 he experienced the first body transformation [Transfiguration]. One of the judges at the competition offered to coach him, and Arnold moved to London, where he lived with the coach's family. He was soon invited to the United States [Spatial Transference between two Kingdoms –The Hero

18 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Gardner

19 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnold_Schwarzenegger

20 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnold_Schwarzenegger

flies through the air (G¹), to prove his abilities, but he lost his first competition. The States in this case represent the Donor [The First Function of the Donor – The Donor tests the Hero (D¹)], and the lost competition can be applied to [The Hero's Reaction – The hero withstands (or does not withstand) a test (E¹)]. Arnold then accepted another invitation to move to California, where he started training at the Gold's Gym – the body-building epicentre. This period of his life is marked with hard work at the gym, late night studies and painstaking adaptation to American culture. Once more, the United States in general and the Gold's Gym in particular, exemplify the Donor [The first Function of the Donor – (D¹)]. During that period, Arnold was attending numerous competitions [Difficult task – Test of endurance]. Work ethic, combined with the use of steroids [Provision or Receipt of a Magical Agent – The agent is eaten or drunk, (F⁷)] brought Arnold a much desired recognition. Embarking on an acting career, which was Arnold's primary goal, brought him another set of difficulties. Agents saw his body as disproportional and his accent as too thick. Arnold was at the very beginning of conquering the movie industry, which at that point, was his enemy [Struggle].²¹ He again used work ethics to overcome the obstacles and his first commercial success came with the movie *Conan the Barbarian* [Solution]. A series of other notable roles soon followed [Victory]. The use of steroids caused public disapproval in a form of a German doctor, who publicly predicted Arnold's early death [Unfounded Claims]. After a legal fight [Struggle] against the doctor, he won the lawsuit [Victory]. Championship wins and prominent film roles brought him numerous awards and honours [Recognition]. Not surprisingly, one can find Proppian functions in Schwarzenegger's political life as well. A detailed narrative analysis of his political career path would be beyond the scope of this paper, however, it is worth noting that it followed a similar pattern. As the results of the analysis suggest, the main motive behind Schwarzenegger's achievements can be detected in enthusiasm, will and work ethics. As already discussed, all three aspects form an ideological fabric of the American Dream.

The fifth exemplification of the American Dream is shown in a story about South-African actress Charlize Theron. Her teenage years were marked with traumatic event; as a 16-year old girl, Charlize witnessed the death of her father, being shot by her mother in a self-defense act [Mediation, the Connective Incident – Misfortune is announced (B⁺)]. The incident left Charlize in a single-parent family [Absentation]. With the help of her mother, Charlize soon won a contract with modeling agency [Beginning Counteraction], so she and her mother left South Africa

21 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnold_Schwarzenegger, see section Steroid use.

and moved to Milan [Departure]. The trip to New York followed soon afterwards [Spatial Transference between two Kingdoms – The Hero flies through the air (G')], where Charlize lived in her friend's windowless basement apartment. Living in the city was hard for Charlize who worked several low paid jobs to make her ends meet, while attending much desired ballet classes. Again, one can see how the city plays a role of the Donor and how the heroine gets interrogated and tested by it. Theron continued working in the city, until the knee injury abruptly ended her career path²² [The First Function of the Donor – The Donor tests the Hero (D')]. After realizing her ballet career was over, Theron became severely depressed [Hero's Reaction / The Hero does not withstand the test (E')]. She got visited by her mother, who flew from South Africa to help her. Her mother bought her a one-way ticket to Los Angeles [Provision or Receipt of a Magical Agent / Various characters place themselves at the disposal of the hero (F⁹)]. The turning point of her career occurred at the bank in Los Angeles, when the teller refused to cash the check sent to Charlize by her mother. Charlize went into an argument with the bank representative. This verbal fight episode with the bank (which represents a symbol of material existence) corresponds to the function of [Struggle]. The argument was witnessed by a talent agent standing behind her. Impressed by her character, he offered her several casting options. The function of an agent corresponds to [The First Function of the Donor]: Charlize had to prove her acting skills in the initial roles that were offered to her [The Hero's Reaction – The hero withstands (or does not withstand) a test (E')]. After proving herself in minor roles, Theron took her chance by starring in more demanding roles that required extreme preparations and body transformations²³ [The Difficult Task – Test of strength, adroitness, fortitude]. The key element of the American Dream can be seen in overcoming the Difficult task, more precisely in a lower level function of the strength and fortitude that characteristically corresponds to the value of hard work. Strategically, the efforts and hard work also correspond to the function of [Solution]. Convincing performance of difficult roles brought Theron financial success in the movie industry [Victory], followed by high ranking awards and nominations (Academy Award for Best Actress, Golden Globe Award) which can be attributed to the function of [Recognition] and overall transformation – from South-African traumatized teenage girl to Oscar-winning Hollywood actress [Transfiguration]. This example demonstrates a very solid structure of narrative functions that

22 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlize_Theron

23 http://www.etonline.com/news/164171_charlize_theron_on_shocking_film_transformations

resonate with the ideal of American Dream in the following linear way: a desire, an endless hope, a land of opportunities where hard work will be rewarded, and the possibility that desired goals can be achieved.

The final biography example in this section deals with the story of Madonna. As transparently illustrated in her pop-song, titled *American Dream*,²⁴ Madonna epitomizes the idea of an opulent life that was paved with hard work and humble beginnings. Only significant milestones from Madonna's rather full and complex biography will be extracted and compared with other portraits analysed so far. Madonna lost her mother when she was 5 years old [Absentation – An intensified form of absentation is represented by the death of parents]. Her relationship with her step-mother was strict and she recalls her father as authoritarian. At elementary school, she was known for her high grades and unconventional behaviour. Her deviations from standard behavioural norms can be attributed to the function of [Violation of Interdiction]. At the age of 20, Madonna dropped out of college and moved to New York to pursue a career in dance [Departure]. In New York she was forced to take different low-paying jobs to be able to compensate for her living costs and extra dance classes. At one late night returning home, she was sexually abused. She later described the traumatic experience as haunting²⁵ and disturbing.²⁶ This episode can be implicitly correlated with [The First Function of the Donor / The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc.], where the city of New York symbolizes the Donor. Despite the traumatic experience, Madonna continued with various attempts to get into the music business industry. She performed in various bands [The Hero's Reaction / The Hero withstands the Test]. Her first success soon followed (a series of music hits – [Victory]), but it came along with the public controversy, when *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines published nude photos from her early years [Delivery / Person Betraying]. This episode marked a turning point in Madonna's life as the public disclosure of her nudity symbolized the milestone that corresponds to the function of [Mediation, the Connective Incident]. As poignantly stated by her brother Christopher: "Any innocence she may have had is now gone. She has nothing to hide anymore /.../ from

24 Lyrics of the song *American Life*: https://play.google.com/music/preview/Tvmzuxuy35n2bxtpd26fu7zkkve?lyrics=1&utm_source=google&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=lyrics&pcampaignid=kp-lyrics. Prevailing themes of the *American Life* album were fortune, fame, modern society, American Dream, materialism, American politics, Hollywood.

25 "[t]he episode was a taste of my weakness, it showed me that I still could not save myself in spite of all the strong-girl show. I could never forget it." [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madonna_\(entertainer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madonna_(entertainer))

26 <http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/entertainment/music/madonna-biography-119458>

now on, she will forever invade [her privacy] herself.”²⁷ Madonna’s reaction followed in a form of tactical controversy [Beginning Counteraction] which was systematically exhibited throughout her work: the imagery of kissing African-American actor in the role of Jesus Christ, several nude appearances in public, releasing the book titled *Sex*, blending sex and religion, etc. Various conflicts with critics and media [Struggle] brought her additional commercial success in music and movie industry [Victory].²⁸ Her path has been marked with a series of tasks, which mostly consisted of learning and acquiring new skills in acting, singing, managing, playing instruments, filming, directing and writing – in order to keep her prime position in the entertainment industry. These activities correspond to the function of [Difficult Tasks / Test of strength, adroitness, fortitude / Test of endurance]. She has resolved all tasks by hard work and constant willingness to learn and improve [Solution], which reflected in her overall success (Best-selling female recording artist of all time and the wealthiest woman in the music business, Golden Globe for Best Actress, etc. [Recognition]).²⁹ Her constant reinvention [Transfiguration], evidently embedded in her styles, is utilized in her media strategy – a constant reinvention of her appearance *de facto* perpetuates and strengthens her 35-years long presence in the entertainment industry. The following paragraph summarizes the major elements in Madonna’s life story:

When the efforts of her more excitable chronicles, and especially those, who have focused on the sexual and the sensational, are added to her own early propaganda, it is easy to see how the myth of Madonna was born: the ghetto childhood; the schoolgirl rebel; the flirty young Lolita who became a sexual athlete; the mistreated Cinderella, complete with Wicked Stepmother; the misunderstood artist.³⁰

The central theme of Transformation, where one can achieve prosperity by continuously changing and adapting, carries in itself an aspect of activity. Compared to other biographies examined so far, Madonna’s story appears to be significantly more consistent with the concept of the American Dream: her biography explicitly suggest that determination, work ethics and irrepressible confidence formulate a cultural and material accomplishment.

27 <http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/entertainment/music/madonna-biography-119458>

28 <http://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/entertainment/madonna-milestones-over-the-years>

29 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madonna_\(entertainer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madonna_(entertainer))

30 Morton, A. 2001: Chapter 3 (unmarked pages): https://books.google.hr/books?id=S_Q_B1sk-hYC&printsec=frontcover&q=morton+madonna&hl=sl&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

It is worth pointing out that each biographical narrative utilizes Propp's elements in different order. Regardless of the sequential nature of each story, *the pattern can be seen*: as shown in *Fig. 1*, most of the given examples of American Dream stories include the following narrative functions (not necessarily in that order): [Absentation], [Violation of Interdiction], [Mediation, The Connective Incident], [Beginning Counteraction], [Departure], [The First Function of the Donor], [Struggle], [Victory], [Difficult Task], [Solution], [Recognition], and [Transfiguration]. Given the examples in this discussion, it can be concluded that 12 out of 31 functions *form a stable morphology of the American Dream narrative*. The typical American Dream story is largely built on 12 narrative elements, which can be described as "key narrative functions" that form a distinguishable pattern of the examined concept. All examined biographies have in common the following elements: (i) Absentation of at least one parent (abandonment, death); (ii) Violation of certain cultural norms or rules (not fulfilling other people's expectations, for example leaving college, or freeing oneself from parental oppressions); (iii) Meditation, i.e. turning points in a personality's life, the decisive moments (meeting the billionaire, witnessing murder, being molested ...); (iv) Reaction or counteraction that can be interpreted as initial activities taken in order to achieve the goal (creating an album, signing a contract with a modelling agency), (v) Departure (typically as leaving hometown); (vi) The First function of the Donor: in the context of the American Dream, it can be explicit (a person) or implicit (a city – in the case of Madonna or Charlize Theron, it is the city that represents a challenge or even a threat. Once the challenge is passed, both heroines enjoy their city's 'magical' advantages that helped them on their quest, like for example the benefits of agent network in Hollywood); (vii) Struggle is the central theme in the American Dream narrative. It is usually depicted as open combat with the media, agents, movie critics, institutions and other opponents (artists from the entertainment industry); (viii) Difficult task in the American Dream is mostly referred to the efforts to achieve goals: as already emphasized, this element represents the unavoidable hard work, sacrifice and risk taking. All examples show that Solution (ix) is presented as a *set of moral rules*, which guide characters in their most difficult moments. This moral principle is related to the idea of determination, optimism and *work ethics*. Victory (x) is depicted as an upward class mobility, home ownership (personal wealth, estate) and owning one's own business (record labels, own production, own cloth-line). Recognition (xi) is related to cultural capital and social acknowledgement (Oscars, Grammys), and (xii) Transformation is typically associated with physical and psychological conversion ("from no one to someone").

In conclusion, *6 distinctive paired functions* can be defined: as shown on the *Fig. 1*, the typical paired functions featured in American Dream stories are: (i) [Absentation] → [Violation of Interdiction]; (ii) [Mediation] → [Beginning Counteraction]; (iii) [Departure] → [First Function of the Donor]; (iv) [Struggle] → [Victory]; (v) [Difficult Task] → [Solution]; and (vi) [Victory] → [Recognition].

Fig. 1: The narrative functions and pairs of functions based on the biographical data of 6 well-known personalities. Each biography is represented by the media as a typical American Dream story.

	Oprah Winfrey	Jay-Z	Chris Gardner	Arnold Schwarzenegger	Charlize Theron	Madonna
1. ABSENTATION	*	*	*	*	*	*
2. INTERDICTION	*	*	*	*	*	*
3. VIOLATION of INTERDICTION	*	*	*	*	*	*
4. RECONNAISSANCE	*	*	*	*	*	*
5. DELIVERY	*	*	*	*	*	*
6. TRICKERY	*	*	*	*	*	*
7. COMPLICITY	*	*	*	*	*	*
8. VILLAINY or LACKING	*	*	*	*	*	*
9. MEDIATION, THE CONNECTIVE INCIDENT	*	*	*	*	*	*
10. BEGINNING COUNTERACTION	*	*	*	*	*	*
11. DEPARTURE	*	*	*	*	*	*
12. FIRST FUNCTION OF THE DONOR	*	*	*	*	*	*
13. HERO'S REACTION	*	*	*	*	*	*
14. PROVISION OR RECEIPT OF A MAGICAL AGENT	*	*	*	*	*	*
15. SPAT. TRANSFERENCE BTWN 2 KINGDOMS, GUIDANCE	*	*	*	*	*	*
16. STRUGGLE	*	*	*	*	*	*
17. BRANDING	*	*	*	*	*	*
18. VICTORY	*	*	*	*	*	*
19. LIQUIDATION	*	*	*	*	*	*
20. RETURN	*	*	*	*	*	*
21. PURSUIT	*	*	*	*	*	*
22. RESCUE	*	*	*	*	*	*
23. UNRECOGNIZED ARRIVAL	*	*	*	*	*	*
24. UNFOUNDED CLAIMS	*	*	*	*	*	*
25. DIFFICULT TASK	*	*	*	*	*	*
26. SOLUTION	*	*	*	*	*	*
27. RECOGNITION	*	*	*	*	*	*
28. EXPOSURE	*	*	*	*	*	*
29. TRANSFIGURATION	*	*	*	*	*	*
30. PUNISHMENT	*	*	*	*	*	*
31. WEDDING	*	*	*	*	*	*

The Archetypal Structure

Another meaningful layer is to be considered in addition to the narrative structure, which is forming a solid fabric of the American Dream, as already shown in the examples above. The distinct features of each character imply that the American Dream is additionally governed by an archetypal structure of a hero. Key findings of Jungian deep analytical psychology can be used here to understand the power of symbolism and to revive the theory of archetypes in contemporary cultural contexts.

First, it is worth noting that Jung struggled with a precise definition of an archetype. There has been a lot of conceptual confusion around this notion, mainly due to its elusive nature (Jung, 1995: p. 75); an arche-

type cannot be attributed solely to personalities (hero, villain, mentor, wizard, shapeshifter, etc.), but also to typical life situations (divorce, marriage, love triangles, etc.). For the purpose of this discussion it will be sufficient to say, that: (i) an archetype always carries a positive and negative aspect and is thus paradoxical in its nature; (ii) archetypes are part of the synthetic process, defined as a process of individuation (*ibid.*); (iii) an archetype is defined as an innate universal prototype of behaviour or pattern of thought.

Despite the conceptual difficulties, it is possible to discern an archetypal structure in the American Dream. The attempt to find parallels between a particular archetype – that is, of the hero – and the main characters in the American Dream narratives can serve as a modest case study that could eventually be extended to the empirical domain by using modern computational methods (see Implications and Discussion).

As already mentioned, the double (binary) aspect of an archetype has been widely discussed in analytical psychology; this binary opposition is commonly known to be present in symbols, archetypes and, broadly speaking, myths. From the perspective of a myth, an American Dream is no exemption and it is worth noting that between the opposites, the symbol always emerges. For example: [Victory] as the most frequent and important narrative function is naturally related to *dramatis personae* category, which, in the case of the American Dream, is represented by the character of a Hero.³¹ Looking from the perspective of archetypes and their intrinsic binary nature, the American dream represents two ‘parts’ of the same symbolic entity, where two distinct but mutually dependent oppositions can be identified: (i) the desire to achieve a certain goal; and (ii) the struggle (typically narrativised as an antagonistic and difficult path) that leads towards the satisfaction of that desire, known as the realization of the goal. In the context of psychoanalytic theory, this principle represents the mechanism of delayed gratification, which, to some extent, corresponds to the Freudian Pleasure and Reality Principle, and the structural model of the psyche, where the role of the Ego plays an important part in terms of balancing between the uncoordinated instinctual tendencies of the Id and morality-driven choices of the Superego (Freud, 2010). However, in the context of an archetype theory, the numinous Hero character always acts between binary oppositions, such as obstacles vs. goals. As Jung points out, the hero archetype has existed since the time of immemorial (Jung, 1988: p. 73). Jung writes: “The universal hero myth, for example, always refers to a powerful man or god-man who vanquishes evil

31 As part of the syntax it seems natural to conclude that Victory and Hero are causally connected.

in the form of dragons, serpents, monsters, demons, and so on, and who liberates his people from destruction and death” (Jung, 1988: p. 79). Jung argues that the myth of the hero is the most common myth in the world:

These hero myths vary enormously in detail, but the more closely one examines them the more one sees that structurally they are very similar. They have, that is to say, a universal pattern, even though they were developed by groups or individuals without any direct cultural contact with each other—by, for instance, tribes of Africans or North American Indians, or the Greeks, or the Incas of Peru. Over and over again one hears a tale describing a hero’s miraculous but humble birth, his early proof of superhuman strength, his rapid rise to prominence or power, his triumphant struggle with the forces of evil, his fallibility to the sin of pride (*kybris*), and his fall through betrayal or a “heroic” sacrifice that ends in his death.³²

In that respect, the main character of the American Dream is a modern reinvention of an eternal symbol that functions in a similar syntax as ancient gods of Greek or any other mythology: in its plain version, the hero always starts poor, works hard, struggles, and wins the battle. This motive then leads to a more complex and fine-grained narrative of the hero, who, faced with many life challenges, works their way through difficulties, – even at their own existential risk – experiences symbolic death and eventually becomes an accomplished personality.³³ At this point it is worth identifying the main conceptual difference between the American Dream hero and the Jungian hero. The difference lies mainly in the complexity of a hero character: the Jungian hero enters various evolutionary stages, from the primitive childish phase and the reckless adolescent phase, to the self-sacrifice stage and the final stage of individuation (Jung, 1988: p. 116), while the American Dream hero demonstrates a simpler version of that archetype: a typical American Dream hero starts as a reckless child, but rapidly becomes extroverted, with their struggles being predominantly external. Nevertheless, the symbolic process of growing up is reflected in the hero’s struggle, while their internal dilemmas are being reduced to “bad moments” or “moments of weakness” (see examples in Madonna’s biography). Deep psychological emphasis on the period of transition (from initiation to maturity) is not as granular as in Jungian de-

32 Jung, 1988: p. 110.

33 The Jungian term of ‘self-actualization’ is to be intentionally avoided, as it is multidimensional in its meaning. It needs to be emphasized that the ideal of the American Dream recognizes personal accomplishment strictly through financial maturity and materialistic achievements.

scriptions; the transition in the American dream narrative serves only as a necessary step to achieve the final (material) goal and *it is not an independent process in which the hero becomes free of binary constraints*. Therefore American Dream stories typically depict a goal-oriented behaviour that is instantaneously focused on material achievement and social recognition, while the Jungian hero archetype follows the quest for wholeness (path of individuation), which by default leads to the process of integrating the conscious and the unconscious. To summarize: the Jungian archetype of a hero is continuously characterized by the psyche's pursuit for individuation (self-actualization). At the final stage, the Jungian hero is able to transcend the oppositions, given by an archetype. The American Dream hero, on the other hand, shares the basic features with their mythological version, except for the final feature of transcendence. Consequently, their existence is confined to the realm of binary oppositions, and within that realm, they strive for material accomplishment and social recognition. Both merits mark their endeavours, which resonate with an ideal of opulence and upward social mobility.

To conclude this section: the pursuit of the goal and the desire behind it forms an intriguing and dynamic couple that usually manifests in a situation like Difficult task or Struggle. Regardless of the political aspects of the American Dream that he studies, Ghosh shares a similar observation: "In the ideology of the Dream, the difficulty of achieving something is precisely what makes it attractive. The whole point is, after all, to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds (Ghosh, 2013: p. 8).

Implications and Discussion

This paper examined Propp's syntagmatic approach in the context of a modern myth. The narrative functions were used as discrete categories, which did not necessarily follow the sequential order, as proposed by Propp. Regardless of the non-strict order of interrelations between the elements, the functions of the 6 biographical examples given in this paper were successfully identified and paired, as seen in *Fig. 1*. Moreover, the findings suggest that the abstract levels, extracted from each story, share the same and relatively fixed structure. This structure is defined by 12 functions that are present in all story examples. From 12 narrative functions, 6 distinctive function pairs that appear to be typical for the American Dream narrative, were identified.

The applications of narratives, based on the unconscious theory of desire and the pleasure principle (Freud, 2013) are a common practice in a mediated reality. Edward Bernays' seminal work on the manufacture of consent *The engineering of consent* (Bernays, 1955), demonstrates, how con-

cepts can be designed, implemented and collectively perceived with public relations techniques. It can be argued that a myth like the American Dream cannot exist independently; even if carefully structured, it needs to be imposed, forcibly promoted and advertised. It might be hypothesised that the American Dream surpassed the test of time for two reasons. Firstly, the narrative consists of a distinctive pattern – a solid structure that can be immediately recognized by the reader; secondly, the narrative has been vigorously maintained and promoted (produced, reproduced and distributed) by the pop culture industry.

Furthermore, in order for (any) myth to function, the internal mental structures of the human mind need to be aligned with the narrative structure of the myth. The narrative unconsciously draws human's attention and the external engineering of meanings and concepts is inevitably related to the deeper understanding of internal mental processes that follow the narrative as it unfolds. For instance, the core practice of effective public relations is based on the recognition of the hidden layers in storytelling that are closely related to the psychological processes of empathy and identification with the character. In addition to the narrative flow, the myths also possess a potent sentiment. For example, an emotional charge of the American Dream is based on a desire to become a better version of oneself. Desire – the basic emotion of every human being – also serves as a vehicle for external communication and commercialization: the regime of success and individual empowerment has been based on the notion of desire and it is safe to argue that all derivatives of the American Dreams are conditioned by it.

It is reasonable to conclude, that the American Dream has been actively and seamlessly implemented in public discourse; its omnipresence makes this ideal so persistent, that it has become nearly invisible. In other words, due to its permeability, it has become the way to perceive the world, without being aware of its existence, which is a trait, common to all cultural paradigms. However, the implications of the American Dream are manifold and can be identified and examined in various layers and forms of popular culture, such as the Hollywood movie industry,³⁴ celebrity culture industry, music industry, etc.

The concepts, along with the principled systems of understanding, change with a given culture. Here, it has been argued that the American Dream holds a relatively fixed narrative core that, along with the solid ar-

34 A short list of examples: *The Great Gatsby* (2013), *The Social Network* (2010), *Rocky* (1976), *An American Tail* (1986), *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006), *Mr. Smith goes to Washington* (1939), *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), *Wall Street* (1987), *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010), *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), *American Beauty* (1999).

chotypal formation, can sustain the test of time. However, the post-structural findings point to the fact that discursive formations – and the American Dream concept cannot be an exemption – do change their course over time. The discussion herein presents a modest attempt to understand the potential of the narrative and archetypal structure of this concept. Nevertheless, further research should take into account two important aspects that are beyond the scope of this paper: firstly, the postmodern forms of the American Dream deserve further attention. As already demonstrated, the persistence of the American Dream lies in its ability to adapt to various media formats and trends. In this regard, the American Dream could be examined as a discursive formation (in strictly Foucauldian terms), where one could observe the social history of the concept, including its post-modern condition: for example, what elements of the American Dream are preserved in non-narrative media formats, such as celebrity reality shows, where material wealth has been intensely displayed?³⁵ With this approach, the visual cues of the American Dream could be examined through the lens of temporal analysis in order to detect external, i.e. visual changes that might have occurred from its inception to recent adaptations in various media representations. Secondly, the narrative structure as seen in the small sample presented here, already demonstrates traces, typical of the American Dream concept. In order to confirm such a claim and avoid the inevitable bias of a small sample, an analysis should be extended to a considerably larger data-set of biographies. The extraction of morphologies has already been transferring from laborious manual task to automated task, mainly in the field of computational linguistics (Finlayson, 2016: p. 55). Modern computational tools and advancements in machine learning have proved to be methodologically efficient in detecting function levels, embedded in stories, although implicit functions remain problematic (Finlayson, 2016: p. 57). However, the constantly emerging stories reveal a repetitive pattern of basic narrative functions and together with the prospects and advancements of data analytics and machine learning, the field of various popular culture forms can be further examined. At the time of writing this paper, the empirical validation on a large scale data set, related to the topic of the American Dream, still remains underexplored. The possibilities of a computational examination could be extended to studying the basic core of the American Dream narrative and its variable external elements, such as time, settings, etc. By examining the American Dream with temporal analysis, one could: (i) follow the modifications of the concept; (ii) define its fixed structure that sustained it through time;

35 Here we refer to reality show formats, that depict (strictly in visual terms) the opulence of American Dream, but offer no grand-narratives for example *The Kardashians*.

and (iii) identify the variables of external elements. In a broader sense, a large scale data analysis, combined with in-depth knowledge of anthropology, linguistics and analytical psychology could provide researchers with a clear and comprehensive understanding of the concept and its dynamics over the course of time.

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Appendix

Functions of *dramatis personae* according to Propp.³⁶

I. Absentation

The person absenting himself can be a member of the older generation.

(β')

³⁶ Propp, V., 1968, 25–65.

An intensified form of absention is represented by the death of parents. (β^2)

Sometimes members of the younger generation absent themselves. (β^3)

II. Interdiction

A forbidding edict or command is passed upon the hero ('don't go there', 'don't do this'). The hero is warned against some action. (γ^1)

An inverted form of interdiction is represented by an order or a suggestion. (γ^2)

III. Violation of interdiction

The forms of violation correspond to the forms of interdiction. (δ) The villain enters the story.

Functions II and III form a *paired* element.

IV. Reconnaissance

The reconnaissance has the aim of finding out the location of children, or sometimes of precious objects, etc. (ϵ^1)

An inverted form of reconnaissance is evidenced when the intended victim questions the villain. (ϵ^2)

In separate instances one encounters forms of reconnaissance by means of other personages. (ϵ^3)

V. Delivery

The villain receives information about his victim:

The villain directly receives an answer to his question. (ζ^1)

An inverted or other form of information-gathering evokes a corresponding answer. (ζ^{2-3})

VI. Trickery

The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings.

The villain uses persuasion. (η^1)

The villain proceeds to act by the direct application of magical means. (η^2)

VII. Complicity

The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy:

The hero agrees to all of the villain's persuasions. (θ^1)

The hero mechanically reacts to the employment of magical or other means. (θ^2)

VIII. Villainy

The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family:

The villain abducts a person. (A^1)

The villain seizes or takes away a magical agent. (A^2)

The villain pillages or spoils the crops. (A^3)

The villain seizes the daylight. (A^4)

The villain plunders in other forms. (A^5)

- The villain causes bodily injury. (A⁶)
- The villain causes a sudden disappearance. (A⁷)
- The villain demands or entices his victim. (A⁸)
- The villain expels someone. (A⁹)
- The villain orders someone to be thrown into the sea. (A¹⁰)
- The villain casts a spell upon someone or something. (A¹¹)
- The villain effects a substitution. (A¹²)
- The villain orders a murder to be committed. (A¹³)
- The villain commits murder. (A¹⁴)
- The villain imprisons or detains someone. (A¹⁵)
- The villain threatens forced matrimony. (A¹⁶)
- The villain makes a threat of cannibalism. (A¹⁷)
- The villain torments at night. (A¹⁸)
- The villain declares war. (A¹⁹)

VIII A: Lack

One member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something:

- Lack of bride. (a¹)
- A magical agent is needed. (a²)
- Wondrous* objects are lacking (without magical power). (a³)
- A specific form /.../ is lacking. (a⁴)
- Rationalized forms /.../ are lacking. (a⁵)
- Various other forms. (a⁶)

IX. Mediation, the Connective incident

Misfortune or lack is made known; the hero is approached with a request or command; he is allowed to go or he is dispatched:

- A call for help is given, with the resultant dispatch. (B¹)
- The hero is dispatched directly. (B²)
- The hero is allowed to depart from home. (B³)
- Misfortune is announced. (B⁴)
- The banished hero is transported away from home. (B⁵)
- The hero condemned to death is secretly freed. (B⁵)
- A lament is sung. (B⁶)

X. Beginning counteraction

- The seeker agrees to or decides upon counteraction. (C)
- This moment is characteristic only of those tales in which the hero is a seeker. Banished, vanquished, bewitched, and substituted heroes demonstrate no volitional aspiration toward freedom, and in such cases this element is lacking.

XI. Departure

- The hero leaves home. (↑)

The sign (↑) designates the route of the hero, regardless of whether he is a seeker or not. In certain tales a spatial transference of the hero is absent.

XII. The first function of the donor

The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or helper:

The donor tests the hero (D¹)

The donor greets and interrogates the hero. (D²)

A dying or deceased person requests the rendering of a service. (D³)

A prisoner begs for his freedom. (D⁴)

The hero is approached with a request for mercy. (D⁵)

Disputants request a division of property. (D⁶)

Other requests. (D⁷)

A hostile creature attempts to destroy the hero. (D⁸)

A hostile creature engages the hero in combat. (D⁸)

The hero is shown a magical agent which is offered for exchange. (D¹⁰)

XIII. The hero's reaction

The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor. /.../ In the majority of instances, the reaction is either positive or negative.

The hero withstands (or does not withstand) a test. (E¹)

The hero answers (or does not answer) a greeting. (E²)

He renders (or does not render) a service to a dead person. (E³)

He frees a captive. (E⁴).

He shows mercy to a suppliant. (E⁵)

He completes an apportionment and reconciles the disputants. (E⁶)

The hero performs some other service. (E⁷)

The hero saves himself from an attempt on his life by employing the same tactics used by his adversary. (E⁸)

The hero vanquishes (or does not vanquish) his adversary. (E⁹)

The hero agrees to an exchange, but immediately employs the magic power of the object exchanged against the barterer. (E¹⁰)

XIV. Provision or receipt of a magical agent

The hero acquires the use of a magical agent:

The agent is directly transferred. (F¹)

The agent is pointed out. (F²)

The agent is prepared. (F³)

The agent is sold and purchased. (F⁴)

The agent falls into the hands of the hero by chance (is found by him). (F⁵)

The agent suddenly appears of its own accord. (F⁶)

The agent is eaten or drunk. (F⁷)

The agent is seized. (F⁸)

Various characters place themselves at the disposal of the hero. (F⁹)

XV. Spatial transference between two kingdoms, guidance

The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search:

The hero flies through the air. (G¹)

He travels on the ground or on water. (G²)

He is led. (G³)

The route is shown to him. (G⁴)

He makes use of stationary means of communication. (G⁵)

He follows bloody tracks. (G⁶)

XVI. Struggle

The hero and the villain join in direct combat.

This form needs to be distinguished from the struggle (fight) with a hostile donor. These two forms can be distinguished by their results. If the hero obtains an agent, for the purpose of further searching, as the result of an unfriendly encounter, this would be element D. If, on the other hand, the hero receives through victory the very object of his quest, we have situation H.

They fight in an open field. (H¹)

They engage in a competition. (H²)

They play cards. (H³)

XVII. Branding, marking

The hero is branded:

A brand is applied to the body. (J¹)

The hero receives a ring or a towel. (J²)

XVIII. Victory

The villain is defeated:

The villain is beaten in open combat. (I¹)

He is defeated in a contest. (I²)

He loses at cards. (I³)

He loses on being weighed. (I⁴)

He is killed without a preliminary fight. (I⁵)

He is banished directly. (I⁶)

XIX. Liquidation

The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated. /.../ the narrative reaches its peak in this function.

The object of a search is seized by the use of force or cleverness. (K¹)

The object of search is obtained by several personages at once, through a rapid interchange of their actions. (K²)

The object of search is obtained with the help of enticements. (K³)

The object of a quest is obtained as the direct result of preceding actions. (K⁴)

The object of search is obtained instantly through the use of a magical agent. (K⁵)

The use of a magical agent overcomes poverty. (K⁶)

The object of search is caught. (K⁷)

The spell on a person is broken. (K⁸)

A slain person is revived. (K⁹)

A captive is freed. (K¹⁰)

XX. Return

The hero returns. (↓)

XXI. Pursuit, chase

The hero is pursued:

The pursuer flies after the hero. (Pr¹)

He demands the guilty person. (Pr²)

He pursues the hero, rapidly transforming himself into various animals, etc. (Pr³)

Pursuers (dragons' wives, etc.) turn into alluring objects and place themselves in the path of the hero. (Pr⁴)

The pursuer tries to devour the hero. (Pr⁵)

The pursuer attempts to kill the hero. (Pr⁶)

He tries to gnaw through a tree in which the hero is taking refuge. (Pr⁷)

XXII. Rescue

Rescue of the hero from pursuit:

He is carried away through the air. (Rs¹)

The hero flees, placing obstacles in the path of his pursuer. (Rs²)

The hero, while in flight, changes into objects which make him unrecognizable. (Rs³)

The hero hides himself during his flight. (Rs⁴)

The hero is hidden by blacksmiths. (Rs⁵)

The hero saves himself while in flight by means of rapid transformations into animals, stones, etc. (Rs⁶)

He avoids the temptations of transformed she-dragons. (Rs⁷)

He does not allow himself to be devoured. (Rs⁸)

He is saved from an attempt on his life. (Rs⁹)

He jumps to another tree. (Rs¹⁰)

XXIII. Unrecognized arrival

The hero, unrecognized, arrives home or in another country. (o)

XXIV. Unfounded claims

A false hero presents unfounded claims. (L)

XXV. Difficult task

A difficult task is proposed to the hero. (M)

Ordeal by food and drink.

Ordeal by fire.

Riddle guessing and similar ordeals.

Ordeal of choice.

To kiss the princess in a window.

To jump up on top of the gates.

Test of strength, adroitness, fortitude.

Test of endurance.

Tasks of supply and manufacture.

Other tasks.

XXVI. Solution

The task is resolved. (N)

XXVII. Recognition

The hero is recognized (Q).

He is recognized by a mark, a brand (a wound, a star marking), or by a thing given to him (a ring, towel). In this case, recognition serves as a function corresponding to branding and marking. The hero is also recognized by his accomplishment of a difficult task (this is almost always preceded by an unrecognized arrival).

XXVIII. Exposure

The false hero or the villain is exposed. (Ex)

XXIX. Transfiguration

The hero is given a new appearance. (T)

A new appearance is directly effected by means of the magical action of a helper. (T¹)

The hero builds a marvellous palace. (T²)

The hero puts on new garments. (T³)

Rationalized and humorous forms. (T⁴)

XXX. Punishment

The villain is punished. (U)

XXXI. Wedding

The hero is married and ascends the throne. (W)

BOOK REVIEW

A Cautious and Cautionary Tale: Robert Putnam's *Our Kids*

Robert Putnam: *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. New York: Simon and Schuster 2015

First of all – this is a deeply depressing and disturbing work about the growing rates of poverty among American children in the last decades.¹ It points to the “linkage from economic hardship to stressed parenting to bad outcomes for kids”.² It is an important book that abounds with data that clearly prove that situation is deteriorating. I read it as a cautionary tale, an extremely cautionary tale for all of us – as it shows “the consequences of an economic system whose values grow increasingly toxic” (Eisenberg, 2015: p. 295). Not that I think that the historic and social situation is directly “translatable” to this part of the world, clearly not, but the book does invite certain associations, especially in the light of conservative restoration coupled with neoliberal pressures (see Apple, 1993) we are witnessing on a wider scale.

At the same time – being completely differently situated as the author of the book, as a female in a post-socialist central European context with strong affinities towards feminist rethinking of social phenomena – I have some serious issues about the book and its theses or interpretations. I certainly cannot agree entirely with one of the reviewers that this is an overly critical or extreme work (see Cayetano, 2016). The book is thoroughly researched and backed up by hard data from Putnam's own research and

1 Not to mention the moment in which this review is written – a particularly bad moment for America under the president in office. But the book was written before the current administration took over.

2 I am using Putnam's book as e-book, so I am unable to give page numbers.

numerous other studies, so I do not wish to sound completely negative in my judgement. But what I find extremely and sometimes even annoyingly problematic is the traditionalist (or should I say: conservative) methodological and conceptual framework.³ Perhaps it is merely “conventional” (as in “conventional indicators of social mobility”). Nevertheless, I think it is time to change our vocabularies or, at least, rethink them. I will – hopefully – elucidate this in the course of this review.

As the author himself has put it: the subject of the book is the transformation of America as a place that used to offer decent opportunities for all the kids to a place, half a century later, where the kids living on the “wrong” side of the street cannot imagine the future that awaits kids from the “right” side of the tracks. They are “being denied the promise of American Dream” – in contrast to the postwar prosperity (the author’s case study city is his native Port Clinton, Michigan, where, he claims, socioeconomic class was not so strong a barrier for kids of any race as it would become later, in the twenty-first century). Whereas his numerical proofs are not to be doubted as this is a book well-grounded in hard data, I do see problems on a “soft” side. It may be true that “the escalator that had carried most of the class of 1959 [Putnam’s own high school class] upward suddenly halted when our own children stepped on”, but what about the stories of those who are not the majority represented in these data? Furthermore – and I do apologize for my dogmatism here – I find it hard to accept that the native talent and fortitude were all it took, back then, to climb the social ladder.

Putnam explains his starting point:

The same 1950s boom that sustained Port Clinton’s egalitarian culture led the historian David Potter in his 1954 bestseller *People of Plenty* to claim that American affluence had allowed more equality of opportunity “than any previous society or previous era of history had ever witnessed.” Even if the popular belief in equality of opportunity was exaggerated, he added, it had led Americans to believe that if we can’t make it on our own, it’s our own fault. Equality in America, Potter wrote, had come to mean not equality of outcome, as in Europe, but “in a major sense, parity in competition”.

One barrier looms larger than it did, claims Putnam, and that are class origins which means that class-based opportunity gap among young people has widened in recent decades. He does acknowledge that gender and ra-

3 E.g.: “Marriage” is used throughout as a sort of state to be desired; it apparently does not stand for “stable relationships” of other kinds. (I am not referring here to analyses of divorce, cohabitation and multi-partner fertility that are present in the book.)

cial biases remain powerful, but they would, he claims, represent less burdensome obstacles today than they did in the 1950s. The basic narrative of Putnam's book is undeniably true – “the gap between rich and poor kids in America is getting more severe on all sorts of dimensions” (cf. Eisenberg, 2015: p. 292), but this reading of the situation could be – I think – backed up by mentioning other axes of marginalization as intersections are so powerful at marginalization that they need to be taken into account: not only merely summarizing the effects of one, two or three oppressive categories, but acknowledging how these categories can mutually strengthen or weaken each other (see e. g. Winker and Degele, 2011). Gender for example is not put out as a very defining determinant for upward mobility – which works in Putnam's conceptual framework where gender equality or feminist theoretizations of it are hardly on the radar.⁴

The book consists of two different perspectives. One is personal narratives or interviews with youngsters and their families from different backgrounds and geographical parts of the USA in order “to help reduce the perception gap”, which adds a different view, gives voice to the ones hereto unheard.⁵ The other is statistical data and its interpretation. Both focus on class divisions which translate, as it seems, to the division between parents with or without college education. The controversial part, for me at least, is the interpretative frame of the areas where inequality is most strongly visible. These are, as identified by the author: families and parenting styles,⁶ schooling and community support. Of course, these areas are not controversial *per se*, but become such after Putnam has put them in his interpretative frame in which he is reading statistical data at face value. Putnam claims, basing his claim on previous research, that “children

4 He, however, does acknowledge that feminist revolution transformed gender and marital norms. But I think that certain feminist insights and/or rethinkings simply cannot be ignored any more in the building of critical knowledge.

5 Personal narratives need to be carefully read, of which the author is aware, see e. g. the part about the “golden memories of yesteryear”, but perhaps not quite enough since such narratives are not reports, but my be veiled by childhood nostalgia (for what never was?). The description given by many of his 1959 class respondents “We were poor, but we didn't know it” could be debatable in this light.

6 One of them being (over-)involvement of parents or over-parenting (aka helicopter parents and Tiger Moms) in school work and affairs, which, in my opinion, only widens the class gap – the “entrance” of parents into schools and virtually all areas of school activities does not necessarily prove a good thing (as can be illustrated by the Slovenian case with its over-involvement of parents to the point of absurdity). One dimension of over-parenting approach in America is that “parents in upscale communities also demand a more academically rigorous curriculum”. It may be true that parental engagement with schools encourages (could encourage?) higher performance especially among socioeconomically disadvantaged youth, but are those parents able, have time etc. to intensively parent? Putnam is aware that questions about causality are not easy to answer.

who grow up without their biological father perform worse on the standardized tests, earn lower grades, and stay in school for fewer years, regardless of race and class. They are also more likely to demonstrate behavioural problems ...” The power (and danger) of such statements – and I do not by any means opt here for a post-statistical society! – lies in generalizations and in turning a blind eye to individual stories, not to mention essentialist readings. This is of course not a suggestion to mothers to persist in abusive relationships, but it treads on a very slippery terrain which is legitimized by the very conventional conceptual framework mentioned before. It is of course not solely the difficulty of the book, but also of the disciplines the author is indebted to.

Similarly, as he claims, “The collapse of the traditional family hit the black community earliest and hardest, in part because that community was already clustered at the bottom of the economic hierarchy”. One can, surely, understand the point that social changes brought some very difficult consequences – but do we claim here that traditional family is something that must be preserved by all means and is thoroughly and in every case a good affair? Again, the trouble is in the interpretation and essentialist understandings.

Furthermore, while I can of course agree that “stable, two-parent loving families” are good for children (“two-parent”, it is not stated but it can be safely assumed, means heterosexual relations) and that stability in this regard is a good thing⁷ and that poor single moms can have on general even harder times than moms in a relations, but what about moms with abusive husbands, not to mention black single moms etc.? (And how exactly loving families and happy marriages Putnam is talking about should be defined?) Should not there be real and realistic initiatives to help single moms out instead of discussing the possibility that welfare benefits gave poor single moms an incentive to have kids. Putnam refers to “some careful studies” that have confirmed a modest, statistically significant effect of that sort. Should Americans rather not think along the lines of introducing sexual education in schools (it is a rhetorical question, I am aware of that, even more at the present moment) since this is a good measure to help prevent teen pregnancies, and make contraception more readily available? More or less individual actions (such as “Avoid the stork”) towards “changing the norm from childbearing by default to childbearing by design” may not have as much effect as would a national initiative.⁸

7 To increase marriage rates, Putnam proposes seeking help from religious communities that can influence their members without involving government (!).

8 For a current trends in this regard, see for example S. Singh (2017) at <http://feministing.com/2017/06/21/missouri-votes-to-let-employers-fire-people-who-use-birth-control/> for

Similarly – I have to bring this up since it is presented as a powerful predictor of how children will fare as they develop – there are family dinners. Putnam quotes his source that youths who ate dinner with their parents at least five times a week, “did better across a range of outcomes: they were less likely to smoke, to drink, to have used marijuana, to have been in a serious fight, to have had sex . . . or to have been suspended from school, and they had higher grade point averages and were more likely to say they planned to go on to college”. This is again an example of troubles with the interpretation. Besides, it might give the impression that this is causal, not perhaps correlational. I find such categories particularly upsetting – family meal does not have to be a pleasant event – the line of thought should be developed further as to what these meals actually stand for (caring parents, caregivers or important adults, economic stability aka enough money to provide for regular meals, etc.).

Let us turn now to the school part of inequality. As reported by Putnam: in terms of enrolment in early childhood education the United States ranks 32nd among the 39 countries in the OECD, which is a low rank considering the importance of preschool education. But the “opportunity gap” is said to be already large by the time children enter kindergarten, which the author connects to the gaps in cognitive achievement by level of maternal education. Schooling, he claims, plays a minor role in creating score gaps. This could again be a very controversial terrain: maternal sensitivity and nurturance as almost a sole factor to influence a life of a child.⁹ But “regardless of their own family background, kids do better in schools where the other kids come from affluent, educated homes. This pattern appears to be nearly universal across the developed world”. That is why Putnam names the American public school today an echo chamber: the advantages or disadvantages that children bring with them to school have effects on other kids. This is connected to the so called neighbour-

some latest “endeavours” to end virtually all family planning (disclaimer: it sounds as something taken out of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*): a new Missouri bill would target abortion providers and sanction employment and housing discrimination against people who use birth control or have an abortion ... In other words, if the bill is passed, you could be evicted in the state of Missouri for having an abortion, using birth control, or becoming pregnant while unmarried.

- 9 The point where I really hold a grudge against the author is his using the experiments in rats (how mother rats nurture their newborns and how often) as a proof that “providing physical and emotional security and comfort” can make a great difference in children’s lives (to which I of course totally agree). Such experiments in e. g. in apes have been analysed critically by feminist researchers of science, especially Donna Haraway, who explains this laboratory-induced psychopathology as particularly dangerous to social world as it invariably deals with mother-infant relations and defines a “natural” motherhood (see Haraway, 1989). It is quite agonizing to read about pain induced to laboratory animals in psychological experiments.

hood effect: “growing residential segregation by social class is a key underlying cause of differences in kids’ educational experiences”. Children attend schools of different quality. Again, the solution to this problem does not seem to be very realistic: Putnam suggests moving poor families to better neighbourhoods. (If poor families are moved to better neighbourhoods, what then becomes of the poor neighbourhoods? Are better ones still better?)

Extracurricular activities are described by Putnam as “a near-perfect tool”, invented by the Americans, to foster equal opportunity (as they provide a natural and effective way to provide mentoring and inculcate soft skills, says Putnam). But, as they are mostly provided in a form “pay-to-play”, one can see them as just another dividing factor. Putnam suggests that this should be amended, but his proposals somehow do not look quite realistic: his appeal is for more funding for extracurricular activities.

Indeed, it is the anger factor that I miss sometimes in this documentation of the expansion of inequality, and that is why I read this as a cautious tale: documenting, but not really seeking reasons for it (culprits?) and realistic and/or political changes. The rise in inequality recognized by Putnam in this book seems “to spring if not from natural causes, then from unlucky but well intentioned policy choices,” as put by M. Eisenberg (Eisenberg, 2015: p. 294). Putnam touches upon possible causes for “this breathtaking increase in inequality”, but does not put a finger to it. They are, as he says, much debated: globalization, technological change, de-unionization, changing social norms, post-Reagan public policy ... So the premise of American national independence “all men are created equal”, as important as it may be, looks in these murky waters very much devoid of any contents, even if claimed by Putnam, that “Americans of all parties have historically been very concerned about this issue”.

The George W. Bush administration is mentioned as an example of trying to improve things: it is said to pursue an array of policy experiments designed to enhance marriage and marital stability and rigorously evaluated the results. Putnam does not make any comment on such policy experiments (by the way, he acted as a consultant to several American presidents) nor takes a stand as regards various political decisions. He does, however, state that

The absence of personal villains in our stories does not mean that no one is at fault. Many constraints on equal opportunity in America today, including many of the constraints apparent in our stories, are attributable to social policies that reflect collective decisions. Insofar as we have some responsibility for those collective decisions, we are implicated by our failure to address removable barriers to others’ success.

To end with, as put by one of the reviewers, M. Eisenberg, “this book is a frustrating subject for review. It is praiseworthy and disappointing [...] scholarly, but hobbled by its patterns of selective attention and language” (Eisenberg, 2015: p. 290) and, as said in the beginning of this review, very conventional in its presentation and concepts. Childhood poverty, described in this book, is a problem because it reduces productivity and economic output, raises health expenditures etc., but it is also a problem because it is plain simple wrong (naïvely as this may sound). All things said, *Our Kids* is an important, empathic book, but often, as I tried to show, too cautious in its course. It certainly provokes serious debates, and that might be a good thing.

Valerija Vendramin

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ABSTRACTS

Abstracts

MANUFACTURING AND SELLING A WAY OF LIFE

Igor Bijuklić

The article is treating the subject of technocracy in the Progressive era (1880-1920) focusing on the instrumental character that was ascribed to communication for achieving social cohesiveness and a perfected socialisation of men among the growing populations of immigrants. It questions a specific form of social organisation that demanded unity of thought and behaviour in order to enhance its own processes of production and consumption as a means for national prosperity. Further it tries to explain how mass production and consumption introduced uniformity as their new potential and how, consequently, conformism gained an entirely new character while losing all its explicit characteristics.

Keywords: communication, social engineering, social order, consumerism, conformism

IZDELOVANJE IN PRODAJANJE NAČINA ŽIVLJENJA – ZGODOVINSKA ANALIZA NOVIH OBLIK KONFORMIZMA

Igor Bijuklić

Članek obravnava tematiko tehnokracije v progresivni dobi ZDA (1880–1920) in se osredotoča na instrumentalno funkcijo, ki je bila dodeljena komunikaciji kot sredstvu za doseganje družbene kohezivnosti in izpopolnjeno podružbljanje ljudi med rastočimi populacijami priseljencev. Vprašuje po specifičnih oblikah družbene organizacije, ki je zahtevala enotnost misli in obnašanja, da bi okrepila svoje lastne proizvodne in potrošniške procese kot sredstev za nacionalno blaginjo. Nadalje skuša po-

jasniti, kako sta množična proizvodnja in potrošnja uvajali uniformnost kot svoj novi potencial in kako je posledično konformizem izgubil svoje eksplisitne značilnosti in dobil povsem nov značaj.

Ključne besede: komunikacija, družbeni inženiring, družbeni red, potrošništvo, konformizem

LIVIN' THE MERITOCRATIC DREAM! OR WHY IT MAKES SENSE THAT PERCENT PLANS IN COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS REPRESENT THE FUTURE OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Cyril Ghosh

Affirmative action in university admissions is a polarizing dispute in the United States. Its supporters claim it establishes equal opportunity – a central tenet of the American Dream. Adversaries suggest that the policy constitutes impermissible discrimination and preferential treatment for underrepresented minority groups. Some argue for a reformed version of affirmative action that takes socioeconomic background into account. Finally, there are those that advocate replacing affirmative action with Percent Plans – which are race-neutral plans that nonetheless have the consequence of ensuring racially and socioeconomically diverse classrooms at state-run institutions of higher education. In this essay, I suggest that of all these proposals Percent Plans are the most aligned with the widely popular ideology of the American Dream and therefore has the potential to have the broadest possible support from Americans across the ideological spectrum. These plans also ensure representation of socioeconomic and racial diversity in a way that does not accord “preferential” treatment to any particular group of people, which in turn makes them more likely to enjoy widespread support in the American population.

Keywords: affirmative action, percent plans, American Dream, equal opportunity, meritocracy

ŽIVETI MERITOKRATIČNE SANJE! ALI ZAKAJ JE SMISELNO, DA NAČRTOVANI ODSOTKI PRI VPISU NA VISOKE ŠOLE IN UNIVERZE PREDSTAVLJAJO PRIHODNOST POZITIVNE DISKRIMINACIJE

Cyril Ghosh

Pozitivna diskriminacija pri sprejemu na univerzo predstavlja v Združenih državah spor, ki razdvaja. Njeni podporniki trdijo, da ustvarja enake možnosti – osrednje načelo ameriških sanj. Nasprotniki opozarjajo, da ta politika predstavlja nedopustno diskriminacijo in prednostno obravnavo slabo zastopanih manjšinskih skupin. Nekateri se zavzemajo za preo-

blikovano različico pozitivne diskriminacije, ki upošteva socialno-ekonomsko ozadje. Nenazadnje obstajajo tudi tisti, ki zagovarjajo zamenjavo pozitivne diskriminacije z načrtovanimi odstotki, ki predstavljajo rasno nevtralne načrte, ki pa imajo kljub temu kot posledico zagotavljanje rasno in socialnoekonomsko raznolikih učilnic v državnih visokošolskih ustanovah. V tem članku predlagam, da so izmed vseh predlogov načrtovani odstotki najbolj usklajeni s splošno popularno ideologijo ameriških sanj in imajo zatoj lahko potencialno najširšo možno podporo Američanov v okviru celotnega ideološkega spektra. Ti načrti zagotavljajo tudi zastopanje socialno-ekonomske in rasne raznolikosti na način, ki nobeni skupini ljudi ne daje "prednostnega" obravnavanja in zato pri ameriškem prebivalstvu uživajo široko podporo.

Ključne besede: pozitivna diskriminacija, načrtovani odstotki, ameriške sanje, enake možnosti, meritokracija

THE MORPHOLOGICAL AND ARCHETYPAL TRACES IN THE AMERICAN DREAM: EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND SYMBOLISM

Maja Gutman

The concept of the American Dream has been present in modern society for over a century; it has fueled numerous academic discussions in effort to systematically understand its functions and implications on culture and society. As proposed in this paper, the potency of the American Dream lies precisely in its intriguing and well-defined structure; the idea of prosperity and the pursuit of happiness, which is to be achieved through hard work, can be argued as a fairly stable and consistent maxima, that not only fits into different historical contexts, but also into different cultural systems. Furthermore, it can be argued that even if the concept is a result of careful considerations that converge with contemporary dominant system of social and cultural values, its power lies in intrinsic double aspect, which surpasses the social engineering objectives. Moreover, the power of the concept comes from its fundamental properties; the first property can be attributed to narrative functions, and the second to the function of an archetype, which, by default, consists of an intriguing binary aspect. This paper aims to analyze the narrative and archetypal frameworks of the American Dream and demonstrate, how the solid structure of this concept forms an invisible modern mythological fabric in modern media representations, and more broadly, popular culture.

Keywords: narrative structure, hero-archetype, symbolism, media constructs

MORFOLOŠKI IN ARHETIPSKI NASTAVKI V AMERIŠKIH SANJAH: RAZGRNITEV ANALITIČNIH ZMOŽNOSTI PRIPOVEDNE STRUKTURE IN SIMBOLIKE

Maja Gutman

Številne akademske razprave poskušajo razumeti družbene funkcije in implikacije že več kot stoletje prisotne ideje o Ameriških sanjah, pri čemer samoumevnost konceptualnih nastavkov ni deležna širše obravnave. Zdi se, da retorika Ameriških sanj izhaja iz pripovedne strukture in njej pripadajočih funkcij; slednje indicirajo idejo prosperitete, ki je možna zgolj skozi novo ekonomsko vedenje, utelešeno v delovni etiki in togi determiniranosti. Ameriške sanje so lahko mišljene kot razmeroma stabilna in konsistentna maksima, ki se je uspela implementirati v različne kulturne in ekonomske sisteme. Četudi se da govoriti o Ameriških sanjah kot o sistematično izdelanem konceptu, ki je v sozvočju z dominantnim družbeno-ekonomskim ustrojem, jih je možno razumeti tudi onkraj upravljalških tehnik družbenega inženiringa. Ponujata se dva možna načina osmišljanja: prvi način obravnava koncept v kontekstu Proppovih pripovednih funkcij, medtem ko drugi v konceptu prepozna arhetipsko podstat, ki jo v pretežni meri opredeljuje arhetip junaka. Tako pripovedni kot arhetipski način obravnave indicirata relativno trdno konceptualno strukturo Ameriških sanj; ta bodisi posredno ali neposredno formira sodobne mitološke zgodbe, ki se v obliki medijskih reprezentacij o novodobnih junakih pomembneje umeščajo v širše polje popularne kulture. *Ključne besede:* pripovedna struktura, arhetip junaka, simbolika, medijski konstrukti

AMERICAN DREAM STUDIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY: AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

Robert C. Haubart

The American Dream has been a subject of fascination, conjecture, analysis, and study since James Truslow Adams first memorialized the term in print in his 1931 book, *The Epic of America*. Although a journalistic staple around the world, the concept has been variously defined. Studies of the American Dream over the intervening period have often suffered from terminological imprecision, an absence of sophisticated theoretical grounding, and a lack of empirical rigor. The present paper attempts to lay out some of the principal theoretical and empirical issues that bear on the future potential for studies of the American Dream.

Keywords: inequality, equal opportunity, intergenerational upward mobility, success ethic restless spirit, individualism, competition

ŠTUDIJE AMERIŠKIH SANJ V 21. STOLETJU: AMERIŠKA PERSPEKTIVA

Robert C. Hauhart

Ameriške sanje so bile predmet fascinacije, domnev, analize ter preučevanja vse odkar je James Truslow Adams vnesel sam izraz leta 1931 v svoji knjigi *The Epic of America*. Navključ svoji novinarski razširjenosti po vsem svetu, je bil sam koncept različno opredeljen. Preučevanje ameriških sanj je v tem obdobju pogosto trpelo zaradi terminološke nenatančnosti, odsotnosti sofisticirane teoretične utemeljenosti kot tudi zaradi pomanjkanja empirične strogosti. Pričujoči prispevek poskuša utemeljiti nekaj glavnih teoretičnih in empiričnih vprašanj, ki se nanašajo na prihodnji potencial preučevanja ameriških sanj.

Ključne besede: neenakost, enake možnosti, medgeneracijska mobilnost navzgor, etika uspešnosti, nemirni duh, individualizem, konkurenca

CONFLICTING NARRATIVES OF THE AMERICAN DREAM: OBAMA'S EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY AND TRUMP'S 'MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN'

Michael A. Peters

This essay describes the crafting of the American dream as a rhetorical device that utilises narrative resources to tell and retell a story of America's history as a philosophical reflection on the core value of social equality that defines national identity and the future to which all Americans might aspire. The epic of America defined by James Truslow Adams in the early 1930s has been utilised by various politicians and public figures to unify the country and to depict a future that can be rediscovered in the American past, in the words of the constitution and in the struggles that came to represent the civil rights movement for racial equality. This essay examines Obama eloquent speeches that made the American Dream central to his elections and the way education figures fundamentally in his vision for America, contrasting this unifying and positive politics with the largely divisive view that characterises Trump's version of "Make America Great Again!" based on the politics of envy and playing off sentiments accompanying the rise of the alt-right.

Keywords: epic, James Truslow Adams, Obama, equality of educational opportunity, Trump, rise of alt-right

KONFLIKTNE NARACIJE AMERIŠKIH SANJ: OBAMOVE ENAKE MOŽNOSTI IN TRUMPOV 'MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN'

Michael A. Peters

Esej opisuje oblikovanje ameriških sanj kot retoričnega sredstva, ki uporablja pripovedne vire, da bi [ponovno] povedala zgodbo o zgodovini Amerike kot filozofsko refleksijo o temeljni vrednoti družbene enakosti, ki opredeljuje nacionalno identiteto ter prihodnost, ki bi si jo lahko želeli vsi Američani. Zgodbo o Ameriki, kot jo je opisal James Truslow Adams v začetku 30-ih let 20. Stoletja, so uporabljali različni politiki in javne osebnosti, da bi združili državo in predstavili prihodnost, ki jo je mogoče ponovno odkriti v ameriški preteklosti, v besedah ustave ter v bojih ki jih je predstavljalo gibanje za državljanske pravice za rasno enakost. Ta esej preučuje Obamove prepričljive govore, v katerih so ameriške sanje osrednjega pomena za njegovo izvolitev ter za osrednjo vlogo izobraževanja v njegovi viziji Amerike. To združujočo in pozitivno politiko postavi nasproti razdvajajočemu pogledu, ki je značilen za Trumpovo različico "Make America Great Again!" ki temelji na politiki zavisti ter izigravanju čustev kar hkrati spremlja vzpon alternativne desnice.

Ključne besede: ep, James Truslow Adams, Obama, enake možnosti, Trump, vzpon alternativne desnice

PERVERSION OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Darko Štrajn

The American dream and the Enlightenment overlap in more than one sense, and they both certainly include in their core an idea of the emancipative role of education. Individualism, equal opportunity, and success as "the constitutive elements of the Dream" (Ghosh) are the basic concepts that form an "elastic" ideology supporting different political ideals. The mythology of the American Dream could be viewed through the concept of "invented tradition", which was itself invented in the seminal volume, edited by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). Far from being just an object of illusions of everyday consciousness, the American Dream possess a body of highly articulate ideas and it is represented by many works of literature and art – emphatically including the art of cinema. The key contradiction, "hidden" within the American Dream, is rooted in many diverse visions of individualism as a foundation of freedom. Anyway, the notion of education within the discourse of the American Dream lost exactly what its democratic promise was of equal chances for the willing individuals. Although a stratification of the educational opportunities

within the bourgeois order always took place, there were periods when the achievements of policies, which stimulated so-called social mobility through education, were significant. Of course, such achievements belong to the times of the welfare state, when dreams and reality seemed to have approached each other. The trajectories, presented in Putnam's book *Our Kids* as diagrams, charts, and graphs visualize the perversion of the American Dream through the influence of neoliberalism. Putnam does not give any Leninist answer to the Leninist question, which he uses as the title of the last chapter of his book: "What is to be Done?" He envisions mostly long-term policies, which should produce the restructuring of complex schemes of economic, educational and cultural contexts on the micro-level in order to reduce economic inequalities and their social consequences in the long run.

Keywords: individualism, culture, education, neoliberalism, ideology

PERVERZIJA AMERIŠKIH SANJ

Darko Štrajn

Ameriške sanje in razsvetljenstvo se prekrivata v več kot enem smislu in zagotovo vključujeta idejo o emancipativni vlogi izobraževanja. Individualizem, enake možnosti in uspeh kot »konstitutivni elementi sanj« (Ghosh) so osnovni koncepti, ki tvorijo »elastično« ideologijo, ki podpira različne politične ideale. Mitologijo ameriških sanj je mogoče razumeti s pomočjo koncepta »izmišljene tradicije«, samega izmišljenega v vplivnem zborniku, ki sta ga uredila Hobsbawm in Ranger (1983). Daleč od tega, da bi bile ameriške sanje samo predmet iluzij vsakdanjega zavedanja, vsebujejo mnogo zelo artikuliranih idej, saj jih zastopa veliko literarnih in umetniških del – med njimi poudarjeno tudi filmska umetnost. Ključno protislovje, »skrito« znotraj ameriških sanj, je ukoreninjeno v mnogih raznolikih vizijah individualizma kot temelja svobode. Kakorkoli že, pojem izobraževanja je v diskurzu ameriških sanj izgubil svoj demokratični obet enakih možnosti za voljne posameznike. Čeprav je v meščanskem redu vedno nastajala stratifikacija možnosti za izobraževanje, so bila obdobja, ko so bili dosežki politik, ki so spodbujale tako imenovano socialno mobilnost prek izobraževanja, pomembni. Seveda taki dosežki spadajo v čas socialne države, ko se je zdelo, da se sanje in resničnost približujeta drugo drugemu. Trajektorije, predstavljene v Putnamovi knjigi *Our Kids*, kot diagrami, grafikoni in grafi, vizualizirajo perversijo ameriških sanj pod vplivom neoliberalizma. Putnam ne daje nobenega leninističnega odgovora na leninistično vprašanje, ki ga uporabi za naslov zadnjega poglavja svoje knjige: »Kaj storiti?« Predvideva predvsem dolgoročne politike, ki bi morale povzročiti prestrukturiranje kompleksnih shem ekon-

omskega, izobraževalnega in kulturnega konteksta na mikro ravni, da bi dolgoročno zmanjšali ekonomske neenakosti in njihove družbene posledice.

Ključne besede: individualizem, kultura, izobraževanje, neoliberalizem, ideologija

FROM A CITY ON THE HILL TO THE DUNGHEAP OF HISTORY: AN INTERVIEW WITH PETER McLAREN

Mitja Sardoč

In this interview with Mitja Sardoč, Peter McLaren discusses some of the persisting challenges associated with the American Dream. Starting with an overview of its main delineating features and its controversial historical legacy, he challenges straight away the 'standard' interpretation of the American Dream and questions its overall coherence. At the same time, he also discusses Donald Trump and his relationship to the American Dream. The concluding part of the interview is devoted to the presentation of the relationship between education and the American Dream.

Keywords: the American Dream, capitalism, ideology, inequality, radical pedagogy

OD MESTA NA GRIČU DO SMETIŠČA ZGODOVINE: INTERVJU S PETEROM McLARNOM

Mitja Sardoč

V intervjuju z Mitjo Sardočem Peter McLaren razpravlja o nekaterih ključnih izzivih, ki so povezani z ameriškimi sanjami. Začenši s pregledom njegovih glavnih značilnosti ter njihove sporne zgodovinske zapuščine, McLaren problematizira t.i. 'standardno' interpretacijo ameriških sanj kot tudi same koherentnosti tega ideala. Hkrati odpre tudi vprašanje Donalda Trumpa in njegov odnosom do ameriških sanj. Zaključni del intervjuja je namenjen predstavitvi odnosa med vzgojo in izobraževanjem ter ameriškimi sanjami.

Ključne besede: ameriške sanje, kapitalizem, ideologija, neenakost, radikalna pedagogika

EDUCATION AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Mitja Sardoč

As a central element of American culture, the American Dream is said to represent a distilled version of basic American values and the single most important emancipatory ideal associated with the American 'way of life'. This introductory article to the journal special issue on education and the American Dream identifies some challenges the 'standard' interpretation

of the American Dream has been focusing on. It also introduces the articles and the interview on some of the most pressing issues associated with the American Dream and its relationship with education.

Keywords: American Dream, education, social mobility, (in)equality, 'standard' interpretation

AMERIŠKE SANJE IN IZOBRAŽEVANJE

Mitja Sardoč

Kot osrednji element ameriške kulture predstavljajo ameriške sanje destilirano različico temeljnih ameriških vrednot ter najpomembnejši emancipacijski ideal, povezan z ameriškim načinom življenja. Ta uvodni članek tematske številke o izobraževanju in ameriških sanjah opredeli nekatere izmed izzivov, s katerimi se sooča t.i. 'standardna' interpretacija ameriških sanj. Obenem prispevek tudi predstavi članke ter intervju, ki obravnavajo nekatera najbolj pereča vprašanja povezana z ameriški sanjami ter njihovim odnosom do izobraževanja.

Keywords: ameriške sanje, izobraževanje socialna mobilnost, (ne)enakost, 'standardna' interpretacija

THE SLOVENIAN COUNTERPART TO THE AMERICAN DREAM

Srečo Dragoš

One of the major (three) parts of American dream – as formulated by the Nobel Prize winner, Martin Luther King, jr. – was a social issue. Just when American society has reached the consensus that without the reduction of social inequalities, neither the individual nor the society can be free, there was a change in policy. American fight against poverty has been lost at the very beginning due to neoliberal abuse of theory of poverty as a culture (Oscar Lewis). The wrong weapon was used: instead of material help and rights resocialization and moralization in the fight against poverty prevailed. The result is that these dreams turned into a global toxic product of US exports. By hijacking from above, That American dreams have become a limited asset that can only be realized by the richest at the expense of all others who have not yet wakened. In the last third of this article, the author analysis two questions, one of which has local and the other has a global meaning. The first question is about the resilience of the American dreams, which are strengthened in proportion to the distance from their origin, that is, why the above mentioned dreams are the strongest on the global periphery (the case of Slovenia). And secondly, whether such a development is more dependent on voluntaristic or more on deterministic factors.

about the resilience of the American dreams, which are strengthened in proportion to the distance from their origin, that is, why the above mentioned dreams are the strongest on the global periphery (the case of Slovenia). And secondly, whether such a development is more dependent on voluntaristic or more on deterministic factors.

Keywords: American dream, poverty, ideology, social state, social policy, imperialism, soft power

AMERIŠKE SANJE PO SLOVENSKO

Srečo Dragoš

Ena od glavnih (treh) sestavin ameriški sanj – kot jih je formuliral Nobelov nagrajenec, Martin Luther King, jr. – je bilo socialno vprašanje. Ravno takrat, ko je ameriška družba dosegla najvišjo stopnjo konsenza o tem, da brez zmanjševanja družbenih neenakosti ne more biti svoboden niti posameznik niti družba, je prišlo do preobrata. Zgleden in evropsko sočasen ameriški boj proti revščini je bil zgubljen že na samem začetku in sicer z neoliberalno zlorabo teorije (Oscarja Lewisa) o revščini kot kulturi. Uporabljeno je bilo napačno orožje: namesto materialnih pomoči in pravic so v boju z revščino uporabili resocializacijo in moraliziranje. Rezultat je v tem, kar smo dobili danes, ko so omenjene sanje prerasle v globalni toksični produkt ameriškega izvoza. Z ugrabitvijo od zgoraj so postale omejena dobrina, ki jo lahko realizirajo le najbogatejši na račun vseh drugih, ki se še niso zbudili. V zadnji tretjini tega članka se avtor ukvarja z analizo dveh vprašanj, od katerih imka eno lokalno, drugo pa globalno domet. Prvo vprašanje je o trdoživosti ameriških sanj, ki se krepijo sorazmerno z oddaljenostjo od njihovega izvora, torej, zakaj so najmočnejše na svetovni periferiji (primer Slovenije). In drugič, ali je tak razvoj bolj odvisen od voluntarističnih ali bolj od determinističnih dejavnikov.

Ključne besede: ameriške sanje, revščina, ideologija, socialna država, socialna politika, imperializem, mehka moč

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Igor Bijuklič, finished his PhD thesis (2014) on the history of modern propaganda and PR techniques. He participated as a research fellow in the following projects at the Peace Institute in Ljubljana concerning the history of modern antipolitical paradigms: »Drucker and Postsocialism« (2005-2006), »Critical Reflections on the Managerial Revolution« (2006-2008), »Trans-disciplinary view on America« (2010-2012). Between 2013 and 2015, he was employed as a researcher at the Center for Social and Anthropological Research in Education at the Educational Research Institute in Ljubljana. From 2015 on, he is working as a Ph.D. assistant at the Faculty of Management, University of Primorska.

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Maja Gutman is a Research Associate at the department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Her academic background consists largely within the Humanities, with emphasis on Cultural and Media studies, and most recently, Consciousness studies. She completed her PhD in Anthropology of Everyday Life – Media Studies, at AMEU-ISH – Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, Ljubljana, Slovenia (2016). Her current research is focused on theoretical aspects of conscious and unconscious mind and its indirect behavioral expressions in cultural data. To be able to fully co-develop new tools and methodologies for observing and measuring reports from different states of mind, Maja has started working on other research topics, such as transformational aspects of subjectivity, embodied cognition in multi-sensory environments, and immersion. Her research topics take into account both philosophical and neuroscientific approaches,

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Maja Gutman je zunanja raziskovalka na oddelku za računalništvo na Univerzi Kalifornije, Los Angeles (UCLA), s katero sodeluje na transdisciplinarnih projektih. Leta 2016 je na AMEU-ISH – *Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis* (Ljubljana) doktorirala iz antropologije vsakdanjega življenja, njeno področje raziskovanja pa se giblje znotraj antropologije, kulturnih in medijskih študij ter študij zavesti. Od leta 2016 v sodelovanju z UCLA razvija pilotski projekt, pri katerem z uporabo večje baze podatkov sledi vedenjskim vzorcem spremenjenih stanj zavesti in jih primerja s teoretskimi vidiki o zavednih in nezavednih miselnih procesih. Sodeluje tudi pri razvoju sodobnih računalniških metod za spremljanje in analizo uporabnikovega vedenja v digitalnih okoljih, pri čemer uporablja teoretska izhodišča utelešene kognicije in potopitvenosti. Slednja s pomočjo podatkovne analitike aplicira predvsem na multimodalna okolja, kot je virtualna resničnost.

Robert C. Hauhart

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Robert C. Hauhart (PhD, J.D.) je profesor na oddelku za družboslovje in socialno pravičnost na Saint Martin's University, Lacey v ZDA. Je avtor številnih raziskav o ameriških sanjah, vključno z knjigo *Seeking the American Dream: A Sociological Inquiry* (Palgrave MacMillan 2016) ter "American Sociology's Investigations of the American Dream: Retrospect and Prospect," *American Sociologist*, 46(1):65-98.

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Peter McLaren je profesor za kritične študije, sodirektor in mednarodni ambasador za globalno etiko in socialno pravičnost, demokratični projekt Paula Freireja na Donna Ford Attallah College za izobraževalne študi-

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Michael A. Peters

Michael A. Peters is Distinguished Visiting Professor at the School of Sociology, Beijing Normal University, Professor of Education at the University of Waikato, New Zealand and Emeritus Professor in Educational Policy, Organization, and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. He is the executive editor of the journal, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, and founding editor of five international journals, *Policy Futures in Education*, *E-Learning and Digital Media* (SAGE), and *Knowledge Cultures* (Addleton), *The Video Journal of Education and Pedagogy* (Springer), *Open Review of Education Research* (T&F). His interests are in philosophy, education and social policy and he has written over eighty books, including most recently: *Wittgenstein and Education: Pedagogical Investigations*, (2017) with Jeff Stickney, *The Global Financial Crisis and the Restructuring of Education* (2015), *Paulo Freire: The Global Legacy* (2015) both with Tina Besley, *Education Philosophy and Politics: Selected Works* (2011); *Education, Cognitive Capitalism and Digital Labour* (2011), with Ergin Bulut; and *Neoliberalism and After? Education, Social Policy and the Crisis of Capitalism* (2011).

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Mitja Sardoč

Mitja Sardoč (PhD) is a senior research associate at the Educational Research Institute in Ljubljana (Slovenia) where he is member of the 'Social Contract in the 21st Century' research programme. He is author of scholarly articles and editor of a number of journal special issues on citizenship education, multiculturalism, toleration, equality of opportunity and patriotism. He is Managing Editor of *Theory and Research in Education* [<http://tre.sagepub.com/>] and member of the editorial board of *Educational Philosophy and Theory* and the *Open Review of Educational Research*. He edited two books published by Wiley (*Citizenship, Inclusion and Democracy* and *Toleration, Respect and Recognition in Education*). He is also a contributing author to the *SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy*. He is editor-in-chief of *The Handbook of Patriotism* [[http://refworks.springer.com/ Patriotism](http://refworks.springer.com/Patriotism)] that is to be published by Springer in 2018.

Mitja Sardoč (PhD) je zaposlen kot raziskovalec na Pedagoškem inštitutu v Ljubljani, kjer je član programske skupine 'Družbena pogodba v 21. stoletju'. Je avtor znanstvenih in strokovnih člankov s širšega področja vzgoje in izobraževanja ter urednik vrste tematskih števil domačih in tujih znanstvenih revij s področja državljanske vzgoje, multikulturalizma, enakih možnosti itn. Je glavni urednik revije *Theory and Research in Education*, odgovorni urednik revije *Šolsko polje* ter član uredniškega odbora revij *Educational Philosophy and Theory* ter *Open Review of Educational Research*. Je tudi urednik dveh zbornikov, ki sta izšli pri založbi Blackwell (*Citizenship, Inclusion and Democracy* ter *Toleration, Respect and Recognition in Education*), avtor monografije *Multikulturalizem: pro et contra* ter soavtor monografije *Enake možnosti in družbena (ne)enakost v družbi znanja*. Je urednik publikacije *Handbook of Patriotism*, ki bo izšla pri založbi Springer.

Darko Štrajn

Darko Štrajn graduated in philosophy and sociology, Faculty of Arts – University in Ljubljana. He was heading the programme in educational research at the Educational Research Institute from 1999 to 2014. He is also the professor of philosophy, lecturing on methodology of humanities and film theory at the graduate School for Studies in Humanities (ISH) in Ljubljana. His research comprises topics such as education and social change, politics, aesthetics and media. His last book under the title *From Benjamin to the End of Cinema* (available on-line) was published in 2017.

Darko Štrajn je diplomiral iz filozofije in sociologije na Filozofski fakulteti Univerze v Ljubljani. Od l. 1999 do 2014 je vodil raziskovalni program na Pedagoškem inštitutu. Kot redni profesor predava o metodologiji humanističnih ved in o filmski teoriji na podiplomski šoli za humanistične študije (AMEU - ISH) v Ljubljani. Njegove raziskave obsegajo teme kot so izobraževanje in družbene spremembe, politika, estetika in mediji. Njegova zadnja knjiga pod naslovom *From Benjamin to the End of Cinema* (dostopna na spletu) je izšla l. 2017.

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Poglavja v knjigi: Walzer, M. (1992) The Civil Society Argument. V MOUFFE, Ch. (ur.), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship and Community*. London: Routledge.

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The spacing of the article should be double spaced, the font Times New Roman (size 12 in the main text and size 10 in the footnotes). Paragraphs should be indicated using an empty row. There are three types of hierarchical subheadings, which should be numbered as follows:

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I.1

I.1.1

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Journal Articles:

Kerr, D. (1999b) Changing the political culture: the advisory group on education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools. *Oxford Review of Education*. 25 (1–2), pp. 25–35.

Book chapters:

Walzer, M. (1992) The Civil Society Argument. In: Mouffe, Ch. (ed.), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship and Community*. London: Routledge.

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