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13.

CASTE, CLASS, AND RACE:
AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE

by

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Preface

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This paper will attempt to develop what the author perceives as a more accurate and valid approach for analyzing and discussing America's race, class, and ethnic relations. In general, one can say that much of America's sociological theory regarding the nature of its system of inequality has presented an image of America which confirmed or coincided with the ideology of its ruling class: a position or approach which demonstrates the correctness of Marx's assertions regarding the role and function of bourgeois intellectuals and their "scientific" theories. Other observers have noted that there are inherent Social Darwinistic cultural assumptions underlying or implicit in these theories (e.g., Marvin Harris' Rise of Anthropological Theory and Thomas Gossett's Race: The History of An Idea, come readily to mind). Thus, the relationship between culture and the social scientists, especially in their interpretations of what constitutes "social facts," is often determined by and biased in favor of the ruling cultural ethos. Thus, if the prevailing cultural ethos is one which states that America is a liberal democratic, laissez-faire free enterprise capitalist cultural system with "liberty and justice for all," with an open and fluid class system which provides each individual with the opportunity to achieve Horatio Alger type success and fortune, where every citizen is guaranteed certain "inalienable rights," then American social science theory tends to confirm this image in its efforts to "explain and predict" human group behavior. I further contend that this is inevitable because the individual theoreticians are products of this cultural ethos. They have been socialized to believe that the "ideal" is the reality. They may concede that there are some minor "aberrant" exceptions (perhaps even half the entire nation), but these can be expected to change in the direction of the ideal. When confronted with the realities of class privileges and power, sociologists chose to minimize its importance: "It was a temporary, transitional phenomenon characteristic of the capitalistic epoch." We have

*This paper is a revised chapter from the author's doctoral thesis which is entitled Sociological Theory, Black Culture, and the Black Middle-Class (available from University of Michigan Dissertation Microfilms).

moved beyond that stage now into the post-industrial society where freedom, equality, and negotiated, rational, bureaucratic justice prevails. While there have been some exceptions to this general trend--especially among the "muckrakers" and pro-populist intellectuals--this general trend has been the rule and, in the more recent period, it has intensified.

The strength of American social scientists' commitment to (and immersion in) the liberal democratic ethos is most vividly reflected in their efforts to account for the position of Black people in American society. For here, they have been confronted with the most blatant contradiction in the liberal democratic ethos--the "American Dilemma." So, what have they attempted to do to account for this "troubling presence" in their otherwise liberal democratic utopia?

As I mentioned above, several American sociologists were influenced by Darwin's theory--especially as it was developed by Spencer. As Gossett¹ noted in his celebrated historical treatment of race and Social Darwinism, Spencer's theories permeated most early American sociological thought. His influence was especially noticeable in the work of Sumner--one of the most prominent and theoretically influential American social scientists. This school of thought "scientifically" documented and justified the enslavement of Blacks and their continued consignment to the lower caste. In this framework, Blacks were perceived as incapable of comprehending liberal democratic culture because of their bio-cultural backwardness--they were the products of a tribal, pre-literate, animistic culture. Their language was crude; their technology was simple; their religion was pagan; and their crania were incapable of housing a brain "big" or "heavy" enough to comprehend and encompass the sophisticated, complex, technologically advanced liberal democratic culture. Thus, slavery and the subsequent quasi-feudal tenant farming were excellent ways of gradually "uplifting" these darker people from the darkness of a "dark" continent into the "light" of Western civilization. In essence, Americans were doing "these people" a favor out of the goodness of their liberal hearts, and from benign concern for their moral, spiritual, and cultural development. They were socializing these backward, quasi-human beings into the modern world in a protective and supportive manner--spoon-feeding civilization to them since their minds were like those of children. As Gossett demonstrated, when the Southern

white apologists set aside the Bible as a justification for slavery, they had only to turn to the prestigious colleges and universities--Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, University of Chicago, and so forth, whose fledgling social science divisions or sociology and anthropology departments were bastions of "scientific" racism.

This position was challenged by the abolitionist influenced liberal humanists who argued for accepting the humanity of Blacks. Their arguments were reinforced by the presence of many Blacks who had demonstrated their ability to become functioning, normal, even materially successful American citizens. From this group's perspective, Blacks' status in American society was due to racial prejudice and discrimination--especially from the more culturally backward, irrational white southerners who had to be forced to free their slaves; that is, the South was portrayed as culturally behind and subordinate to the North, Midwest, and the West. This was reflected in its outdated, anti-democratic, socially and culturally fragmented economic system (i.e., plantation slavery on the one hand, subsistence farming on the other). So even though the South had been beaten into submission and forced to subordinate its regional political-economic system to the expanding northeastern liberal capitalist ruling class, it still retained its traditional, irrational attitudes, beliefs and values regarding the "Negro." The underlying implications in this approach is that the entire region suffered from "cultural lag"--from its retention of European feudal forms of political-economic organization to its irrational emotions and practices toward the "Negro."²

The concept developed to capture the peculiar position of Blacks in the United States was caste. It is generally known that much of American sociological theory regarding the nature of its system of inequality is derived from Weber. It is interesting to note, though, that although Weber used the concept of caste in his discussion of ethnicity and social class, few, if any, American sociologists indicated an awareness of Weber's position. Weber observed that status groups (as opposed to commercial acquisitive groups) were stratified according to their life-styles as reflected by their material goods (conspicuous consumption). However, this status group stratification could become caste stratification when ethnicity was an issue, especially if one or more of the ethnic groups was a "pariah" group:

. . . the caste structure transforms the horizontal and unconnected coexistencies of ethnically segregated groups into a vertical social system of super- and subordination . . . ethnic coexistencies condition a mutual repulsion and disdain but allow each ethnic community to consider its own honor as the highest one: the caste structure brings about a social subordination and an acknowledgement of "more honor" in favor of the privileged caste and status groups. This is due to the fact that in the caste structure ethnic distinctions as such have become "functional" distinctions within the political societalization.³

Weber's conceptualization of the relationship between ethnicity and caste suggests a permanence or the continuation over time of a system of inequality. Although it is an accurate description of what happened in many instances when ethnic and status groups found themselves competing for highly valued goods and services in the same geographical area, it was perceived as being characteristic of a more traditional society; that is, feudal Europe. To have accepted Weber's concept of a functional, subordinate ethnic caste system would have contradicted all the liberal democratic "truths" most American social scientists had been socialized to accept regarding the nature of their society and the rights and freedoms of individual citizens. Thus, they chose to use caste in the anthropological sense of the term to describe the distinct condition of American "Negroes." In so doing, they could remain true to the liberal democratic ethos and discuss the experience of Blacks as a transitory aberration. This is reflected in Rose's observations regarding the position of Blacks:

. . . the present position of the Negro is more like that of the European lower class than it is like that of the white American lower class, at least in the Northern and Western states. For this reason it is justifiable to speak of Negroes as the only American lower class (using the term in the European sense), or to use a more precise anthropological term--"caste"--to designate them. I prefer the latter approach especially as it permits recognition of the significant status and other differences within the Negro group.⁴

In this observation, Rose presents an excellent confirmation of the cultural biases inherent in American sociological theory which I mentioned above. America is portrayed as having transcended the European class system

to the point where "only" the Negro can be said to be a lower class: there is no white lower class ethnic group in this sense, especially in the North and West. Only Blacks--a racial group--can be said to occupy a permanent subordinate class position in America, and even they have some internal differentiation. Thus, racial caste and class are a deplorable situation found only in the European feudal culture of the Southern United States.

Although the caste school of race and class relations in the South used Warner's much criticized anthropological approach, their description and interpretation of Southern, small-town culture was largely accepted. As I noted above, this interpretation and description of southern life reinforced the northern liberal democratic bourgeois elite's perception of themselves as culturally and morally superior to any remnant of traditional European society. Their attack on Warner's description of Northeastern villages and small towns was in part a reaction to its portrayal of these communities' similarities to Southern communities--excluding the racial situation; that is, Warner's descriptions of the class cultures of New England were similar to Dollard's, the Gardners', and Davis' portrayal of the white caste-class system in the South.⁵ As I argued above, this criticism of Warner's approach is even more difficult to comprehend in that Warner's model of class and ethnic relations was essentially the same as that of the functionalist-assimilationist. In his analysis of Warner's theory, Gordon observed that one of this school's principal theses was that members of ethnic subsystem as long as they did not rise above the lower-middle class:

. . . whereas an upper-middle or higher class position implies breaking away from the ethnic group to a position initially of marginality and eventually of incorporation into the dominant group. Thus, his prognosis for non-racial ethnic groups on the American scene is that most of them will decrease in size and importance and probably eventually disappear.⁶

Thus, the principal difference between white ethnics and Blacks and other racial or colored minorities lies in their total lack of access into the higher classes by virtue of their skin color and concomitant sociocultural stigmata. This situation of being permanently blocked from access to the dominant culture also figures in Myrdal's definition and description of the

American caste system. In his discussion of the inappropriateness of the concept of "class" in discussing racial differences, he made the following observations:

The . . . term, "class," is impractical and confusing in this context since it is generally used to refer to a nominal status group from which an individual can rise or fall. There is class stratification within each of the two groups. When also used to indicate the difference between the Negro and white groups, the term "class" is liable to blur a significant distinction between the two types of social differences. The recently introduced terms "minority group" and "minority status" are also impractical . . . since they fail to make a distinction between the temporary social disabilities of recent white immigrants and the permanent disabilities of Negroes and other colored people. We need a term to distinguish the large and systematic type of social differentiation from the small and spotty type and have throughout this book used the term "caste."⁷

Prior to Myrdal's massive study, most American sociologists were willing to accept the Warner school portrayal of Black-white relations in the South as characterizing a caste system, but they refused to accept this situation as reflective of race relations in the more liberal, enlightened North and West. As Myrdal commented, American observers of the race scene tended to lump the peculiar, unique problems of Blacks together with those of the then-recent European immigrants; that is, Blacks would enter the urban assimilationist cycle, a model popularized by Park and his students at the University of Chicago--including Black sociologists Frazier, Johnson, Drake, and Cayton (among others). In Park's theory, recent ethnic and racial immigrants to the urban areas usually began their acculturation/assimilation journey into mainstream America from their lower class, homogeneous, slum communities and gradually through their ethnic political participation were able to achieve economic and class progress. Thus, by the third generation, they were generally more "American" (middle class) than ethnic.

Myrdal challenged this assertion by noting that caste barriers to Black progress were not restricted to the South; that the difficulty with accepting this position was due to the insistence of critics of the caste

school on emphasizing the differences between the nature of "classical" caste systems and the more "liberal" manifestations of prejudice and discrimination characteristic of American race relations:

It should . . . be clear that the actual content of the Negro's lower caste status in America, that is, the social relations across the caste line, vary considerably from region to region within the country and from class to class within the Negro group. It also shows considerable change in time It will only have to be remembered constantly that when the term "caste relations" is used in this inquiry to denote a social phenomenon in present day America, this term must be understood in a relative and quantitative sense. It does not assume an invariability in space and time in the culture, nor absolute identity with similar phenomena in other cultures. It should be pointed out . . . that those societies to which the term "caste" is applied without controversy--notably the Antebellum slavery society of the South and the Hindu society of India--do not have the "stable equilibrium" which American sociologists from their distance are often inclined to attribute to them.⁸

Here, Myrdal is responding in large part to Cox's critique of the caste school. It is somewhat ironic, within the context of the model I am attempting to delineate, that a Black sociologist would challenge the caste school on the basis that it misrepresented the nature of Black-white relations in the United States. Yet, his criticisms of this school also provide us with some insights into the nature of capitalist culture and its impact on the Black community. In addition, this debate also introduces the central concept underlying this discussion--that of cultural conflict or, as it is presented in this debate, the relationship between subordinate and superordinate cultures.

Cox's basic disagreement with the caste school reflected his commitment to a Marxist approach to the study of human society. As such, he attacked the caste school from the Marxian evolutionist position; that is, caste societies were described as tradition-bound, static societies with a certain mode of production while the liberal-democratic, individualistic capitalist culture had another, superior, mode of production. Note the distinctions he makes between a caste society and race relations in the

United States:

As distinguished from bipartite interracial adjustment, the caste system is ancient, provincial, culturally oriented, hierarchical in structure, status conscious, nonconflictive, non-pathological, occupationally limited, lacking in aspiration and progressiveness, hypergamous, endogamous, and static.⁹

One can see from this description that Cox perceived capitalist culture and its race problem to be quite the opposite of this; that is, cosmopolitan, heterogeneous, modern, conflict oriented, unlimited occupationally, pathological, competitive, and very progressive. Cox took the position that equating race relations in modern, liberal-democratic, capitalist America with caste relations in an ancient caste system is like saying an apple is "under certain circumstances" an orange:

In Western civilization, there is basically a limitless urge to exploit the means of production. In a caste system, this is not nearly so pronounced. Production . . . is based upon hereditary monopoly rather than upon competitive opportunities . . . race relations or problems are variants of modern political class problems--that is to say, the problems of exploitation of labor together with the exploitation of other factors of production. In a caste system, there is no proletariat, no struggle--indeed, no need for the proletarianization of the workers. We shall assume "judicial notice" of the fact that the race problems in the United States arose from its inception in slavery, out of the need to keep Negroes proletarianized.¹⁰

Cox, in the true Marxian tradition on the race question, emphasized the differences in the cultural modes of economic production. In so doing, he supports the Marxian thesis that racism is a rather recent phenomenon in human history and is correlated with the evolution and development of the capitalist mode of production. This position has been challenged in the works of several historians and social analysts. Nevertheless, while Cox's distinctions have some validity, he is basing them on "ideal-type" constructs. He is comparing two systems in terms of how they are supposed to work as opposed to how they actually work: note the distinctions he made between a caste system and a capitalist system in the following passage:

Production in a caste economy . . . is carried out by hereditarily specialized producers associations

which have not only the right to the peaceful enjoyment of their specialty but also the sacred duty to execute it faithfully and contentedly. Castes do not have the alternative opportunity of working in those industries which yield the largest returns. A significant point of difference here is that there is no "boss" employing castes at stipulated wages to produce commodities which belong to an entrepreneur and which he expects to sell at a profit. The material products of a caste belong to the caste; and it ordinarily disposes of them according to certain established rules of the community.¹¹

Having established the ideal or theoretical political-economic characteristics of a caste system, he then attempted to demonstrate, theoretically, how the position of Blacks in America cannot be compared or equated with that of caste:

On the other hand Negroes in the United States have the right to sell their labor in the best market. The competition of different varieties and especially open exploitation tend to keep Negroes out of many employments: in so far as the constitutional and religious right to any given occupation is concerned . . . both Negroes and whites are on equal footing. Thus, not only are the races not identified with any particular occupation but there is also no accepted plan for the sharing of occupations.¹²

Thus, one critical difference in Cox's ideal construction of caste culture and capitalist culture is that in capitalist culture, "Negroes" are as "free" to be exploited as are other workers. However, he did concede that they "may be" prevented from participation in "certain" occupations due to "competition" and "open exploitation."

In Cox, the "Achilles heel" of Marxian theory on race and class is classically revealed. As Myrdal observed, these are different phenomena-- class relations and race relations are separate and distinct; yet they have some overlapping behavioral manifestations. The fact that Cox attempts to subsume the issue of race in the United States under the so-called "broader" issue of class strikes me as another example of a "scientist" (this time, a brother: so y'all won't be calling me a racist) circumscribed by ideology-- an ideology that negates his cultural being in the same Western chauvinistic manner as that of liberal-democratic universalism. I was initially quite

impressed with Cox's conceptual distinctions between modern capitalism and the Hindu caste system because of these important critical differences in their respective cultural organization.¹³ Yet, his position is essentially that of a bourgeois intellectual: although his perspective is Marxian, his argument supports American ruling class ideas in a way similar to the functionalists. It is not "grounded" in the "real" world (at the time of his writing) of Jim Crow segregation, racial lynchings, restrictive covenants in the North, occupational discrimination, political and economic disenfranchisement, and so forth. To ignore the unique, gross inequities and injustices being perpetrated upon member of his racial or cultural group and to "lump" this phenomenon under the umbrella of proletarian class struggle reflects another type of blindness which often afflicts educated members of oppressed racial groups (Fanon calls this a form of "colonized mentality"). While they often adopt a radical and/or critical theoretical orientation, they fail to acknowledge or perceive the underlying implications that their position has for the survival and perpetuation of their group's culture.¹⁴ Cox's inability to see the convergence between Marxian theory and liberal democracy on the issue of Black culture reflects the persuasive power of liberal progressivism: we often find ourselves deeply immersed in it even in the midst of our critical attacks upon it. To deny the existence of a racial caste on the basis that it was not legal or consistent with liberal-democratic cultural ideology is analogous to the functionalists arguing that America was a fluid open-class system. In each case, the ideal is assumed to be real.

Myrdal appeared to be responding directly to Cox when he noted that many observers of America's race relations confused caste relations with the caste line:

The changes and variations which occur in the American caste system relate only to caste relations, not to the dividing line between the castes. The latter stays rigid and unblurred. It will remain fixed until it becomes possible for a person to pass legitimately from the lower caste to the higher without misrepresentation of his origin. The American definition of "Negro" as any person who has the slightest amount of Negro ancestry has its significance in making the caste line absolutely rigid. Had the caste line been drawn differently--for example, on

the criterion of the pre-dominance of white or Negro ancestry or of cultural assimilation-- it would not have been possible to hold the caste line so rigid.¹⁵

For Cox, the existence of the racial caste line was a temporary phenomenon. He noted in an article published prior to the one referred to above that when two racial or nationality groups were isolated as a consequence of a situation of sustained conflict or basic repugnance, they should not be construed as castes even though their relationship was one of superordination and subordination or "conqueror and conquered." He termed these situations "latent power group relations." These situations occur when a society (culture) has not fully integrated the various groups within its population. Cox observed further that since the South was not a fully integrated society, caste theory was not applicable: the relationship between the races was still unstable, subject to change.

. . . . Negroes and whites in the Deep South do not constitute an assimilated society. These are rather two societies. Thus we may conceive of Negroes as constituting a quasi or tentative society developed to meet certain needs resulting from their retarded assimilation. Unlike the permanence of caste, it is a temporary society intended to continue only so long as whites are able to maintain barriers against their assimilation.¹⁶

The question here, of course, is just when Cox expected this "temporary," "latent power group situation" to end. He admitted that the legal barriers to the assimilation of Blacks had been eradicated, but their "tentative" society still appeared to be subordinate. Cox was apparently willing to ignore what Berreman perceived as the essential similarity of the two systems--that caste rules function to maintain the caste system with its institutionalized inequality indefinitely:

In the United States, color is the conspicuous mark of caste, while in India there are complex religious features which do not appear in America, but in both cases dwelling area, occupation, place of worship, and cultural behavior, and so on are important symbols associated with caste status. The crucial fact is that caste status is determined and therefore systems perpetuated, by birth: membership in them is ascribed and unalterable. Individuals in the low castes are considered inherently inferior and relegated to a disadvantaged position, regardless

of their behavior. From the point of view of the social psychology of intergroup relations, this is probably the most important common and distinct feature of the caste systems.¹⁷

On these issues, Cox can be categorized as an optimistic Marxist assimilationist. He had little regard for Black culture and appeared to be looking forward to the day when the Black "quasi" society would cease and desist--thereby demonstrating its complete (as opposed to "retarded") assimilation into American mainstream culture and, if I am reading him correctly, active involvement in the anticipated Marxian class struggle. As I noted above, Cox's description of Black American culture as tentative, retarded, and temporary, as well as his proposed solution to this "latent power group conflict," was essentially the same as that of the pro-caste, liberal humanitarians. Both Cox's and Myrdal's forecast or prognosis for the Black community was one of gradual absorption into liberal-democratic America. This is a good example of what Cruse referred to when he noted that the goal for both liberal Marxists and liberal non-Marxists was the same--the cultural negation of the Black community.

The fact that two different observers using different theoretical approaches arrived at the same conclusion in spite of all the evidence to the contrary is most amazing. It demonstrated an unusual amount of "faith" in liberal-democratic culture and the "American Creed." It also demonstrated some rather naive notions regarding the nature of both Black and American culture. However, the major contribution that the caste school made was that of introducing the element of cultural conflict; that is, emphasizing the fact that whites and Blacks existed in separate caste cultures with one cultural group superordinate and the other subordinate was an acknowledgement of cultural differences that were maintained and perpetuated over time. It was a confirmation of Blumer's thesis¹⁸ which discussed race relations as a sense of group position. From this perspective, racial prejudice and discrimination were not confined to the acts of individuals or their attitudes. Rather, racism--the feeling or sense of cultural and biological superiority--is as much a part of American culture as "mom and apple pie." As such, it is an inherent part of American institutional life: it is taught to and internalized by children as they are taught to read, write, and speak. This sense of group superiority over racial groups is reinforced

once the child leaves his family and enters into the major socializing agent in American society--the educational system. In these settings, Blacks and other racial minorities are quite conspicuous by virtue of their absence, usually in both the physical setting (that is, classroom) and the content (that is, curriculum). If they are present in either or both, they are usually perceived and/or depicted as inferior.

The caste school's perspective also confirmed and reinforced Warner's conception of the nature of capitalist America's cultural class structure. This approach, as noted above, documented the presence of stable social classes among both groups. Their approach (and Warner's) was essentially the same as that of Nunez, a Mexican sociologist, in that they perceived culture to be the basic differentiating factor distinguishing the classes. According to Nunez, social classes are differentiated by their peculiar life-styles which are based on their economic structure:

In the same way we find that there is a culture of the higher class, another of the middle-class, and still another of the proletarian class within every civilized society, as aspects or phases of its general culture; and that with the essential characteristics of these cultures well defined, permanent units or circles can be formed in spite of the incessant changes operating in the persons living within them. But the social class is not constituted either by the individuals regarded as such or by the cultural contents of each circle, but by uniting both elements into a living, always actual synthesis. (*Italics mine.*)¹⁹

Nunez's emphasis on class cultures as aspects of its more general culture comes very close to the position informing this treatise. However, he did not introduce the elements of race and ethnic oppression or assimilation into his theory. Thus, his descriptions of the politics, economics, and values of the various classes composing modern civilized (read capitalist) society would hold true for ethnically homogeneous societies. When his model is applied to the United States, one must emphasize that the generalized class cultural portraits he presented were reflections of aspects of the white Anglo-Saxon protestant cultural system which functions as the American culture. This qualification is essential in that America--as both Cruse and Gordon have demonstrated--is stratified by class, race, and ethnicity.

Nunez's model (also Weber's and Mills') emphasized both the political-economic dimension of class as well as that of culture or life-style. This is reflected in his portrait of the upper or higher class where he noted that the pride of blood or wealth is a dominant characteristic: although in the modern bourgeois society, this pride is based more on wealth and power independent of any consideration of blood. He delineated several distinctive features or cultural traits characteristic of the capitalist upper-class: 1) possession of wealth and capital power; 2) a refined form of material and moral living permitting the satisfaction of human needs through its access to the best things; 3) a feeling of safety and pride of class; 4) social conduct constrained by rigorously observed conventions; 5) constant preoccupation about keeping up appearances; and 6) a reactionary and conservative spirit.²⁰

Nunez perceived these cultural attributes of the upper-class to be constants; that is, they exist as Durkheimian "social facts"--external to the individual and yet constraining him or her. In essence, before an individual is considered to be wholly or completely "higher-" or "upper-class," s/he must possess and internalize most or all of these cultural prerequisites. Nunez differs from Warner in that he includes the elements of power, especially economic power, as an inherent element in upper-class culture. Warner and his disciples concentrated more on the behavioral and blood dimensions while underemphasizing or omitting a discussion of the importance of wealth and power. However, both Nunez and Warner perceived these class cultures as being open and more fluid than caste stratification. Thus, Nunez can also be perceived as a Darwinistic evolutionist in his perception of modern "civilized" society's class organization as being an "advance" over backwards, more rigid, traditional caste stratified societies or cultures.

Nunez's cultural portrait of the middle class is classic in that it captures the unity or organic wholeness of capitalist culture--the cement which binds the classes together into a stable, harmonious system, a condition contrary to Marx's predictions. He began by noting that the middle class copies the ways of living of the higher class, which in this purely formal aspect, seems to be its constant ideal: dress, furniture, living quarters, recreation, and so forth. Secondly, it bestows great importance on culture, the sciences, technics, the professions, as the means for the attainment of economic well-being and moral satisfaction; it also possesses a high ethical

and religious sense, and its ambitions are limited to obtaining well-being and moral satisfaction mainly by means of work--it does not make a point of accumulating riches.²¹

Politically, Nunez observed that the middle class exists in an ideological contradiction: it values the rights associated with the ownership of private property, yet it recognizes the vast difference between its wealth and that of the upper class.

It loves and respects private ownership on account of having acquired it by way of patient efforts and privations or because it hopes to acquire it, and naturally feels fearful and indignant at the very idea of being dispossessed of what it justly holds to be the product of its work. The justification of its right to the small property it owns, leads it to justify every right to ownership without taking into account the fact that the enormous properties of the higher class do not have the same foundation.²²

As a consequence of its allegiance to the principles and rights of private property, the middle class is taken to be a factor of moderation, of equilibrium, in the class struggle. This "buffer" role that it plays is essential to the higher class and for the stability of the social system; for, without the latter, the former would be soon destroyed by the proletariat. On the other hand, the proletariat holds this class responsible for delaying the triumph of its cause due to its conformist, timid, counter-revolutionary tendencies. However, Nunez, also noted that the high cultural and ethical and religious sense of the middle class led many of its members to a critical analysis of human societies. Thus, the middle classes have produced, in all historical periods, great revolutionaries, great reformers, and apostles of social justice.

He concluded his discussion of the cultural traits of the capitalist cultural middle class by noting its commitment to maintaining appearances, even at the cost of great sacrifices--the "keeping up with the Joneses" syndrome. Its economic foundation is derived from rent on small property, or revenue from limited capital, from personal work, or from both. Certain sectors of the middle class possess a certain amount of luxury and comfort but this does not approximate that of their more ostentatious reference group and social superiors. Thus, the middle class is composed of service

"workers" or "caretakers": the bureaucrats, technicians, professionals, administrators (public and private), and so forth. It is essentially what recent neo-Marxian theoreticians have labelled the "new working-class."

This portrait of the middle class in modern "civilized" societies, or capitalist churches, confirms in form and substance the idea that the middle class is the cultural bedrock of capitalist societies. The support for the right of private ownership, the imitation of and aspirations for becoming members of the "higher classes," the strict, puritanical observance of the cultural and ethical values of capitalist culture, the management and manipulation of the lower class to serve the interest of the higher class as well as to maintaining and perpetuating the liberal-democratic myth. I will elaborate upon and extend this portrayal of the rôle, function, and cultural values of the middle class in another paper which compares and contrasts the Black and white middle classes. In clarifying the cultural attributes of the middle class as well as delineating its political-economic status within the broader cultural system, Nunez has provided us with an excellent model for analyzing the cultural complexities inherent in the Black-white cultural struggle. However, before elaborating on this issue, let me briefly summarize Nunez's cultural portrait of the lower class in liberal American capitalist culture. It will also provide additional insight on the nature of capitalist culture and the dynamics of racial cultural struggle in America.

Nunez described the lower class as a group of inadequately educated (often illiterate), economically struggling, manual laborers with crude manners of speech and social conduct. They are present-oriented and very religious--that is, they attend church regularly to meet certain of their emotional needs. Politically, they tend to be conservative or aggressively patriotic. They are disproportionately represented in the army--even in countries where military service is not compulsory. Although they have the power in terms of numbers to launch a successful revolution at any time, they tend to be the staunchest supporters of the class-divided, legally structured social inequalities of elite dominated capitalist "democracy": "In spite of its economic situation it accepts the existing state of things, reacting and rebelling only when guided and given a program and a banner by individuals from the other social classes especially from the middle class."²³

Nunez observed that this paradox could be explained only on grounds of religion and culture.

This analysis of the lower classes in capitalist cultures confirms the theses of several social analysts (Cruse, Boggs, Mills, and so on) regarding the folly of American Marxists' attempts at forging an alliance between Blacks (and other nonwhite ethnic groups) and the white working class. As Nunez correctly noted, the working class in capitalist culture is the most reactionary, conservative force for the maintenance of the status quo; its members are the front-line, "cannon-fodder" supporters of the capitalist system. They will place their lives on the line for its protection and perpetuation--be it in Viet Nam, Korea, Japan, Western Europe, Boston, Little Rock, Oakland, Memphis (Johannesburg?), and so on. The Black cultural struggles in the United States--be they directed towards assimilation or separation--inevitably challenge the cultural-economic interests, loyalties, and privileges of this group.

Nunez's observations provide additional support for the Weberian thesis regarding the relationship between capitalism and the Protestant Ethic. That the lower classes in America maintain their deep, devoted loyalty to American capitalist culture despite their obvious and necessary material and social deprivation can only be attributed to religion and culture. This is important because it counters the functionalists' profit-motivated theory of stratification discussed above. If one were to accept their theses, one would have to conclude that the elite of the system--those deriving the greatest amount of wealth, power, privilege, and prestige--would be the first to join the army, man the tanks and planes, first on the "old battle line." Yet, this is not the case; they may be the ones to decide that someone will man the war machinery, but they will not be the ones. If one accepts the postulate that the greatest gift one can render to the perpetuation of one's collective way of life is the gift of his or her life, it is most ironic that this altruistic loyalty is found most amongst those who benefit the least from the status quo. Again, I would like to emphasize that culture with its religious, moral ethos is greater than the sum of its individual parts. Rational economic man--the type implicit in functionalist stratification theory--could not be persuaded that it was in his economic interest to risk his life at a salary lower than that of a corporation president.

(who would probably be earning excess profits as a consequence of the war!). The loyalty of capitalist culture's lower classes reflects the power of the moral/spiritual ethos in maintaining cultural autonomy and racial/cultural superiority. Thus, what would appear to be the perfect setting for the Marxist class struggle is negated through the intervening effect of culture-- a collective commitment to the maintenance and perpetuation of capitalist cultural social life, with its accompanying racial privileges.

Nunez's analysis does not eliminate the possibility of Marxian-style class struggle. However, he notes that the leadership and program for such a movement must come from the middle class: the lower-class is usually incapable of organizing ideological movements. This concept of the middle class as the "new working class" with the potential for creating and implementing strategies for radical socialist social change has been expounded by several social theoreticians.²⁴ The difficulty with this position is essentially the same as that of traditional Marxian theory. It ignores or refuses to accept the importance of the racial-cultural question. Its Western vision of scientific socialism essentially negates other forms of socialism; that is, nonwhite and non-Western like the concept of African socialism (or communitarian socialism) as developed by President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and elaborated by Chinweizu in his provocative monograph, The West and the Rest of Us. These approaches suggest that there are socialistic forms which are culturally consistent with African peoples, and which are to be preferred to imported Western, Marxist-Leninist type(s). However, this is a digression which will be addressed more fully in another essay.

Nunez's analysis of the class system, and the sub-cultures contained therein, is consistent with that of Warner and the caste school. Their delineation of the various classes and the relationships between and within the class groupings contradicts and refutes the functionalists' stratification model. As their models vividly demonstrate, the American capitalist cultural class structure is neither open nor fluid: on the contrary, it is stable and inherently perpetuates social inequality. This analysis of the class system also contradicts the liberal-democratic ethos which serves as the cornerstone for American culture.

Nunez's assertion regarding the cultural unity of the system is also consistent with the racial-cultural struggle model guiding this discussion;

that is, his emphasis on religion and culture as the cement which holds what appears to be disparate and contradictory elements together coincides with the thesis, postulated here which emanated from an analysis of Weber's work. Capitalism as a cultural system also has a moral and spiritual dimension. It is not merely a political-economic system. Its vision or world view is unique in that individualism, competition, and materialism constitute its core elements. As such, it stands in direct opposition to other more communalistic, cooperative societies and cultures. As a consequence of its wealth and power, it has been able to dominate and exploit nonwhite peoples and cultures. This dominance has been justified through the celebration of its cultural superiority. Once capitalism is perceived as a cultural system which bestows special political-economic and racial privileges and benefits on its constituents, then the so-called race-class struggle within the capitalist state takes on new meanings. For while there may be a continuous class struggle occurring among the superordinate groups, that struggle is controlled and constrained by a larger need--the need to remain in ascendance at the expense of nonwhite peoples. Thus, racism constitutes a vital element in maintaining unity within the dominant culture. Nunez, Warner, and the caste school neglected to emphasize this crucial dimension of capitalist culture.

Nunez's delineation of the role of the middle class in capitalist culture is a major contribution to the concept of cultural struggle. Several researchers and social analysts have emphasized the importance of achieving middle-class status, especially for people of color in America. The assimilationist-integrationist model for race relations in American sociology has generally used the middle class as the norm for determining the "progress" of racial and ethnic groups. If these researchers could demonstrate that the majority of a racial or ethnic group have acquired the attributes of the middle class, it was generally conceded that the group had become "American"--it shared the values, beliefs, and function of the middle-class as described by Nunez. When this model was applied to the Black community, it revealed that the majority of Blacks were lower and/or underclass (to borrow Billingsley's concept); that is, they were outside and beneath the mainstream middle class. Thus, increasing the number of middle-class Blacks became a national objective for many liberal policymakers. If they are

successful--they haven't been thus far--the Black community would cease to exist in any culturally distinguishable way. From the perspective of cultural struggle, the realization of that objective would be construed as a defeat for Black America. However, due to the tenacity of the racist element inherent in capitalist culture, this does not constitute an imminent danger. The more pressing problem confronting the Black community is that of its contemporary middle-class' orientation toward the cultural struggle. As Warner and the caste school demonstrated, the Black middle class has traditionally identified with the dominant culture's middle class. This group in the Black community has been presented as the model to be emulated by its lower class brethren. It has been described as representing the "best" of the race. This was due in large measure to its conventional public behavior, its material state, its cultural style, its participation in mainstream politics, and its often heroic struggles against the apartheid-type discrimination of the old South. Members of the Black middle class have been very aggressive in their efforts to become accepted--to get in the door; to prove their humanity by competing as equals with white counterparts. From the perspective of cultural struggle, the pursuit of these objectives places members of this group in the enemy's camp vis-a-vis their non-assimilated racial brethren. For, as Nunez clearly and decisively indicated, the middle class is the bedrock of capitalist culture; the "caretaker" of the system, the guard at the gates to the castle; the interpreter, the definer, and the justifier of capitalist cultural hegemony. Thus a Black person must become culturally white (BASP - Black Anglo-Saxon Protestant) in order to be accepted into this group. In so doing, he/she becomes the cultural enemy of his/her racial group.

The cultural assault perpetuated on Black people is one of the gravest problems confronting the Black community. The Black middle class has an important role to play in this continuing struggle if it is committed to fulfilling its historical mission as outlined by DuBois:

So far they are justified; but they make their mistake in failing to recognize that, however laudable an ambition to rise may be, the first duty of an upper class is to serve the lowest classes. The aristocracies of all peoples have been slow in learning this and perhaps the Negro is no slower than the rest, but his peculiar situation demands that in his case this lesson be learned sooner. 25

DuBois made this statement in 1899; it is still a very relevant observation regarding the role of the Black middle class.

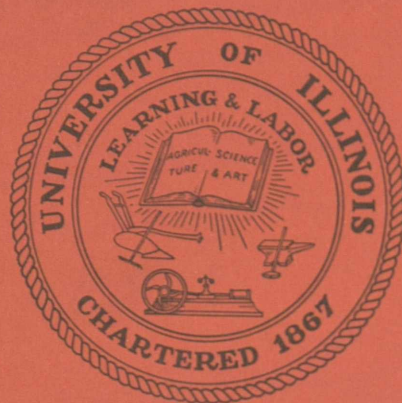
Before concluding this review of capitalist culture, I would like to discuss briefly a very controversial work which supports the basic thesis of this treatise regarding the nature of cultural struggles. I am referring to both an article and the first volume of Wallerstein's work which focuses on the rise and demise of the capitalist world economy.²⁶ Wallerstein's thesis regarding the evolution and ascendance of the capitalist world economy and its exploitation-domination of semi-peripheral and peripheral areas or nation-states reinforces arguments presented here regarding Western European cultural and economic imperialism. His delineation of the nation-states or areas which comprise the semi-periphery and periphery parallels the position of Black and other nonwhite peoples within the United States, within other "core" Western European nations, as well as their position in the international capitalist political-economy: Blacks, and other nonwhite peoples, wherever they are, are the most exploited, oppressed, and dependent groups or nation-states. In essence, the position of Black people in the United States and the world can be perceived as an outgrowth of the expansion of the capitalist world economy through the process of colonialism.

I have stated elsewhere²⁷ that colonialism can be characterized in terms of three interrelated and inter-dependent cultural processes occurring simultaneously--cultural imposition, cultural disintegration, and cultural recreation. While Wallerstein has chosen to focus on the economic roles and functions of areas "peripheral" to the "core," I have chosen to emphasize the impact that this cultural-economic system has had on its victims. The dynamics of this confrontation have been described and analyzed by many scholars.²⁸ The importance of Wallerstein's work for this treatise lies in its connecting the social situation, past and present, of Black Americans with that of their African ancestors and contemporaries. This is especially true if one accepts (as I do) the thesis that Black America is an internal or domestic colony within the United States.

NOTES

1. Thomas Gossett, Race: The History of an Idea (New York: Schocken Books, 1965).
2. The description of Southern culture as an example of New World European feudalism is found in Myrdal's An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (New York: Harper and Bros., 1944); Eugene Genovese's The Political Economy of Slavery (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), and Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974).
3. Max Weber, "Class, Status, and Party," in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, eds. H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).
4. Arnold Rose, "The Concept of Class in American Sociology," Social Research 25 (Spring 1958): 64.
5. John Dollard, Caste and Class in a Southern Town (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937); Burleigh and Mary R. Gardner and Allison Davis, Deep South (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941).
6. Milton Gordon, Social Class in American Sociology (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1958), p. 119.
7. Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (New York: Harper and Bros., 1944), p. 667.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 668.
9. Oliver Cox, "Race and Caste: A Distinction," American Journal of Sociology 50 (March 1945): 360.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 360-361.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 361.
12. *Ibid.*
13. His classic work on these topics remains essential reading to those interested in this subject area: Caste, Class and Race (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1959).
14. Cox's position on caste is even more ambiguous and confusing when one reads his excellent analysis of lynching and his perceptive, provocative critique of Nathan Hare's Black Anglo-Saxons (Marzani & Munsell, 1965). Thus, his analysis of concrete situations appears to contradict his theoretical framework. His work reflects an inner tension between his Marxian-oriented tendencies and his racial (or almost nationalistic) interpretations of certain phenomena.
15. Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy, pp. 668-669.
16. Oliver Cox, "The Modern Caste School of Race Relations," Social Forces 21 (December 1942): 223.
17. Gerald Berreman, "Caste in India and the United States," American Journal of Sociology 66 (September 1960): 122.

18. Herbert Blumer, "Race Relations as a Sense of Group Position," Pacific Sociological Review 1 (1958): 3-7.
19. Lucio Mendieta y Nunez, "The Social Classes," American Sociological Review 11 (April 1946): 170.
20. Ibid., p. 172.
21. Ibid., p. 173.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p. 175
24. Harold Cruse in Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (New York: Morrow, 1967); C.W. Mills in Power, Politics, and People (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963); Charles Anderson in The Political Economy of Social Classes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974).
25. W.E.B. DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p. 317. Originally published in 1899.
26. Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis," Comparative Studies in Society and History 16 (September 1974): 387-415; The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century (New York: Academic Press, 1974).
27. Douglas V. Davidson, "The Sociology of Oppressed Cultures," Journal of Black Political Economy 6 (Summer 1976): 420-437.
28. I mentioned Chinweizu's seminal work entitled The West and the Rest of Us (New York: Random House, 1975) earlier. Walter Rodney's How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1964); Albert Memmi's The Colonizer and the Colonized (New York: The Orion Press, 1975); and Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1966); and other volumes also focus on these issues.



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