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FELLOWSHIPS

THE NEGRO AS A
CONTRAST CONCEPTION

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VI

THE NEGRO AS A CONTRAST CONCEPTION

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I

RELATIONS between white and black people in the South have given rise to a distinctive conception of the Negro. As a natural outcome of the juxtaposition of two divergent ethnic groups, white people have sharply distinguished themselves from black people. It is not surprising then to find that there has been a marked tendency to conceive of the Negro in terms of contrast. In fact, one may speak of the Negro as a "contrast conception."¹

The social opposition has given rise to a conceptual dichotomy somewhat analogous to that between God and the devil in popular religion. The devil is a contrast conception set in juxtaposition to God as an antonym to represent the antithesis of Christian values. By this conceptual polarity the values are exalted and made all the more impressive. The contrast introduces a dichotomy which is conceived as running through the whole universe, dividing not only the natural world but the social order, and relegating objects and conduct to either the kingdom of God or the kingdom of the devil. The counter-concepts likewise form the basis for the interpretation of human nature and society.

Such a polarization of values is characteristic of moral beliefs. In the social logics lying at the basis of the social order we find such counter-conceptions as male and female, light and darkness, hot and cold, up and down, which carry moral connotations of good and bad, benevolent and malev-

¹ Credit is due Erich Voegelin who has characterized Judaism in Germany as a counter-conception. See *Rasse und Staat* (Tübingen, 1933), Zweiter Teil, "Die Rassenidee und der Aufbau der Gemeinschaft," Kap. 7, "Die Juden als Gegenidee."



olent. Thus, the moral order utilizes some conceptual scheme which serves to give sanction to the accepted social values through contrast. Just as the moral virtues are made more tangible and forceful by personalizing them, so are the unacceptable acts made more fearful by attributing them to personal beings. The latter are conceived to be antithetical to the benevolent personages but, nevertheless, are complementary to them and essential to the world view.

In the traditional social philosophy which arose out of the plantation economy of the South there appears to be just such a polarization of social values and beliefs regarding the white and Negro peoples. White master and Negro slave were set apart from the beginning. During the history of the South the discussion growing out of the long-sustained opposition between the Negro and white groups led, in the realm of belief, at least, to a distinct delineation of each in contrast to the other. The social separation is reflected in the concepts and beliefs white people came to hold about the "opposite race." In popular thought black and white have become conceptual antipodes. The black man and his appurtenances stand as the antithesis of the character and properties of the white man. The conception makes of the Negro a counter-race. The black race serves as a foil for the white race, by which the character of the latter is made all the more impressive.²

The contradistinction between white and black is still an important element in Southern thought and literature. Though it has long been subjected to severe criticism, and rejected by many, its logical implications have so thoroughly insinuated themselves into the mind of the masses that it exerts an unconscious influence upon general public opinion. The conventional idea of the Negro forms the fundamental premise in public discussion of "the Negro problem." As

² Voegelin and others show how the Jews in Germany are being used in a similar manner. Tacitus long ago made use of racial contrasts in his portrayal of Roman decadence by posing the Germans as an ideal race. Moralists and theologians frequently point to "pagans and heathens" to establish a point of view by reference to its negation.

such it conditions contacts and relations between the races, and must be taken into consideration in formulating any racial program. Citizens and institutions who would adopt a liberal program must continually ask, "What will the public think?" or "What will be the social or political reaction?" Certain elements of the older beliefs have become crystallized into social rules which people generally obey whether they agree with the underlying principle or not.

Here we are concerned with the functioning of the traditional concept of Negro people in social relations. In calling attention to its influence on public opinion we by no means intend to imply that it is still held universally. Our primary interest in the beliefs is the manner in which they portray the concept and its function and not as evidence of race prejudice and discrimination. Our materials were selected on this basis, and in quoting the statements and developing their implications no personal agreement or disagreement is implied. The analysis is based upon interviews and published works from which quotations are given to illustrate prevalent beliefs without any assumption as to their scientific or ethical validity. It is important to keep in mind also that we are assuming the standpoint of the white masses and viewing the "opposite race" through their eyes. We are looking out from the white world across the moat separating the races. From this point of view certain things white people say are relevant. They may be regarded as social facts in themselves and as facets of an underlying social philosophy of race relations. It is the general form of the ideology that is important and not the detailed statements by individuals. The latter will vary according to the informant, the region, and the social class. They are important only in so far as they reveal the total structure of the ideology³ and the com-

³ The word *ideology* is a nonevaluative term referring to bodies of social beliefs diffused through the minds of the masses. Ideologies arise in response to a social situation and are pragmatically oriented to social relations and political action in the broader sense. As such they are an expression of the social consciousness in its effort to legitimize the prevailing social order. See Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York, 1936).

mon assumptions diffused through the public opinion of the community.

If the presentation is not to be misunderstood, it is necessary to keep in mind that the racial beliefs do not by any means reveal a total picture of race relations. Indeed, one of the most interesting phases of race relations is the manner in which the beliefs and conceptions fail to take account of the intricate web of social and economic ties that bind the groups into a common social order.⁴ It will become progressively evident that the beliefs are a part of a racial philosophy which tends to obscure as well as reveal facts about the "opposite race." Furthermore, there is a tendency for popular beliefs to be stated in general terms. In discussing Negroes white people often unconsciously impute their views to other areas where different conditions prevail. Likewise, clashes between the races are so impressive that frequently they are felt to be generally prevalent, and thus the amicable relations are obscured. Moreover, conventional beliefs, like all traditions, are slow to change and may persist long after the social milieu giving rise to them has disappeared. They may intrude themselves into the social consciousness in such a manner, however, that one does not recognize their origin or anachronistic character. When a body of beliefs becomes so totally out of harmony with the changing present that it distorts the world view and misrepresents social relations we may justifiably speak of a "false social consciousness."

How, then, is the Negro conceived in conventional opinion? What is the nature of the white-caste conception of the black caste? We shall first discuss the physical traits which are presumed to be at the basis of the racial distinction. It is clear, however, that race is not conceived merely in biological terms, but correlated with these are social traits. The sociological implications loom larger than the anthropological assumptions. The essence of the racial contrast appears to be a moral antithesis, which tends to be projected through all

⁴ See chap. vii, "The Plantation: The Physical Basis of Traditional Race Relations," by Edgar T. Thompson.

social relations. After describing the symbolic character of the physical and moral traits, we shall proceed to show how they function to define the character of the black man. The social meaning of the counter-conception will be seen in the social dichotomy between the races and the manner in which the concept obscures the life of the opposite race. Its wider significance appears when it is viewed against the background of the popular racial ideology comprising the whole system of racial beliefs and mores. In this respect we shall point out how the concept is integrated into a social philosophy of race relations.

II

The beliefs concerning the physical traits of the Negro constitute one of the most conspicuous phases of the conceptual contrast. White Southerners have been very greatly interested in the anthropology of the black man in America and elsewhere, but the popular mind was primarily interested in the traits that pertain to the Negro's participation in society. Natural universal sanctions are sought for social relations. The characteristics assigned the Negro are symbolic of the status given him in the social order. This explains why the black man has been conceived as subhuman and brutish, and altogether unlike white men. Indeed, some have supposed that the race descended from the mongrel offspring of man and monkeys.

The attitude toward the race was tersely expressed by a man who remarked, "The Negro is a strange being." In the racial ideology, where every difference is assumed to make a difference, emphasis has been placed upon every distinctive trait, for each was supposed to symbolize the utter contrast and to indicate the Negro's brute non-white nature. Thus, it is pointed out that he inherits black skin instead of white, wool instead of hair, thick lips, a snub nose, long arms, a small brain, and enlarged genitalia. Charles Carroll, in *The Negro a Beast*, wrote that the white and the Negro "present the strongest contrast to each other in their physical and

mental characters" and in their modes of life.⁵ Hinton Helper, in *Nojoque* (1867), set up *black* and *beastly* as exact synonyms. It is said that the animal propensities of the black race are also evident in early maturity, especially in sexual functions.

As the counterpart of the highly civilized white man, the black man is thought to be subhuman in temperament and lacking in emotional control and restraint. He is said to be incapable of the continuous affection and mental concentration that are so essential in civilized society. Thus, the race may be conceived as being beyond the pale of human sympathy. This is the meaning of the beliefs which cast doubt upon the Negro's possession of a soul. These beliefs symbolize to the folk mind the black man's deficiency in the essence of human personality. Furthermore, it is obvious that these beliefs about Negroes are simply another form of those fictions almost universally applied to the lower classes of society.⁶ Wherever one social class looks down upon another as inferior, members of the latter are regarded as brutish in nature and vulgar. They are characterized as superior in such animal qualities as strength and endurance, sexual potency, and the lack of sensitiveness to pain. They are thick-skulled, dull and unintelligent, primitive and childlike. Invariably these inferior classes who are regarded thus are also characterized as dirty and immoral, and contact with them is repugnant.

III

Of all the ideological traits distinguishing the Negro from the white the most symbolic are the fictions portraying his moral life. Negroes are thought by some to be "immoral and promiscuous just like animals." It is said that they, unlike white people, have little or no moral restraint,

⁵ St. Louis, 1900, p. 45. Carroll concluded that since God created man in his own image, and God is not a Negro, then the Negro is not human but a beast.

⁶ See Gunnar Landtman, *The Origin of the Inequality of the Social Classes* (London, 1938).



and there are no enduring bonds of personal attachment between them.⁷ An old Southerner said, "I have never known an instance of lasting sacrificial friendship or love between two blacks. The negress even neglects her offspring. Their love is sensual, and they have no family life to speak of." We were told, "The Negro has degraded Southern morality. We cannot have any moral standards with so many free and easy Negro women running loose. Most every Negro wench is a prostitute. I don't call it seduction by white men, for what really happens is the Negro women seduce the white men. Sex is at the basis of the whole problem." A Southern lady remarked, "We must deplore the low morals of the Negro, but we just have to recognize that they have a code of morals of their own—jungle morals. It's different from ours, and lower, and they can't be expected to be any better. Just go listen to their church service some time. It's just like the tom-toms of the jungle."⁸ The moral slips of white women are matters of gossip to be passed in confidence, but some housewives have no hesitancy in discussing, even with strange gentlemen, the moral laxity of their maids.

Since the moral beliefs and sentiments diffused through a society constitute the ultimate sanctions of the social organization, it is not surprising to hear so much talk about the morals of opposite races and classes. These characterizations are to be understood symbolically, however, as representative of the opposition that runs through the community. Moral distinctions are the final rationalizations of racial contrasts, for through these collective representations the

⁷ See Howard Odum, *The Social and Mental Traits of the Negro* (New York, 1910), and N. S. Shaler, *The Neighbor* (New York, 1904). Also compare the portrayal of the immoral or amoral nature of Negro life in such books as Richard Coleman, *Don't You Weep, Don't You Moan* (New York, 1935). The existence of an extensive literature of this type appealing to the reading public is incontrovertible evidence of the pervasive character of the white-caste ideology described here.

⁸ Statements for which no citations are given are from documents based on personal interviews. They, of course, lose much of their significance when taken out of their context. It is unfortunate that it is impossible to give longer quotations to convey the nuances of sentiment.

counter-ideas of race are reduced to feelings and sentiments; they become emotive in nature. In *Cinnamon Seed*, a story of the South by Hamilton Basso, a little boy posed a very crucial question in Southern thought: "What's the difference between Negroes and us?" It was explained, "Don't you feel the difference? . . . If the feeling of difference wasn't there, there wouldn't be any difference." But once the difference is felt, now everything makes a difference, "the way everything is arranged. . . . It's the way it should be arranged. . . . There has to be a difference. There always will be."

This explains the sentimental quality of the beliefs and the emphasis on moral isolation, the immorality of the Negro, his criminal nature, and his lack of civilized moral control. There is a feeling that he is not amenable to the white moral order. It is said, "Negroes don't look at these things like we do. They are not conscious of any disgrace or ostracism." It is assumed that the shame of being a Negro swallows up every other ignominy. So great is the gulf between the two races that some white people feel little responsibility for Negro moral life, and "nothing a Negro can do could possibly reflect discredit upon white people."

Once the ideological contrast is established there is a tendency to extend it through the whole social and physical universe. The color of bodies takes on a moral connotation, which is projected through the social order and attaches itself to social objects and acts. Booker T. Washington recalled how in his youth it was assumed that "everything white was good and everything black was bad. . . . We always understood that God was white and the Devil was black."⁹ Things that do not measure up to expectations are "nigger" or "niggerish." These terms usually connote contempt. For example, a bad game of bridge is referred to as "nigger bridge." In describing an unattractive dog a lady added, "It's just an ol' cur like you'd see 'round any nigger house."

The words "Negro" and "nigger" have been transferred to a wide range of uses to refer to black objects or to dis-

⁹ *The Story of the Negro* (New York, 1909), I, 23.

tinguish black and white things. Murray's *New English Dictionary* cites usages in which they refer to animals, plants, insects, objects such as corn, cloth, coffee, etc. Thus hard coconut shells are called "Negro-skulls." Likewise "nigger" is applied to impurities, such as the black substance which separates out in soapmaking. Here by implication the term has a connotation of inferior, imperfect, impure, etc. Coarse cloth is "Negro-cloth," and rank cheap grades of black tobacco are called "niggerhead twist." The term "Negro-head" is also applied to an inferior quality of india-rubber. The crude vulgate of the illiterate is called "nigger-language" or "nigger-talk." Inefficient lazy methods of work are designated as "niggerish." Thus one reads, "They niggered the huge logs off with fire," and "To *nigger-out*, signifies . . . to exhaust land."

Negro things are repulsive, undesirable, and to be avoided. A Southerner remarked, "When I went North I could not help but be self-conscious about eating cheese and crackers and canned meats. In my part of the country we never ate these things. They were regarded as Negro food. It was a common sight to see Negroes sitting around stores on Saturday eating cheese and crackers and sardines." Another person related that "A lady had a vacant house on the back of the lot. It was suggested that she might easily rent it to a white workman. 'Goodness, no! Nobody would think of living here. Negroes used to rent it.'" Such comments as the following subtly portray the projection of the moral cleavage all along the color line. "I've seen Negroes living on the same street with white people around here. I don't see why whites put up with it. They don't live with Negroes down home. If one moves down with the Negroes we just class them with the Negroes, for no one with any self-respect would do it."

IV

Thus the racial beliefs function to create two sociological races and to set them apart as two social orders and moral universes. One method of maintaining the distinction be-

tween them is through a feeling of resentment. Now, it is significant that the atmosphere within which the conception of the Negro arose is permeated with this feeling and likewise that the conceptual framework is ideological in nature. Only from this standpoint can we understand the *raison d'être* for the antithetical beliefs about Negro and white people and the emotive nature of the ideas. Wherever groups and classes are set in sharp juxtaposition, the values and mores of each are juxtaposed. Out of group opposition there arises an intense opposition of values, which comes to be projected through the social order and serves to solidify social stratification. Thus, the ideological concepts reflect the polarities of mutually antagonistic schemes of life implicit in the world views.

Now we can understand the conceptual contrast by which Negro social values are inverted and made the negation of white values. The racial philosophy tends to draw a color line through the social universe, relegating objects and acts to the Negro and white spheres. In social relations the black man stands in sharp contrast to whites. He is expected never to forget his place in society. To mistake a white man for a Negro is a heinous offense, and, according to court decisions, does "violence to the feelings of persons." To refer to a white man as a "nigger lover" is the most damning of epithets, for in the mind of the masses a white man can have no sympathy for Negroes in preference to his own race.

The traditional contrast between the Negro and white man was brought out strikingly in a case tried in South Carolina in 1835.¹⁰ Two court witnesses were objected to as incompetent on the ground that they were persons of color. However, the testimony showed that they exhibited none of the distinctive marks of the African race. "They are respectable, have always been received into society, and recognized as white men." The court decided that "the condition of the individual is not to be determined solely by . . . Negro blood, but by reputation, by his reception into society. . . ."

¹⁰ *State v. Cantey*, 2 Hill, S. C. Reports, 614-617.

This will depend, however, upon his character and conduct. "It may be well and proper, that a man of worth, honesty, industry and respectability, should have the rank of a white man, while a vagabond of the same degree of blood should be confined to the inferior caste."

In this case, where resort could not be made to arbitrary visible marks of race, the essential moral character of the racial dichotomy appears as the criterion. Then, in this phase of the public mind the essence of whiteness is honesty, industry, and respectability. In the words of the court, "It would be an absurdity in terms to say that such an one is, in the popular sense of the word, a person of color." Negro character, on the other hand, is an inversion of these traits. The black man is regarded as a vagabond, and has been reputed to be dishonest, lazy, and disrespectful. In the popular conception the character of the Negro is transposed and set as the diametric opposite of white character. Nevertheless, it is plain that just as the devil completes the world view of popular religion, so the conception of black folk is an essential antipode in the white-caste ideology. Black folk serve as the complement of white folk in the social philosophy enveloping the biracial society.

The traditional racial ideology has thus made of *the* black man a devil, a bogey-man, the epitome of evil and badness. He is a foil that sets off the white social values, lending to them an increased splendor. The use to which the black race is put is cryptically suggested by the story of the little girl who cried because the Negroes were leaving. When asked why she was crying, she replied, "When the Negroes are all gone there won't be anybody to be better than."

Wherever an alternative of judgments exists there is a tendency to designate the Negro as bad, offensive, degraded. These traits are assumed to be Negro nature. It is natural for Negroes to behave as they do. So, by implication, any person who behaves in this way is a Negro or niggerish. When a white person is very repulsive, he is said to be "just like a Negro" or "as mean as a Negro." During a conversa-



tion a white man attempted to find epithets adequate to convey the contempt he held for "a bunch of low-down white people." Finally he characterized them as "continually quarreling and fussing with each other just like a bunch of Negroes. You know how Negroes are. They don't feel natural 'less they are fighting and fussing." To "nigger one self" is degrading. The Negro is the personification of the dangerous and fearful; so in popular thought the demon is "a nigger in the woodpile."

In the movie, *Green Pastures*, the greatest compliment Noah could pass upon De Lawd was, "Dat's mighty white o' you, Lawd." Formerly when a community wanted to confer an extremely high honor upon a Negro he was officially declared to be a white man. Such was the reward of the informant who warned white people of Vesey's plot. In the case cited above the court suggested that "It may be well and proper, that a man of worth," even of mixed blood, "should have the rank of a white man" as "a stimulus to the good conduct of these persons and security for their fidelity as citizens."

The popular conception of Negro character is dramatically portrayed in folk beliefs, fables, anecdotes, jokes, songs, and literature. To sound natural the anecdote must be told in the dialect which whites attribute to Negroes and which is believed to be peculiar to them. In striking contrast to the colored characters, the white characters speak in the most polished and stilted phrases. The things white people laugh at in Negro life are significant, for these are the traits that are considered distinctive. The blackface comedian is so different, so far apart from whites that he has little claim for their sympathy; hence they can laugh at him. Even his moral life is made the point of ribald jokes. Some Southerners protested against the portrayal of the lower class in the play, *Tobacco Road*. It was regarded as a travesty against the whole South. But there is little compunction against playing up the unattractive features of the Negro community in any connection, for by implication these represent what

Southern white people are not. They reveal the reverse of the "true South."

We can now understand some elusive aspects of the diametrically opposite way white and Negro women are regarded. The white woman is one of the most conspicuous symbols of white racial values. She stands for the home, domestic relations, and intimate contacts. To protect her is to make secure the inner social circle and to forestall race mixture. Thus, she is made to exemplify the virtues of the race and is enshrouded with the symbols of purity. Her status is made all the more exalted by the conceptual polarity of comparison with the black woman. In contrast to the ennoblement of white women, Negro women stand as the symbol of degradation. Here, above all, the distinction is absolute. There can be no basis of comparison between the two. Everywhere in public one sees and hears the contrast implied in the terms, "white ladies" and "colored women." In white parlance the Negro is not ordinarily a lady or a gentleman.

While the extremely strong social consciousness among white men makes any attack on white women a personal affront, Negro women appear, according to some informants, to be fair game for all. The two do not seem to participate in a common moral code to which acts are accountable.¹¹ A gentleman remarked, "All the time I was in the deep South I never heard of a bastardy trial involving a white man and a negress. A Negro woman never had the nerve to bring up anything like that in public." Another old Southern man remarked, "These Negro women like to have the white men come around to see them. You know how they are—the most passionate people there are. It was never a question of seducing them, for they were just as anxious as the men. Of course, it might have looked bad for white men to go over to see Negro women in the old days, but it was a

¹¹ See David Cohn, *God Shakes Creation* (New York, 1935), and John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New Haven, 1937), chap. vii.

good thing in a way, for it saved a lot of white women going into prostitution."

V

In the popular mind the Negro has been conceived as different from white people in not only the one aspect of color but in every respect. The contrariety is pointed out in economic activities, education, religion, language, health, manners, recreation, etc.¹² What then is the social effect of the ideological dichotomy?

The social meaning of the antipodian conception of black and white peoples can best be understood by reference to the social relations within which it operates to segregate the two races. Once established as the basis of race relations, the caste principle was extended to virtually all activities where the two ethnic groups came into contact. Thus, those institutions that have arisen since the days of slavery have been established on a parallel basis. It is apparent that there is a feeling of necessity for keeping apart the races in all those social activities which, because of the sentiments and emotions bound up with them, are defined as implying a basis of social equality. The principle of parallelism is so well established that Negroes are expected to restrict themselves to their own institutions. A public official said, "Negroes have their own stores, theaters, churches, and assembly halls. Why should they want to come over and barge in where they are not wanted? They think they are too good to meet in the warehouses, but they would be more at home there. They don't feel at ease in white places, for it is not natural—they're out of place. Everyone knows they enjoy their own company more. They like it better over in their own community where they have their own social life among themselves." Note that the Negro is conceived of as the aggressor, "barging in" where he is not wanted.

Business is not even carried on in isolation from the racial beliefs and mores. "A Negro salesman called on a white

¹² See the works of Thomas Bailey, Howard Odum, R. W. Shufeldt, F. L. Hoffman, B. W. Smith, and others.

businessman after his concern had written for an appointment. When he appeared with his samples he was ordered out of the store. 'You go back and tell your company that I'm a Democrat, a Methodist, and a Southerner, and I don't want any Negro coming around my place.'” The manager had evidently expected a white man and was ready to extend the conventional reception, but when the person turned out to be colored the pattern of behavior was the wrong one. The situation clashed with his habits and beliefs concerning Negroes, hence the emotional outburst.

In the mind of the businessman just quoted the terms Democrat, Methodist, and Southerner represented three systems of belief and loyalty which he supposed by their nature excluded Negroes. This is significant, for it is obvious that the people within a community are bound together by a body of opinions and sentiments. The communal institutions function by virtue of these sanctions diffused through the public mind. Now, race relations take place within this milieu of public opinion. As a matter of fact, a sociological race (as distinct from a zoölogical aggregation) is a form of public created by the self-consciousness of its members, which arises from the diffusion of a particular ideology. Thus, in the South, the members of the white race hold particular beliefs and sentiments about the opposite race which form a basis of social cohesion among themselves. On the other hand, these beliefs make the whites very conscious of themselves in contrast with the Negro, for Negroes do not share these beliefs. Here is the essential basis of the racial cleavage. Since the Negro does not participate fully in the body of public opinion and diffuse sentiments, he is shorn of some of the phases of social personality and character. He is not a citizen in the fullest sense of the word but “an alien in a white man's country.” When an announcement carries the notice that “the public is invited,” it is usually understood that only whites are expected to attend. No explanation is necessary, for it is unconsciously assumed that Negroes are not a part of “the public.”



The manner in which white people control and direct the institutions of the larger community serving both races without always consulting Negroes is indicative of the profound cleavage in the public mind.¹³ Evidently it is tacitly assumed that Negroes have no opinions on public matters that need to be taken into consideration. There is no extensive body of agreements or understandings between the groups regarding joint participation in control. "Politics is the white man's business," and this appears to be the general agreement in most matters of group interest and action, both formal and informal. A school official remarked, "Politics always enter into decisions as to the location of white school buildings, but when it comes to locating a Negro school we just make a survey and place it where it ought to be. Negroes do not have the political pull whites have." Likewise in economic relations the black race has fewer claims that must be respected. A white laborer said, "When there are not enough jobs to go around we ought to see that our own race is taken care of first." This attitude the public assumes toward aliens in general. The political dichotomy is also evident in leadership. It has been observed that the leaders of the Negro community generally exist by virtue of white influence. They do not arise within the Negro group because of prestige there but are appointed by white people, and it is through these leaders that whites exert their influence upon the Negro community.

Wherever the races come together the feeling of difference is evident. Between the Negro and white people there does not exist in its fullest form that body of consensus or common feeling which usually grows up between persons and groups associated in a community. It is as if the two races are strangers to each other. There is little reciprocity in communication and interaction. When speaking of each other they tend to be hesitant, evasive, and uncertain. There exists a moral isolation which is so well known

¹³ See Paul Lewinson, *Race, Class and Party* (New York, 1932), and Buell G. Gallagher, *American Caste and the Negro College* (New York, 1938).

that courts take account of it when members of the opposite race are called as character witnesses. Neither can "know in what respect a person of the other race is held in the community in which he moves." A foreign student, traveling in the South, observed: "I was amazed at the profound ignorance of the white people about the Negro part of the community. They hardly know where the institutions are located. They could seldom direct me to them. When a Negro accompanied me on a visit to public institutions, he was regarded as my chauffeur, and I could never get anyone to understand otherwise. Once a college president accompanied me, and when I introduced him as the head of the local Negro college the white men turned away. They would never speak directly to a Negro in my presence, but only indirectly."

In setting up a dichotomy in the social order and bifurcating the social sentiments, the ideology has tended to create of the black race an enemy to white society against whom all must unite. The white folk conceive of themselves as confronted with an alien group,¹⁴ the struggle against which assumes a moral compulsion. Thus we were told, "We have got to stand up for our kind. Wherever you see white and black they will never mix. The two are always at war with each other—and always will be. We white people have got to stand together or else be beaten down by the black men. . . . We just have to keep these Negroes in their place. When things get so bad that you cannot do it by talking to them, we have to get together and beat them down." Here we see the primary function of

¹⁴ Writing in 1885, George W. Cable, in *The Silent South* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885), pp. 6-7, portrayed the profound feeling which all through slavery and since has made an alien of the Negro. "Generations of American nativity made no difference; his children and children's children were born in sight of our door, yet the old notion held fast. . . . He accepted our dress, language, religion, all the fundamentals of our civilization, and became forever expatriated from his own land; still he remained, to us, an alien." B. Schrieke, *Alien Americans* (New York, 1936), p. 140, observed fifty years later that "The Negro is still regarded as an alien."



racial dogma asserting itself. By posing a counter-race or an inner enemy, the ideology produces cohesion within white society. The common object of hatred provides a common element of belief and sentiment.

There is a widespread fear of the invasion of the white social order by the black man. This is evident from the many beliefs symbolizing the Negro's alleged eagerness to marry into white society. Likewise the fear finds expression in the revulsion against eating together and the dislike of the "uppity Negro" and "Negroes who have been North," for these "get out of place." One of the most abominable things an informant could think of was "the way Negroes and whites eat and bathe together in the North. They go in the same bathing pools with white people. Just think of the dirty black Negroes with their diseases going into a pool with whites. I don't see how a white man could degrade his race like that."

The fear of social invasion greatly affects the conception of the Negro held by certain elements of the population. This is borne out by the fact that the most bitter animosity toward the race is manifested by those classes of the white population that are closest to the Negro in status, and hence on a competitive basis with the race. The white élite and socially secure classes have little to fear from, and on the whole are rather tolerant toward, the black man. On the contrary, the whites who are in a precarious social position are forever on guard against the invasion of the "low down Negroes." They avoid being classed with them by reacting strongly against "Negro invasion" of residential areas. "Negro jobs" are repulsive, and the class is always on guard to protect "white jobs" from Negroes. They don't want "stinking Negroes around the house" and "can't stand Negroes cooking." Nor do they allow "dirty diseased Negroes" to take care of their children. Race riots and anti-race movements are fomented by this class.

The Negro has also appeared as a counter-race in South-

ern politics. This can be understood by recalling that in order to function properly and effectively a political party must have an opponent. If there is no issue, there can be no discussion and public interest disappears. If there is no fight, party unity declines. Now, it is evident that in the Solid South the Negro has been posed as an "opposition party" against whom whites are expected to unite. He has been used as a scapegoat upon whom the ills of Southern life have been heaped. Through this symbol the forces of disorganization are personalized, and the disparate elements of social opposition become focused upon an object that is socially defined and highly visible. When political activity lags the public is quickly awakened by the "Negro issue." In fact, white politicians have at times subsidized Negro party activities, to keep the opposition virile enough to be effective.¹⁵ As a rule, proponents of issues and candidates dare not openly seek the support of Negroes, for any issue supported by Negroes is thought to be essentially bad. A politician said, "In a campaign for a progressive measure the Negroes were anxious to help, because they saw it would give them a showing in local government. Now, if they had been whites we would have boasted of their backing, but we dared not let the public know, for it would have been a defeating boomerang."

VI

We have characterized the beliefs about the Negro as ideological. By this we mean that the outlook and conceptual orientation are an expression of white-caste consciousness in its effort to legitimize prevailing or desired race relations. It is essential to take account of this in understanding one of the motives for casting the Negro in the conventional role as the counterpart of white men. The South has been forced to "explain" constantly its "peculiar institution." During most of its history outsiders have criti-

¹⁵ Robert W. Winston gives a striking instance of this in his autobiography, *It's a Far Cry* (New York, 1937), chap. xiii.

cized its racial customs. Hence much of its literature has been polemical rationalizations and defences in answer to its critics.¹⁶ In "explaining" Southern race relations writers, such as Harris, Page, and Dixon, inevitably portrayed a character who was naturally inferior and subordinate to white people. In this literature the black man is made the converse of the white man. Through it there runs a sharp racial distinction, a contrast so definite that racial assimilation is made obviously impossible and repulsive.

In commenting on the books current in his youth Booker T. Washington was struck by the manner in which they "put the pictures of Africa and African life in an unnecessarily cruel contrast with the pictures of the civilized and highly cultured Europeans and Americans." In one book a picture of George Washington was "placed side by side with a naked African, having a ring in his nose and a dagger in his hand. Here, as elsewhere, in order to put the lofty position to which the white race has attained in sharper contrast with the lowly condition of a more primitive people, the best among the white people was contrasted with the worst among the black."¹⁷ Washington relates that he unconsciously took over the prevalent feeling that there must be something wrong and degraded about any person who was different from the customary.

From the standpoint of the ideology the qualities that distinguish the races are very important for social relations and must be preserved. They are felt to be the bulwark of Southern society. While the "aping nigger" is the butt of frequent jokes, the matter also strikes a serious note. It represents the threat of Negroes becoming like white people. A housewife explained: "The young Negroes don't

¹⁶ See William E. Dodd, "The Social Philosophy of the Old South," *American Journal of Sociology*, XXIII, 735-746 (May, 1918); Paul H. Buck, *The Road to Reunion* (Boston, 1937); Jesse T. Carpenter, *The South as a Conscious Minority, 1789-1861* (New York, 1930).

¹⁷ B. T. Washington, *op. cit.*, I, 8-9. A similar contrast was made by William McDougall in *Is America Safe for Democracy?* (New York, 1921) by juxtaposing a picture of Lincoln and an African savage.



make good maids. They are continually trying to imitate white people. They want to be like us because they are dissatisfied with themselves. They talk too fast and aren't courteous to white people. They sit while talking to whites. One I had not only tried to imitate my speech but tried to dress like me. Of all things that was the limit. When she talked on the telephone or answered the door, she imitated me and the neighbors mistook her conversation for mine." There have been widespread objections on the part of the masses to education which removes the caste differences, i.e., those traits setting the Negro off from the white race. An educated Negro no longer takes the role of the servant.

We have now gained an insight into the motivation back of the defamation of the mulatto. The person of mixed blood is a moral anomaly. He tends to assume the role and attitudes of white people and to view himself as one white man views another. He presents a dilemma to the popular mind. Since he is a marginal person, others assume contradictory attitudes toward him. It seems that the mulatto is becoming so much like white people that the latter redouble their efforts to preserve the race distinctions.

The remarks of an old farmer reveal the emotions that pervade this marginal realm of race relations. While "over in Negrotown" he encountered a man whom he supposed to be white and proceeded to treat him accordingly. He said, "The man called in the house for someone and there walked out a big fat Negro woman. I looked at this fellow again, for I had thought he was a white man. He sure did look like one. After the Negro woman had gone back in the house I asked him who she was, and he said, 'She's my wife.' I says, 'I thought you were a white man at first. Who are you?' And he said, 'I'm one of Mr. Tom Smith's boys, but I never try to act like a white man.'" In telling the story years afterward the informant unconsciously betrayed the emotion which still enshrouded the incident.

When he thought a white man was living with a Negro woman he was highly incensed. He had been treating him "like a white man," i.e., in a distinctive manner befitting a fellowman. There still was an emotional situation until the Negro assured the farmer that "I never try to act like a white man." Then the tension was relieved, the emotional block subsided, and the behavior could be resumed on the customary level. In communication and conduct the Negro was assigned the conventional role. The farmer now knew how to treat him and everyone felt all right.

One of the most persistent patterns of belief in Southern thought is the heritage from the slave regime. It is through this phase of the social consciousness that the racial ideology is given one of its most potent expressions. Here we find a mentality that preserves the racial contrast by insistence upon adherence to the patriarchal relations of master and slave in contemporary race relations. In commenting on the contrariety between the two races a white man said, "These Negroes aren't anything but animals anyway. It hasn't been long since they were all just slaves, and one would go out and buy a big husky Negro like he would a good mule."

Though Negroes are competing with whites for many jobs, there still prevails much of the pattern of the plantation economy. Manual toil and menial tasks tend to be reserved for the Negro. A common laborer said, "They work right many Negroes at the tobacco factories. Don't nobody mind Negroes working there, cause it's known that them are jobs that no white man can stand. Just ain't healthy for them. Course you know a Negro can stand anything. That dust doesn't hurt him a bit. The thing that's ruining all of us is that Negroes are given jobs that white people ought to have."

Southerners cannot get along without the Negro because the whole economic system is dependent upon his labor. One of the chief problems has been to keep the Negro on the land. His labor is the chief reliance of planters, and

when he leaves the planter stranded, crops go to ruin. Furthermore, depressed Southern agriculture has not been able to keep up with the rising wage scale. Every wave of Negro emigration and every advance in wages have brought crises in the South. The reaction to the situation finds expression in such remarks as "We can't get the Negroes to work," and "They demand too high wages," which transmute the relation to another level. One is still told that "Negroes are too undependable and are temperamentally unfit for factories. He hasn't the aptitude for mastering the intricacies of machines. The monotony puts him to sleep." It is out of this situation that there has arisen the popular belief that "cultivation of the soil is natural to the black man." It is thought that his native habitat is the country and that he is at home in the cotton fields. There he is contented, for "the cabin in the cotton" is his heritage. Civilized city life is too complex and places too many burdens upon the simple nature of this jungle-bred race. He cannot stand the city and dies off at an early age.

The South's dependence on the Negro is further obscured by the belief in the complete dependence of the black race upon the white race for moral as well as economic support. The Negro is thought of as a child race, the ward of the civilized white man. We are told: "The savage and uncivilized black man lacks the ability to organize his social life on the level of the white community. He is unrestrained and requires the constant control of white people to keep him in check. Without the presence of the white police force Negroes would turn upon themselves and destroy each other. The white man is the only authority he knows." We frequently heard remarks that "the best Negroes have been trained by white people." In contrasting city and country Negroes one person remarked, "Out in the country the Negroes work hard and can be depended on. That's because they have been trained by white people. They're not used to mixing with their kind much." Again it was said, "White

people in the South have learned that a Negro is no good without a white man over him.”

The conviction that Negroes are utterly dependent upon whites is a natural expression of the benevolent paternalism inherent in the class organization. This spirit is reminiscent of the master-slave relation and serves to create and preserve the aloofness and opposition characteristic of that regime. Here is another element of the ideology which heightens the sense of distinction and contrast. Thus it is said: “We understand the Negroes and try to do everything we can for them. We white people know their leaders, because they have been in and out of our homes as servants. They hardly had to ask for anything, because oftentimes we knew what they needed better than they did. These people were all good Southern Negroes, and our leaders have always been Southern gentlemen who understood the Negro and how to get along with him better than anybody else in the world.”

VII

It is apparent that through the endless discussion of the Negro there runs a basic pattern of ideas. The beliefs are facets of an ideology, the central theme of which is the natural and inevitable quality of the social order. They are oriented toward the social logics of a caste order, and have for their purpose the sanctioning of race relations on that basis. The system of beliefs contributes to this end by giving to Southern society a mythical background. It brings over to the present the traditions of the past out of which the pattern of race relations has grown. The tremendous interest in the Negro and his traits is ideological. It is significant that it is out of this philosophical milieu that the conception of the Negro has grown, for herein lie the logical motives which have determined the nature of that concept. The ideology, of which the counter-idea is the fundamental premise, tells us little about the Negro per se, but much about the white people, their wishes and struggles, and what they want the Negro to be like.

The traditional racial ideology has thus given rise to a "false social consciousness" which tends to distort everything that comes into its sphere. Negro life and character are made the antitheses of that of the white man. The contemporary flow of Negro life and the status of his community are obscured in deference to a pattern of behavior belonging to the plantation economy of the past. By casting a glamor of pathos over the patriarchal relations of the old regime they are posed as ideal patterns for the present. We may venture to assert that the racial ideology and its counter-conceptions have tended to create a black sociological race which in all respects is compatible with the social wishes of the white caste. Then the counter-beliefs about the Negro are expressions of the social sentiments and antipathies of the superior caste.

This point of view gives us an insight into many of the remarks white people make about Negroes. We are told: "The Negro loves the South. No one understands him like the Southerner. When you see a Negro in the North, you'll find he's homesick for the South. There's no one in the North to help him out like we do in the South. . . . Negroes do not want equality. I've never seen but one Negro who demanded that I refer to a colored person as mister. We had a very faithful old janitor, and we thought the world of him. Once when he was sick I went out to look him up. I asked a Negro woman where I could find Uncle Skids. She replied, 'I don't know where you'll find any Uncle Skids, but Mister Jones lives over there.' That made me mad, for I could never think of calling Uncle Skids mister. He'd think that I didn't like him any more." This man was speaking from the perspective of the prevailing racial philosophy and was oblivious to the fact that the Negro might have, in his own community, a social personality or role compatible with the title of address. Even the élite Negroes who are at the head of state institutions and national business concerns are conceived in the conventional role of the servant. In commenting on Negro leaders a white man

said: "They are just as submissive as they can be. They know how to get along with white people. When you go over to see one on business they get up and stand. When you go up to one on the street he'll take off his hat and say, 'Yes suh, mister, what can I do for you?'"

Here we see one of the fundamental aspects of the racial ideology: it obscures Negro life and attitudes. This arises from the dual function it serves, for it operates to draw white people together, while at the same time it distinguishes and sets Negroes apart from whites, and the sharper the contrast the better the purpose is served. The opponent must be depreciated and made a nonentity. In this manner the ideology makes of the Negro an alien that cannot be assimilated to the white group. We were told: "I don't care what you do for a Negro, you can never make him like a white man. He's not as intelligent, but the basis of the problem is disease and sin." Assimilation is made repulsive, for the out-group is portrayed as physically and morally unclean.

VIII

We are now in a position to understand more fully the symbolic character of the beliefs which tend to take from the black man the elements of social personality. Now we can understand why Negroes do not always participate in those events in which the community celebrates its collective life and ritualizes its interests and values. In the early eighteenth century when Negroes were chased from Independence Square on the Fourth of July, it was said that "They have no part in it." Wherever and in so far as the race has been excluded from those ceremonials in which the common feelings are created and expressed, it has been thereby excluded from full participation in the community life. It is not surprising then to see that the black man has little part in public opinion, and that there has been a tendency to deny him a part in the white man's sacred tradition and myth. We were told: "In my youth people thought

that the Negro had no soul. They said there is no Negro in the Bible, and the Bible doesn't apply to them."¹⁸

The white-caste ideology has undergone constant change in the history of the South. When Negroes were savages and heathens no racial ideology was required to symbolize the social distinction. When the social and cultural differences between black and white were great the contrast was still obvious, and a crude simple racial doctrine sufficed. But as the Negro became civilized and threatened to invade the inner sanctity of white society, a social philosophy was built up to rationalize the social opposition and sentiment against assimilation. The contrast now became a symbolic one. As the threat of assimilation has become greater, as Negroes have become more like whites, the ideology has become more abstract, more "scientific" and "rational," more finely drawn. It approaches the recondite and occult nature of European racialism which finds expression in French and German politics.

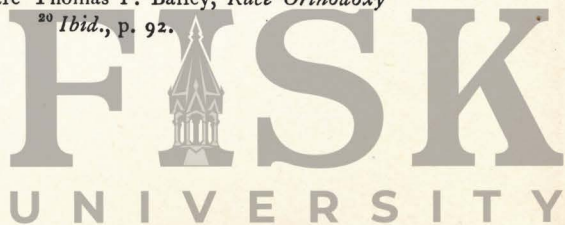
The traditional racial ideology of the South forms a conceptual framework within which everything social is viewed.¹⁹ For generations Southerners have busied themselves writing a "Sociology for the South" to which task have been bent the efforts of historiography, psychology, biology, economics, etc. The racial beliefs are thoroughly diffused through the masses and pervade all forms of literature. In this manner the ideology has become a part of the world view of the masses, contributing to the formation of their goals, sentiments, and motives. Outsiders in passing judgments upon the South appear to be oblivious to this, but the emotive nature of the beliefs indicates that they are just as much a part of the mores as any other beliefs. Bailey wrote, "The race attitude of the Southern whites is not a code of cases but a creed of a people,—a part of their morality and of their religion."²⁰

Once the ideology has arisen it becomes a creative factor

¹⁸ See also Carroll, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

¹⁹ If this appears too broad, compare Thomas P. Bailey, *Race Orthodoxy in the South* (New York, 1914).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92.



in the social process. It reacts back upon the social milieu within which it originated. This immanent phase of the social logics takes on an independent character in culture. It evolves and exfoliates as if endowed with a separate existence. It is applied to new situations, it utilizes new fictions, and it is constantly presenting new rationalizations. The beliefs are so powerful that there is a constant pressure toward consistency with the ideological pattern thus set. Negroes themselves cannot escape the pattern, but unconsciously assume the role held out to them. Newcomers subtly accept the beliefs as they do Southern dialect and etiquette.²¹ So thoroughly is the collective unconscious of the South suffused with the racial philosophy that anything may become a racial issue. The racial mores are a part of the ultimate sanction of the moral order, and they are assumed as the criteria of relevance, truth, and right. As such they constitute a *Weltanschauung*, which intrudes itself into the social consciousness as an authority within itself, an orthodoxy that needs no defense.

The broader significance of the problem sketched here must now be obvious. Within the Southern interracial situation we find an excellent example of the functioning of a social ideology. The history of its development is well documented, and moreover, under constant criticism, it is continually being rationalized. Within the social milieu in which the two ethnic groups were competing it arose to maintain distinctions. In serving this function it has virtually created two sociological races—white and black—two natural groups which cannot be mixed. It makes of the opposition between them an irrevocable conflict. Thus, the ideology “naturalizes” the social order, giving an ultimate sanction to the relative status assumed by the races, and at the same time provides a basis for white-caste cohesion. In the process the Negro is posed as a counter-race, an inner enemy, the antithesis of white society. The name, the antonym of white, denotes a contrast conception.

²¹ Bertram W. Doyle, *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South* (Chicago, 1937).