
22. *The Modern Caste School of Race Relations*

DURING THE LAST DECADE A PROLIFIC SCHOOL OF WRITERS ON race relations in the United States, led mainly by social anthropologists, has relied religiously upon an ingenious, if not original, caste hypothesis. Professor W. Lloyd Warner is the admitted leader of the movement, and his followers include scholars of considerable distinction.¹ We propose here to examine critically the position of this school.

The Hypothesis

If we think of a hypothesis as a tentative statement of a theory which some researcher sets out to demonstrate or to prove, then the school has no hypothesis. But we shall quote liberally so that the authors might have an opportunity to speak for themselves about the things which they believe. These we shall call loosely the hypothesis. The school is particularly interested in race relations in the Southern states of the United States, and its members believe that they have struck upon an

¹See the leading hypothesis by W. Lloyd Warner, "American Caste and Class," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XLII, September 1936, pp. 234-37. See also, by the same author, "Social Anthropology and the Modern Community," *ibid.*, Vol. XLVI, May 1941, pp. 785-96; W. Lloyd Warner and W. Allison Davis, "A Comparative Study of American Caste," in *Race Relations and the Race Problem*, pp. 219-40; W. Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Children of Bondage*; W. Lloyd Warner, Buford H. Junker, and Walter A. Adams, *Color and Human Nature*; W. Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, Mary R. Gardner, and W. Lloyd Warner, *Deep South*; John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*; Buell G. Gallagher, *American Caste and the Negro College*; Robert Austin Warren, *New Haven Negroes*; Kingsley Davis, "Intermarriage in Caste Societies," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 43, September 1941, pp. 376-95; Robert L. Sutherland, *Color, Class and Personality*; Edward A. Ross, *New-Age Sociology*; William F. Ogburn and Meyer F. Nimkoff, *Sociology*; Kimball Young, *Sociology*; Robert L. Sutherland and Julian L. Woodward, *Introductory Sociology*; Stuart A. Queen and Jeanette R. Gruener, *Social Pathology*; Alain Locke and Bernhard J. Stern, *When Peoples Meet*; Wilbert E. Moore and Robin M. Williams, "Stratification in the Ante-Bellum

unusually revealing explanation of the situation. In the South, they maintain, Negroes form one caste and whites another, with an imaginary rotating caste line between them. "The white caste is in a superordinate position and the Negro caste in a subordinate social position." The following definition of caste has been most widely accepted.

Caste . . . describes a theoretical arrangement of the people of a given group in an order in which the privileges, duties, obligations, opportunities, etc., are unequally distributed between the groups which are considered to be higher and lower. . . . Such a definition also describes class. A caste or organization . . . can be further defined as one where marriage between two or more groups is not sanctioned and where there is no opportunity for members of the lower groups to rise into the upper groups or of members of the upper to fall into the lower ones.²

A class system and a caste system "are antithetical to each other. . . . Nevertheless they have accommodated themselves in the southern community. . . ." The caste line is represented as running asymmetrically diagonally between the two class systems of Negroes and whites as in the following diagram.³

It is assumed that during slavery the caste line, AB in diagram, was practically horizontal but that since then, with the cultural progress of Negroes, it has rotated upward. It may become perpendicular so as to coincide with the line DE; indeed, though unlikely, it may swing over toward the whites. The point here is that it would be possible for the line to take a vertical position while the caste system remains intact.

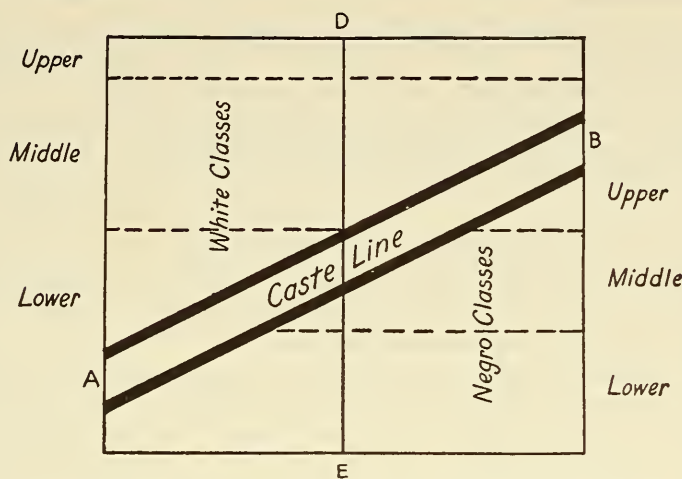
It is thought further that the social disparity between Negro classes and white classes is particularly disconcerting to upper-class Negroes.

South," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 7, June 1942, pp. 343-51; Allison Davis, "Caste, Economy, and Violence," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. LI, July 1945, pp. 7-15; James Melvin Reinhardt, *Social Psychology*; Guy B. Johnson, "Negro Racial Movements and Leadership in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 43, July 1937, pp. 57-71; M. F. Ashley Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth*; "The Nature of Race Relations," *Social Forces*, Vol. 25, March 1947, pp. 336-42; Paul H. Landis, *Social Control*; Ina Corinne Brown, *National Survey of the Higher Education of Negroes*, U.S. Office of Education, Misc. No. 6, Vol. 1; Verne Wright and Manuel C. Elmer, *General Sociology*; W. Lloyd Warner, Robert J. Havighurst, and Martin B. Loeb, *Who Shall Be Educated*; St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis*; Mozell C. Hill, "A Comparative Analysis of the Social Organization of the All-Negro Society in Oklahoma," *Social Forces*, Vol. 25, 1946, pp. 70-77; and others.

The counterpart of this group of thinkers is another school which has with equal enthusiasm attempted to explain caste relationship in terms of racial antagonism. See chapter on the origin of caste.

²W. Lloyd Warner, "American Caste and Class," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XLII, p. 234.

³*Ibid.*, p. 235.



Courtesy of "Social Forces"

Position of "Caste Line" between Whites and Negroes
in the United States

The "emotional instability of many of the individuals in this group" may be readily explained since:

In his own personality he feels the conflict of the two opposing structures, and in the thinking and feeling of the members of both groups there is to be found this same conflict about his position. . . . Although he is at the top of the Negro class hierarchy, he is constantly butting his head against the caste line.⁴

It is believed that in many countries of the world besides India there are developed caste systems, but the school has never found it convenient to demonstrate this proposition. "Caste," Warner and Davis assert without proof, "is found in most of the major areas of the world; this is particularly true of Africa, Asia, and America. The Indians of the southeastern United States and those of British Columbia have well-developed, if not castes, then caste-like structures. We cannot take time to examine those American systems, but we shall briefly summarize the material on East Indian caste. . . ." ⁵ Thus the caste system in India has been taken as the criterion; nowhere has the school relied upon any other system.

⁴Ibid., p. 236. See also *Deep South* by Davis, Gardner, Gardner, and Warner, p. 13.

⁵"A Comparative Study of American Caste," in *Race Relations and the Race Problem*, Edgar T. Thompson, ed. Observe, incidentally, this editor's own involvement with the ideas of the school: Ibid., p. xiii.

On the crucial question of marriage among castes Warner and Davis give Emile Senart credit for the belief that castes "isolate themselves to prevent intermarriage"; while they regard hypergamy as an example of "variations from the caste ideal."⁶ Kingsley Davis, however, thinks that hypergamy distinguishes two major types of caste systems. In India hypergamy is possible because the Indian caste system is a "non-racial caste system"; in the United States and South Africa, on the other hand, hypergamy is impossible because there are in these situations "racial caste systems."⁷ Warner and Davis depend further upon Senart and Bouglé for their significant conclusion that "*no one occupation has but one caste assigned to it.*"⁸

Considerable emphasis is put upon the fact that a Negro or a white person, who is born Negro or white, could never hope to become anything other than Negro or white. "Children and grandchildren of Negroes will continue to be born into, live in, and only die out of the Negro 'caste.'"⁹ Further, this biological fact of inheriting racial marks strikes Kingsley Davis as providing an ideal foundation for a caste system:

The reason that race serves as an excellent basis of caste is that one gets one's racial traits by birth from parents having those traits, and one cannot change these traits during the rest of one's life.¹⁰

These, then, are some of the leading postulates of the caste school of race relations. Without continuing to introduce fragmentary statements at this point, we shall attempt an evaluation.¹¹

Estimate of Basic Principles

Although the school has relied completely upon references to the caste system in India for its authority, it has nowhere made anything approaching a careful study of the caste system. Yet, even so, it has been difficult to determine which of their selected "essences" of the caste system will be controlling in given situations; and one is seldom certain about the degree of concentration of these extracts. For example, after

⁶Ibid., pp. 229, 230.

⁷"Intermarriage in Caste Societies," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 43, July-September 1941, pp. 376-95.

⁸In *Race Relations and the Race Problem*, p. 231.

⁹W. Lloyd Warner, Buford H. Junker, Walter A. Adams, *Color and Human Nature*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁰Op. cit., note, p. 387. See also *Deep South*, p. 15.

¹¹We should add that sometimes members of the school speak of "the American system of color-caste" with probable implication that the Indian system is not based upon color.

their most elaborate discussion of caste in India, the following conclusion is reached:

There has been no attempt in these last few paragraphs to demonstrate that our caste structure and Indian caste structure are exactly the same, but rather we have attempted to show that they are the same kind of social phenomena.¹²

At this point the question may easily devolve upon the meaning of the expression "same kind." At least the reader might have expected that the authors would now attempt to show that the phenomena are indeed commensurable. But they do not. From this point on they proceed to discuss race relations in the United States, totally oblivious of a theory of caste or of whether caste ever existed in India. Apparently their thin discussion of Indian caste is merely intended to provide subject atmosphere.

We have had considerable difficulty also in finding clear-cut statements of principle. Usually some such phrase as "for our purpose," "as here used," "in so far as," or "generally" limits conclusions that are forthwith given universal applicability. To be sure, one could hardly question such a contrivance, yet it may be likened to the researcher who says: "This animal before us is not a horse, but *for our purpose* it is convenient to call it a horse. If you examine it closely, you will discover that it is a water buffalo. That does not matter, however, for we are not going to use it in the water-buffalo sense. Obviously, you cannot say the animal is not a horse; it is, in so far as it has four legs; and four legs are generally understood to be the essence of all horses and water buffaloes."

At points where clarity is most needed the school invariably becomes obscure, impressionistic, or circuitous. It has been accepted that the form of social organization in Brahmanic India constitutes a caste system. This system has certain distinguishing characteristics; hence we shall consider these the norm.

Definitions of a society are difficult to formulate; they are usually insufficient. For example, A. L. Kroeber wrote an article on caste¹³ and came to the conclusion that a caste system is not possible in Western society; notwithstanding this, Warner, without even so much as a reference to Kroeber's negative conclusion, adopted his definition of "a caste" and reached the opposite position: "The social system of Old City [in the South] fits this definition of Kroeber's and of most of the

¹²Warner and Davis, in *Race Relations and the Race Problem*, p. 232.

¹³"Caste," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.

ethnologists and social anthropologists.”¹⁴ A play with definitions usually results in debate rather than constructive interest in the social problem. At any rate, Warner’s own definition of caste considers two factors as determining: (a) that intermarriage between groups is not sanctioned, and (b) that there is no opportunity for members of lower groups to rise into upper groups, nor for those of the upper groups to fall into the lower groups.

It should be emphasized that a definition of a *caste* does not describe the *caste system*. We have shown elsewhere that upper-caste men in India have always been able to marry women of lower castes without disturbing the caste system, a procedure which could not be sanctioned in the South. Then, too, endogamy may be an isolator of social classes, castes, tribes, sects, millets, or any other social groups which think they have something to protect; hence, the final test of caste is not endogamy but the social values which endogamy secures. Indeed, A. C. Mace sees marrying out of one’s class as an offense second only to the commission of crime, while Bouglé speaks of the horror of misalliances and the belief in impurity of contact between upper and lower classes in Europe.¹⁵ Endogamy is not the essence of caste; if there is an essence of caste, endogamy merely bottles it up.

Probably the most insidious analogy between race and caste relations resides in the idea of life membership in each group. The identity of these phenomena, however, is only apparent. It must be obvious that a man born in a certain race cannot have the choice of leaving it and going into another race. But it is not at all obvious that a person born in one caste could not become a member of another caste. The biological affiliation of persons belonging to a given race has not been the position of one caste-man with respect to another in India. In fact, this very distinction should raise the suspicion that different social forces are operating in the caste system from those in situations of racial adjustment.

But what really do we mean by saying that a white man cannot fall into the Negro group? To the extent that he can have sex relations with Negro women he can “fall” biologically. The mixed-blood children that are born are, in the long run, the most potent equilibrators of the races; and the lawmakers of the South are by no means unmindful of this fact. The Negro may “rise” biologically if he is able to pass.

From too much preoccupation with the unchangeableness of physical

¹⁴*Deep South*, p. 9.

¹⁵C. A. Mace, “Beliefs and Attitudes in Class Relations,” in *Class Conflict and Social Stratification*, T. H. Marshall, ed., p. 159; C. Bouglé, *Essais sur le régime des castes*, 3d ed., p. 6.

inheritance, the conclusion is reached that the social status of Negroes and whites in the South may become identical, yet they will continue to constitute two castes. In explaining his diagram, Warner holds that there is a theoretical possibility of Negroes advancing to the point where they may become the dominant caste. And this makes his theory particularly illogical and sterile.

So far as its logic is concerned, it asserts that Negroes may become equal to whites, evidently in wealth, in learning, in opportunity to control the government of the state; in short, culturally equal. Yet Negroes and whites will still be unequal; unequal, obviously, in color. For a person born white could never have the privilege of becoming black. Clearly, it must be on the grounds of the latter disability that his caste system will still be maintained. And since, so far as we know, time will not alter the possibility of a man's changing his racial marks, we must expect the white caste and the black caste to remain indefinitely intact—an ideal leopard-and-spots theory of race relations.

The race-caste assumption is sterile because it has no way of confronting the real dynamics of race relations. It goes happily past the meaning of the racial dichotomy in the South. Engrossed with ideas of "social structure," the school remains oblivious of the physiology of the society. It presumes that the white man is protecting his color and that the Negro is equally interested in protecting his, so that with the ballot in the hands of Negroes and with the opportunity for cultural participation open to them as normal citizens, the black code which keeps the races segregated will still be the law of the South. Elsewhere we have attempted to show, however, that the greater the relative cultural advancement of Negroes, the less will be the need of the white man's protecting his color. The theory sees a caste system set up in the South in the interest of the white man's color and, for that matter, the Negro's also.¹⁶ Nonetheless, it may be shown that the white man has no such obsession about his color. He will protect it only so long as it helps him to reserve a calculable cultural advantage.

The caste interpretation of race relations in the South cannot see that the intermarriage restriction laws are a social affront to Negroes;

¹⁶Guided by the idea of Warner's caste line, Guy B. Johnson goes into the following monstrosity: "The great question in the coming era of race relations in the South will be, how far and how fast can the horizontal line of caste shift toward the vertical line of a biracial society? That is, how much equality can Negroes secure in the separate order? In so far as the gradual revision of racial attitudes makes caste distinctions obsolete, there will be change with a minimum of conflict." In *Race Relations and the Race Problem*, p. 150. In other words, this writer reasons that changing social attitudes are making caste distinctions obsolete, and that when all caste distinctions become obsolete, the caste line will be vertical!

it cannot perceive that Negroes are smarting under the Jim Crow laws; it may not recognize the overwhelming aspiration among Negroes for equality of social opportunity; it could never realize that the superiority of the white race is due principally to the fact that it has developed the necessary devices for maintaining incontestable control over the shooting iron; and it will not know that "race hatred" may be reckoned in terms of the interests of the white ruling class. Hence, it is possible for the school to imagine the anomaly of Negroes fully assimilated culturally and yet living symbiotically apart from whites on the basis of some unexplained understanding that their colors should never be mixed. In other words, the races will, as Warner and Davis believe "isolate themselves to prevent intermarriage"! When this static approach is given up, the caste belief must also be given up.

In order that the authors might come to terms with the disturbing question of the relationship of occupation and caste, it is concluded that even in India there is no identification of every occupation with a caste. It is argued, in other words, that since many castes have the same occupation, occupation is no significant factor in the system.¹⁷ The point to remember here, however, is that every caste has a traditional occupation or a limited number of cognate occupations, and not that every occupation has a caste.

Considerable importance is ascribed to interracial etiquette in the South as a social device supporting the supposed caste system there. Thus, according to Davis, Gardner, and Gardner:

The most striking form of what may be called caste behavior is deference, the respectful yielding exhibited by the Negroes in their contacts with whites. . . . The behavior of both Negroes and white people must be such that the two are socially distinct and that the Negro is subordinate. Thus the Negro when addressing a white person, is expected to use a title such as "Sah," "Mistah," or "Boss," etc., while the white must never use such titles of respect to the Negro, but should address him by his first name or as "Boy."¹⁸

However, in the South there is also an etiquette intended to keep poor whites at a proper distance from the upper-class whites, and it is probably more severely non-reciprocating there than in other parts of the country. To upper-class Negroes, also, lower-class Negroes are very respectful. The titles "Boss," and so on, of themselves, may indi-

¹⁷See Warner and Davis in *Race Relations and the Race Problem*, p. 231.

¹⁸Op. cit., p. 22. Incidentally, we may observe that the authors present this passage concerning interracial etiquette with the implicit freshness of a discovery. No one reading it would ever suspect that *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South*, by Bertram W. Doyle, had been on the bookshelves some years before.

cate only a recognition of superior rank. Indeed, a system of social etiquette which distinguishes superior persons or classes is no exclusive trait of the caste system. It is found in schools, in churches, among social classes, as well as among peoples and races who live in relationship of subordination and superordination.

The method of selecting and identifying isolatedly certain aspects of intercaste relationship, such as endogamy, non-commensality, or other marks of social distinction with their apparent counterparts in race relations, may at first seem convincing. In almost every case, however, the comparison is not between caste and race but merely a recognition of apparently common characteristics of all situations of superior-inferior or superordination-subordination relationships.¹⁹ In conversation with the writer, one advocate of the caste school said: "No better illustration of the existence of caste in the South can be found than the practice of the races refusing to eat at the same table." But ordinarily only social equals eat, sleep, or play together. Army officers may not eat with privates, and medical doctors may resent sharing the same table with orderlies of the hospital; and so, too, a race bent upon maintaining a position of dominance can seldom engage in so socially leveling an act as that of eating together with members of the subordinate race.

The social-essence method of making comparisons between the caste system and other forms of social relationship makes it possible for different members of the caste school to choose different essences as their criterion of caste and yet not disturb the equanimity of the school. For example, according to John Dollard, the essence of caste is "a barrier to legitimate descent"; to W. Lloyd Warner, it is endogamy; to Guy B. Johnson, it is the achievement of "accommodation"; to Robert E. Park, "etiquette is the very essence of caste"; and to some, like Buell G. Gallagher, the criterion of analogy is not mentioned at all, the assumption evidently being that the identity of the phenomena should be taken for granted. Thus, it is possible for these writers to take hold of any one of a number of apparent analogues and proceed with it to identify caste and race relations.²⁰ If we study the

¹⁹It is this same kind of eclecticism which leads Gunnar Myrdal to conclude that the "status" and "problems in society" of women and children reveal, "striking similarities to those of Negroes." *An American Dilemma*, pp. 1073ff.

²⁰As an illustration of this possibility, consider the following remarks by Jawaharlal Nehru concerning the Indian-European relations. "It was a notorious fact," he says, "that whenever an Englishman killed an Indian, he was acquitted by a jury of his own countrymen. In railway trains, compartments were reserved for Europeans; and, however crowded the train might be—and they used to be terribly crowded—no Indian was allowed to travel in them even though they were empty. . . .

caste system as the proverbial blind men studied the elephant, who will trust our conclusions?

Personality of Upper Class Negroes

It is a common belief, not peculiar to the caste school, that upper-class Negroes are especially maladjusted. The biracial system in the United States, it must be admitted, is a pathological situation; and to the extent that this is so, it affects adversely the personalities of both whites and blacks.²¹ But sensitivity to social wrongs need not imply derangement or an "off-balance" personality. We may mention at this point, however, that although this assertion calls for explanation, the caste theorists evidently do not realize that it is most damaging to their hypothesis. A person belonging to a lower caste is not "constantly butting his head against the caste line." In fact, the absence of such a phenomenon is so vital to the persistence of a caste order that it would hardly be inaccurate to maintain that it is definitely incompatible with a caste system. Caste barriers in the caste system are never challenged; they are sacred to caste and caste alike.²² The personalities developed in the caste system are normal for that society.

Negroes are moving away from a condition of extreme white domination and subjection to one of normal citizenship. The determinant of

Benches and chairs were also reserved for Europeans in the public parks and other places. I was filled with resentment against the alien rulers of my country who misbehaved in this manner; and, whenever an Indian hit back, I was glad." *Toward Freedom*, pp. 20-21.

It would seem possible, by some ingenious eclecticism, to use even this limited information to identify Indian-European relations with caste relations, but we should expect the dullest of Hindus to remain unimpressed with the suggestion that in India there are two castes: the one East Indian and the other European. And this even though another statement by the same writer is cited in apparent support of this caste theory: "What a great gulf divides the two races, and how they distrusted and disliked each other! . . . each side was a little afraid of the other and was constantly on its guard in the other's presence. To each the other appeared as a sour-looking, unamiable creature, and neither realized that there was decency and kindness behind the mask." *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²¹On this point Gunnar Myrdal observes: "The conservative Southerner is not so certain as he sometimes sounds. He is a split personality. . . . The Southern conservative white man's faith in American democracy, which he is certainly not living up to, and the Constitution, which he is circumventing, are living forces of decisive dynamic significance. *Op. cit.*, pp. 461-62.

Another member of the school sees the inner strife as a personality difficulty of the whites. "With peculiar poignancy," says Buell G. Gallagher, "the individual white man feels within himself the warfare between profession and practice which he shares with his institutions. Two general streams of experience interweave in this shifting pattern of uneasiness." *Color and Conscience*, p. 24.

²²Under the impact of Western culture the caste structure in India is being shaken, but it should be remembered that Western civilization is not attacking another civilization in the South, for this is itself Western civilization.

unrest or social dysphoria among a people is not so much their *state* of subjugation or seeming oppression; rather it is either the process of their changing from some accommodated stage of well-being to one of subservience, or some political-class movement itself determined by some fundamental economic change. At any rate, since the Civil War the situation among Negroes in the South has been culturally progressive. Hortense Powdermaker makes the significant observation that it is not difference in class so much as difference in age which determines the attitude of Negroes toward whites. "Among the younger [Negro] generation, those in their teens, twenties, and thirties, resentment is keen and outspoken."²³ Older Negroes were reared in an earlier school of racial beliefs; and, indeed, the younger are not infrequently very impatient with their elders' compromising attitudes toward whites. Among Negroes in the South the "Uncle Toms" are distributed all through the social classes.

Of course militance in the interest of racial progress should not be mistaken for personality imbalance. In fact, dissatisfaction with the status quo must necessarily be the common preoccupation of all Negro leaders. There is, furthermore, some compensation to upper-class Negroes. Frequently they meet whites in flattering situations, mostly in business relations. They have considerable prestige among their own people, sometimes even more than that which whites of similar attainments can hope for within their own group. This windfall may not only compensate for loss of respect from low-class whites, but it may even result in a sort of grandiose importance inconsistent with reality. The "big Negro," a recognized personality type, is usually indelicate and grossly lacking in humility; yet he is not pathological.²⁴

Upper-class Negroes do not envy poor whites in the South because the latter are beyond the purview of the black code. One might as well argue that some human beings suffer severe personality traumas because they recognize that the dogs and cats of the rich have certain advantages that they cannot have. The resentment of upper-class Negroes is rather against the ruling class, the guardians of the status quo. Enlightened Negroes recognize clearly the cultural inferiority of the poor whites. As a youth, W. E. B. Du Bois says of himself: "I cordially despised the poor Irish and South Germans, who slaved in

²³*After Freedom*, pp. 325, 331.

²⁴Perhaps there should be no objection to a transient assertion of personality disorganization such as the following by Gunnar Myrdal. It makes no point as a basis for significant conclusions. "This national *ethos* [the American Creed] undoubtedly has a greater force in the North than in the South. . . . But . . . even the [white] Northerner has a split personality." *Op. cit.*, p. 439.

the mills, and annexed the rich and well-to-do as my natural companions."²⁵ The power of sublimation and conceit to rescue persons from isolation and frustration must be reckoned with. Bitter as it is, therefore, the real conflict is usually between Negroes and their cultural equals or superiors. Sometimes it may seem to end in despair, as when Countee Cullen exclaimed:

*Yet do I marvel at this curious thing:
To make a poet black, and bid him sing!*^{25a}

Ordinarily, however, it is a persistent challenge to Negroes, an integrating force in a cause which must be served. Claude McKay, in his *America*, symbolizes this situation.

*Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
Giving me strength erect against her hate.
Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.
Yet as a rebel fronts a king in state,
I stand within her walls with not a shred
Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.*^{25b}

At this point we should mention another crucial misconception of Warner's. He believes that Dr. Du Bois has achieved leadership of a movement for "parallelism" among American Negroes.²⁶ However, the fact that Du Bois as an assimilationist had a secure following, yet on his advocating a compromise with segregation was speedily wound up in his position and left to the thankless and interminable business of explaining his policy,²⁷ should have led Warner to give a different significance to the place of "parallelism" in the social aspirations of Negroes. He might have been on safer ground had he referred to the open plan of white South Africans ostensibly to develop a nation of whites and one of blacks within the same economically competitive area.

²⁵*Darkwater*, p. 10.

^{25a}From "Yet Do I Marvel" in *Caroling Dusk*, an anthology by Countee Cullen, p. 182.

^{25b}From Claude McKay, *Harlem Shadows*, 1922.

²⁶"American Caste and Class," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XLII, No. 2, September 1936, pp. 235-36.

²⁷See W. E. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, pp. 301ff, for a recent defense.

At any rate, segregation is a white man's principal anti-color weapon of oppression; therefore, Negroes can have but one quite obvious attitude toward it. Du Bois's leadership was doomed—and is still so—when, as he says of himself, he “proposed that in economic lines, just as in lines of literature and religion, segregation should be planned and organized and carefully thought through.”²⁸ We may assert, as a sort of social axiom, that, with population ratios approximately as they are, the Southern aristocracy could never yield to the Negro political equality—the right to vote and to campaign for votes without intimidation—and still maintain public segregation barriers. Therefore, it is nonsense to speak of political and economic equality of opportunity with segregation.

The Social Organization of Negroes

Symptomatic of the potentialities of the caste hypothesis of race relations is the classification of societies of the world by Warner and Davis.²⁹ From simple “theoretical” classless societies to “our own society [which] possesses ranked internal structures, class and caste orders, groups with diverse cultural [ethnic] traditions, as well as sex and age evaluations,” all the types of societies in the world are included. Thus the dichotomized racial system in the South becomes a natural type of social ranking. “The ranking changes from a status situation in which there is little or no ranking to one in which almost all behavior is given an evaluation of rank.”³⁰

Unless clearly limited, the term “society” is very ambiguous. It is properly used with reference to Western society or to a consumers' cooperative society; however, the authors did not limit the concept. It becomes necessary, then, to settle upon some meaning of the term before discussing it. According to John Dewey:

Persons do not become a society by living in physical proximity any more than a man ceases to be socially influenced by being so many feet or miles removed from others. . . . Individuals do not even compose a social group because they all work for a common end. . . . What they

²⁸Ibid., p. 305. Many years ago, when Alexis de Tocqueville said, “The Negroes and the whites must either wholly part or wholly mingle,” he saw clearly the only possibilities of a stable racial adjustment; and it is doubtful whether today anyone will seriously question the inevitability of the latter alternative. See *Democracy in America*, Vol. II, p. 238.

²⁹In *Race Relations and the Race Problem*, pp. 225–27.

³⁰Ibid., p. 227. See also Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. by Sarah A. Solovay and John H. Mueller, pp. 81–83, for a discussion of the misleading possibilities of such a typology of societies.

must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge—a common understanding.³¹

Assimilation and consensus seem to be necessary. John S. Mackenzie emphasizes this:

When a people is conquered and subject to another, it ceases to be a society, except in so far as it retains a spiritual life of its own apart from that of its conquerors. . . . So long as the citizens of the conquered state are merely in the condition of atoms externally fitted into a system to which they do not naturally belong, they cannot be regarded as parts of the society at all.³²

Another way of looking at a society is in terms of its capacity to perpetuate itself. Hinduism, or the caste society of India, is a powerful form of social organization which may go on self-satisfiedly, so to speak, forever. It carries within itself no basic antagonisms. But the social aims and purposes of whites and Negroes in the South are irreconcilably opposed. If such a situation could be termed a society at all, it must be a society divided against itself. Sapir has used this idea in his analysis of culture. Thus he writes:

The genuine culture is not of necessity either *high or low*; it is merely inherently harmonious, balanced, self-satisfactory. . . . If the culture necessitates slavery, it frankly admits it; if it abhors slavery, it feels its way to an economic adjustment that obviates the necessity of its employment.³³

In like manner we may think of the larger American society as fundamentally antipathetic to the non-Christian, non-democratic, bi-racial system in the South; hence it is continuously "feeling its way" to something else. To put such a situation easily into a typology of societies which includes the caste system in India, indeed to identify it with the caste system, must be misleading to say the least. The caste system of India is a minutely segmented, assimilated social structure; it is highly stable and capable of perpetuating itself indefinitely. Castes in India constitute a natural status system in one society, while Negroes and whites in the South tend to constitute two status systems, i.e., two social-class systems in two societies that are in opposition.

³¹*Democracy and Education*, p. 5.

³²Quoted by F. A. McKenzie, "The Assimilation of the American Indian," *Proceedings of the American Sociological Society*, Vol. III, p. 45; see also Emile Durkheim, op. cit., pp. 85-86. "By a society," says Robert Redfield, "is meant a recognizable system of human relations characterizing a group, the members of which are aware of their unity and of their difference from others." *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, p. 80.

³³"Culture, Genuine and Spurious," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XXIX, January 1924, p. 410. See also Albert Bushnell Hart, *Slavery and Abolition, 1831-1841*, p. 32.

When two racial or nationality groups become more or less isolated from each other because of some continuing conflict situation or basic repugnance, we do not refer to them as forming a social-status hierarchy even though their relationship is one of superordination and subordination or of conqueror and conquered. As an illustration, Adolf Hitler says in his *My Battle*: "It must be held in greater honour to be a citizen of this Reich, even if only a crossing-sweeper, than to be a king in a foreign state."³⁴ Suppose now that this philosophy be made a reality in future German-Polish relationships; all Poles will then be considered inferior to the least of Germans, and an etiquette will be developed to implement the attitude. But there will be here no social-status hierarchy; neither would Hitler there and then have enacted a caste system. The Poles will seek a *modus vivendi* in some sort of society of their own; and the intergroup relationship will most likely be one of antagonism, a latent power-group relationship.³⁵

So, too, Negroes and whites in the Deep South do not constitute an assimilated society. There 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 a caste, it is a temporary society intended to continue only so long as whites are able to maintain the barriers against their assimilation.³⁶ It provides the matrix for a universe of discourse in which members of the group give expression to their common sympathies, opinions, and sentiments, and in which their primary social institutions function. The political and economic

³⁴E. T. S. Dugdale, trans., p. 182.

³⁵Consider the following circular reasoning by Guy B. Johnson, a member of the caste school: "Caste may be thought of as an accommodation, since its very existence is evidence that two or more unlike groups have worked out some sort of *modus vivendi*." In *Race Relations and the Race Problem*, p. 126.

³⁶Professor Robert Redfield described the evolution of a racial dichotomy into a social class system. It is significant to note that no such process could be suggested as a means of liquidating the caste system. "It requires little special knowledge to assert that the contact of the Spanish with the Maya, as is generally the case with long-continuing interaction between diverse ethnic groups, began with the existence of two separate societies, each with its own racial and cultural characteristics, and moved toward the formation of a single society in which the original racial and cultural differences disappear. At the time of the Conquest there were two groups that looked across at each other, both aware of the marked ethnic differences that attended their sense of distinctness one from the other. As the two groups came to participate in a common life and to interbreed, the ethnic differences became blurred, so that other criteria of difference, such as occupation, costume, or place of residence, came to be relatively more significant signs of social distinctness than was race or general culture. . . . At first there were two societies, ethnically distinct. At last there is a single society with classes ethnically indistinct." Op. cit., p. 58.

structure is controlled by another and larger society to which the whites are assimilated and toward which all Negroes are oriented.

The "public" of the white society includes Negroes only in the broadest sense; and when Negroes in their institutional functions declare that "everybody is invited," white people who turn up must assume the role of strangers. The "we feeling" of the white and of the Negro society tends to be mutually exclusive. Says Robert E. Park: "Gradually, imperceptibly, within the larger world of the white man, a smaller world, the world of the black man, is silently taking form and shape."³⁷ Ray Stannard Baker reports an interview with a Negro store owner in Atlanta:

"What do you mean by protection?" I asked.

"Well, justice between the races. That doesn't mean social equality. We have a society of our own."³⁸

One device for retarding Negro assimilation, which does not have to be resorted to in the caste system, is the policy of guarding against any development of an overt expression of indispensability of Negroes within the social organization. Whatever their *de facto* importance, they must never appear as an integral part of the society. Instead, they pay little taxes; hence little or none of certain public expenditures should be diverted to their benefit. The theory of taxation according to ability to pay and expenditure according to need does not include them. Crime, sickness, high mortality rates, and poverty almost characterize Negroes, hence they are a drag on "society" and may be ostensibly sloughed off to advantage. Whites are generally protected from contact with cultured Negroes. The successful practice of this contrivance tends to give the Negro a sense of worthlessness and unwantedness, which contributes finally to the retardation of his assimilation. In Brahmanic India, however, where the population is assimilated to the caste culture, it is openly admitted that low-caste men are indispensable to the system, and this admission does not conduce to any advancement in the latter's social status.

By using the caste hypothesis, then, the school seeks to explain a "normal society" in the South. In short, it has made peace for the hybrid society that has not secured harmony for itself; and in so far as this is true, its work is fictitious.

³⁷"Racial Assimilation of Secondary Groups," *Proceedings of the American Sociological Society*, Vol. VIII, p. 77.

³⁸*Following the Color Line*, p. 40. Cf. Carl C. Zimmerman, "The Evolution of the American Community," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XLVI, May 1941, p. 812; Hortense Powdermaker, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

Contribution of the School

An astonishing characteristic of this caste school of race relations is its tendency to conceive of itself as being original. It believes not only that it has made a discovery, but also that it has "created" something.³⁹ It is difficult, however, to determine wherein rests its originality. We do not know who first made the analogy between race relations and the caste system of India, but it is certain that the idea was quite popular during the middle of the last century. One of the most detailed and extended discussions of this hypothesis is that of the Hon. Charles Sumner published in 1869; and in 1904 William I. Thomas brought his full genius into play upon the subject.⁴⁰ Since then many textbooks have accepted the idea.⁴¹ Some students, like Sir Herbert Risley, have used the hypothesis as the basis of extensive research.⁴² Many writers, such as E. B. Reuter and Charles S. Johnson, have applied the term casually to the racial situation in the United States.⁴³ Donald Young has discussed the concept rather elaborately.⁴⁴ Among these we take somewhat at random from the writings of a journalist who in 1908 published in book form the findings of his study of race relations in the South.

In explaining the "class strata" among Negroes Ray Stannard Baker says:

I have now described two of the three great classes of Negroes: First, the worthless and idle Negro, often a criminal, comparatively small in

³⁹"The view that the relationships of whites and Negroes in the South are systematically ordered and maintained by a caste structure, and that the status of individuals within each of these groups is further determined by a system of social classes existing within each color-caste, was the creation of Warner." Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, p. xvi. "The presence of caste and class structures in the society of the deep South was reported upon first by a member of our research group. . . ." Davis, Gardner, Gardner, and Warner, *Deep South*, p. 5. "An original interpretation of class and caste distinctions in the United States, providing a useful frame of reference for an appreciation of caste phenomena in this country." Ogburn and Nimkoff, *Sociology*, p. 343.

⁴⁰Charles Sumner, *The Question of Caste*. William I. Thomas, "The Psychology of Race Prejudice," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XI, March 1904, pp. 593-611. As early as 1828 Governor William B. Giles of Virginia referred repeatedly to the free Negroes as a "caste of colored population." See John H. Russell, *The Free Negro in Virginia*, p. 165.

⁴¹Among the best of them are C. H. Cooley, *Social Process*, p. 279, and *Social Organization*, pp. 209-28; Park and Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, pp. 205-06, 722.

⁴²See, for example, *The Peoples of India*, p. 263, and *Census of India*, 1901.

⁴³Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States*, p. 360; Johnson, "Caste and Class in an American Industry," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XLII, July 1936, pp. 55-65.

⁴⁴*American Minority Peoples*, pp. 580-85. See also R. E. Park, "Racial Assimilation in Secondary Groups," op. cit., p. 73.

numbers but perniciously evident. Second, the great middle class of Negroes who do the manual work of the South. Above these, a third class, few in number, but most influential in their race, are the progressive, property owning Negroes, who have wholly severed their old intimate ties with the white people—and who have been getting further and further away from them.⁴⁵

With respect to the color line, called a caste line by the modern school, Baker states:

When the line began to be drawn, it was drawn not alone against the unworthy Negro, but against the Negro. It was not so much drawn by the highly-intelligent white man as by the white man. And the white man alone has not drawn it, but the Negroes themselves are drawing it—and more and more every day. So we draw the line in this country against the Chinese, the Japanese, and in some measure against the Jews; and they help to draw it.⁴⁶

Baker then proceeds to clinch the full idea of the caste hypothesis:

More and more they [Negroes] are becoming a people wholly apart—separate in their churches, separate in their schools, separate in cars, conveyances, hotels, restaurants, with separate professional men. In short, we discover tendencies in this country toward the development of a caste system.⁴⁷

It is difficult to see what the modern caste school has added to this, unless it is perhaps publicity and “scientific” prestige.⁴⁸ Certainly anyone who has a taste for art might use the information given above to draw a caste line between the white and the black class structures. But Baker, like most other former advocates of the caste hypothesis of race relations in the United States, thinks almost fancifully of the idea and does not stipulate that his work should stand or fall with the belief. He realizes that the consideration of primary significance is not the “caste line” but the way in which that line holds. Thus he concludes:

This very absence of a clear demarcation is significant of many relationships in the South. The color line is drawn, but neither race knows just where it is. Indeed, it can hardly be definitely drawn in many rela-

⁴⁵*Following the Color Line*, p. 65.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 300.

⁴⁸It is true that sometimes members of the modern caste school have referred to race relations as “color-caste.” But, so far as we know, they have never shown in what way “color-caste” is different from caste. In fact, some of the early theories on the origin of caste have sought to identify caste with racial antagonism. Therefore, the substitution of the term “color-caste” for caste does not seem to have relieved the fundamental confusion.

tionships, because it is constantly changing. This uncertainty is a fertile source of friction and bitterness.⁴⁹

With respect to the scientific precision of the word "caste" the school insists: "By all the physical tests the anthropologists might apply, some social Negroes are *biologically white*," hence the term "race" cannot have meaning when applied to Negroes.⁵⁰ We should remember here, however, that the racial situation in the South never depended upon "physical tests of anthropologists." It developed long before anthropometry became of age. Furthermore, the sociologist is interested not in what the anthropometrists set up as their criteria of race, but in what peoples in interaction come to accept as a race. It is the latter belief which controls their behavior and not what the anthropometrist thinks.

But in reality the term "caste" does not economize thinking on this subject; it is a neology totally unjustified. Before we can know what the Negro caste means it is always necessary first to say what kind of people belong to the Negro caste. Therefore, in the course of defining "Negro caste" we have defined "Negro race," and the final achievement is a substitution of words only. One may test this fact by substituting in the writings of this school the words "Negroes" or "white people" wherever the words "Negro caste" or "white caste" appear and observe that the sense of the statement does not change.

For this reason the burden of the productions of this school is merely old wine in new bottles, and not infrequently the old ideas have suffered from rehandling. In other words, much that has come to us by earlier studies has taken on the glamour of caste, while the school seldom refers to the contributions of out-group students.⁵¹

One could hardly help recalling as an analogous situation the popularity which William McDougall gave to the instinct hypothesis. Without making any reference to William James, Lloyd Morgan, and others, who had handled the concept with great care, McDougall set out with pioneering zeal to bend all social behavior into his instinct theory. It was not long, however, before reaction came. And so, too,

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 31.

⁵⁰Davis, Gardner, Gardner and Warner, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

⁵¹As a typical example of this, see Davis and others, op. cit., pp. 15-136 and 228-539. Consider, in illustration, the weighty significance and originality with which the following commonplace is introduced: "The critical fact is that a much larger proportion of all *Negroes* are lower class than is the case with *whites*. *This is where caste comes to bear. It puts the overwhelming majority of Negroes in the lowest class group, and keeps them there.*" (Italics added.) Davis and Dollard, op. cit., p. 65. This quotation also illustrates the mystical way in which real problems have been explained away.

until quite recently, the race-caste idea had a desultory career. This idea has now been made fashionable, yet already students who had once used the term "caste" are beginning to shrink from it.⁵² However, we should hasten to add that this school has none of the anti-color complexes of the instinct school; its leadership merely relies a little too much upon sophistry and lacks a sociological tradition.

In the following chapter we shall consider the major contribution of the Carnegie Studies, which also relies upon a "caste hypothesis" but which seems important enough to justify separate discussion.

⁵²See R. E. Park in the introduction to Bertram W. Doyle, *The Etiquette of Race Relations*, and Charles S. Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt*. But observe Johnson's relapse. In speaking of Negro-white relationship in the United States he says: "A racial or caste division of labor is one type of adjustment growing out of economic conflict between racial groups." In *Sociological Foundations of Education*, Joseph S. Roucek, ed., p. 423; also in *Patterns of Negro Segregation*, pp. xvi *passim*. Professor Park has been toying with the idea. For instance, Dr. Donald Pierson gives him credit approvingly for the following simple and somewhat inadequate scheme. "In a caste system," Pierson writes, "the racial lines may run thus:

Race Lines	White
	Mixed-blood
	Black

Negroes in Brazil, p. 337. For a similar diagram by Park, see "The Basis of Race Prejudice," *The Annals*, Vol. CXXXX, November 1928, p. 20. See also the preceding chapter.

23. *An American Dilemma:*¹ *A Mystical Approach to the Study of Race Relations*

IF THE THEORETICAL STRUCTURE OF OUR MOST ELABORATE STUDY of race relations in America, *An American Dilemma* by Gunnar Myrdal, is correct, then the hypotheses developed in the preceeding three chapters cannot be valid, for the two views are antithetical. It thus becomes incumbent upon us to examine carefully Myrdal's approach. In this examination some repetition is unavoidable, and it seems advisable to quote rather than to paraphrase the author. This critical examination, to be sure, is not intended to be a review of *An American Dilemma*. As a source of information and brilliant interpretation of information on race relations in the United States, it is probably unsurpassed.² We are interested here only in the validity of the meanings which Dr. Myrdal derives from the broad movements of his data. The data are continually changing and becoming obsolescent; but if we understand their social determinants we can not only predict change but also influence it. In fact, Myrdal himself directs attention to his social logic in saying: "This book is an analysis, not a description. It presents facts only for the sake of their meaning in the interpretation."³

In his attempt to explain race relations in the United States the author seems to have been confronted with two principal problems: (a) the problem of avoiding a political-class interpretation, and (b) the problem of finding an acceptable moral or ethical interpretation.⁴

¹Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*. Although this is a work of considerable scholarly collaboration, we shall, in this discussion of it, assume that it is entirely by Dr. Myrdal.

²Herbert Aptheker would disagree heartily with this, for he has published a small book devoted entirely to a criticism of Myrdal's factual data and of their interpretation. See *The Negro People in America*.

³Op. cit., p. li.

⁴Myrdal conceives of his problem—that is to say of race relations in the United States—as "primarily a moral issue of conflicting valuations" and of his "investiga-

In the first part of this discussion we shall attempt to show how his "value premise" and the caste theory are employed and, in the second part, how a shying away from the obvious implications of his data is contrived as solution for these problems. We shall not discuss the concept from which the book derives its title, for it seems quite obvious that none of the great imperialist democracies either can or intends to practice its democratic ideals among its subject peoples.⁵ Myrdal does not bring to light the social determinants of this well-known dilemma; he merely recognizes it and rails against its existence. It is a long time indeed since Negro newspapers have observed: "The treatment of the Negro is America's greatest and most conspicuous scandal."⁶ The dilemma is not peculiarly American; it is world-wide, confronting even the white masses of every capitalist nation.⁷ At any rate, what seems to be of immediate significance is Myrdal's explanation of the basis of race relations.

"The Value Premise"

At the beginning of his study, in a chapter on "American ideals," Dr. Myrdal lays the atmosphere for his conclusions on race relations. The way in which the author handles this subject, as he himself recognizes with some contradiction, has been long ago in dispute among American historians. He considers certain national ideals as if they were phenomena *sui generis*, having an existence apart from and indeed determinative of the economic life of the people. Although he concedes that "the economic determinants and the force of the ideals can

tion" as "an analysis of morals." Ibid., p. xlvi. Cf. Leo P. Crispi, "Is Gunnar Myrdal on the Right Track?" *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Summer, 1945.

⁵In a debate at an imperial conference in 1923 on the status of South African Indians, General Smuts faced the dilemma in this way: "I do not think our Indian fellow-subjects in South Africa can complain of injustice. . . . They have prospered exceedingly in South Africa. People who have come there as coolies, people who have come there as members of the depressed classes in India, have prospered. . . . They have been educated, and their children and grandchildren today are many of them men of great wealth. They have all the rights, barring the rights of voting for parliament and the provincial councils, that any white citizen in South Africa has. . . . It is only political rights that are in question. There we are up against a stone wall and we cannot get over it." Quoted in P. S. Joshi, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

⁶Myrdal, *op. cit.*, p. 1020. Dr. Myrdal understands clearly that expressions such as this have now achieved respectability; in fact, they are desirable, since "it is becoming difficult for even popular writers to express other views than the ones of racial equalitarianism and still retain intellectual respect." *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁷Years ago Nathaniel Peffer entitled his book *The White Man's Dilemma* and sought to make it clear that "at bottom" the problem is economic—the problem of world-wide economic exploitation by "white capital," of which the American race problem is but one variation.

be shown to be interrelated,"⁸ he is mainly concerned not with showing this interrelationship but rather with elaborating an implicit hypothesis that the "American Creed" is *the* vital force in American life.

The unanimity around, and the explicitness of, this Creed is the great wonder of America. . . . The reflecting observer comes to feel that this *spiritual convergence*, more than America's strategic position behind the oceans and its immense material resources, is what makes the nation great and what promises it a still greater future.⁹

We need not be detained here with the question as to whether either of the foregoing alternatives is the sufficient explanation of the "nation's greatness"; our immediate purpose is to observe the author's abstract orientation. He seems never to recognize the determining role of class interest but rather sets his study against a backdrop of an apparently common American ideology which he says "is older than America itself." Thus:

Americans of all national origins, classes, regions, creeds, and colors, have something in common: a social *ethos*, a political creed. . . . When the American Creed is once detected, the cacophony becomes a melody . . . as principles which *ought* to rule, the Creed has been made conscious to everyone in American society. . . . America is continuously struggling for its soul.¹⁰

The cultural unity of the nation is this common sharing of both the consciousness of sin and the devotion to high ideals.¹¹

Contrary to Myrdal's rhapsodic description of class and group unity, James Madison, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, had this to say about the "sentiments" and beliefs of some of the interest groups:

The most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property. Those who have and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society. Those who

⁸Op. cit., p. 6.

⁹Ibid., p. 13. (Italics added.) Myrdal describes "the American Creed" as follows: "These principles of social ethics have been hammered into easily remembered formulas. In the clarity and intellectual boldness of the Enlightenment period these tenets were written into the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the constitutions of the several states. . . . But this Creed is . . . no American monopoly. With minor variations . . . the American Creed is the common democratic creed. 'American ideals' are just humane ideals as they have matured in our common Western civilization upon the foundation of Christianity and pre-Christian legalism and under the influence of the economic, scientific, and political development over a number of centuries. The American Creed is older and wider than America itself." Ibid., pp. 4, 25.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 3-4.

¹¹Ibid., p. 22.

are creditors and those who are debtors fall under a like discrimination. A landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations and divide them into different classes, actuated by different sentiments and views. The regulation of these various and interfering interests forms the principal task of modern legislation, and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of government.¹²

The views of Myrdal and Madison are significantly different. Myrdal is seeking to detect the harmony and "melody" in American life, which he assumes are produced by unquestioned acceptance of certain generalized national symbols by all the people. Madison, on the other hand, is trying to see what fundamentally sets group against group within the nation—what it is that produces the "spirit of party faction." We think that Myrdal is abstract and unreal because he implicitly homogenizes the material interests of the American people and then declares animistically, "America is continually struggling for its soul." Madison recognizes the importance of group sentiments, but he does not say they are determined essentially by a creed. Probably if Myrdal had approached his problem from the point of view of group interests he might have recognized the irreconcilable inconsistency even in "these ideals . . . of the fundamental equality of all men, and of certain inalienable rights to freedom." It should be recalled here that the author's assignment was that of discovering the pertinent social factors entering into a situation of continuing social conflict and antagonism.

The following is an intimation of the significance of Myrdal's creedal analysis for his main problem: "From the point of view of the American Creed the status accorded the Negro in America presents *nothing more and nothing less* than a century-long lag of *public morals*. In principle the Negro problem was settled long ago. . . ."¹³ Had this statement been a mere figure of speech, it should, of course, be of no consequence. It is, however, in this area of elated abstraction that our author intends to keep the subject. Probably it may be said rather conclusively that the Negro problem cannot be solved "in principle" because it is not basically an ideological problem. Indeed, speaking abstractly, we may conclude similarly that all the major social problems of the Christian world were solved "in principle" by the opening words of the Lord's Prayer—to say nothing of the whole Sermon on the Mount.

¹²*The Federalist*, No. 10. See, for a similar observation, Woodrow Wilson, *Constitutional Government of the United States*, pp. 217-18.

¹³Op. cit., p. 24. (Italics added.)

Many years ago Professor Charles A. Beard effectively criticized this romantic approach to the study of American society. He said: "In the great transformations in society, such as was brought about by the formation and adoption of the Constitution, economic 'forces' are primordial or fundamental and come nearer 'explaining' events than any other 'forces.'" And further: "Whoever leaves economic pressures out of history or out of the discussion of public questions is in mortal peril of substituting mythology for reality and confusing issues instead of clarifying them."¹⁴ To be sure, social ideologies are always significant, but they are, on the whole, dependent social phenomena.

It is just such a relationship with which Abraham Lincoln was confronted when he declared: ". . . our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure." Neither side in this civil war questioned the ideals, yet they were—and to this very day are—not fully agreed on the interpretation of the ideals.¹⁵ The crucial circumstances, then, are not the presumed universal acceptance of the "Creed," but rather the interests which make its peculiar and divergent interpretations inevitable. In other words, each side had different material interests and, as is ordinarily the case, the ideals of each were made subservient to the material interests. To put it otherwise, the Creed, in its formative stage, was seriously debated and contested, but since it had become stereotyped, neither side questioned it. Each side, however, insisted upon a self-interested interpretation of it.

The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution have become national symbols, like the flag. It is quite another thing, however, to say that the content of these documents is accepted even as a creed

¹⁴*An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, 1st ed., pp. xii, xvii.

¹⁵In the Federal Constitutional Convention of 1787 General Pinckney of South Carolina intimated realistically the interests behind the contemporary Negro problem. Said he: "An attempt to take away the right [to import slaves] as proposed would produce serious objections to the Constitution." And he "declared it to be his firm opinion that if he himself and all his colleagues were to sign the Constitution and use their personal influence, it would be of no avail towards obtaining the assent of their constituents. South Carolina and Georgia cannot do without slaves. As to Virginia she will gain by stopping the importation. Her slaves will rise in value, and she has more than she wants. It would be unequal to require South Carolina and Georgia to confederate on such unequal terms. . . . He contended that the importation of slaves would be for the interest of the whole Union. The more slaves, the more produce to employ the carrying trade; the more consumption also, and the more of this, the more of revenues for the common treasury." See Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, Vol. II, p. 371.

by the whole people. As E. E. Schattschneider points out: "The truth of the matter is that the American public has never understood the Constitution, nor has it ever really believed in it, in spite of the verbal tradition of Constitutionalism."^{15a} One pertinent illustration is the non-acceptance of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments either in spirit or in practice by the ruling class of the South. Again we cite a statement on this point by James Madison: "Neither moral nor religious motives can be relied on as an adequate control"; and, in another context: "Wherever there is an interest and power to do wrong, wrong will be done."¹⁶

The Constitution did not settle or remove the vitally conflicting interests of the infant capitalist system; it simply compromised or ignored them. In other words, it postponed for a later date the real solution of latent antagonisms—postponed it until such time as one side or the other developed sufficient power to force a solution in its favor. And yet the Constitution is so ample in its scope that with certain amendments and abrogations it may become the fundamental law of a consummate democracy.¹⁷

Moreover, Myrdal's "value premise" appears to be demonstrably weakened in consequence of its being built principally upon certain fictitious attributes of ideal types, such as "the citizen," "American popular thought," "the American soul," "the common good American." For instance, the foregoing concept is employed in this way: "Today it is necessary in everyday living for the common good American citizen to decide for himself which laws should be observed and which not."¹⁸

The Caste Hypothesis

The whole theoretical frame of reference of *An American Dilemma* is supposedly couched in a caste hypothesis. As Myrdal himself puts it: "Practically the entire factual content of . . . this book may be con-

^{15a}*Party Government*, p. 53.

¹⁶*Documentary History of the Constitution*, Vol. V, p. 88.

¹⁷"The federal Constitution was a reactionary document from the point of view of the doctrines of the Revolution. Its bill of rights was a series of amendments added by dissatisfied elements after the instrument had been drawn up and submitted to the people. The rule of the few . . . soon began, and government lent its hand to the few who could invest in its financial paper and who gave their efforts to the building of cities and commerce and industry. . . . A new order of bourgeois acquisitiveness . . . was in the saddle. Democracy, like the rest of the hindmost, was left for the devil." Avery Craven, *Democracy in American Life*, p. 13. See also Woodrow Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

¹⁸Myrdal, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

sidered to define caste in the case of the American Negro.”¹⁹ However, it is evident that Myrdal—in spite of the lamentable use of such phrases as “in our view,” “as we have defined it,” and so on—does not intend to coin a new concept. In criticizing Charles S. Johnson’s idea of caste he declares, “We do not believe that such a caste system as he has defined ever existed.”²⁰ Therefore, in his explanation of race relations in the United States, our author means to accept the known concept as a norm. Of some significance is the way in which the term is selected. This is the reasoning:

The term “race” is . . . inappropriate in a scientific inquiry since it has biological and genetic connotations which . . . run parallel to widely spread false racial beliefs. The . . . term, “class,” is impractical and confusing . . . since it is generally used to refer to a non-rigid status group from which an individual member can rise or fall. . . . We need a term to distinguish the large and systematic type of social differentiation from the small and spotty type and have . . . used the term “caste.”²¹

Obviously, in arriving at this decision to use the term “caste” in explaining race relations in the United States, Dr. Myrdal employs the method of successive elimination. Without attempting to be facetious, it may be compared with that of the scientist who comes upon a strange animal and, having the necessity to classify it, says to himself: “This is not a cat, I am sure; neither is it a dog, I am positive of that; therefore, since I do not think of anything else, I am going to call it a duck.”

There is no new theory of race relations in this study, but it develops the most elaborate defense of the caste belief. Dr. Myrdal has adopted not only the whole theory of the caste school of race relations in the United States but also its procedure. Like the leadership of this school, he appears to have taken some pride in regarding as worthless a study of Hindu society as a basis for making comparisons with Western society. Yet, as we should expect, he depends entirely upon the Hindu system for his orientation.

Thus the reader is asked to accept generalizations about the caste system in America when no other reference is made to the cultural norm than the following:

It should be pointed out . . . that those societies to which the term “caste” is applied without controversy—notably the ante-bellum slavery society of the South and the Hindu society of India—do not have the “stable equilibrium” which American sociologists from their distance are

¹⁹Ibid., p. 669.

²⁰Ibid., p. 1375.

²¹Ibid., p. 667.

often inclined to attribute to them. . . . A Hindu acquaintance once told me that the situation in the United States is as much or more describable by the term "caste" as is the situation in India.²²

From this, one thing is clear: Myrdal is very much in error in believing that it is recognized without controversy that slavery in the South constituted a caste system.²³ Moreover, it is difficult to see how one could avoid the conclusion that the author has descended to some vulgar means in referring to the hearsay of "a Hindu acquaintance" as authority for the sociology of caste.

The Biological Problem

Probably the crucial circumstance in attempts to use some term other than race in describing race relations is a desire to get around the biological implications in the term. Yet it has never been shown that there is a real necessity for this. In fact, those who verbally eschew the biological connotation of the term proceed, nonetheless, to make physical differences the crux of their discussion. This is particularly true of Myrdal. Says he, "Negro features are so distinct that only in the Negro problem does [belief in the desirability of a light skin and "good" features] become of great social importance."²⁴ And he proceeds, evidently without realizing it, to point out the relationship of skin color to caste:

. . . the average Negro cannot effectively change his color and other physical features. If the dark Negro accepts the white man's valuation of skin color, he must stamp himself an inferior. If the light Negro accepts this valuation, he places himself above the darker Negroes but below the whites, and he reduces his loyalty to his caste.²⁵

Myrdal continues his biological interpretation of race relations with great clarity. "When we say that Negroes form a lower caste in America," he asserts, "we mean that they are subject to certain disabilities solely because they are 'Negroes,'"²⁶ manifestly; that is to say, solely because they are colored or black. Moreover, although the writer did not elaborate this point, he refers to Asiatics, Indians, and Negroes as

²²Ibid., p. 668. See also note c.

²³We cannot be certain, however, that Myrdal has a settled view on this point, for he says elsewhere: "After the [Civil] War and Emancipation, the race dogma was retained in the South as necessary to justify the caste system which succeeded slavery. . . ." Ibid., p. 88. See also pp. 221-24.

²⁴Ibid., p. 669.

²⁵Ibid., p. 669.

²⁶Ibid., p. 669.

"the several subordinate castes."²⁷ It should be interesting to see how he fits these peoples into an American caste hierarchy. At any rate, with this conception of race relations, the author inevitably comes to the end of the blind alley: that the caste system remains intact so long as the Negro remains colored.

The change and variations which occur in the American caste system relate only to caste relations, not to the dividing line between 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 a person who has the slightest amount of Negro ancestry has the significance in making the caste line absolutely rigid.²⁸

Myrdal is so thoroughly preoccupied with the great significance of skin color that, although he realizes that in America Negroes of lighter complexion have greater social opportunities, he believes that they may as well be unmixed blacks so far as the "caste line" is concerned. Accordingly he asserts: "Without any doubt a Negro with light skin and other European features has in the North an advantage with white people when competing for jobs available for Negroes. . . . Perhaps of even greater importance is the fact that the Negro community itself has accepted this color preference."²⁹ This, however, has nothing to do with the rigidity of the caste line.

When Dr. Myrdal strays from his physical emphasis he becomes confused. For instance, he concludes that "being a Negro means being subject to considerable disabilities in practically all spheres of life."³⁰ Evidently it must follow logically from this that to the extent to which these "disabilities" are removed, to that extent also a person ceases to remain a Negro. The confusion is further deepened by the combination of a cultural and biological view of caste.

Caste . . . consists of such drastic restrictions to free competition in various spheres of life that the individual in a lower caste cannot, by any means, change his status except by a secret and illegitimate "passing" which is possible only to the few who have the physical appearance of members of the upper caste.³¹

In other words, caste consists in restrictions to free competitions, but restrictions to free competition are entirely limited by a man's

²⁷Ibid., p. 670.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 668-69.

²⁹Ibid., p. 697.

³⁰Ibid., p. 668.

³¹Ibid., p. 675.

physical appearance. Now, we may ask, what is the nexus between physical appearance and caste?

Rigidity of the Caste System

We may reiterate that the caste school of race relations is laboring under the illusion of a simple but vicious truism. One man is white, another is black; the cultural opportunities of these two men may be the same, but since the black man cannot become white, there will always be a white caste and a black caste: "The actual import of caste is gradually changing as the Negro class structure develops—except in the fundamental restrictions that no Negro is allowed to ascend into the white caste."³² Yet, if this is so, what possible meaning could the following observation have? "We have been brought to view the caste order as fundamentally a system of disabilities forced by the whites upon the Negroes."³³

Closely related to this amorphous concept of the rigidity of caste is the meaning given to interracial endogamy. Myrdal uses it to identify the races in the United States as castes.

The scientifically important difference between the terms "caste" and "class" is . . . a relatively large difference in freedom of movement between groups. This difference is foremost in marriage relations. . . . The ban on intermarriage is one expression of the still broader principle . . . that a man born a Negro or a white is not allowed to pass from the one status to the other as he can pass from one class to another.³⁴

Now it could hardly be too much emphasized that endogamy of itself is no final criterion of caste. Endogamy is an isolator of social values deemed sacrosanct by social groups, and there are many kinds of social groups besides castes that are endogamous. The final test of caste is an identification of the social values and organization isolated by endogamy. To say that intercaste endogamy in India means the same thing as interracial endogamy in the United States is like saying that a lemon and a potato are the same things because they both have skins.

An illustration of Myrdal's complete disregard of the nature of caste organization is his discussion of "caste struggle." This concept of "caste struggle," to be sure, is totally foreign to our norm, the Indian caste system. Moreover, this must be so because castes in Brah-

³²Ibid., p. 693.

³³Ibid., p. 669.

³⁴Ibid., p. 668.

manic India do not want to be anything other than castes. There is no effort or logical need to homogeneate themselves. A caste is a status entity in an assimilated, self-satisfied society. Regardless of his position in the society, a man's caste is sacred to him; and one caste does not dominate the other. The following description of caste has absolutely no application to caste in India.

The caste distinctions are actually gulfs which divide the population into antagonistic camps. The caste line . . . is not only an expression of caste differences and caste conflicts, but it has come itself to be a catalyst to widen differences and engender conflicts.³⁵

Mysticism

If the scientist has no clear conception of the norm which he is using to interpret social phenomena, the norm itself is likely to become lost in the data. When this happens he will ordinarily have recourse to mystical flights. In our case Myrdal seems to attribute magical powers to caste. Speaking of the cause of the economic position of Negroes in the United States he says: "Their caste position keeps them poor and ill-educated."³⁶ And, "Caste consigns the overwhelming majority of Negroes to the lower class."³⁷ Indeed, the whole meaning of racial exploitation in the United States is laid at the altar of caste. Thus it is observed: "The measures to keep the Negroes disfranchised and deprived of full civil rights and the whole structure of social and economic discrimination are to be viewed as attempts to enforce *the caste principle*."³⁸

More immediately, this mysticism is due primarily to a misapprehension of the whole basis of race relations. Caste is vaguely conceived of as something, the preservation of which is valuable per se. "The caste system is upheld by its own inertia and by the superior caste's interests in upholding it."³⁹ It is no wonder, then, that Myrdal falls into the egregious error of thinking that the subordination of Negroes in the South is particularly the business of poor whites. In this light he reasons: "That 'all Negroes are alike' and should be treated in the same way is still insisted upon by many whites, especially in the lower classes, who actually feel, or fear, competition from the Negroes and who are inclined to sense a challenge to their status in the

³⁵Ibid., pp. 676-77.

³⁶Ibid., p. 669.

³⁷Ibid., p. 71.

³⁸Ibid., p. 690. (Italics added.)

³⁹Ibid., p. 669.

fact that some Negroes rise from the bottom."⁴⁰ This, obviously, is a conception of race relations in terms of personal invidiousness. Surely, to say that "Southern whites, *especially in the lower brackets . . .* have succeeded in retaining [the] legal and political system" is to miss the point entirely. We shall return to this question in the following section.

One primary objection to the use of the caste belief in the study of race relations rests not so much upon its scientific untenability as upon its insidious potentialities. It lumps all white people and all Negroes into two antagonistic groups struggling in the interest of a mysterious god called caste. This is very much to the liking of the exploiters of labor, since it tends to confuse them in an emotional matrix with all the people. Observe in illustration how Myrdal directs our view: "All of these thousand and one precepts, etiquettes, taboos, and disabilities inflicted upon the Negro have a common purpose: to express the subordinate status of the Negro people and the exalted position of the whites. They have their meaning and chief function as symbols."⁴¹

It thus appears that if *white people* were not so wicked, if they would only cease wanting to "exalt" themselves and accept the "American Creed," race prejudice would vanish from America. "Why," asks Myrdal, "is race prejudice . . . not increasing but decreasing?" And he answers sanctimoniously: "This question is . . . only a special variant of the enigma of philosophers for several thousands of years: the problem of Good and Evil in the world."⁴² Clearly, this is an escape from the realities of the social system, inexcusable in the modern social scientist.⁴³ At any rate, the philosophers' enigma ap-

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 689.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 66.

⁴²Ibid., p. 79. See W. Cunningham, *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce*, Vol. I, pp. 556-57, for a review of this tendency among sixteenth-century English moralists to explain social problems by attributing them to human sinfulness.

⁴³Probably we should mention here another deplorable achievement of Myrdal's—his developed capacity for obscuring the basis of racial antagonism. Consider in illustration the following paragraph:

"Though the popular theory of color caste turns out to be a rationalization, this does not destroy it. For among the forces in the minds of the white people are certainly not only economic interests (if these were the only ones, the popular theory would be utterly demolished), but also sexual urges, inhibitions, and jealousies, and social fears and cravings for prestige and security. When they come under the scrutiny of scientific research, both the sexual and the social complexes take on unexpected designs. We shall then also get a clue to understanding the remarkable tendency of this presumably biological doctrine, that it refers only to legal marriage and to relations between Negro men and white women, but not to extra-marital sex relations between white men and Negro women." Ibid., p. 59.

This excerpt is not exceptional; it characterizes the writing. Its meaning is probably this: "The theory of color caste is a rationalization. Besides the economic

parently leads him directly into a mystical play with imponderables. As he sees it, "white prejudice" is a primary determinant in race relations. "White prejudice and discrimination keep the Negro low in standards of living. . . . This, in turn, gives support to prejudice. White prejudice and Negro standards thus mutually 'cause' each other."⁴⁴ Moreover, "the chief hindrance to improving the Negro is *the white man's firm belief in his inferiority*."⁴⁵ We shall discuss this controlling idea in a later section.

Poor Whites

It should be pointed out again that Myrdal not only closes his eyes to the material interests which support and maintain race prejudice but also labors the point that there is basic antagonism between poor whites and Negroes. Says he: ". . . what a bitter, spiteful, and relentless feeling often prevails against the Negroes among lower class white people in America. . . . The Marxian solidarity between the toilers . . . will . . . have a long way to go as far as concerns solidarity of the poor white American with the toiling Negro."⁴⁶ In fact, the author goes further to intimate that the poor whites may assume a dominant role in the oppression of Negroes in the South, because the interest of the poor whites is economic, while that of the ruling class is a feeling for superiority:

Lower class whites in the South have no Negro servants in whose humble demeanors they can reflect their own superiority. Instead, they feel actual economic competition or fear of potential competition from the Negroes.

interests upon which this rationalization is based, we should take into account certain appetites and instinctual drives common to all human beings." The conclusion in the last sentence is incorrect. It is contrary to both the logic of race relations and the data as recorded in the literature including some of the earliest court records on white-man, Negro-woman sex relations. The deplorable fact about this writing is not so much that it is obscure as that it seeks to maneuver the reader into accepting the rationalization as the real reason for racial antagonism. We could hardly emphasize too much that "sexual urges, inhibitions," and so on, traits common to Negroes as well as whites, cannot explain why certain whites dominate Negroes. Moreover, the author does not show that anyone has ever argued that the mere fact that a rationalization is recognized for what it is destroys it. This, obviously, is a straw man set up to cover the author's obsession with abstractions.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 75.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 101. (Italics added.)

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 69. In almost identical terms André Siegfried interprets the racial situation: "In the wealthy families some of the old-time sentimentality still survives from the slave days, but the 'poor white' sees in the Negro nothing but a brutal competitor who is trying to rob him of his job. His hatred is unrelenting, merciless, and mingled with fear. To understand the South, we must realize that the lower we descend in the social scale, the more violent the hatred of the Negro." *America Comes of Age*, p. 97. See also Edwin R. Embree, *Brown America*, p. 201.

They need the caste demarcations for much more substantial reasons than do the middle and upper classes.⁴⁷

The author hesitates to come to that obvious conclusion so much dreaded by the capitalist ruling class: that the observed overt competitive antagonism is a condition produced and carefully maintained by the exploiters of both the poor whites and the Negroes. Yet he almost says this in so many words: "Plantation owners and employers, who use Negro labor as cheaper and more docile, have at times been observed to tolerate, or co-operate in, the periodic aggression of poor whites against Negroes. It is a plausible thesis that they do so in the interest of upholding the caste system which is so effective in keeping the Negro docile."⁴⁸ And even more strikingly he shows by what means white workers are exploited through the perpetuation of racial antagonism. Says he: "If those white workers were paid low wages

⁴⁷Op. cit., p. 597. This social illusion concerning the naturalness of racial antagonism between Negroes and poor whites, a mirage ordinarily perpetuated by the white ruling class, is deeply embedded in the literature. For instance, Professor Louis Wirth declares with finality: "It has been repeatedly found by students of Negro-white relations in the South that the so-called white aristocracy shows less racial prejudice than do the 'poor whites' whose own position is relatively insecure and who must compete with Negroes for jobs, for property, for social position, and for power. Only those who themselves are insecure feel impelled to press their claims for superiority over others." See "Race and Public Policy," *The Scientific Monthly*, April 1944, p. 304.

Now, we may ask, why should competition be more natural than consolidation in the struggle for wealth and position? Why should insecurity lead more naturally to division than to a closing of ranks? Suppose the Negro and the white proletariat of the South decide to come together and unite for increasing power in their struggle for economic position, what are the sources of opposing power—disorganizing power—that will be immediately brought into action? Wirth might just as well argue that the antagonism and open conflicts which ordinarily develop between union strikers and scabs are caused by a feeling of insecurity among the scabs. In the end this argument must be put into that category of vacuus universals which explain nothing, for who in this world does not feel insecure? And if it is a matter of the degree of insecurity, then we should expect Negroes to take the initiative in interracial aggression since they are the most insecure. In the theoretical discussion of race relations "human nature" or the behavior of human beings as such should be taken for granted.

Sometimes thought is effectively canalized by such apparently objective statements by social scientists as the following: "A standard saying among the southern common folks is that we ought to treat the Negro as we did the Indian: kill him if he doesn't behave and, if not, isolate him and give him what we want to." Howard W. Odum, "Problem and Methodology in an American Dilemma," *Social Forces*, Vol. 23, October 1944, p. 98. Clearly the implication here is that the Southern aristocrats and their university professors are the protectors of the Negroes against the pent-up viciousness of the "southern common folks"—a complete perversion of reality.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 598. In another context he recognizes that "there had been plenty of racial competition before the Civil War. White artisans had often vociferously protested against the use of Negroes for skilled work in the crafts. But as long as the politically most powerful group of whites had a vested interest in Negro mechanics, the protesting was of little avail." Ibid., p. 281.

and held in great dependence, they could at least be offered a consolation of being protected from Negro competition."⁴⁹

At any rate, Myrdal refuses to be consistent. Accordingly, he asserts, attitudes against interracial marriage "seems generally to be inversely related to the economic and social status of the informant and his educational level. . . . To the poor and socially insecure, but struggling, white individual, a fixed opinion on this point seems an important matter of prestige and distinction."⁵⁰ It would not do, of course, to explain the situation realistically by concluding that if the revised black codes written by the white exploiting class against intermarriage were abrogated an increasing number of marriages between the white and the black proletariat would take place, the consequence of which would be a considerably reduced opportunity for labor exploitation by this class.⁵¹

The Ruling Class

Myrdal does not like to talk about the ruling class in the South; the term carries for him an odious "Marxist" connotation. Yet inevitably he describes this class as well as anyone:

The one-party system in the South . . . and the low political participation of even the white people favor a *de facto* oligarchic regime. . . . The oligarchy consists of the big landowners, the industrialists, the bankers,

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 286. In the South African situation Lord Olivier makes a similar observation: "When the capitalist employer comes on the scene, making discriminations as to the labor forces he must employ for particular work in order to make his profits, which is the law of his activity to do, then, and not till then, antagonism is introduced between the newly-created wage-working proletarian white and the native—who, in regard to the qualifications which properly determine wage contracts, are on exactly the same footing." *The Anatomy of African Misery*, p. 135.

⁵⁰Op. cit., p. 57.

⁵¹Hinton R. Helper, the renegade Southerner who never bit his tongue in his criticism of the white ruling class of the South and who, however, never concealed his prejudices against the Negroes, spoke more than a grain of truth when he described the position of the poor whites. It is essentially applicable to present-day conditions. "Notwithstanding the fact that the white non-slaveholders of the South are in the majority as five to one, they have never yet had any part or lot in framing the laws under which they live. . . . The lords of the lash are not only absolute masters of the blacks . . . but they are also the oracles and arbiters of all the non-slaveholding whites, whose freedom is merely nominal and whose unparalleled illiteracy and degradation is purposely and fiendishly perpetuated. How little the 'poor white trash,' the great majority of the Southern people, know of the real conditions of the country is indeed sadly astonishing. . . . It is expected that the stupid and sequacious masses, the white victims of slavery, will believe and, as a general thing, they do believe, whatever the slaveholders tell them; and thus it is that they are cajoled into the notion that they are the freest, happiest, and most intelligent people in the world, and are taught to look with prejudice and disapprobation upon every new principle or progressive movement." *The Impending Crisis*, pp. 42-44 *passim*.

and the merchants. Northern corporate business with big investments in the region has been sharing in the political control by this oligarchy.⁵²

And he stresses the ineffectiveness of the exploited masses. "The Southern masses do not generally organize either for advancing their ideals or for protecting their group interests. The immediate reason most often given by Southern liberals is the resistance from the political oligarchy which wants to keep the masses inarticulate."⁵³ Furthermore, he indicates the desperate pressure endured by Southern workers when he says: "The poorest farmer in the Scandinavian countries or in England . . . would not take benevolent orders so meekly as Negroes and white sharecroppers do in the South."⁵⁴

Sometimes Myrdal shakes off the whole burden of obfuscation spun about caste, creeds,⁵⁵ and poor-white control to show, perhaps without intending to do so, the real interest of the ruling class and how it sets race against race to accomplish its exploitative purpose:

The conservative opponents of reform proposals [that is to say the ruling class in the South] can usually discredit them by pointing out that they will improve the status of the Negroes, and that they prepare for "social equality." This argument has been raised in the South against labor unions, child labor legislation and practically every other proposal for reform.

It has been argued to the white workers that the Wages and Hours Law was an attempt to legislate equality between the races by raising the wage level of Negro workers to that of whites. The South has never been seriously interested in instituting tenancy legislation to protect the tenants' rights . . . and the argument has again been that the Negro sharecropper should not be helped against the white man.⁵⁶

It seems clear that in developing a theory of race relations in the South one must look to the economic policies of the ruling class and not to mere abstract depravity among poor whites. Opposition to social equality has no meaning unless we can see its function in the service of the exploitative purpose of this class. "When the Negro rises socially," says Myrdal, "and is no longer a servant, he becomes a stranger to

⁵²Op. cit., p. 453.

⁵³Ibid., p. 455.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 466.

⁵⁵This statement is made advisedly. The following unreal conflict between status and ideals may indicate further the nebulous level at which the theoretical part of this study is sometimes pitched: "The American Creed represents the national conscience. The Negro is a 'problem' to the average American partly because of a palpable conflict between the status actually awarded him and those ideals." Ibid., p. 23.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 456.

the white upper class. His ambition is suspected and he is disliked."⁵⁷ Again: "The ordinary white upper class people will 'have no use' for such Negroes. They need cheap labor—faithful, obedient, unambitious labor."⁵⁸ And the author observes further: "In most Southern communities the ruling classes of whites want to keep Negroes from joining labor unions. Some are quite frank in wanting to keep Negroes from reading the Constitution or studying social subjects."⁵⁹

In the South the ruling class stands effectively between the Negroes and the white proletariat. Every segregation barrier is a barrier put up between white and black people by their exploiters. Myrdal puts it in this way: "On the local scene the accommodation motive by itself does not usually encourage Negro leaders to such adventures as trying to reach behind the white leaders to the white people."⁶⁰ Moreover, it is not the poor whites but the ruling class which uses its intelligence and its money to guard against any movement among Negroes to throw off their yoke of exploitation. "In many communities leading white citizens make no secret of the fact that they are carefully following . . . all signs of 'subversive propaganda' and unrest among the Negroes in the community, and that they interfere to stop even innocent beginnings of Negro group activity."⁶¹

The reasoning which we are now following, it may be well to state, is not Myrdal's; we are merely culling those conclusions which the data seem to compel the author to make but which he ordinarily surrounds with some mysterious argument about caste.

From one point of view the masters did not have so great a need for racial antagonism during slavery. Black workers could be exploited in comparative peace; the formal law was on the side of the slave owner. As Myrdal observes: "Exploitation of Negro labor was, perhaps, a less embarrassing *moral conflict* to the ante-bellum planter than to his peer today. . . . Today the exploitation is, to a considerable degree, dependent upon the availability of extralegal devices of various kinds."⁶² Obviously, among these extralegal devices are race prejudice, discrimination, and violence—especially lynching and the threat of lynching. "Discrimination against Negroes is . . . rooted in this tradition of economic exploitation."⁶³

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 593.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 596.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 721.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 727.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 459.

⁶²Ibid., p. 220. (Italics added.)

⁶³Ibid., p. 208.

Emphasis upon Sex

In spite of this, however, Myrdal refuses to accept a realistic interpretation of race relations. Throughout these volumes he warns his readers not to put too much reliance upon a socioeconomic explanation. Thus he declares: "The eager intent to explain away race prejudice and caste in the simple terms of economic competition . . . is an attempt to *escape from caste to class*."⁶⁴ The reasoning here, of course, is unrelieved nonsense. Incidentally, it illustrates the hiatus in understanding which an inappropriate use of the concepts "caste" and "class" might entail. At any rate, our author thinks it is more revealing to take sex as our point of reference. In fact, Myrdal presents a scheme of social situations in which he ranks intermarriage and sexual intercourse involving white women as the highest in motives for discrimination, while he ranks economic conditions sixth and last.

(1) Highest in this order [of discrimination] stands the bar against intermarriage and sexual intercourse involving white women (2) . . . several etiquettes and discriminations . . . (3) . . . segregations and discriminations in use of public facilities such as schools . . . (4) political disfranchisement . . . (5) discrimination in the law courts . . . (6) . . . discriminations in securing land, credit, jobs . . .⁶⁵

This rank order evidences the degree of importance which "white people" attach to certain social facts calculated to keep the Negro in his place, and it is "apparently determined by the factors of sex and social status."⁶⁶ The Negroes' estimate, however, is just the reverse of this: "The Negro's own rank order is just about parallel, but inverse, to that of the white man."⁶⁷ Here, then, is a perfect example of social illusion, an illusion that must inevitably come to all those who attempt to see race relations in the South as involving two castes.

In reality, both the Negroes and their white exploiters know that

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 792. (Italics added.)

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 61. In similar vein he asserts: "It is surely significant that the white Southerner is much less willing to permit intermarriage or to grant 'social equality' than he is to allow equality in the political, judicial and economic spheres. The violence of the Southerner's reaction to equality in each of these spheres rises with the degree of its relation to the sexual and personal, which suggests that *his prejudice is based upon fundamental attitudes toward sex and personality*." (Italics added.) Ibid., p. 61.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 61. It is further emphasized: "The concern for 'race purity' is *basic* in the whole issue; the primary and essential command is to prevent amalgamation. . . . Rejection of 'social equality' is to be understood as a precaution to hinder miscegenation and particularly intermarriage. The danger of miscegenation is so tremendous that segregation and discrimination inherent in the refusal of 'social equality' must be extended to all spheres of life." Ibid., p. 58.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 61.

economic opportunity comes first and that the white woman comes second; indeed, she is merely a significant instrument in limiting the first. Moreover, these selected elements of social discrimination should not be thought of as discrete social phenomena; they are rather intermeshed in a definite pattern supporting a dominant purpose. If the white ruling class intends to keep the colored people in their place—that is to say, freely exploitable—this class cannot permit them to marry white women; neither can it let white men marry Negro women. If this were allowed to happen Negroes would soon become so whitened that the profit makers would be unable to direct mass hatred against them⁶⁸ and would thus lose their principal weapon in facilitating their primary business of exploiting the white and the black workers of the South.⁶⁹ If a Negro could become governor of Georgia it would be of no particular social significance whether his wife is white or colored; or, at any rate, there would be no political power presuming to limit the color of his wife. But if, in a “democracy,” you could insist that his wife must be black, you could not only prevent his becoming governor of Georgia, but you could also make him do most of your dirty and menial work at your wages.⁷⁰ Sexual obsession, then, functions in the fundamental interest of economic exploitation.

As a matter of fact, Myrdal is apparently so concerned with his sexual emphasis that he is here led to compare incommensurable

⁶⁸It should be made crystal-clear that the design of the ruling white people is not primarily to keep the blood of the white race “pure,” but rather to prevent race mixture; it is therefore definitely as frustrating to their fundamental purpose of economic exploitation to infuse white blood into the Negro group. Their purpose can be accomplished only if the Negroes remain identifiably colored.

⁶⁹Decades ago George W. Cable observed: “The essence of the offence, any and everywhere the race line is insisted upon, is the apparition of the colored man or woman as his or her own master; that masterhood is all that all this tyranny is intended to preserve. . . . The moment the relation of master and servant is visibly established between race and race there is a hush of peace. . . . The surrender of this one point by the colored man or woman buys more than peace—it buys amity.” *The Negro Question*, pp. 22–23.

And, as if it were in confirmation of this, C. R. Goodlatte writes, “It may be said of us that we welcome the native as a servant: as a rule we treat him individually in a fairly humane fashion; we often win his esteem and trust; but in any other capacity than that of a docile servant we consider him intolerable.” “South Africa: Glimpses and Comments,” *Contemporary Review*, CXXXIII, 1928, p. 347.

⁷⁰In order to support his specious argument Myrdal relies pivotally upon such sour-grape expressions as the following by R. R. Moton: “As for amalgamation, very few expect it; still fewer want it; no one advocates it; and only a constantly diminishing minority practise it, and that surreptitiously. It is generally accepted on both sides of the color line that it is best for the two races to remain ethnologically distinct.” *Op. cit.*, p. 62. This, from a Negro, is assumed to be evidence that Negroes do not want intermarriage. On its face, Myrdal might have asked: Why should something that is not wanted be practiced “surreptitiously”? Moreover, would the white ruling class be obsessed with the prevention of intermarriage if the natural likelihood of its occurring were exceedingly remote?

arrays: the "white man's" system of rationalization with the real basis of race relations, as the Negroes react to it. If he had been consistent in dealing with economic reality, he would probably have been able to extricate its superstructure of rationalization with sex as its emotional fundament. Indeed, this very approach might have led him to discover the pith of the problem, for Negroes "resist" least that which is of comparatively little moment and most that which is of crucial significance. Sex is not "basic" in race relations, but it is basic in the system of rationalization which supports racial antagonism.

Again our author sees the problem in this light: "It is inherent in our type of modern Western civilization that sex and social status are for most individuals the danger points, the directions whence he fears the sinister onslaughts on his personal security."⁷¹ This passage is intended as an explanation of the "white man's theory of color caste," determined by sexual fears. However, it seems inadequate for two reasons: (a) it is not significantly characteristic of "Western civilization" and (b) it tends to conceive of race prejudice as a personal matter. In all societies "sex and social status" are "danger points" to the individual. In apparently most of them they are much more so than in Western society; in Brahmanic India, for instance, they are infinitely more so, but there has been no race prejudice in Brahmanic India. Then, too, we could hardly overemphasize the fact that race prejudice is not a personal attitude. The individual in the South is not allowed to exercise personal discretion in this matter. Indeed, it is obviously the very fear of sexual attraction between individual members of the races which caused the ruling class to make laws supported by propaganda for its control.

The Vicious Circle

Capitalist rationalizations of race relations have recently come face to face with a powerful theory of society and, in order to meet this, the orthodox theorists have become mystics. This evidently had to be so because it is exceedingly terrifying for these scientists to follow to its logical conclusion a realistic explanation of race relations; and yet they must either do this or stultify themselves. Here the social scientist is "on the spot"; he must avoid "the truth" because it is dangerous, regardless of how gracefully he eases up to it. In illustration, Myrdal advises Negroes not to become too radical and to think of many causes as of equal significance with the material factor: "Negro strategy would

⁷¹Ibid., p. 59.

build on an illusion if it set all its hope on a blitzkrieg directed toward a basic [economic] factor. In the nature of things it must work on the broadest possible front. There is a place for both the radical and the conservative Negro leaders."⁷² This, obviously, will lead to a situation in which the ideas of one group of leaders will tend to offset those of another.

Although Myrdal overlays his discussion of race relations with a particularly alien caste belief, his controlling hypothesis has nothing whatever to do with caste. His "theory of the vicious circle"⁷³ is his controlling idea. This theory is essentially an abstract formulation, inspired by a largely inverted observation of "a vicious circle in caste" by Edwin R. Embree,⁷⁴ and rendered "scientific" by the application of certain concepts which Myrdal seems to have used to his satisfaction in his study, *Monetary Equilibrium*.

As we have seen in a previous section, the vicious circle runs as follows: "White prejudice . . . keeps the Negro low in standards of living. . . . This, in turn, gives support to white prejudice. White prejudice and Negro standards thus mutually 'cause' each other." These two variables are interdependent, but neither is consistently dependent; a change in either will affect the other inversely. If we initiate a change in Negro standards, say, by "giving the Negro youth more education," white prejudice will go down; if we change white prejudice, say, by "an increased general knowledge about biology, eradicating false beliefs concerning Negro racial inferiority," then Negro standards will go up.

It is this kind of mystical dance of imponderables which is at the basis of the system of social illusions marbled into Myrdal's discussion. In the first place, Myrdal does not develop a careful definition of race prejudice. He does say, however: "For our purpose [race prejudice] is defined as discrimination by whites against Negroes."⁷⁵ But he does not use this definition, in fact we do not see how he can, for race prejudice is a social attitude, an acquired tendency to act; it is not some act or action which is the meaning of discrimination.⁷⁶ Myrdal's studied analysis would lead us rather to deduce the following definition of race

⁷²Ibid., p. 794.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 75-78, 207-09, and Appendix 3.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 1069, note.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 78.

⁷⁶In another connection Myrdal seems to give a different meaning to the concept: "If for some reason . . . white workers actually came to work with Negroes as fellow workers, it has been experienced that *prejudice* will often adjust to the changed amount of *discrimination*." Ibid., p. 1067. (Italics added.) See also pp. 1141ff.

prejudice: a feeling of bitterness, especially among poor whites, aroused particularly by a standing sexual threat of Negro men to white women. As he sees it, the white man's "prejudice is based upon fundamental attitudes toward sex and personality."

If, according to Myrdal's "rank order of discrimination," the whites are most concerned with sex and the Negroes with economic advancement, his fundamental equilibrium of social forces should be a direct correlation between white prejudice and Negro sexual aggression—not Negro standards, which are clearly basically economic. In this way white prejudice will tend to vanish as Negro men give up their interest in white women; Negro standards will also go up, but only incidentally. If, for instance, Negro men would relinquish their desire to marry white women, "white people" would no longer be prejudiced against Negroes; the latter would be encouraged, say, to vote and campaign for political office and to demand their share of jobs and public funds in the Deep South.⁷⁷ To be sure, Myrdal does not demonstrate any such proposition. We may put it in still another way: If Negro standards go up and at the same time Negroes increase their interest in white women, then, to be consistent with Myrdal's sexual emphasis, white prejudice must increase. From this it follows that Negro standards are a non-significant variable.

The point which the author seems to have avoided is this: that both race prejudice and Negro standards are consistently dependent variables. They are both produced by the calculated economic interests of the Southern oligarchy. Both prejudice and the Negro's status are dependent functions of the latter interests. In one variation of his theory of the "vicious circle" Myrdal reasons:

Assuming . . . that we want to reduce the bias in white people's racial beliefs concerning Negroes, our first practical conclusion is that we can effect this result to a degree by *actually improving Negro status*. . . . The impediment in the way of this strategy is . . . that white beliefs . . . are active forces in keeping the Negroes low.⁷⁸

Here beliefs are assumed to be prime movers; they "keep the Negroes low." This is mysticism. If we can "improve Negro status" the reason

⁷⁷"Negroes are in desperate need of jobs and bread. . . . The marriage matter [to them] is of rather distant and doubtful interest." Ibid., p. 6. The Negroes, thus goes the logic, want jobs and the white men want to protect their women from Negro men. But white men are rather willing to let Negroes have jobs, while Negro men are not particularly interested in white women. If this is so, if these two admittedly antagonistic groups are vitally interested in different things, why is there antagonism at all? It would seem that men fight only when they are possessed of conflicting interests in the same object.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 109. (Italics added.)

for the existence of derogatory beliefs about Negroes is, to the extent of the improvement, liquidated. With a rise in the standard of living of Negroes there tends to be merely a concomitant vitiation of the rationalizations for the depressed conditions of Negroes. The belief is an empty, harmless illusion, like beliefs in werewolves or fairies, without the exploitative interest with which it is impregnated. If the economic force could be bridled, the belief would collapse from inanition. There is a vested interest in anti-racial beliefs.

The effective interest is a need for slaves, or peons, or unorganized common laborers—a need for “cheap, docile labor.” The latter interest, of course, is involved in a complicated web of feeling established by both immemorial and recent rationalizations. If beliefs, per se, could subjugate a people, the beliefs which Negroes hold about whites should be as effective as those which whites hold about Negroes.

This assumption of Myrdal’s, that racial beliefs are primary social forces, leads him to conclude almost pathetically that the “white man’s” beliefs are only a “mistake,” which he would gladly correct if only he had truthful information. Accordingly our author suggests the following attack upon the beliefs themselves:

A second line of strategy must be to rectify the ordinary white man’s observations of Negro characteristics and inform him of the specific mistakes he is making in ascribing them wholesale to inborn racial traits. . . . People want to be rational, to be honest and well informed.⁷⁹

Evidently the misapprehension in this presentation inheres in Myrdal’s moral approach. He does not recognize consistently that the propagators of the ruling ideas, those whose interest it is to replace debunked beliefs with new ones, are not mistaken at all, and that they should not be thought of merely as people or white people. They are, in fact, a special class of people who fiercely oppose interference with the established set of antagonistic racial beliefs. The racial beliefs have been intentionally built up through propaganda. They are mass psychological instruments facilitating a definite purpose; therefore, they can best be opposed by realistic aggressive propaganda methods.⁸⁰ It is, to repeat, consummate naïveté to assume that the ruling class in the South will permit a free, objective discussion of race relations in its schools or public places.⁸¹ Today such a practice can succeed only as a hazardous underground movement.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 109.

⁸⁰This view also holds against certain popular conceptions of race prejudice as “superstition” or “myth.”

⁸¹On this point, see Stetson Kennedy, *Southern Exposure*, p. 349.

Furthermore, the author's unstable equilibrium between race prejudice and Negro standards is evidently too simple. For instance, if Negro standards go up because of interference from some outside force, say the Federal Government, the cultivated race prejudice among the poor whites may tend to diminish, but at the same time the hostility of the ruling-class whites may increase. The reason for this is that, because of the interference, the status and problems of Negroes and those of the poor whites may be made more nearly to coincide and thus enhance the possibility of an establishment of a community of interest between these two groups, a process diametrically opposed to the purpose and interests of the white ruling class. Therefore, it becomes incumbent upon the latter class to re-establish its position by bringing into play those very well-known means of reaffirming racial antipathy.

Although Myrdal never permits himself to accept a consistently realistic approach to the study of race relations, he recites as historical fact that which his theory confutes. For instance, the following historical passage says quite clearly that race prejudice is an attitude deliberately built up among the masses by an exploiting class, using acceptable rationalizations derogatory to the Negro race, so that the exploitation of the latter's labor power might be justified.

The historical literature of this early period . . . records that the imported Negroes—and the captured Indians—originally were kept in much the same status as the white indentured servants. *When later the Negroes gradually were pushed down into chattel slavery* while the white servants were allowed to work off their board, *the need was felt . . . for some kind of justification above mere economic expediency and the might of the strong.* The arguments called forth by this need . . . were broadly these: that the Negro was a heathen and a barbarian, an outcast among the peoples of the earth, a descendant of Noah's son Ham, cursed by God himself and doomed to be *a servant* forever on account of an ancient sin.⁸²

Now there is no mysticism here—nothing about “sexual drives,” “fears,” “inhibitions,” “labile balance,” and so on—the historical process is clear. The exploitative act comes first; the prejudice follows. It explains unequivocally that a powerful white exploiting class, by “the might of the strong” and for “economic expediency,” pushed the Negroes down into chattel slavery and then, as a justification and facilitation of this, utilized the means of propaganda, which are ordinarily in its control, to develop racial antagonism and hate in the white public for the Negroes.⁸³

⁸²Op. cit., p. 85. (Italics added.)

⁸³It is interesting to observe with what anonymity Myrdal uses such key concepts as “imported,” “captured,” “kept,” “pushed down,” and so on. One would think

Attacking beliefs by negation is obviously a negative procedure—sometimes even a futile one. In an essay of epoch-making significance, written in about the year 1800, Henri Grégoire⁸⁴ demonstrated, probably as clearly as ever, that the white man is “making a mistake in ascribing Negro characteristics to inborn racial traits”; yet this assignment is still freshly advocated. As a matter of fact, Count Arthur de Gobineau almost put men like Grégoire out of existence.⁸⁵ In like manner, Dr. W. T. Couch, formerly editor in chief of probably the most influential Southern press, proceeds to “gobinize” Myrdal.

Couch, in a caustic criticism of Myrdal, referring to him as “silly” and “ignorant,” says the white man cannot make concessions to Negroes because these will ultimately lead to Negro men’s marrying white men’s daughters. “One concession will lead to another, and ultimately to intermarriage.”⁸⁶ Here the thinking of both authors is bogged down in the slough of sexual passion from which we may not hope for light on race relations. Moreover, in this unrealistic world of beliefs Couch has Myrdal where he wants him; he seems to triumph with such intuitive declarations as: “The assertion of equality is an assertion of values.”⁸⁷ And, in a characteristically pre-Civil War, slaveholders’ contention about the meaning of the Declaration of Independence, he becomes involved with Myrdal’s moral orientation. “I believe,” says Couch, “*An American Dilemma* was written under gross misappre-

that the subject referred to by these terms of action would be of primary concern in the investigation. It is, however, highly impersonalized, and the whole social situation tends to remain as if it were an act of Nature.

⁸⁴*An Inquiry Concerning the Intellectual and Moral Faculties, and Literature of Negroes*, trans. by D. B. Warden, Brooklyn, 1810.

⁸⁵After Professor Donald Young had completed his examination of the conditions of American minority peoples he made the following conclusionary statement: “Action, not cautious and laborious research, is demanded of those who would lead the populace. Thus a Chamberlain, a Gobineau, or a Stoddard attracts myriads of followers by a pseudo-scientific program based on a doctrine of God-given white supremacy . . . while the very names of Franz Boas, Eugene Pittard, Herbert A. Miller, E. B. Reuter, Friedrich Hertz, and other scholarly students of the peoples of the world are unknown outside of a small intellectual circle. ‘Give us the solution and let sterile scholars while away their time with obscure facts which lead but to quibbling books!’ is the cry of the masses.” Yet the reason that Gobineau *et al.* have been widely accepted by the white ruling classes of the world is not that they presented a course of “action” but that they had the timely ingenuity to contrive a system of plausible logic which justified an accomplished act: the white racial mastery of the world. Explanations and justifications were desperately needed. For the most part the scholars mentioned have been able only to point out flaws in the anti-racial arguments; they had already lost their conviction when they innocently accepted the spurious grounds of discussion which the apologists of racial exploitation had chosen. They apparently did not recognize that both the racial antagonism and its pseudo-scientific rationalizations are products of a peculiar social system.

⁸⁶*What the Negro Wants*, Rayford W. Logan, ed., p. xvi.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. xvii.

hensions of what such ideas as equality, freedom, democracy, human rights, have meant, and what they can be made to mean."⁸⁸ Thus, without restraint and without enlightenment, the mystics, steeped in metaphysical truck, set upon each other.

A positive program, on the other hand, calls for an attack upon the source of the beliefs, so that it might be divested of its prestige and power to produce and to substitute anti-racial beliefs among the masses. In other words, the problem is that of converting the white masses to an appreciation and realization of the ruling-class function of the beliefs and their effect as instruments in the exploitation of the white as well as of the black masses. Then, not only will the old beliefs lose their efficacy, but also the new ones will die aborning.

A positive program calls for the winning of the white masses over to a different system of thinking—not merely a campaign of scholarly denials of spectacular myths about creation, stages of biological progress, cultural capacity, and so on. Indeed, such negation may even play into the hands of the "racists," for they may not only divert attention from the realities of race relations but also help to spread and implant the myths among the public. However, the effectuation of such a program, the intent of which must be to alienate public support of the aristocracy, will undoubtedly evoke terrific opposition from this class. To be sure, this fact merely demonstrates further the basis of racial antagonism in the South and the correctness of the suggested positive program. At the same time, of course, Negroes must learn that their interest is primarily bound up with that of the white common people in a struggle for power and not essentially in a climb for social status.

At any rate, it is precisely this realization which Dr. Myrdal constantly seeks to circumvent. Accordingly he argues inconsistently that the ruling class in the South is the Negroes' best friend.

Our hypothesis is similar to the view taken by an older group of Negro writers and by most white writers who have touched this crucial question: that the Negroes' friend—or the one who is least unfriendly—is still rather the upper class of white people, the people with economic and social security who are *truly* a "non-competing group."⁸⁹

The author, by one symptom or another, cannot help showing of what he is really apprehensive: the bringing into consciousness of the

⁸⁸Ibid., p. xv.

⁸⁹Op. cit., p. 69. (Italics added.) It is interesting to observe how Dr. Myrdal has finally become almost reactionary in the sense of the incorrigible segregationist, W. T. Couch, who also says: "Nothing is more needed in the South today than rebirth of [Booker Washington's] ideas, restoration of the great leadership that he was giving." Op. cit., p. xxiii.

masses the identity of the interests of the white and the black workers. In accordance with this attitude he takes a superficial view of the economic order and asks Negroes to go to the labor market and see who is their real enemy. Thus he asserts:

The aim of [the theory of labor solidarity] is to unify the whole Negro people, not with the white upper class, but with the white working class. . . . The theory of labor solidarity has been taken up as a last solution of the Negro problem, and as such is escapist in nature; its escape character becomes painfully obvious to every member of the school as soon as he leaves abstract reasoning and goes down to the labor market, because there he *meets caste* and has to talk race, even racial solidarity.⁹⁰

As a justificatory illustration of the validity of his principle of "cumulative causation," the summatory interaction of the elements of Negro standards and other social factors, Myrdal says: "The philanthropist, the Negro educator, the Negro trade unionist . . . and, indeed, the average well-meaning citizen of both colors, pragmatically applies the same hypothesis."⁹¹ In reality, however, this is not a confirmation of a sound theory of race relations; it is rather an apology for reformism. Within the existing system of power relationship this is the most that is respectably allowed. Reformism never goes so far as to envisage the real involvement of the exploitative system with racial antagonism. Its extreme aspiration does not go beyond the attainment of freedom for certain black men to participate in the exploitation of the commonalty regardless of the color of the latter. This aspiration is the prospect which the Southern oligarchy with some degree of justification ordinarily refers to as "Negro domination."

Then, too, with reformation as an end, the logical "friend" of the Negro leader must necessarily be this same white aristocracy; for he must ultimately become, like the aristocracy, the inevitable economic adversary of the exploited masses; he must become, in other words, a "black Anglo-Saxon." Indeed, assuming bourgeois proclivities, his very appeal to the masses for support in his struggle for "equality" is an unavoidable deception. The reformer seeks to eliminate only the racial aspects of the exploitative system; he compromises with the system which produces the racial antagonism. But the white ruling class cannot willingly accept even this compromise, for it knows that the whole system is doomed if Negroes are permitted to achieve unlimited status as participating exploiters. In such an event there would be no racial scapegoat or red herring to brandish before the confused white com-

⁹⁰Myrdal, *op. cit.*, p. 793. (Italics added.)

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 1069.

monality as a means of keeping them and the Negro masses from recognizing the full impact of political-class oppression.

Today "conservative" theories of race relations are not merely denied; they are confronted with a countertheory, the theory that racial antagonism is in fact *political-class* antagonism and that race prejudice is initiated and maintained by labor exploiters. It is not, it would seem clear, that the aristocracy is less antagonistic to the Negroes but that this class uses more respectable weapons against them, which are also infinitely more powerful and effective. As a matter of fact, the poor whites themselves may be thought of as the primary instrument of the ruling class in subjugating the Negroes. The statement attributed to a great financier, "I can pay one half of the working class to kill off the other half," is again in point.

As we have seen, Myrdal does not favor this explanation. He declares that all the Negro's troubles are due to the simple fact that "white people" want to be superior to colored people; or, indeed, merely to the fact that the Negro is colored. His argument follows:

We hear it said . . . that there is no "race problem" but only a "class problem." The Negro sharecropper is alleged to be destitute not because of his color but because of his class position—and it is pointed out that there are white people who are equally poor. From a practical angle there is a point in this reasoning. But from a theoretical angle it contains escapism in a new form. It also draws too heavily on the idealistic Marxian doctrine of the "class struggle." And it tends to conceal the whole system of special deprivations visited upon the Negro *only because he is not white*.⁹²

Throughout the study the author has frequently found it sufficient simply to mention the name of Karl Marx in order to counter views based upon the determining role of the "material conditions of production" and distribution.⁹³ After a studied argument in favor of the futility

⁹²Ibid., p. 75. (Italics added.)

⁹³And yet Myrdal has shown himself to be vitally wanting in an understanding of the difference between status rivalry and class struggle. Observe, for instance, the following typical confusion: "Our hypothesis is that in a society where there are broad social classes and, in addition, more minute distinctions and splits in the lower strata, the lower class groups will, to a great extent, take care of keeping each other subdued, thus relieving, to that extent, the higher classes of this otherwise painful task necessary to the monopolization of the power and the advantages.

"It will be observed that this hypothesis is contrary to the Marxian theory of class society. . . . The Marxian scheme assumes that there is an actual solidarity between the *several lower class groups* against the *higher classes*, or, in any case, a potential solidarity. . . . The inevitable result is a 'class struggle' where all poor and disadvantaged groups are united behind the barricades." Ibid., p. 68. (Italics added.) Myrdal thinks that Marx thinks the *upper class* and the *lower class*, mere social illusions, are in conflict. No wonder he seems to conclude that Marx is rather foolish. And he does not trouble himself at all to explain how the "higher classes" exercise the "necessary painful task" of keeping the lower classes subdued when, per-

of Negroes adopting a Marxian view of society, he concludes: "Even after a revolution the country will be full of crackers' is a reflection I have often met when discussing communism in the Negro community."⁹⁴ The least we could say about this is that it is very crude. On this kind of thinking John Stuart Mill is emphatic: "Of all the vulgar modes of escaping from the consideration of the effect of social and moral influences on the human mind, the most vulgar is that of attributing the diversities of conduct and character to inherent natural differences."⁹⁵ More especially it expresses the fatalism upon which the whole orthodox school of race relations inevitably rests.

Myrdal, as a confirmed moralist, is not concerned with problems of power but rather with problems of "regenerating the individual" by idealistic preachments. If only the individual could be taught to accept the morality of the Creed, then society would lose its fever of racial pathologies and settle down to a happy existence. However, the point we are trying to make is that, in a feudal system, serfdom is natural and the serf will be treated like a serf regardless of whether the lord is a bishop or a secular noble; in the slavocracy of the South the slave was treated like a slave, whether his master was white or black; in modern capitalism black workers are exploited naturally and race hatred is a natural support of this exploitation. In other words, morality is a function of the social system, and a better system can change both morality and human nature for the better.

There will be no more "crackers" or "niggers" after a socialist revolution because the social necessity for these types will have been removed. But the vision which the capitalist theorist dreads most is this: that there will be no more capitalists and capitalist exploitation. If we attempt to see race relations realistically, the meaning of the capitalist function is inescapable. At any rate, although Myrdal criticizes Sumner and Park for their inert and fatalistic views of social change, he himself contends that any revolutionary change in the interest of democracy will be futile:

. . . a national policy will never work by changing only one factor, least of all if attempted suddenly and with great force. In most cases that would either throw the system entirely out of gear or else prove to be a wasteful expenditure of effort which could be reached much further by being

chance, the latter stop fighting among themselves and turn their attention to their common enemy. This is, to use the term so frequently employed by Myrdal, "escapeism."

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 509.

⁹⁵*Principles of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, p. 390. Long before this John Locke had said quite as much; see *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

spread strategically over various factors in the system and over a period of time.⁹⁶

✓ This is not the place to discuss the theory of revolution, but it must be obvious that the purpose of revolution is not to "throw the system out of gear." It is to overthrow the entire system, to overthrow a ruling class; and the cost of revolution did not frighten the capitalists when it became their lot to overthrow the feudalists.

An American Dilemma, the most exhaustive survey of race relations ever undertaken in the United States, is, for the most part, a useful source of data. In detail it presents many ingenious analyses of the materials. But it develops no hypothesis or consistent theory of race relations; and, to the extent that it employs the caste belief in interpretations, it is misleading. Clearly, the use of "the American Creed" as the "value premise" for his study severely limits and narrows Dr. Myrdal's perspective. Even though we should grant some right of the author to limit the discussion of his subject to its moral aspects, he still develops it without insight. He never brings into focus the two great systems of morality currently striving in our civilization for ascendancy, but merely assumes a teleological abstraction of social justice toward which all good men will ultimately gravitate. Moreover, since we can hardly accuse him of being naïve, and since he clearly goes out of his way to avoid the obvious implications of labor exploitation in the South, we cannot help concluding that the work in many respects may have the effect of a powerful piece of propaganda in favor of the status quo. If the "race problem" in the United States is pre-eminently a moral question, it must naturally be resolved by moral means, and this conclusion is precisely the social illusion which the ruling political class has constantly sought to produce. In this connection we are conscious of the author's recognition that "social science is essentially a 'political' science." One thing is certain, at any rate: the work contributes virtually nothing to a clarification of the many existing spurious social theories of race relations—indeed, on the latter score, Myrdal's contribution is decidedly negative. And for this reason evidently he has been able to suggest no solution for the dilemma, but, like the fatalists whom he criticizes, the author relies finally upon time as the great corrector of all evil.

⁹⁶Op. cit., p. 77.