

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS:
A STUDY IN
IDEOLOGY AND UTOPIA

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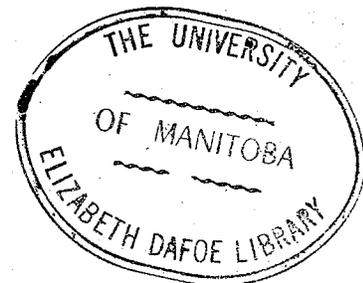


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PART ONE

THE SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The case for the "end of ideology" is by now a familiar one and has been challenged from many quarters. Among those who have questioned its demise, Reinhard Bendix has written that "it is when human reason and the ends of action are questioned that 'ideology' comes into its own"¹ and indicates that this debate is far from being closed. The Dutch sociologist R.F. Beerling argues for the persistence of ideology in a similar vein: "Ideologies provide man with an answer to the question of how he is to behave both as an individual and as a member of society. Though that answer may be supported by scientific arguments, it is more than just a product thereof."²

Neither of these arguments, however, actually attack the "end of ideology" thesis on its own ground. As the thesis is presented in Daniel Bell's The End of Ideology, the "end" is equated with a condition of political and in-

¹Reinhard Bendix, "The Age of Ideology: Persistent and Changing" (Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, California. Reprint No. 161, Comparative/International Series), p. 296.

²R.F. Beerling, "On Ideology", Sociologica Neerlandica, vol. 4(1), 1966-67, p.33.

tellektual consensus in American society. By "consensus" he means that the traditional political philosophies of the West--liberalism, conservatism, and Marxism--have ceased motivating or directing political and intellektual activity. Traditional conservatism and laissez-faire liberalism do not address themselves to the problems and realities of an advanced industrial society. The trade union movement has found Marxism irrelevant to the interests of workers in achieving improved wages, working conditions, and other benefits, while intellektuals have a diminishing tendency to express disaffection in political terms. There is no longer any source of grievance, protest, or disaffection which expresses itself as opposition to the existing institutions of the society. All interests and viewpoints share what Herbert Marcuse calls a "common universe of discourse and action". They accept the same social values and political instrumentalities as legitimate and effective.

Bell's position cannot be refuted theoretically, for it is a description rather than an explanaton of social changes in American society and is verifiable only in that context. The decade subsequent to the publication of The End of Ideology has seen the emergence of social movements that seem to deny the consensus Bell points to as evidence for the end of ideology thesis. One of the more prominent is the so-called Black Power movement. The popularity of the term and its adoption by groups with widely differing

programs make the attempt to assign it a specific definition futile. The ambiguity and popularity of the term indicate that it represents a general reevaluation or re-estimation of the Negro's relationship to the rest of American society rather than a coherent political philosophy per se.

This suspicion is confirmed in the book Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America by Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, a semi-official statement of the Black Power position. The authors define Black Power as the principle that "before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks", that "group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength"³; surely a prosaic political truism. They go on to claim, however, that a "black consciousness" is "vital to Black Power." A black consciousness is "difficult, if not impossible, for white America, or for those blacks who want to be like White America, to understand", because it is a "basically revolutionary mentality."⁴ The relationship of this consciousness to political action is stated in the following terms: "We understand the present rules of the (political) game and we reject them. But before the need for new rules and new forms can be accepted by black

³ Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America (Random House-Vintage, New York, 1967), p. 44.

⁴ Ibid., p. 184.

people, there must be created the will--the consciousness--for those forms."⁵ According to Carmichael and Hamilton experience with federal programs and party politics "serve as an education in control and bargaining, in the workings of the American system. Unintentionally, the government educates black people--provides them with a disillusionment in that government and thereby breeds a new consciousness."⁶ This new consciousness rejects a demeanor of "humble appeal" along with middle-class "Horatio Alger dreams" which are imitations of "white America at its worst" and, as we saw, does not want to "be like white America."

This mood and orientation toward American society is the soil out of which the Black Power movement has grown and which its spokesmen rely on for further growth. It is clearly in opposition to the consensus postulated by Bell. The black consciousness is "revolutionary" to the extent that it rejects what are taken to be the prevailing aspirations of white society and recognizes a need for "new rules and forms" of political life. The development of this consciousness is in fact seen as a natural product of active involvement with the legitimate social and political agencies. Yet this black consciousness is not itself a statement of the new rules and forms of political life sought by Black Power. Rather it is the basis for the search for these new forms,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 183-84.

the force which motivates and informs the search.

Bell's argument equated the end of ideology with consensus or "the exhaustion of political ideas." The most frequent meaning he assigns to "ideology" is "political ideas" in the sense of political philosophies. This position implies that the end of consensus would be signalled by the emergence of a new set of political alternatives to the present institutions. But the black consciousness is a mentality which fulfills only one of Bell's criteria of an ideology. It challenges the dominant consensus, but does not formulate new rules and forms of political life and activity. Nor does it constitute a political philosophy. The idea of a black consciousness suggests something different from adherence or commitment to a set of codified precepts. It refers to the perception and evaluation of the state of being black. This state of being is one which is apprehended in relation to a dominant white society. Consequently, the black consciousness, as Carmichael and Hamilton suggest, becomes a perception and evaluation of white society and the state of being white as well; it is a felt relationship of the Negro to the dominant white society of which he is himself a part. In order to understand how a consciousness which is "black" in this sense functions as an "ideology" in Bell's terms--denying the consensus of American society, rejecting its approved values and institutions--ideology must be understood not as political philosophy, but as existentially determined consciousness.

In other words, ideology must be understood in sociological terms in order to comprehend the origins and development of black consciousness.

Accordingly the first part of this paper deals with the sociological theory of ideology and attempts to understand how such "oppositional" mentalities as black consciousness develop. The perspectives derived from this discussion are then used to analyze a body of writing which I have chosen to represent the black consciousness. This body of writing consists of non-fictional material--essays, autobiography, social history--by four contemporary American Negro writers--James Baldwin, Malcolm X, LeRoi Jones, and Eldridge Cleaver. This material was selected in preference to the various polemics, statements, and position papers on Black Power, because its subjectivity provides a better understanding of the genesis of black consciousness than any attempt to define the movement black consciousness has inspired.

CHAPTER I

KARL MARX

The term "ideology" derives from the philosophical school of Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836) and Cabanis (1757-1808). Destutt and Cabanis intended ideology as a "science of ideas" that would defend enlightenment philosophy from traditionalist attacks. They subscribed to a sensationalist psychology that derived from Locke and Condillac and which shared the enlightenment opposition to scholasticism, a priori reasoning, and appeal to tradition and authority as criteria of truth. According to this psychology the means of knowing are the senses. Thinking, judging and remembering are so many transformations of sensory data influenced by a distinct faculty, the will, which is the foundation of legislation and morality.¹ The scientific description of the natural processes of the mind has a normative purpose. Ideology reveals a true picture of human nature, defining the laws of human sociability. By laying bare the common ground of human needs and aspirations Ideology provides the legislator with the means of arranging society in a

¹J.W. Stein, "Origins of Ideology", South Atlantic Quarterly, LV (April, 1956). pp. 163-70.

harmonious fashion.² The translation of the findings of the science of ideas into legislation proceeds by way of pedagogy. Destutt believed that Ideology had a direct role to play in politics and government through educating the will in the findings of science and reason. Ideology would realize the human potential for happiness and virtue by integrating learning and action.

The Convention of 1795 assigned Destutt to manage the newly formed Institut de France, a nationwide system of higher learning devoted to the propagation of enlightenment thought. The Institut comprised technological and normal schools as well as a system of central colleges. The core of the Institut was the Class of Moral and Political Sciences, from which liberal republican ideas were disseminated throughout the educational system and into the government services. In the face of the corruption of the Directorate (1795-1799) the "idéologues" supported Napoleon in his successful bid for power in the Brumaire of 1799. The idéologues wanted a Republic midway between monarchical and directorial forms in which a "true aristocracy of enlightened intellectuals would influence policy"³ directly, and apparently felt that Napoleon intended to institute this ideal commonwealth.

As Napoleon's policies--the curtailment of freedom of

²George Lichtheim, "The Concept of Ideology" in The Concept of Ideology and Other Essays, Random House, New York, 1967.

³J.W. Stein, op. cit.

speech, press, and assembly, suspension of elections, adoption of the title of Emperor, and the Concordat with Rome--increasingly deviated from these expectations, the idéologues rapidly fell from favor. In January of 1803 he abolished the central colleges and the Class of Moral and Political Science and reduced the number of Institut members in government positions. He replaced these institutions with an Imperial University and transformed the technological and normal schools into arms of the state. Napoleon's attacks on the idéologues at this point established the negative connotations that have ever since adhered to the term "ideology" and initiated the use of the terms as a commonplace in political thought. He characterized Ideology as "visionary moonshine" and "idealistic trash", claiming that it undermined the sanctity of law and order and encouraged people "who had never taken it into their heads to think or who had forgotten how" to take a part in the formation of public opinion.⁴ As late as December of 1812 in an address to the Conseil d'Etat Napoleon laid the blame for his defeat in Russia at the feet of the idéologues.⁵

Napoleon was not primarily concerned with attacking the idéologues on theoretical grounds. Although he castigated Ideology as a "ténébreuse métaphysique qui, en cher-

⁴Ibid.

⁵Lichtheim, op. cit.

chant avec subtilité les causes premières, veut sur ces bases fonder la législation des peuples, au lieu d'appropriier les lois à la connaissance du coeur humain et aux leçons de l'histoire",⁶ he was more worried by the "legislation" the idéologues supported than by their psychological theories. It may be said that Napoleon initiated what one writer has called the "common" or "political" use of the term.⁷ According to this usage ideology is "a set of theoretical and practical assertions constituting a socio-political program."⁸ Views having something to do with politics and possessing a certain degree of integration constitute an ideology when they are espoused by a definable group. In this manner a term which originally denoted the study of ideas became a description of ideas themselves.

In The German Ideology, Karl Marx makes reference to "morality, religion, metaphysics, and other ideologies."⁹ It is clear that his use of the concept refers to a much wider range of social phenomena than the common usage outlined above. Marx retains the pejorative connotations pop-

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Colwyn Williamson, "Ideology and the Problem of Knowledge", Inquiry, 10 (1967). pp. 121-38.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ T.B. Bottomore and Maximilian Rubel, eds. Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy, (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1956), p. 90.

ularized by Napoleon and likewise uses the term to refer to ideas themselves rather than to their study. But in this formulation politics and political ideas per se are a side issue, coming under the heading of "other ideologies."

Furthermore, whereas Napoleon considered ideology the visionary concoction of a small group of academic cranks, Marx emphasizes the social origins of ideology:

Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc.--real, active men, as they are conditioned by a determinate development of their productive forces, and of the intercourse which corresponds to those, up to its most extensive forms.¹⁰

Ideologies are natural outgrowths of social life, collective products of human interaction. The question naturally arises why Marx attaches a pejorative label to those inevitable products of human intercourse. Another way of phrasing the question is to ask what he means to tell us about given ideas or conceptions when he describes them as ideologies. To answer this question we must place the concept of ideology in relation to other aspects of Marx's thought.

Bottomore and Rubel offer a concise statement of this relationship as follows:

Marx's concepts of "false consciousness" and "ideology" are related to the concept of "alienation". False consciousness is the consciousness of individuals in a condition of alienation, and ideology is the

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 89.

system of beliefs produced by such a false consciousness.¹¹

Marx's fullest statement on alienation is his essay "Es-tranged Labor" in The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. Any number of commentators have assumed that alienation was for Marx a unique feature of what he called capitalist society.¹² While Marx devotes most of his attention to dissecting the forms of alienation imposed on the wage-earner, he concludes that:

Though private property appears to be the source, the cause of alienated labor, it is rather its consequence, just as the gods are originally not the cause but the effect of man's intellectual confusion. Later this relationship becomes reciprocal...On the one hand it (private property) is the product of alienated labor, and on the other it is the means by which labor alienates itself, the realization of this alienation.¹³

Capitalism does not create alienated labor, but is created by it. In Marx's view capitalism is an absolute realization of alienation, a social order in which the primary alienation of labor extends to include all other social relations and finally the relation of the individual to himself.

The essay on alienated labor breaks off before Marx

¹¹ Ibid., p. 21.

¹² See for instance Lloyd D. Easton, "Alienation and History in the Early Marx", Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, XXII (1961-62). pp. 193-105.

¹³ The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, ed. Dirk J. Struik, (International Publishers, New York, 1964), p.117.

fully develops the answer to his question how does man come to alienate, to estrange, his labor. The outlines of the answer he had in mind, however, are contained in his remarks on the nature of alienated labor. The alienation of labor is for Marx the primary form of alienation because labor, in the broadest sense of the term, is the fundamental relationship between man and the world. In his first thesis on Feuerbach, Marx remarks that:

The chief defect of all previous materialism (including that of Feuerbach) is that things (Gegenstand), reality, the sensible world, are conceived only in the form of objects (Objekt) of observation, but not as human sense activity, not as practical activity, not subjectively.¹⁴

This practical, human sense activity is what Marx refers to as "labor." Labor is the uniquely human activity because it is the integration of man's unique subjectivity with the natural world he confronts:

Just as plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc. constitute theoretically a part of human consciousness, partly as objects of natural science, partly as objects of art--his spiritual inorganic nature, spiritual nourishment which he must first prepare to make palatable and digestible--so also in the realm of practice they constitute a part of human life and human activity.¹⁵

Theoretically, the labor process overcomes the contradiction between man's subjectivity and the alien facticity of the

¹⁴Bottomore and Rubel, op. cit., p. 82.

¹⁵Marx, op. cit., p. 112.

natural world by appropriating nature to human use, transforming it into an image of man himself. Man "duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself in a world that he has created."¹⁶ This practical appropriation of nature enacts and reveals man's essential nature as a "species being."

Feuerbach had argued in The Essence of Christianity that the difference between men and "brutes" lay not in the possession of consciousness per se, but rather in the forms of consciousness. He conceded that other animals possessed powers of perception and judgment toward outward objects, and even the sense of self as an individual. Human consciousness consisted in holding the species or the essential nature of the individual as an object of thought. Man's unique "inner" life was a relation to his species, his general nature, rather than merely an individual subjectivity. He felt that this "species life" was indissolubly connected to the functions of thought and speech. These capacities implied relationships to concrete persons, but enabled the individual to maintain a conscious and reflective relationship to men in general even without the presence of a concrete other.

Marx adopted the same picture of man as a "species being", but maintained that this essential nature is enacted and thereby fully realized only in the labor process:

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 114.

The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is its life activity. Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity. It is just because of this that he is a species being. Or rather, it is only because he is a species being that he is a conscious being, i.e. that his own life is an object for him...In creating a world of objects by his practical activity, in his work upon inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being, i.e., as a being that treats the species as its own essential being.¹⁷

Man becomes conscious of his own nature as a conscious species in his practical activity in the physical world. In this formulation Marx defines the relationship between the two dimensions of human being that he feels define the species man: consciousness and sentience, objectivity and subjectivity.

While man appropriates and reproduces nature in his own image he produces his own social relations and conceptions as well. Through the labor process man's social relations as well as nature and the physical products of labor become objects of consciousness, the sources of ideas and conceptions. But it is man himself who "produces" conceptions and ideas, just as he produces his social arrangements and his own species consciousness. Marx claims however that the

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 113.

ideas and conceptions men habitually produce are ideologies, in which "men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a camera obscura",¹⁸ alienated forms of consciousness which distort the true nature of man as the producer of his world. He attributes this phenomenon to the "historical life process" of man in society and suggests that its source is in some sense biological by comparing the process to the inversion of objects on the retina of the eye.

The primary example of ideology for Marx was religion, and his development of the concept was heavily influenced by Feuerbach's analysis of religion as an alienated consciousness in his The Essence of Christianity (1841). Briefly, Feuerbach claimed that in religion man externalizes his essential species properties, attributing them to fictitious beings who are in turn viewed as their source. For example, man attributes to God powers of creation that are in fact his own and understands his own powers of judgment and reason as mere reflections of a divine intelligence when in reality these characteristics are the essence of man as a species being. Consequently religion is a form of self-alienation that prevents men from realizing and fulfilling their own essence as species beings. Feuerbach felt that religion had to be destroyed in order to overcome man's self-alienation, in other words to reverse the relation of subject and predicate. The alienated religious conscious-

¹⁸ Bottomore and Rubel, op. cit., pp. 89-90.

ness posited man as a predicate to the subject God; the dealienated conscious would understand that God was the predicate or product of the subject man.

Marx accepted Feuerbach's analysis of religion as an alienated consciousness (ideology) and agreed that the relation between subject and predicate were reversed (as in a camera obscura). But he did not think Feuerbach had carried his analysis to its logical conclusion:

Feuerbach sets out from the fact of religious self-alienation, the duplication of the world into a religious and a secular one. His work consists in resolving the religious world into its secular basis. but the fact that the secular basis deserts its own sphere and establishes an independent realm in the clouds, can only be explained by the cleavage and self-contradictions within this secular basis... Feuerbach therefore does not see that the "religious sentiment" is itself a social product.¹⁹

In order for men to create an alienated consciousness Marx felt there had to exist some alienating activity, some condition that separated men from their essence as species beings and caused the displacement of this essence to an alien, fictitious realm. He located this condition of ideology in the alienation of labor, which subordinates the essence of man to the status of means:

Labor, life-activity, productive life itself, appears in the first place merely as a means of satisfying a need--the need to maintain physical existence. Yet the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species---its species character--is contained in the

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 83-84.

character of its life activity; and free, conscious activity is man's species character...Estranged labor reverses this relationship, so that it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life activity, his essential being, a mere means to his existence.²⁰

"Free, conscious activity" is unalienated labor. Man comes to alienate his labor because he faces a world from which he must wrest the means of his existence. Under these conditions labor becomes toil or work. Man's activity is not free because it is circumscribed within a domain of necessity. Man's essential nature is denied as he subordinates it to the necessity of gaining the requirements of existence:

Labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague... Man only feels himself freely active in his animal functions--eating, drinking, procreating...and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal.²¹

Human society is therefore built around the necessity to enforce alienated labor in the service of survival. Hierarchical systems of authority, including various systems of social stratification and the state, exist because men must be coerced into acting against their human essence on a life-time basis. Yet it is still true that men contemplate

²⁰ Marx, op. cit., p. 113.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 110-111.

themselves in a world of objects and institutions that they have themselves created. But when men contemplate themselves in a world built on the alienation of labor, Marx felt that they do not contemplate themselves as they really are, in their essence, but in a state of alienation from their true nature. The fact that men are alienated from their true essence as species beings does not mean that awareness of that essence is lost, but only that it is distorted. Consequently in the case of religion, the primary form of ideology, the consciousness of this essence is preserved but displaced into a fictitious realm. The consciousness remains, but it becomes false consciousness, and a system of ideas such as a theology which formalizes this false consciousness is an ideology.

Feuerbach had, in Marx's view, correctly identified religion as the primary form of alienated consciousness, but Marx realized that religion was only one of many forms in which men became (falsely) conscious of themselves. We have seen that he identified metaphysics and "morality" as ideologies, and elsewhere he adds political philosophies, economic theories, and legal forms to the list. Under these various rubrics men attempt to understand the relationships between men, between men and their own activities, or between men and the rest of the natural or supernatural world, and to formulate laws or principles which are generally valid. Marx felt that all of these forms shared a common characteristic, the reification of temporary structures of action or experience:

Social relations thus given, had, insofar as they were expressed in thought, to take the form of ideal conditions and necessary relations, i.e. to find expression in consciousness as conditions arising out of the concept of man, of human existence, of the nature of man, of man as such. What men and their social relations actually were appeared in consciousness as representations of man as such, of his modes of being, or of his exact determinations.²²

The same process is at work here as in the religious consciousness. Some section of the alienated human condition is confused with the human essence. The confusion is only compounded when it is not realized that the forms of alienation are themselves constantly modified throughout history. Marx made this point explicit when he commented on the utilitarian philosophers that "the apparent absurdity which transforms all the various interrelationships of men into the single relationship of utility, an apparently metaphysical abstraction, follows from the fact that in modern civil society all relationships are in practice subordinated to the single abstract relationship of money and speculation."²³ This passage helps to explain why Marx did not consider ideologies totally false and referred to them often as "representations." Ideologies are indeed accurate representations of various dimensions of alienation. But those who profess or adhere to ideologies inevitably reify such representations into pictures of "man as such" or "reality per se."

²²Bottomore and Rubel, op. cit., p. 64.

²³Ibid., p. 169.

It is clear from this discussion that Marx did not consider the existence of ideologies in itself evidence of duplicity on the part of those who propagate them. Although the ruling ideas of any age in his view were ideas that legitimated the dominance of the ruling class, this did not mean that the rulers somehow escaped alienation, for "everything which appears in the worker as an activity of alienation... appears in the non-worker as a state of alienation."²⁴

Marx habitually referred to "true consciousness" as "science," but his view of science was opposed to positivism. He considered man a part of the natural world and felt that "natural science will one day incorporate the science of man, just as the science of man will incorporate natural science; there will be a single science."²⁵ But in order for natural science to absorb the science of man it had to become concrete and historical. He criticized "the inadequacy of the abstract materialism of natural science, which leaves out of consideration the historical process,"²⁶ which is "the activity of men in pursuit of their ends." A true science would be based on a proper understanding of the relation between man and nature and between man and his activity in history. It would base its study of man on the fact that he appropriates and transforms nature in

²⁴Marx, op. cit., p. 119.

²⁵Bottomore and Rubel, op. cit., p. 85.

²⁶Ibid., p. 79.

accordance with his needs and thereby produces himself. In order to be fully realized in theory and in practice such a "science" or true consciousness would require the abolition of that scarcity which requires the alienation of labor. Marx's political program follows from these requirements, for he believed that the abolition of private property could result in such increased productivity that alienated labor could gradually be abolished.²⁷ With the abolition of alienated labor man's sensuous, life-activity would be reunited with his essence as a species being, and a true, dealienated consciousness emerge.

Thus Marx fully transformed the notion of ideology from a derogatory epithet into a profound analytical concept. Ideology emerges not as a political program or as a simple kind of error, but a reification which "sets forth the actual social relations among men as a totality of objective relations, thereby concealing their origin, their mechanisms of perpetuation, and the possibility of their transformation. Above all, it conceals their human core and content."²⁸ Ideology represents the temporary, historical structures of human action as things in themselves, possessing a suprahistorical and thereby suprahuman reality and validity. An ideology may represent accurately the prevailing forms of alienation in a given society, but since alienation is itself "untrue" in the sense that we have seen, ideology remains the product of a false, alienated consciousness.

²⁷ Herbert Marcuse, Reason and Revolution (Beacon Press, Boston, 1941), p. 282.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 280.

CHAPTER II

KARL MANNHEIM

Mannheim's formulation of the concept of ideology proceeds from a different set of philosophical presuppositions than did that of Marx, although Mannheim acknowledged his heavy debt to Marx throughout his own work. The bulk of Mannheim's important work on ideology and the sociology of knowledge was published during the 1920's, before the publication or indeed the discovery of those early writings such as the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the German Ideology, which have revealed the sophistication of Marx's thought on the relation between mind, labor and society. He associated the notion of ideology with a "vulgar" Marxism that reduces all mental constructs to a conscious or unconscious reflection of immediate material, i.e. economic advantage. Mannheim rightly rejected this approach as inadequate for a serious investigation of the relationship between the constructs of consciousness and society and apparently considered himself an exponent of a sophisticated Marxism which preserved what was permanently valid in Marx's thought and integrated this residuum with the discoveries of modern historical, social, and philo-

sophical research.

Ideology and Utopia (1929) contains Mannheim's fullest statement of his conception of the sociology of knowledge and the place of "ideology" and "utopia" within it. Most commentary on this work revolves around two related points: Mannheim's alleged relativism and the epistemological status of socially determined knowledge. Critics have frequently asked what validity can be accorded to "knowledge" if one accepts the proposition that ideas are merely the product of a certain social situation. Specifically, they have maintained that there remains no standard for the separation of falsehood and truth if all ideas are socially determined and that Mannheim's own position cannot legitimately claim validity. A student who finds Mannheim's theoretical position logically contradictory will be cut off from understanding his categories of ideology and utopia, for the epistemological question and the problem of relativism are at the very heart of his sociology of knowledge.

He began exploring these problems in an early essay entitled "Historicism"¹ in which he claimed that historicism was the common Weltanschauung of the modern era:

Historicism is therefore neither a mere fad nor a fashion; it is not even an intellectual current, but the very basis on which we construct our observations of the socio-cultural reality. It is not something

¹Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge, Karl Mannheim, ed. by Paul Kecskemeti. (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1952), pp. 84-133. First published in Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, Tübingen; vol. 52, No. 1. June, 1924.

artificially contrived, something like a programme, but an organically developed basic pattern, the Weltanschauung itself, which came into being after the religiously determined medieval picture of the world had disintegrated and when the subsequent Enlightenment, with its dominant idea of a supra-temporal Reason, had destroyed itself.²

Historicism is the Weltanschauung of modern times in the sense that we find it natural, almost reflexive, to consider any phenomenon as the present result of a process of change and development in time. Mannheim attributes this tendency to "experience flux and growth" to the pervasive influence of the idea of evolution. The very fact that Weltanschauungen based on some static or eternal element have been successively undermined--the examples he uses are the medieval world picture based on religious Revelation and the Enlightenment with its hypostatization of a secular Reason--is responsible for the rise and dominance of a view of the world, which makes change and development the natural context for perceiving or understanding phenomena.

Mannheim concludes that on the basis of historicist principles epistemology can no longer be regarded as a systematic science which provides a foundation for the pursuit of any form of knowledge. Instead, epistemology is itself merely the function of an invisible Weltanschauung:

The axioms from which any epistemological system takes its departure are mainly derived from metaphysical-ontological presuppositions. Although epistemology

²Ibid., pp. 84-85.

claims to furnish a standard in terms of which the truth of metaphysical systems can be judged, it turns out itself to have its basis in definite metaphysical positions... All these matters are settled before epistemology as such begins; within epistemology, they are treated as self-evident.³

Epistemology is a pseudo-science. It pretends to investigate the most profound matters, the criteria for judging the acts of the mind itself, but it is never capable of recognizing its own assumptions since they are imbedded in a social-historical world the epistemologist takes for granted.

This conclusion is what many critics point to as Mannheim's relativism. Clearly, if the mind is incapable of extricating itself from the influence of implicit Weltanschauungen and if these are constantly disintegrating and reconstituting themselves in history, it would seem that no true knowledge of the social-historical world were possible at all. Mannheim's solution to this problem acknowledges these tendencies in the historicist position, but accepts them as the starting point of historical-social knowledge.

When Mannheim talks about "historical knowledge" he is not referring to the presumed factual data with which the historian reconstructs some aspect of the past. He is referring to history as a "process" and the kind of knowledge he has in mind is an understanding of the "meaning" of the process of parts of it. The problem that his epistemological position presents for the acquisition of this kind of know-

³Ibid., pp. 112-113. .

ledge is the lack of any point of reference distinct from history itself from which the entire process can be contemplated. It seems that one must make teleological assumptions or posit a supra-historical realm of absolute values in order to "understand" the historical process in toto, either of which are incompatible with Mannheim's historicist view of epistemology. Historicist thought seems to deny its own ability to understand history, but Mannheim contends that "historicist theory fulfills its own essence only by managing to derive an ordering principle from this seeming anarchy of change--only by managing to penetrate the innermost structure of this all-pervading change."⁴

His first step in this direction is to challenge the idea that the historian's participation in the weltanschauung of his own time inevitably leads him to distort the past. Since the ultimate goal of historical inquiry is to understand the meanings of the process as a whole, Mannheim concludes that the object of inquiry within a "period" must be the weltanschauung as well as the factual reconstruction of events. "Meaning" is something that is defined by weltanschauungen. It only exists within some more or less systematic scheme for interpreting the world and guiding action within it. The study of the meaning of the overall process of history must take as its primary data the various meaning systems realized during the process itself. According to Mannheim any such meaning system embodies a set of concrete "intentional

⁴ Ibid., p. 86.

attitudes" toward the objects of the human and natural worlds. These intentional attitudes are subjective and volitional, reflecting active involvement with the world within the frame of reference posed by a given weltanschauung. Now his point is that "the subject possessing historical knowledge is not a purely contemplative one."⁵ It can not be purely contemplative, because the object of historical knowledge (the weltanschauung) can only be apprehended from an intentional attitude. This intentional attitude comprises various non-rational aspects of human action--will, desire, value. Mannheim claims that "in Kantianism, the knowing subject, the so-called epistemological subject, is completely freed from all concrete voluntary impulses and from the historically determined conditions of psychic life in general."⁶ This subject is not capable of historical knowledge because it lacks an active dimension, without which it is unable to understand weltanschauungen. Mannheim concludes that the only subject that is capable of historical knowledge is a historical subject, one which is rooted in a concrete weltanschauung. This subject operates from within its own intentional attitudes and this dimension of the knowing subject is necessary to understand history as meaning.

According to this view there is no supra-historical perspective from which to study the past: history must

⁵Ibid., p. 101.

⁶Ibid.

always be viewed from within history itself. Mannheim turns this admission to his own advantage by maintaining that only the historical subject can achieve the kind of knowledge on which the true understanding of history depends. Mannheim realizes that the historian cannot indiscriminately apply the value standards and "world postulates" of his own culture and era to the past. He follows the general line of historicist thought in recommending that the student "describe and evaluate past epochs in terms of their own standards and values." This method--"the immanent critique and representation of the past"--relies on verstehen, the intuitive penetration of the concrete weltanschauungen of the past. But despite general agreement on the importance of the intuitive procedure, successive generations continue to produce different historical accounts of the same events. On the face of it, this phenomenon appears to be an instance of relativism in action. Despite all efforts at intuitive understanding the bias of the present still colors our picture of history. The work of the historian seems to reveal as much about the present as about the past.

Mannheim concedes that "no statement about history is possible without the historico-philosophical preconceptions of the observing subject entering into its content", despite the efforts at verstehen. But instead of distorting the past the bias of the present reveals it:

The historical subject-matter (the his-

torical content, so to speak, of an epoch) remains identical "in itself", but it belongs to the essential conditions of its cognizability that it can be grasped only from differing intellectual-historical standpoints-- or, in other words, that we can view only various "aspects" of it...one could, it seems to us, venture the thesis that it is part of the essence of a historico-cultural, but also of a psychic object, that it is, by way of certain cross-sections and dimensions of depth the nature of which is dependent on the mental psychic perspective location of the observing, interpreting subject.⁷

Since one weltanschauung can only be understood from within another and because "the historico-philosophical position of the observer makes itself evident not merely in the sense of a position of assent or dissent to that which is reported, but in the very categories of meaning, in the principle of selection and its direction," it follows that all historical knowledge must of necessity be "perspectivistic." The past can only be approached from a concrete historical-intellectual position. A given position reveals distinct "facets" of the historical subject matter. There is always a limit on interpretation and speculation posed by the known facts and data about the topic under investigation. But the ordering of this data into a coherent whole will always be undertaken from a given perspective within history. Mannheim claims that this constant change of perspective on the past is what deepens and enriches our knowledge of it,

⁷Ibid., p. 105.

for each new perspective reveals an aspect of the subject matter overlooked or slighted in previous accounts. New perspectives reveal new kinds of facts as well as new meanings of the old ones.

There need be no problem of "choosing" between the meanings attributed to the historical process by successive generations of historians. Since history is a dynamic process, the "meaning" of the process itself is constantly changing. It is possible for a variety of perspectives to "coexist." Mannheim avoids relativism by making the "historical process" itself into an absolute:

To say that the absolute itself is unfolding in a genetic process, and that it can be grasped only from definite positions within the same process, in categories which are moulded by the unfolding of the material content of the genetic flux itself--to say this is not tantamount to professing relativism.⁸

The fact that critics did call this position relativism was attributed to their belief in a static, supra-temporal Reason that could act as an absolute criterion for the truth of statements about history. Mannheim claimed that it is only in relation to this criterion of truth--a criterion borrowed uncritically from natural science--that his "perspectivism" can appear relativistic. He relied on the familiar distinction between natural and cultural-historical sciences, concluding that "truth" in the latter

⁸ Ibid., p. 130.

sphere must be "dynamic". The belief in a static Reason is a holdover from the weltanschauung of the Enlightenment. Within the world view of historicism, Reason like all other phenomena develops and realizes itself in history. Mannheim identifies Reason with the totality of perspectives on the past and finds it "embodied in self-contained philosophical systems which grow out of the various centres which form within the stream."⁹

Mannheim's formulation of the sociology of knowledge follows the principles laid down in "Historicism". Whereas in that essay the main problem was the cognition of the past, the issue raised by the sociology of knowledge for Mannheim is the understanding of the present. In his essay "The Problem of a Sociology of Knowledge" he proposes four major factors that have contributed to the emergence of the sociological study of knowledge and thought. The first and most important of these is the "self-transcendence" or "self-relativization" of thought. By this he means that theoretical, abstract thought is no longer considered a self-contained activity operating on independent criteria of validity. It is rather a "partial phenomenon belonging to a more comprehensive factor within the totality of the world process."¹⁰ The emphasis here is that mental production is related to the other "factors" in "the world

⁹ Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁰ Mannheim, op. cit., "The Problem of a Sociology of Knowledge", p. 138.

process" in certain definable ways. The second factor is what he calls the "unmasking turn of mind", the desire to "disintegrate" rather than refute ideas by reference to their function. This "turn of mind" can be attributed to the breakdown of medieval absolutism and the intensified class conflicts resulting from the emergence of a new social order. The third factor is the establishment of the socio-economic sphere as the "absolute" in terms of which thought is "relational" rather than absolute. The final factor is the extension of the "unmasking turn of mind" so that it focuses not only on individual ideas of individual subjects but on total weltanschauungen. Mannheim considers the earlier form of unmasking a crude kind of interest--psychology which assumes an equivalent correspondence between an idea and some material interest the individual wishes to protect. This kind of unmasking he considers truly relativistic, because "the fact that a social-psychic function of a proposition or idea is unmasked does not mean that it is denied or subjected to theoretical doubt--one does not even raise the question of truth or falsehood."¹¹ Such activity has a narrow partisan purpose--to discredit the opponent without actually refuting the truth of what he says. The sociology of knowledge, which is defined in Ideology and Utopia as the "non-evaluative total general conception of ideology," is concerned not merely with the content of propositions, but with

¹¹Ibid., p. 141.

their form as well. It wishes to demonstrate "the existentially determined nature of an entire system of Weltanschauung."

The focus of the sociology of knowledge is thus essentially the same as history. The object of study is in both cases the entire system of reality within which specific ideas, values, assumptions, and meanings are located. For the sociology of knowledge, however, the weltanschauung or "style of thought" is an attribute of the group--usually a "class" for Mannheim--rather than the "epoch." The intellectual position which determines the thinker's perspective is not a location in time but a "social situation" from which he views his own society. Like Marx, he feels it is possible to identify groups or classes defined by unique activities and "from their real life-process show the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process."¹² Every epoch is "divided among several currents: it may happen, at most, that one of these currents achieves dominance and relegates the others to the status of under-currents."¹³ When the object of "perspectivistic" perception is the present rather than the past the problem of perspectives is one not of historical understanding but of political action. His larger point is, however, that the perspective defined by a "social situation" is not simply a political weapon chosen for its pragmatic value in fighting

¹²Bottomore and Rubel, op. cit., p. 90.

¹³Mannheim, op. cit., p. 181.

the opponent on the level of ideas. The perspective is an organic part of the life-situation of a group, an integral expression of the activities and "pragmatic, extra-theoretical aspirations" of men as members of a distinct group. He insists upon a usage of the term "ideology" similar to that found in the early Marx in place of the later equation of ideology with political propaganda.

Mannheim's distinction between ideology and utopia is based on the notion that different social situations produce different "intentional consciousnesses" toward the existing reality of society. Both forms of consciousness have a common feature in that they "transcend" the present empirical reality of society in the direction of some absent or non-existent entity. "Ideologies are the situationally transcendent ideas which never succeed de facto in the realization of their projected contents,"¹⁴ while utopias are situationally transcendent ideas which "when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time."¹⁵ Opposed to both ideology and utopia are pragmatic, "situationally congruous" modes of thought which accept and work within accepted instrumentalities, adapting them to new problems and contingencies when they arise. Another way of putting

¹⁴ Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, (Harcourt, Brace, and World, New York, 1936), p. 194.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 192.

this is that utopian conceptions are historically transcendent while ideological conceptions are not. Ideology is identified almost entirely with religion. In the case of religions the transcendence of the present is directed toward a realm above and beyond history and consequently "never succeeds de facto in the realization of its projected contents."¹⁶

The relationship he posits between ideology and utopia is a dialectical one. This means that "every age allows to arise (in differently located social groups) those ideas and values in which are contained in condensed form the unrealized and the unfulfilled tendencies which represent the needs of each age."¹⁷ These "tendencies" are what ideologies attempt to displace to a sphere where they no longer appear as historical possibilities. Thus ideology serves the function that Marx had attributed to it in his early writings. It represents the given empirical reality as the only possible order. It confuses the impossible per se with what is only relatively utopian, that which cannot be realized within the prevailing order. Religion legitimates this view of the social order by locating transcendence outside the social world altogether. Consequently a utopian consciousness is a reversed picture of the world as it is presented in ideology. And for this reason Mannheim considers utopias themselves relative to the existing order. "The

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 199.

first stirrings of what is new (even though they often take on the form of opposition to the existing order) are in fact oriented towards the existing order." The utopia of one epoch may contain ideological elements that cannot be challenged until a later period when social forces have developed that are capable of grasping that which they in turn deny as real historical possibilities. Neither "ideology" nor "utopia" refer to specific sets of ideas themselves, but rather the relation of any set of ideas to the forces at work in society. The utopia functions as a "wish image" of the future, but this image of the future is intimately bound up with one's view of the present. And this is influenced not only by social situations but also by the ideological picture that society presents of itself.

CHAPTER III

PETER BERGER AND THOMAS LUCKMANN

C. Wright Mills remarked in an essay entitled "Language, Logic, and Culture"¹ that the chief defect of the existing formulations of the sociology of knowledge is that "they lack understanding and clear-cut formulations of the terms with which they would connect mind and other societal factors." This deficiency is apparent to Mills in the terminology used by Marxists and those like Mannheim who are heavily influenced by Marxist thought. Mills finds that terms such as "reflect", "mold," "determine," or "penetrate," beg the questions they purport to answer and hide inadequate analysis.

These deficiencies become apparent in Mannheim's description of the basic forms of utopian mentality. In his essay "The Problem of a Sociology of Knowledge" he considered that "the central problem of a sociology of knowledge will be that of the existentially conditioned genesis of the various standpoints which encompass the patterns of thought available to any given epoch."² In Ideology and

¹C. Wright Mills, Power, Politics, and People, (Ballantine Books, New York, 1963), pp. 423-438.

²Mannheim, Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge, p. 144.

Utopia he sets out to describe the four basic types of utopian mentality: orgiastic chiliasm, liberal-humanitarianism, conservatism, and socialism-communism. Mannheim presents constructions of these various forms of consciousness in the manner of ideal types, and identifies each with a certain "stratum" of the society in which they were dominant patterns of consciousness. He finds that "the identifying characteristic of Chiliastic experience is absolute presentness":

The Chiliast expects a union with the immediate present. Hence he is not preoccupied in his daily life with optimistic hopes for the future or romantic reminiscences. His attitude is characterized by a tense expectation. He is always on his toes awaiting the propitious moment and thus there is no inner articulation of time for him.²

In the case of liberalism he reports that:

The utopia of the liberal-humanitarian mentality is the "idea". This, however, is not the static platonic idea of the Greek tradition, which was a concrete archetype, a primal model of things; but here the idea is rather conceived of as a formal goal projected into the infinite future whose function it is to act as a mere regulative device in mundane affairs.³

In its purest form the conservative mentality is anti-utopian:

²Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, p. 216.

³Ibid., p. 219.

Conservative mentality as such has no utopia. Ideally it is in its very structure completely in harmony with the reality which, for the time being, it has mastered. It lacks all those reflections and illuminations of the historical process which come from a progressive impulse. The conservative type of knowledge originally is the sort of knowledge giving political control. It consists of habitual and often also of reflective orientations toward those factors which are immanent in the situation.⁴

Finally, the socialist-communist mentality:

Socialism is at one with the liberal utopia in the sense that both believe that the realm of freedom and equality will come into existence only in the remote future. But socialism characteristically places this future at a much more specifically determined point in time, namely the period of the breakdown of capitalist culture...But insofar as the question is one of the penetration of the idea into the evolving process and the gradual development of the idea, the socialist mentality does not experience it in this spiritually sublimated form...In this context, ideas are not dreams and desires, imaginary imperatives wafted down from some absolute sphere; they have rather a concrete life of their own and a definite function in the total process. They die away when they become outmoded, and they can be realized when the social process attains to a given structural situation. Without such relevance to reality, they become merely obfuscating "ideologies."⁵

By constructing these ideal types Mannheim demonstrates that

⁴Ibid., pp. 229-30.

⁵Ibid., pp. 240-41.

some form of utopian mentality has generally been the counterpart to ideology in modern times. He also establishes the fact that utopian consciousness has taken a variety of forms at different times since the Reformation as an expression of the dominant tensions within society. But he does not actually discuss the social genesis of these standpoints. He observes that the chiliastic mentality "originated in the oppressed strata of society" and that the liberal-humanitarian utopia "had its basis in a middle stratum, in the bourgeoisie and in the intellectual class." The conservative mentality was characteristic of a traditional ruling class whose prerogatives were ascribed, while the socialist-communist is characteristic of "an ascending class which is not concerned with momentary successes, but which must always be sensitive and alert to unpredictable constellations in the situation."⁶ These correlations do not tell us why one group or another develops a particular utopian mentality or how the position of a group in society generates a unique oppositional consciousness. Mannheim's concept of utopian consciousness is a useful one for dealing with the Negro writers we have chosen to analyze in this paper. It identifies the oppositional consciousness which Daniel Bell misleadingly refers to as "ideology" and suggests a dialectical relationship between the "wish image" and the "legitimate" picture of society. But in order to see how the social position of a group generates an oppositional consciousness or utopian

⁶ Ibid., p. 131.



mentality, we need intermediate terms to "connect mind and other societal factors."

The deficiency in the formulations of the sociology of knowledge noted by Mills has been tackled in a recent work by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge. Berger and Luckmann's position derives in part from both Marx and Mannheim and incorporates the social psychological perspective of G.H. Mead. The problem of relativism, which Mannheim attempted to solve through a sociological approach to historical knowledge, is excluded from the sociology of knowledge proper. Berger and Luckmann feel that sociological interest in "knowledge" and "reality" arises in the first place because they are in fact relative or related to society, but that epistemological questions about the discipline itself or the material treated are outside the interest and competence of the sociologist:

To include epistemological questions concerning the validity of sociological knowledge in the sociology of knowledge is somewhat like trying to push a bus in which one is riding... These questions are not themselves part of the empirical discipline of sociology. They properly belong to the methodology of the social sciences, an enterprise that belongs to philosophy and is by definition other than sociology, which is indeed an object of its inquiries.⁷

⁷ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (Doubleday and Company—Anchor Books, Garden City, New York, 1963), p. 13.

Like Mannheim they reject the mechanistic view of Marx's thought which identifies "substructure" with the economic arrangements per se and the "superstructure" with everything else, reducing the latter to an epiphenomenon. Berger and Luckmann recognize Marx's early writings as the core of his thought on the relationship between society on the one hand and "reality" and "knowledge" on the other. What Marx proposed was that human thought is founded in human activity and the social relations brought about by this activity. They identify "substructure" with human activity ("labor", in the broadest sense) and "superstructure" with the world produced by this activity. Or to put the matter another way, the former becomes "action" and the latter the "subjective meaning complex" of Weber.

In this formulation the authors propose to broaden the concept of "knowledge". In previous efforts, writers have been largely concerned with knowledge in the sense of "ideas", abstract conceptual thought or weltanschauungen. Berger and Luckmann maintain that commonsense "knowledge" should be the focus of attention for the sociology of knowledge, for:

Only a very limited group of people in any society engages in theorizing, in the business of "ideas", and the construction of Weltanschauungen. But everyone in society participates in its "knowledge" in one way or another...only a few are concerned with the theoretical interpretation of the world, but everybody lives in a

world of some sort.⁸

Berger and Luckmann view the sociology of knowledge as the study of the "social construction of reality", because it is just this everyday "knowledge", transmitted socially to the same degree as theoretical knowledge, that defines "reality" for the "man in the street". What is "real" to a person is not exhausted by theoretical formulations of reality and may indeed have nothing to do with such formulations.

This approach to the sociology of knowledge formalizes the concept of ideology advanced by Marx and left essentially unchanged by Mannheim, deriving from it two analytically distinct kinds of social event, legitimation and reification. The process of legitimation is one by which everyday knowledge is transformed into reality per se:

"Legitimation" explains the institutional order by ascribing cognitive validity to its objectivated meanings. Legitimation justifies the institutional order by giving a normative dignity to its practical imperatives. It is important to understand that legitimation has a cognitive as well as a normative element. In other words, legitimation is not just a matter of "values". It always implies "knowledge" as well.⁹

Berger and Luckmann distinguish four levels of legitimation. The first is present as soon as a system of linguistic objectifications of human experience is transmitted. For example, the transmission of a kinship vocabulary ipso facto

⁸Ibid., p. 15.

⁹Ibid., p. 93.

legitimizes the kinship structure. The fundamental legitimating 'explanations' are, so to speak, built into the vocabulary."¹⁰ The second level contains elementary theoretical propositions, including proverbs, moral maxims, legends; folk tales, and wise sayings. The third level of legitimation "contains explicit theories by which an institutional sector is legitimated in terms of a differentiated body of knowledge." The fourth level of legitimation is the level of the symbolic universe. A symbolic universe is defined as a body of theoretical tradition which integrates different areas of meaning and the entire institutional order in a symbolic totality. This level of legitimation "refers to realities other than those of everyday experience...the sphere of pragmatic application is transcended once and for all."¹¹ This symbolic totality cannot itself be experienced, but all human experience can be located within it.

Reification, the second aspect of ideology as developed by Berger and Luckmann, is of course closely related to the processes of legitimation. The definition of reification is essentially the same as Marx's:

Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possibly supra-human terms. Another way of saying this is that reification is the apprehension of

¹⁰Ibid., p. 94.

¹¹Ibid., p. 95.

the products of human activity as if they were something else than human products--such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will.¹²

Reification can occur either on a theoretical or pre-theoretical level. That is, theoretical systems can be described as reifications as well as the consciousness of individuals. Since reification essentially involves attributing an "ontological" status independent of human activity and signification to the products of ongoing human activity, confusing the world of institutions with the world of nature, it is clear that the potential for reification exists to the extent that the social world is objectivated. And the primary function of legitimation is to make the social world an object to the individual "by ascribing cognitive validity to its objectivated meanings" and "by giving a normative dignity to its practical imperatives." In practice the processes of legitimation and reification are one in that they transform the social world into reality per se and bind the individual to the structure of authority by identifying him in toto with his institutional roles and social typifications.

It appears then that the term "social construction of reality" has a double meaning. On the one hand, it refers to the social world as it is produced by human activity that is objectivated prior to individual experience. On the other

¹²Ibid., p. 89.

hand, it refers to the subjective process of construing whereby the individual appropriates or internalizes this reality, identifying himself and understanding his biography in its terms. We noted that the utopian mentality in Mannheim's scheme was one which projected "wishes" or "situationally transcendent ideas" which, to the extent that they might be realized, "tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time." In other words, a utopian mentality would challenge, implicitly or explicitly, the normative legitimations of the institutional order and quite possibly generate a different symbolic universe. But the possibility of opposing the institutional order in such a manner seems to depend on the acquisition of some kind of "knowledge" of the everyday variety that does not fit into the system of legitimation, since as Berger and Luckmann explain, legitimation always implies a prescribed "knowledge" of the society and the language which objectivates this knowledge is an incipient legitimation. The rejection of legitimations and their attendant symbols is in fact a process of de-reification in which legitimations come to be seen as the work of legitimators rather than as independent facts. If groups generate utopian mentalities as Mannheim claims, then such groups must experience their society in some way that makes the legitimations questionable; they must experience a reality other than the one receiving legitimation. This reality is itself susceptible to reification, but this process would similarly

require the rejection of traditional legitimations.

Berger and Luckmann suggest three possible existential or experiential bases for construing a reality different than the one defined by the official symbols of legitimation. First, they claim that a high level of social differentiation creates the possibility of perceiving roles as roles or achieving conscious role-distance. This situation can lead on the part of the individual to a condition of exstasis, awareness that the "real" world is an arbitrary one, that social facts are conventions that depend for their reality on men acting out their roles as if they were independent facts. The second form of differential reality construction is considered under the heading of counter-definition. Counter-definitions are generated when stigmatized individuals "congregate in socially durable groups". When a community of this type emerges it develops its own socialization processes which assign a new significance to the stigma that defines the group. Berger and Luckmann emphasize, however, that in such cases the stigma is not itself challenged and disputed. The individual and the group continue to accept the stigma as a real attribute, but assign a different value to it. To the extent that such a community perpetuates itself and remains separate from the larger society, it is likely to incorporate the "standard" definition of itself into its own picture of the world, accepting it as an inescapable datum of existence and thus stabilizing the relationship between itself and the outside society.

Neither of the situations described above seem to provide by themselves the basis for a utopian mentality, a

consciousness of society which is historically transcendent. The "ecstatic" consciousness does not imply the individual's being part of a group which shares the experience, and, in any case, the experience itself is not one which implies a negative judgment of the society's institutions and their legitimations. The phenomenon of counter-definition, as we have seen, essentially rests on acceptance of the typifications projected by society and the potentially oppositional aspect of denying the significance of such typifications is largely dissipated in the legitimations of the pariah community.

The third source of differential reality construction lies in the phenomenon of identity. Berger and Luckmann claim that whenever identity becomes "problematic", for whatever reasons, a new psychology is generated. They define "psychology" here as "any theory about identity that claims to explain the empirical phenomenon in a comprehensive fashion, whether or not such an explanation is "valid" for the contemporary scientific discipline of that name."¹³ They claim further, however, that any psychology is embedded in more comprehensive theories about reality which are, in turn, "'built into' the symbolic universe and its theoretical legitimations, and vary with the character of the latter."¹⁴ Consequently the "problem" of identity, however it presents itself, is one which contains

¹³ Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 174.

the potential for ambivalence toward or even opposition to the symbolic universe and the legitimations of the institutional order. To the extent that identity becomes problematic for a group it ought to be conducive to dereification of the individual member's consciousness of society. And because the resolution of the problem requires a new "psychology", it seems to be capable of generating a different universe of meaning than that which legitimates the prevailing institutional order. Berger and Luckmann do not discuss the conditions under which identity may or has in the past become problematic for distinct groups in society. But their general perspective leads one to conclude that the "problem" must arise out of a contradiction between such a group's experience of society and the terms offered by society for understanding that experience. To put this another way, the problem of identity involves a perception of a contradiction between social being and ideology.

CHAPTER IV
HERBERT MARCUSE

The theme of identity appears in the work of the Negro writers under discussion as a common denominator in their experience of American society. The "black consciousness" seems inevitably to grow out of the difficulties of coming to terms with being a Negro in America. But as Berger and Luckmann have pointed out, the obvious factor of social stigma is not in itself sufficient to generate an oppositional consciousness of the type Mannheim defines as utopian. In many cases the stigmatized group is able to institutionalize counter-definitions of its status which actually tend to blunt oppositional tendencies and contain the potential for conflict inherent in that status. In order for identity to become the basis for a genuinely negatively mentality--one which in Mannheim's terms is "historically transcendent" or tending to challenge the established order--it would have to present itself or be understood as a "problem" vis-a-vis the legitimations or ideology of society as a whole. Consequently our discussion of the "black consciousness" as a utopian mentality requires a formulation of the "ideology" of American society.

The only comprehensive attempt to understand the ideology of American society made in recent years is Herbert Marcuse's controversial One-Dimensional Man.¹ It is not Marcuse's concern in this work to formulate a theory of ideology per se, but rather to investigate empirically the various ideological processes and institutions at work in the society. Clearly, however, his view of ideology includes those we have discussed above. He considers ideology a reification, formal and systematized, both of concepts and institutions, which function to legitimate the social order and to contain social change within the boundaries of the established order. Like Mannheim he posits a dialectical relationship between the ideology of a society and the form of utopian consciousness generated within it, ascribing to this consciousness a paramount role in restructuring society: "All liberation depends on the consciousness of servitude."² Finally, he recognizes the fact which Berger and Luckmann make most clear, that ideology remains effective in binding individuals to the structure of authority only as long as individuals are brought to identify themselves and the activity of their lives in terms of the institutional legitimations and the symbolic universe in

¹Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1964).

²Ibid., p. 7.

which they cohere. With these perspectives in mind he attempts to analyze the "superstructure" of American society.

Mannheim's comments on the "second" form of utopian consciousness, the liberal-humanitarian idea, are an appropriate background to Marcuse on American ideology. Among the unique characteristics of the liberal utopia in Mannheim's view is the "idea." "In its characteristic form, it also establishes a correct rational conception to be set off against evil reality."³ The liberal utopia is distinguished from the chiliastic by the fact that it places its "wish image" on the plane of historical activity, while the chiliastic utopia is a permanent suspension of mundane history through divine intervention. In this sense the liberal utopia is more "concrete", oriented to the secular life of man in society. It is distinguished from the conservative mentality, however, in the opposite fashion. For Mannheim the conservative mentality "inclines to accept the total environment in the accidental concreteness in which it occurs."⁴ As opposed to this "positivistic" orientation, the liberal mentality projects its "idea" of Reason, Nature, Justice, or whatever, so that "it serves...as a 'measuring rod' by means of which the course of concrete events may be theoretically evaluated."⁵ Consequently,

³ Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, p. 219.

⁴ Ibid, p. 230.

⁵ Ibid., p. 219.

the philosophical school which formalized this mentality provided "the weapon of the bourgeoisie where it came to represent, at one and the same time, culture and politics."⁶

This projection of utopia in the form of the "idea" made that utopia in an important sense "contentless". Whereas the conservative mentality tacitly identifies utopia as the proper and harmonious functioning of the status quo and the chiliast with a perpetuation of the ecstasy which at least for him is perfectly concrete, the liberal utopia remains a concept:

The absence of color corresponds to the emptiness of content of all the ideals dominant at the height of this mode of thought: culture in the narrower sense, freedom, personality, are only frames for a content, which, one might say, has been purposely left undetermined... There is no definite statement of wherein the ideal consists: at one time it is "reason and justice" which appear as the goal; at another it is the "well being of man."⁷

For Mannheim this vagueness was both the virtue and the bane of the liberal mentality. On the debit side, it provided the basis of the attack from the left. The "socialist-communist" utopia according to Mannheim challenges the liberal on the ground that it ignores the concrete social factors that should define the content of its ideals. On the other side, the "vagueness" of the liberal idea was inextricably bound up with its vitality, its optimism, and its ability to

⁶ Ibid, p. 221.

⁷ Ibid, p. 222.

release the practical and intellectual energies of an entire epoch:

Perhaps there was precisely in this indeterminateness which left open such a variety of possibilities and which stimulated the fantasy, that fresh and youthful quality, that suggestive and stimulating atmosphere which even the aged Hegel felt when he recalled the penetrating impact of the great ideas of the revolutionary period...The deepest driving forces of the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment lay in the fact that it appealed to the free will and kept alive the feeling of being indeterminate and unconditioned.⁸

The liberal idea, by appealing to free will and by creating as much as maintaining the feeling of indeterminateness and possibility, placed the "autonomous individual" at the heart of society in the sense of making him theoretically the source of authority and the standard of value. It is in this sense that Mannheim claims "the dominating mood of the Enlightenment has long survived to give these ideas even at this late stage their driving power."⁹

Marcuse states a similar view of the liberal utopia in somewhat stronger terms. The utopia in his view did not remain in a perpetually "ideal" suspension; it manifested itself in the world of practical affairs in the form of legislation designed to promote the realization of "abstract"

⁸ Ibid., p. 229.

⁹ Ibid.

goals:

Freedom of thought, speech and conscience were--just as free enterprise, which they served to promote and protect--essentially critical ideas, designed to replace an obsolescent material and intellectual culture by a more productive and rational one.¹⁰

The liberal utopia was "brought to earth" in the political struggles necessary to institute the classical "bourgeois" liberties. And these liberties expressed the form of the liberal utopia. The various institutionalized freedoms defined the right of individuals to act as free agents in their several life activities, bound by no obligation but those assumed under the independently determined contract. It was felt that these liberties were complementary and worked to reinforce each other. The right of "free enterprise" stood in jeopardy if "outside" agents--church or state--were able to dictate what might be thought or arbitrarily circumscribe the individual's range of action. Similarly, the "civil rights" of speech, religion, thought and the rest were only viable as long as the individual was able freely to pursue his own means of livelihood secure in the knowledge that the produce of his effort was inalienably his to employ and dispense as he pleased. This concrete embodiment of the liberal utopia is still "contentless", as Mannheim believed. It does not prescribe the activities of the individual, and proscribes them only to

¹⁰Marcuse, op. cit., p. 1.

the extent necessary to insure that no one's liberties are infringed by the activities of another. But this "contentlessness" or indeterminacy is deliberate. It is up to the individual to supply the content of his liberty, to determine what he will think, how to live and work, what goals to pursue. For in the liberal utopia and its embodiment, freedom is an attribute of the individual and is recognized as a value insofar as it allows him to realize his own potentialities, to determine himself.

Marcuse argues that the "content" of the forms of liberty prescribed by the liberal mentality has been "filled up", as it were, by the growth of institutions which predetermine the content available to the classic forms and predefine the concepts of self-determination and individual realization in terms of their own requirements of operation and perpetuation. These institutions rely for legitimation, however, on the "symbolic universe" of the liberal utopia, a universe of discourse and action characterized by an "indeterminacy" which leaves open the question of the content of "liberty" or "self-determination."

This development is frequently referred to in Marcuse's work in such phrases as "administration of men and things in the service of continued domination", a form of statement which places men and their needs on one side of an equation, institutions and their administration on the other. This equation is of course applicable to any society. Marcuse uses it here because he is interested in demonstrating the

distance between the goals of liberal utopia and the performance of the "material and intellectual culture" of liberal society. In his view this distance is not adequately accounted for by reference to a quasi-inevitable failure of the actual to conform to the normative, the secular equivalent of the perennial breach between the City of Man and the City of God. To put the matter another way the distance is not merely quantitative, nor on the other hand an impassible ontological breach. It is an empirical fact and can be analyzed in terms of specific sociological factors which prevent the realization of the liberal utopia. At the same time the gap separates qualitatively different worlds in that the "practice" of liberal society in its advanced industrial form does not simply fall short of "utopia", but denies the values it represents.

The "material culture" of advanced industrial society consists of rationalized and highly productive economic units--corporations and affiliated organs of distribution, development, finance, and promotion. The shape of such institutions already challenges the designation "free enterprise" in its original meaning. The entrepreneur no longer appears as the autonomous individual, but the autonomous organization. The efficiency and productivity of such institutions furthermore has rendered their procedures obsolete in terms of the ends of economic activity. "The only needs that have an unqualified claim for satisfaction...the vital ones---nourishment, clothing, lodging at the attainable

level of culture,"¹¹ have long been within the capacity of the society to provide for all its members. But the rationalized economic organization has merely extended, expanded, and refined the form of "rationalization" Weber attributed to economic activity under the influence of Protestant Ethic. One might in fact say that the corporation institutionalizes the worldly asceticism of the Protestant entrepreneur. The perpetuation of the "material culture" of advanced industrialism thus requires the perpetuation of forms of motivation and action, conveniently summarized in the term "work ethic", in the face of productive forces that render them obsolete insofar as the satisfaction of "real" human needs is concerned.

The "material culture" maintains itself only as long as it manages to perpetuate its marketing activities, the "continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise...attuned to a regular market,"¹² that is the distinguishing feature of capitalism whether in its private or state ("socialist") form. Confronted with its own productivity, advanced industrialism is required to promote what Marcuse calls "false" needs. He defines "false" needs as "those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests.

¹¹Ibid., p. 5.

¹²Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. by Talcott Parsons, (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1958), pp. 17 and 21.

in his repression; the needs which perpetuate toil and aggressiveness."¹³ Previously these features of social life, toil and aggression, did not require the creation of "false" needs to perpetuate them. The need was there in the very "true" form of the necessity to reproduce through toil the requirements for maintaining life. In Marcuse's view this perennial necessity eventually came to be glorified and raised to the level of an ethical imperative in the early stages of capitalist development. But advanced industrialism cannot rely on this kind of need to perpetuate its organization of toil. Its own productive capacity far outstrips that required to provide for these needs. It must create new needs whose satisfaction requires the devotion of most waking hours to work (or recuperation from it) which is tolerated because it is a means to their satisfaction. This pattern is of course the postponement of gratification, the rational calculation of profit and loss, which was once the unique characteristic of the capitalist entrepreneur. In advanced industrial society the consumer is required to internalize this mentality as well.

The false or superimposed needs have two defining characteristics. First, as we have indicated above, their satisfaction must involve the marketing of a product of some kind. Second, and more important for our purposes,

¹³ Marcuse, op. cit., p.5.

the newly created needs are increasingly "subjective" needs. There appears to be a fairly definite limit to the amount of consumption an individual may perform out of strictly practical considerations. To put the matter crudely, a person can only hold so much food, can only live in one house or apartment at a time, can wear only a certain amount of clothing at once. On the other hand, once these needs are fulfilled the range of "subjective" needs seems to be limited only by the ability of the manufacturer to present his wares as "necessities". This feat is achieved through ubiquitous commercial advertising and the various forms of mass media which establish and reinforce styles of consumption. The process of creating needs for products such that the failure to satisfy them results in a feeling of deprivation is one in which the individual is led to identify himself in terms of what he consumes. Those whose subjectivity is the preserve of the advertiser "have to buy part and parcel of their own existence on the market."¹⁴ To the extent that the individual identifies himself with what he consumes, or rather takes his identity from it, his dependence on and assent to the structure of authority that supplies the goods is assured.

The activity of the individual in establishing identity through the market is represented as self-determination and individual realization. But the terms of realization are established by an all pervasive conditioning, and the

¹⁴ Herbert Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation (Beacon Press, Boston, 1969), p. 12.

elements of determination are limited by the requirements of the prevailing material culture for its own perpetuation. The "indeterminacy" of the liberal utopia is replaced by the determinacy of rationalized economic organization. What the individual is not free to determine are modes of work, styles of life, and directions of realization that are not presented as legitimate alternatives, that is, those which have not been integrated into the world of toil and reward. Ideally the individual who establishes his identity in terms of the goods the enterprise needs to produce and market is one whose "private space has been invaded and whittled down by technological reality":

The manifold processes of introjection seem to be ossified in almost mechanical reactions. The result is, not adjustment but mimesis: an immediate identification of the individual with his society and, through it, with the society as a whole. This immediate, automatic identification (which may have been characteristic of primitive forms of association) reappears in high industrial civilization; its new "immediacy", however, is the product of a sophisticated, scientific management and organization.¹⁵

The very technological advances which have reduced the need for toil or alienated labor (apotheosized in the "work ethic") enable the institutions which embody them to perpetuate them by coordinating men in the pursuit and satisfaction of false needs. In so doing they subvert the

¹⁵ Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, p. 10.

"autonomous individual" of liberal utopianism, replacing him with one whose identity and realization is thoroughly dependent on forces which he does not determine. At this point the rationality of advanced industrial society is revealed in Marcuse's view as strictly a rationality of means which have become their own end. The rationalized procedures of the material culture conceal a substantive irrationality which manifests itself as the perpetuation of toil, the pursuit of superimposed needs at the expense of the development of humane faculties, and the unnecessary persistence of forms of aggression characteristic of repressive society.

It is in the sense outlined above then that the "content" of the liberal utopia has been "filled up" in such a way that its utopian element is denied and it becomes an ideological vocabulary. A utopian consciousness that arose within advanced industrial society would not necessarily articulate the liberal utopia anew, certainly not in the same terms that was presented by the original opponents of absolutism and the remnants of the feudal order. But it would have to recognize the discontinuity between the terms in which the institutions are legitimated and the manner in which their meaning is limited in their application. It would have to recognize that the institutions of advanced industrialism not only fail to realize the promise of the liberal utopia, but militate against its fulfillment. Or in

still other words it would recognize the styles of behavior and motivation prevalent in this society as inherently ideological.

SUMMARY

The preceding four chapters have considered the development of a sociological conception ideology in order to draw out of the theoretical literature a set of terms and concepts to use in describing the genesis of black consciousness. Marx provides a basic definition of ideology as representation. Representations are the conceptual vocabulary a society uses to legitimate its institutional arrangements and the structure of authority they perpetuate. Ideology legitimates the social order by describing its operation as exemplary of an ideal state of things which is considered the "natural order." Mannheim developed the concept of "utopia" as the complement of ideology. Utopias as ideas or intentional attitudes which serve the opposite function of opposing or illegitimizing the social order. He stressed the continuity or interrelationship between ideological and utopian modes of thought. Both perspectives address themselves to the same ongoing process of social action, although they evaluate it differently. Mannheim often used the term "relative utopia" to indicate that ideas or intentional attitudes are utopian only in relation to an ideological description of social phenomena. He carried the theme of continuity one step further and suggested that the values of ideology and utopia may be similar. The emergence of a utopia implies that the social order no longer appears to conform to an ideal, "natural" state of affairs as depicted in ideology. The utopia may not neces-

sarily reject the ideological image of the ideal and natural, however, it may oppose the social order because it no longer appears to fulfill that ideal image. Utopia is ultimately a political category for Mannheim, but he did not feel that utopian mentalities derived exclusively from dissatisfaction with political institutions per se. He believed that they grew out of the unique experience of the social order that groups possess by virtue of the fact that they are "located" differently within it and thereby view it from a unique perspective.

Berger and Luckmann are concerned with the experiential bases on which opposition to the social order per se rests. They indicate that oppositional mentalities are grounded in a problem of identity. In their view of ideology one of its basic functions is to make the individual identify with the structure of authority by assigning him an identity and relating it to the overall scheme of meaning and value. If this process fails, identity becomes problematic and the individual acquires a degree of alienation from the institutional order and its legitimations which is potentially oppositional. Marcuse uses the perspectives of the previous theorists to develop an analysis of the functioning of American liberal ideology. He identifies the vocabulary of liberal individualism as the ideology of American society and delineates the manner and extent to which the actual institutional arrangements deviate from

the ideological norm. He relates this deviation directly to the question of identity, providing a model of the society that can be used in plotting the development of a utopian mentality.

In the light of our inquiry into the sociological theory of ideology we can see that Daniel Bell's use of the term is confused or, at best, ambiguous. As we have seen, he equates the end of ideology with "consensus". Consensus implies that everyone in a society agrees that the existing social and political institutions are legitimate in that their form and content conform to agreed upon values and are appropriate to the pursuit of agreed upon goals. Bell opposes consensus to ideology when, in effect, it is the hegemony of ideology. It appears then that he is actually arguing for the end of utopia, but mistakenly refers to utopia as ideology. Theoretically, the absence of utopian mentalities in a society is a temporary state of affairs. Announcements of the end of opposition are always premature. This perspective is lacking in Bell's view of American society. He may have been correct in discerning a consensus at the time he wrote The End of Ideology, but he assumed that no possible basis of opposition remained or could develop. The ensuing discussion of the development and content of black consciousness is designed to show that, even while Bell was formulating his view of consensus in America, a new utopian mentality was emerging.

PART TWO
THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF
BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

CHAPTER V
IDENTITY AND STATUS

The writers we plan to deal with have written of Negro life in America from the inside. They have not tried to add to the statistical data pertaining to the position of black people in America or to use such data as a basis of discussion. Indeed James Baldwin has claimed that this manner of addressing racial questions is a way of evading the real issues raised by the status of Negroes in America:

To think of him is to think of statistics, slums, rapes, injustices, remote violence; it is to be confronted with an endless cataloguing of losses, gains, skirmishes; it is to feel virtuous, outraged, helpless, as though his continuing status among us were somehow analagous to disease-- cancer, perhaps, or tuberculosis-- which must be checked, even though it cannot be cured.¹

Elsewhere he refers to the Negro as "the beast in the jungle of statistics; an unknown human reality which is

¹James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son (Beacon Press, Boston, 1955), pp. 18-19.

obscured and in some senses even evaded in the accumulation of "external" descriptive information. Baldwin and the other writers assume an acquaintance with the social and economic dimensions of the status of Negroes in America. They attempt to provide us with an account of how that status is experienced by those whose lives it defines. In other words, they document the shape of a "black consciousness" of American society which they feel is the human reality behind the objective description of socio-economic status.

The reality of the Negro's status impinges upon him at a level which is for the most part invisible or inaccessible to the instruments of observation normally used to record it. This level is generally referred to as the level of identity. The writers who discuss the experience of the Negro in American society are unanimous in seeing identity as a problem. The problem revolves around the fact that the socio-economic status of the Negro is seemingly inseparable from the fact that he is a black man. The Negro is unable to view the objective facts of his position in society as an external condition which, as it were, happens to him, but rather as a condition which expresses what he, as a Negro, essentially is. In other words, he is made to look upon his status not as a status by which he is defined, but as a caste which he defines.

This situation is commonly associated with the institutions of de jure segregation prevalent in the South, but these writers suggest that it is no less forcefully felt in areas of the country where these practices are absent or illegal. Indeed they suggest further that the manner in which Negroes come to identify themselves with their status in areas where legal segregation does not exist is more traumatic for not being the result of obviously deliberate attempts to fix that status.

The Negro who lives outside the South lives in a society in which he is ostensibly free to carry on his life's activities without any concern for the facts of his race. He learns that his race is nevertheless a large factor in his life chances through the attitudes of white people with whom he deals. Malcolm X recounts an interview with a high-school advisor on the subject of his future career:

He told me, "Malcolm, you ought to be thinking about a career. Have you been giving it thought?"

The truth is, I hadn't. I never have figured out why I told him, "Well, yes, sir, I've been thinking I'd like to be a lawyer." Lansing certainly had no Negro lawyers--or doctors either--in those days, to hold up an image I might have aspired to. All I really knew for certain was that a lawyer didn't wash dishes, as I was doing.

Mr. Ostrowski looked surprised, I remember, and leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head. He kind of half-smiled and said, "Malcolm,

one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic. Don't misunderstand me, now. We all here like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer--that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you can be. You're good with your hands--making things. Everybody admires your carpentry shop work. Why don't you plan on carpentry? People like you as a person--you'd get all kinds of work.²

In this interview Malcolm learns that his status cannot be separated from his race. People like him "as a person", but the idea of a Negro lawyer is nevertheless considered "unrealistic." Malcolm claims that this episode was the point at which he began to understand the attitudes of white people toward his race and what their attitudes toward him portended:

It was then that I began to change--inside...Where "nigger" had slipped off my back before, wherever I heard it now, I stopped and looked at whoever said it, And they looked surprised that I did.³

It seems, however, that white attitudes toward Negroes are not usually communicated with the bluntness that Malcolm encountered. They are more often experienced in an indirect fashion which in no way diminishes their effectiveness. The stereotype of the Negro--shiftless, lazy, stupid, good natured, sexually voracious--

²Malcolm X, The Autobiography of Malcolm X (Grove Press, New York, 1965), p. 36.

³Ibid., p. 37.

cious--enshrined in popular mythology and enforced by statute in the South, is not absent in other parts of the nation, but does not form a part of the official view of the Negro. The attitudes themselves persist and, according to these writers, are nearly as prevalent. They manifest themselves whenever contact between Negroes and whites takes place or threatens to take place on a personal level. Malcolm X recalls one form of encounter from his high school days that illustrated to him the attitudes that lay behind the seeming willingness to accept him into the normal run of social life:

After the basketball games, there would usually be a school dance. Whenever our team walked into another school's gym for the dance, with me among them, I could feel the freeze. It would start to ease as they saw that I didn't try to mix, but stuck close to someone on our team, or kept to myself. I think I developed ways to do it without making it obvious. Even at our own school, I could sense it almost as a physical barrier, that despite all the beaming and smiling, the mascot wasn't supposed to dance with any of the white girls.

It was some kind of psychic message-- not just from them, but also from within myself. I am proud to be able to say that much, for myself at least. I would just stand around and smile and talk and drink punch and eat sandwiches, and then I would make some excuse and get away early.⁴

Often the image is communicated more directly, illustrat-

⁴Ibid., p. 30.

ing, as Malcolm points out in the following passage dealing with his foster parents, how deeply it is held:

They would even talk about me, or about "niggers", as though I wasn't there, as if I wouldn't understand what the word meant. A hundred times a day, they used the word "nigger." I suppose that in their own minds, they meant no harm; in fact, they probably meant well. It was the same with the cook, Lucille, and her husband, Duane. I remember one day when Mr. Swerlin, as nice as he was, came in from Lansing, where he had been through the Negro section, and said to Mrs. Swerlin right in front of me, "I just can't see how those niggers can be so happy and be so poor." He talked about how they lived in shacks, but had those big, shining cars out front. And Mrs. Swerlin said, me standing right there, "Niggers are just that way..⁵" That scene always stayed with me.⁵

The two episodes we have quoted are illustrations of what these writers find to be an unavoidable aspect of the Negro's experience in American society--the persistence of these stereotyped attitudes usually associated with the South. There are of course even more "indirect" ways the image is communicated to the Negro--the shuffling darkies habitually depicted in motion pictures are an example of this kind of persistence. James Baldwin remembers another:

⁵Ibid., pp. 26-27.

At the time that I was growing up, Negroes in this country were taught to be ashamed of Africa. They were taught it bluntly, as I was for example, by being told that Africa had never contributed "anything" to civilization. Or one was taught the same lesson more obliquely, and even more effectively, by watching nearly naked, dancing, comic-opera cannibalistic savages in the movies. They were nearly always bad, sometimes funny, sometimes both.⁶

The effectiveness of all such presentations of this image lies in what Baldwin refers to as their essential "innocence." One writer has interpreted Baldwin's description of white innocence to mean that "whites are 'innocent' in the Freudian sense that they know not what they do because they have subconsciously blinded themselves to the horrible deprivation they have caused the Negro."⁷ This innocence usually manifests itself to the Negro, however, as a taken for granted attitude which seems to point to an incontrovertible fact. The very fact of this innocence, along with the fact that most Negroes do live in conditions that the myth predicts, makes it possible for the Negro to accept the myth.

Baldwin indicates that the majority of Negroes tend to accept the myth of white superiority and black

⁶James Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son (Dial Press, New York, 1961), p. 72.

⁷Beau Fly Jones, "James Baldwin: The Struggle for Identity", British Journal of Sociology, XVII(2), June, 1966.

inferiority perpetuated in various ways by white society. He writes of his own father that "he was defeated long before he died because, at the bottom of his heart, he really believed what white people said about him."⁸ When the black man has accepted "what white people say about him", he then sees his position in society as something that expresses what he is, as a caste. Acceptance of the myth of course tends to reinforce this position, because it leads to an overall lowering of motivation. Parents often communicate the myth to their children, fearing the frustration and danger that await them if they rebel against it:

Long before the Negro child perceives this difference, and even longer before he understands it, he has begun to react to it, he has begun to be controlled by it. Every effort (is) made by the child's elders to prepare him for a fate from which they cannot protect him...This filters into the child's consciousness through his parents' tone of voice as he is being exhorted, punished, or loved...The fear that I heard in my father's voice, for example, when he realized that I really believed I could do anything a white boy could do, and had every intention of proving it, was not at all like the fear I heard when one of us was ill or had fallen down the stairs or strayed too far from the house. It was another fear, a fear that the child, in challenging the white world's assumptions,

⁸James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time (Dial Press, New York, 1963), pp. 13-14.

was putting himself in the path of destruction.⁹

Acceptance of the myth is functional at least insofar as it allows the Negro to avoid some of the hostility of the white world. But this avoidance involves adopting an identity and living a life which is patently degrading as well as being defined strictly by a hostile white world. It requires the Negro constantly to "adjust" to the expectations white people have of how he should behave:

Almost all Negroes, as Richard (Wright) once pointed out, are almost always acting, but before a white audience--which is quite incapable of judging their performance: and even a "bad nigger" is, inevitably, giving something of a performance, even if the entire purpose of his performance is to terrify or blackmail white people.¹⁰

This adoption of the role defined as "Negro" by whites is the first form of alienation of identity the Negro undergoes in American society. "Acceptance" of the myths perpetuated by whites does not necessarily imply that the individual black person believes they are literally true, although this is one possibility, but rather that he lives in terms of them. Baldwin refers to those who actually believe the myths as "Uncle Toms" or

⁹Ibid., pp. 40-41.

¹⁰Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, p. 162.

"Aunt Jemimahs" and considers them totally alienated or dis-identified. Those who are forced to identify themselves with the myths in order to survive the hostility that awaits those who "challenge the white world's assumptions" are represented for Baldwin by Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas, the hero of Native Son. In Baldwin's interpretation of this book Bigger is constantly forced to compromise his identity as a man and as a Negro in order to survive. He must constantly "play the nigger" and consequently is dying inside out of a sense of his own degradation, shame, and cowardice. This feeling of shame and degradation is only one side of a coin, however, which is also marked with a bitter, frustrated rage at his humiliation and a hatred for the whites who have forced him to accept and live by the myth. These two aspects of Bigger's "playing the nigger" correspond to the dual nature of the white myth of the Negro. "Uncle Tom, trustworthy and sexless, needed only to drop the title "Uncle" to become violent, crafty, and sullen, a menace to any white woman who passed by."¹¹ The myth of the Negro barely conceals a fear of what the Negro might become, and the confirmation of this fear is how Bigger is forced to reclaim a human identity:

¹¹James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son, p. 21.

There exists among the intolerably degraded the perverse and powerful desire to force into the arena of the actual those fantastic crimes of which they have been accused, achieving their vengeance and their own destruction through making the nightmare real. The American image of the Negro lives also in the Negro's heart; and when he has surrendered to this image life has no other possible reality. Then he, like the white enemy with whom he will be locked one day in mortal struggle, has no means save this of asserting his identity. This is why Bigger's murder of Mary can be referred to as an "act of creation" and why, once this murder has been committed, he can feel for the first time that he is living fully and deeply as a man was meant to live.¹²

Those Negroes who manage to escape the ghetto in order to make their way in white society undergo a different form of alienation of identity. They are required to divest themselves thoroughly of the social milieu from which they have come:

Up to today we are set at a division, so that he may not marry our daughters or our sisters, nor may he--for the most part--eat at our tables or live in our houses. Moreover, those who do, do so at the grave expense of a double alienation: from their own people, whose fabled attributes they must either deny or, worse, cheapen and bring to market; from us, for we require of them, when we accept them, that they at once cease to be Negroes and yet not fail to remember what being a Negro means--to remember, that is, what it means to us.¹³

This is of course impossible since he is not capable of

¹²Ibid., pp. 29-30.

¹³Ibid., p. 20.

getting rid of the most fabled of his race's attributes, his blackness. Nor is it likely that he actually wishes to deny every aspect of Negro life. The Negro who has managed to find a place to stand in white society is in the grip of a paranoid obsession not to appear like "the others." Paradoxically, his identity is still being defined by the myth of the Negro, not because he is forced to accept it, but because he must prevent others from accepting it as an accurate description of him.

The problematic nature of the black person's identity brings him into conflict with white society on an everyday basis, because his negative status derives from the attitudes and expectations of white people toward him. The adaptations to white expectations outlined above are ways of avoiding the conflict and its potentially disastrous consequences. The black person internalizes the conflict in the form of anxiety rather than act out his opposition to the expectations he is required to fulfill. Conflict is at the heart of any utopian mentality, for the latter stand in opposition to the existing order of things. Mannheim believed that utopian mentalities grew out of experience of the social order that placed the group in conflict with it. The black person's experience of American society is one of conflict that impinges on him at the level of identity. Conflict does not inevitably lead to opposition to the social order per se, however.

It does so only to the extent that the specific conflict is perceived as incompatible with the social order as it is legitimated through ideology. The following chapter therefor deals with the black person's perception of his identity conflict in the context of the ethos of American liberalism.

CHAPTER VI
IDENTITY AND LIBERAL IDEOLOGY

Identity is one of the fundamental concerns of liberal ideology. The principles enunciated in such classic documents of American liberalism as the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights assume that individuals rather than groups are the basic units of society. Likewise, the classical liberal freedoms refer and defer to an ideal, self-reliant individual whose opinions are the result of his own reasoning, whose wealth is the reward of his own industry, and whose religion is the expression of his own spiritual experience. This ideal individual creates his own identity and the liberal freedoms are designed to enable him to do so.

This official ideology may have been an important factor preventing wholesale acceptance by black people of the myths perpetuated about them. In any case it has always been used by articulate blacks to goad whites into action against the injustices suffered by Negroes. An example is a Fourth of July speech delivered by Frederick Douglass in Rochester, New York in 1852:

What to the American slave is your Fourth of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence.¹

Negro spokesmen from Douglass to Martin Luther King, Jr. have reiterated this message with only superficial changes. There are echoes of it in the works of the writers we are studying in this paper. Baldwin feels that "any honest examination of the national life (would) prove how far we are from the standard of human freedom with which we began."² Malcolm X strikes the same note when he accuses whites of "talking democracy while keeping the black man out of sight around the corner."³

Black people have always experienced their status and identity in the context of the official liberal ideology of American society. The writers we are dealing with in this paper are by no means the first to recognize the gap between the ideology of pluralism and self-realization on the one hand and the realities of ostracism, contempt, and discrimination on the other. They

¹Quoted by Eldridge Cleaver in Soul On Ice (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1967), p. 75.

²Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, p. 99.

Malcolm X, op. cit., p. 272.

have discovered, however, that the removal of statutory discrimination has not brought the Negro any closer to realizing an authentic identity within American society. Indeed, it seems to have led to a new and deeper ambivalence. Protest against the denial to Negroes of basic liberal freedoms has always been directed at whites and consequently has provided Negroes with at least a neutral identity as an oppressed minority. This type of protest has traditionally made appeal to the conscience of the liberal white. It has portrayed Negroes as staunch upholders of liberal American values who have been denied the full privileges of citizenship on grounds that are themselves highly un-American. In other words, Negroes explicitly identified themselves as Americans, underscored what they had in common with white Americans, and treated their race as an inconsequential matter that ought not to concern reasonable men.

Cleaver, Baldwin, Jones, and Malcolm represent Negroes of the urban North and West. Their awareness of themselves as black men has not developed within a society characterized by the Jim Crow statutes against which the traditional forms of Negro protest have always been directed. In these areas the liberal ideology would seem to prevail both in theory and practice. But as we have seen in the previous chapter, blacks do not find themselves

"free" as a result of legal equality. Negative attitudes toward Negroes on the part of whites persist in areas with no tradition of statutory racism. Jones claims that liberal schemes for integration, however, have meant that "to enter into the mainstream of American society the Negro must lose all identity as a Negro"⁴ and this requirement is in conflict with the principle of self-determination, "the right to choose one's own path...the right to become exactly what one thinks himself capable of."⁵

The Negro's identity becomes truly problematic in American society where liberal values prevail de jure. This situation rules out the possibility of identifying totally with the roles of Uncle Tom and Aunt Jemimah. On the other hand the Negro feels himself forced into those roles by the attitudes of whites, and thus enters the Bigger Thomas syndrome discussed in the previous chapter. The negative attitude of whites is no less clear in the actions of those liberals who have taken it upon themselves to guide Negroes to that latter day Jordan River, the "mainstream" of American life. Blacks perceive the ambivalence that informs the good works, projects and programs of liberal whites who deal with Negroes as a

⁴LeRoi Jones, Home: Social Essays (William Morrow & Co., Inc., New York, 1966), p. 145.

⁵Ibid., p. 70.

social problem. Baldwin feels these efforts are actually intended, though perhaps unconsciously, to prevent the realization of the "monster" lurking in Bigger Thomas. They try to prevent his anger and resentment from turning into violent acts of vengeance by keeping alive the hope that his situation may improve. Such good works are unable to improve the status of Negroes because they reveal too clearly the real attitudes that motivate them. This is the subject of Baldwin's essay "Fifth Avenue, Uptown":

Harlem got its first private project, Riverton--which is now, naturally, a slum--about twelve years ago because at that time Negroes were not allowed to live in Stuyvesant Town...They began hating it at about the time people began moving out of their condemned houses to make room for this additional proof of how thoroughly the white world despised them. And they had scarcely moved in, naturally, before they began smashing windows, defacing walls, urinating in the elevators, and fornicating in the playgrounds. Liberals, both black and white, were appalled at the spectacle. I was appalled by the liberal innocence--or cynicism, which comes out in practice as much the same thing. Other people were delighted to be able to point to proof positive that nothing could be done as long as they are treated like colored people. The people in Harlem know they are living there because white people do not think they are good enough to live anywhere else. No amount of "improvement" can sweeten this fact.⁶

Baldwin feels that the various good works constantly performed on the Negro's behalf are not intended to change

⁶Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, p. 61.

his status, but to make it more palatable. According to Baldwin they succeed only in reinforcing the prevailing attitudes toward blacks and confirming blacks in their resentment of the white world.

The attitudes of whites maintain the ambivalence of Negro identity in America and reveal the liberal ethos as an ideology according to Mannheim's definition of them as "situationally transcendent ideas which never succeed de facto in the realization of their projected contents." The liberal ethos is situationally transcendent in that it is normative and fails de facto to realize its projected content in that black identity remains ambivalent. Blacks cannot console themselves by taking an abstract view of this situation, attributing white attitudes to an inevitable failure of the actual to conform to the normative. Baldwin and Jones indicate that in the black person's experience, white attitudes do not merely fall short of the "situationally transcendent idea", but expressly contradict it. And this contradiction impinges on blacks at the most basic level of their social being, the level of self-conception or identity. The black writers perceive that the identity conflict which is the Negro's essential relationship to American society is incompatible with the normative values in terms of which the social order is legitimated.

The desire to discover or retrieve an autonomous

black identity is the underlying motive of these black writers' reflections on their experience as a Negro in America. In the introduction to one of his books LeRoi Jones says:

One truth anyone reading these pieces ought to get is the sense of movement-- the struggle, in myself, to understand where and who I am, and to move with that understanding. And these moves, most times unconscious, seem to me to have been always toward the thing I had coming into the world, with no sweat: my blackness.⁷

It is in the context of the liberal ethos that the Negro comes to understand, consciously or unconsciously, that his identity is controlled totally by a hostile collective Other, the white world. The normative values of the liberal ethos appear to be contradicted in actuality. They do not represent or account for the values and motives that actuate white behavior toward blacks. Baldwin claims that all blacks are, consciously or unconsciously, struggling like Jones to understand where and who they are and to "move with that understanding." Too often this struggle ends in the negative and suicidal solution reached by Bigger Thomas. He ends by defining himself solely by his hate for whites. His act of vengeance ironically confirms the total power of the white world over him.

⁷Jones, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

Men like Jones and Baldwin, Malcolm X and Cleaver, want to establish a positive identity for black people based on their own understanding of "where and who" they are. Their preliminary answer to that question is "we are black men in a white society." They want to probe the meaning of that fact, for they are certain that it has a profound meaning, at least for whites. Baldwin says that whites "require of them (blacks) that they not fail to remember what being a Negro means--to remember, that is, what it means to us." Whites want Negroes not only to accept their status, but to believe they deserve it. They require of blacks not only subordination, but abnegation. It appears to the black writer, therefore, that the identity of the white is intimately bound up with his image of the Negro; that when the Negro is required to confirm the image the white holds of him, he is actually being asked to confirm the image the white holds of himself. Baldwin writes in a letter to his nephew:

Many of them, indeed, know better, but, as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of their identity. Try to imagine how you would feel if you woke up one morning to find the sun shining and all the stars aflame. You would be frightened because it is out of the order of nature. Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one's sense of one's

own reality. Well, the black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations.⁸

The attempt to reclaim an autonomous identity leads the black writer to investigate the meaning of the myth of the Negro for whites, for his position in their consciousness is indeed "where" he is, and he must understand that before he can discover who he is.

As Berger and Luckmann maintained, a new "psychology" is generated when the identity of an entire group becomes problematic, in order to comprehend the empirical phenomena bearing on the question of identity which are not adequately explained by the prevailing symbolic universe and the institutional legitimations derived from it. The liberal ethos fails to account for the status-identity blacks find imposed on them, and in order to "solve" the problem of identity these black writers have developed their own explanation, their own "psychology of the white man." In doing so he translates the identity conflict that all black people experience into a conflict with the social order per se. He externalizes the identity conflict by projecting it back onto white people and attempts to derive from an investigation of their behavior an image of

⁸Baldwin, The Fire Next Time, p. 20.

the social order that is more accurate from his perspective than the image presented in the liberal ideology. This process is the perception or construing of a "world" different from the one presented by ideology, which is a hallmark of the development of a utopian consciousness. The content of black consciousness will depend largely on what the black discovers are the values that underlie the white identity which depends for confirmation on the perpetuation of the myth of the Negro.

CHAPTER VII

WHITE IDENTITY AND THE MYTH OF THE NEGRO

Baldwin and the others associate the Negro myth with the inception of slavery. In order to justify the brutality of his exploitation of the African slave, the white man claimed that the black was really less than a man, sub-human, inferior. The conditions of slavery and the destruction of African cultural life in America produced the degradation the myth predicted the Negro would live in by virtue of his inferiority. The myth itself contains two versions of the inferior Negro, one that is gratifying to the white and one which is terrifying. The former, Uncle Tom, knows he is inferior and is grateful to the benevolent whites who take care of him and appreciate his peculiar talents--laughing, singing, and dancing--and his unquestioning loyalty to his master. The latter, Tom, hates whites, resents their superiority and is capable of acting out his desire for revenge. Both images indicate the inferiority of the Negro, but one expresses the wishes of whites and the other the fears. Baldwin notes that the images of Uncle Tom and Tom are distinguishable in terms

of sexuality, which looms large in the myth of the Negro in any case. He points out that the stock figure of Uncle Tom is a man too old for sexual activity and in any case seemingly too naive in the acceptance of his own status to think of white women as possible partners. The image of Tom on the other hand is typically saturated with carnality. He is a young man and the vengeance he takes is commonly symbolized as the rape of a white woman, the most forbidden of the master's fruits.

Baldwin feels that the image of Tom is influenced and reinforced by the metaphysical significance attached to blackness in Christian mythology. As Fanon has said:

In Europe, the black man is the symbol of Evil. The torturer is the black man, Satan is black, one talks of shadows, when one is dirty one is black--whether one is thinking of physical dirtiness or moral dirtiness. It would be astonishing, if the trouble were taken to bring them all together, to see the vast number of expressions that make the black man the equivalent of sin. In Europe, whether concretely or symbolically, the black man stands for the bad side of the character.¹

What is true for Europe Baldwin finds even more applicable to Protestant America. He is not willing to say, however, that the obvious association of the Negro with the evil of blackness is simply a coincidence:

¹Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (Grove Press, New York, 1967), pp. 188-89.

I suggest that the role of the Negro in American life has something to do with our concept of what God is, and from any point of view, this concept is not big enough.²

His understanding of how this "concept of what God is" is related to the Negro's position in society is expanded somewhat in the following passage:

In Uncle Tom's Cabin, that cornerstone of American social protest fiction, St. Clare, the kindly master, remarks to his coldly disapproving Yankee cousin, Miss Ophelia, that, so far as he is able to tell, the blacks have been turned over to the devil for the benefit of the whites in this world... Neither of them questions the medieval morality from which their dialogue springs: black, white, the devil, the next world--posing its alternatives between heaven and the flames--were realities for them as, of course, they were for their creator. They spurned and were terrified of the darkness, striving mightily for the light.³

The Christian God, particularly in His Protestant manifestation, is a God of judgment and those who believe in Him are driven to decipher and separate the Good from the Bad, possessed by a "passion for categorization."⁴ They view life on earth as a fleeting purgatory where their status in eternity is determined. Therefore a rigid categorization of options, choices, or alternative actions is necessary

²Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, p. 113.

³Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son, p. 9.

⁴Ibid., p. 14.

in order to avoid those things in the world that are evil and place the soul in jeopardy. The seeker after salvation cannot afford to trust his own judgment in these matters, for the penalty for error is too great. The only alternative to salvation is damnation and no cost is too great to avoid the latter. There is no room for ambiguity, mystery, indeterminacy, or spontaneity in this mentality, because it is in their very nature that they cannot be fitted into the salvational hodograph. They contain at least the possibility of error which is the threat of damnation.

This is essentially the same mentality the black writer sees at work in the thoroughly secularized American society he lives in. The passion for compartmentalization of the world in terms of good and evil is transformed into a frenzied quest for and perpetual reestimation of social status. The object of this quest, however, is not actually the products whose consumption confers status, nor even the esteem of others, but salvation. This syndrome of behavior and motivation seems ultimately to derive from the idea that salvation is predetermined and that prosperity is a sign that an individual is of the elect.⁵ Baldwin relates this mentality to the status of Negroes:

One cannot afford to lose status on this

⁵ See Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1935).

peculiar ladder, for the prevailing notion of American life seems to involve a kind of run-by-rung ascension to some hideously desirable state. If this is one's concept of life, obviously one cannot afford to slip back one rung. When one slips, one slips back not a rung, but back into chaos and no longer knows who he is. And this reason, this fear suggests to me one of the real reasons for the status of the Negro in this country. In a way, the Negro tells us where the bottom is: because he is there, and where he is, beneath us, we know where the limits are and how far we must not fall.⁶

Baldwin suggests here that white people identify themselves as the elect. A white person is one who is saved or is open to salvation and his relative prosperity is a token of his position in the race for eternal bliss. A person under the influence of this conception of life develops an insatiable appetite for confirmation of his salvation. He can always hope to get closer to it than he is at the present time. The ultimate source of confirmation is, paradoxically, those who are damned and whose damnation is visible in the form of relative poverty. According to Baldwin this is the function the Negro serves for white people. In the previous chapter we saw that blacks view liberal programs of uplift and improvement as so many devious mechanisms to preserve the status of Negroes by making it more tolerable. Baldwin claims that whites do not really want that status changed, because it would throw their own

⁶Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, p. 111.

salvation, that is, their identity, into question.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this "white" mentality is its appalling innocence and simplicity. The Negro, who is supposed in this scheme of things to be inferior or incorrigibly debased, is ironically the victim of an outlook on the world which is almost infantile in its naivete. Such a view of things seems to indicate a total absence of knowledge or experience of human beings, white or black. Baldwin finds that this mentality is nevertheless characteristic of most white Americans:

I am afraid that most of the white people I have ever known impressed me as being in the grip of a weird nostalgia, dreaming of a vanished state of security and order, against which dream, unflinching and unconsciously, they tested and very often lost their lives.⁷

In another context he writes:

Americans, who evade, so far as possible all genuine experience, have therefore no way of assessing the experience of others and no way of establishing themselves in relation to any way of life which is not their own. The privacy or obscurity of Negro life makes that life capable, in our imagination, of producing anything at all.⁸

Baldwin is particularly concerned with white "innocence" because he believes "it is the innocence which constitutes

⁷Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, p. 172.

⁸Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son, p. 32.

the crime"⁹ against Negroes in the sense that the innocence makes the crime possible and prevents the white from recognizing it as a crime. But he does not attribute the innocence merely to "ignorance" or "prejudice". He says that whites "evade, so far as possible, all genuine experience." They are capable of it, but for the most part successfully avoid it, and to that extent they are able to impose a distorted and dehumanizing image of Negroes. What does he mean by "genuine experience?" For Baldwin "genuine experience" is characterized by a receptivity to ambiguity, the awareness of complexity, and at least a partial surrender to emotional spontaneity. These characteristics are summed up in the concept of sensuality:

They are terrified of sensuality and do not any longer understand it. The word "sensual" is not intended to bring to mind quivering dusky maidens or priapic black studs. I am referring to something much simpler and much less fanciful. To be sensual, I think, is to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be present in all that one does, from the effort of loving to the breaking of bread...Something very sinister happens to the people of a country when they begin to distrust their own reactions as deeply as they do here, and become as joyless as they have become. It is this individual uncertainty on the part of white American men and women, this inability to renew themselves at the fountain of their own lives, that makes the discussion, let alone elucidation, of any conundrum--that is, any reality--so supremely difficult.¹⁰

⁹Baldwin, The Fire Next Time, p. 16.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 61-62.

Both Baldwin and Jones associate the obsession with a vanished state of order and security--the state of "not-presentness" Baldwin speaks of--and the evasion of genuine experience with the passion for categories and the need of white society for some group to play the role of the "damned." As we saw above, that mentality is characterized by its refusal to recognize ambiguity or tolerate spontaneity. Indeed, at this point it is obvious that the "white" mentality Baldwin describes does not think of life as something to be experienced at all, but rather something to be traversed, an ordeal. It evades "genuine experience" because it considers such moments merely as opportunities for falling into sin or "slipping back a rung" into the chaos of damnation. The image of the Negro as monster or benign clown presents with exaggerated grotesqueness and banality the experience the white tries to evade. The stereotypes suggest that white people are not even capable of the kind of experience they fear:

I think if one examines the myths which have proliferated in this country concerning the Negro, one discovers beneath these myths a kind of sleeping terror of some condition which we refuse to imagine. In a way, if the Negro were not here, we might be forced to deal within ourselves and our own personalities, with all those vices, all those conundrums, and all those mysteries with which we have invested the Negro race.¹¹

¹¹Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, pp. 111-12.

It might be more accurate to say that if the Negro were not here he would have to be invented, for the Negro, as he exists in the "white mentality", is the ballast on the status ladder, and the repository of the ambiguity white people are unwilling to face in themselves and recognize in the world.

The white mentality does not succeed, however, in exorcising the ambiguity it associates with the powers of darkness by projecting them onto the Negro. The Negro merely becomes the ground whereon the ambiguity is encountered and recognized. In fact, the Negro is the most ambiguous figure in the white man's world. The poles of this ambiguity are the figures of Tom and Uncle Tom. The figure of Tom, sullen and vengeful, does not simply represent revellion against the white world's coercive power. His rebellion indicates that he rejects the definitions of reality held by white people and, as we have seen above, these definitions depend on blacks for confirmation. They are thrown into grave doubt if the black does not believe in his own inferiority. White people ironically depend on Uncle Tom to maintain the credibility of their own definitions of reality. Ambiguity is more intolerable in the black than anywhere else--all Negroes must be Uncle Tom--but here is precisely where the most insupportable ambiguity arises. Does Uncle Tom know how much we need him?

How are we to tell? And if he does know, is he really Uncle Tom or is he Tom playing the role of Uncle Tom? The anxiety and insecurity that the white mentality tries to avoid by projecting ambiguity and the potential for sin onto blacks paradoxically confronts it in the figure of the black man himself.

Thus Baldwin does not find it surprising that whites are incapable of dealing with blacks as men rather than as statistics, for "as long as we can deal with the Negro as a kind of statistic, as something to be manipulated, something to be fled from, or something to be given something to, there is something we can avoid, and what we can avoid is what he really, really means to us."¹² This is why Baldwin claims that "our dehumanization of the Negro is indivisible from our dehumanization of ourselves: the loss of our own identity is the price we pay for our annulment of his."¹³ Whites dehumanize the Negro because they are in the grip of a dehumanized mentality themselves. The identity they try to achieve--a member of the elect--is one that cuts them off from a human experience of their own lives as well as the lives of others. "It is a terrible, an inexorable law, that one cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one's own."¹⁴

¹²Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, pp. 112-13.

¹³Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son, p. 19.

¹⁴Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, p. 66.

CHAPTER VIII
BLACK IDENTITY:
UTOPIAN CONSCIOUSNESS AND
NATIONAL POWER

These black writers develop a psychology which attributes white society's definitions of blacks to a mentality which implicitly contradicts the normative values of liberal ideology. The mentality of white people as it is experienced by Negroes negates the terms in which the institutions of the society are legitimated; indeed the institutions of that society in their actual operation can only be expressions of the white mentality. While Baldwin is primarily concerned with delineating the relationship between the white mentality and the black status-identity, Eldridge Cleaver tries to understand that relationship in terms of institutional roles. He expresses that understanding in the form of sexual archetypes:

The Class Society projects a fragmented sexual image. Each class projects a sexual image coinciding with its class-function in society. And since its class-function will differ from that of other classes, its sexual image will differ also

and in the same proportion. The source of the fragmentation of the Self in Class Society lies in the alienation between the function of man's Mind and the function of his Body. Man as thinker performs an Administrative Function in society. Man as doer performs a Brute Power Function. These two basic functions I symbolize, when they are embodied in living men functioning in society, as the Omnipotent Administrator and the Supermasculine Menial.

Since all men are created equal, when the Self is fragmented by the operation of the laws and forces of Class Society, men in the elite classes usurp the controlling and Administrative Function of the society as a whole--i.e. they usurp the administrative component in the nature and biology of men in the classes below them. Administrative power is concentrated at the apex of society, in the Godhead of the society (pharaoh, king, president, chairman). Administrative power beneath the apex is delegated. Those in classes to which no administrative power has been delegated have the administrative component in their personalities suppressed, alienated, denied expression. Those who have usurped the Administrative Function we shall call the Omnipotent Administrators. Struggling among themselves for higher positions in the administrative hierarchy, they repudiate the component of Brute Power in themselves, claim no kinship with it, and project it onto the men in the classes below them.¹

Cleaver specifies something that remained implicit in Baldwin, namely, that the major institutions in American society reflect the desensitized mentality of the Omnipotent Administrators. The values associated with those institutions--efficiency, productivity, rationality--are expressions of the secularized Calvinist mentality that

¹Cleaver, op. cit., pp. 178-79.

needs to purchase its identity on the market. As we have seen, that mentality inclines toward reducing all situations to sets of binary choices in order to traverse them quickly and with the smallest possibility for "error." The high priest of secular Calvinism is the "efficiency expert", who epitomizes the diversion of the desensualized mentality from the spiritual world to the phenomenal.

Baldwin, Cleaver, and the others denounce the aggressive materialism and commercialism of American life that express the white mentality, LeRoi Jones most bitterly: "This is a society which has little use for anything except gain. All is hacked down in its service, whether people, ideas, or ideals...A man who writes or makes beautiful music will be asked to immortalize a soap, or make sounds behind the hero while that blond worthy seduces the virgins of our nation's guilt."² The irony of this materialism, however, is its lack of sensuality, for the white American seeks, through the goods he consumes, not pleasure, but salvation.

"Administrative", "desensualized", and "white" are words that describe the same mentality. It is incompatible with the values of liberal ideology because it imposes identity, and it recognizes only two real identities at that--saved and damned. One's ability to consume indicates the state of one's soul, and consequently the rational

²Jones, op. cit., p. 180.

exploitation of human and natural resources in the interest of maximum efficiency in the creation of material "abundance" becomes an end in itself. Thus sensuality emerges as the critical factor sustaining liberal values, the factor absent from the white mentality. Indeterminacy, which is the ground of self-realization in the liberal utopia, is equivalent to ambiguity, which is comprehended and experienced only within a sensual mentality. Sensuality is the openness or "presentness" to genuine experience without which self-realization becomes merely a slogan. It is a dimension of experience that informs the intellect at the level of human values, the source of rationality in terms of ends. The intellect per se--the administrative mentality--is the source of rationality only in terms of means. The liberal utopia is based on a rationality of ends--ends which each individual ideally chooses and realizes for himself.

Cleaver's description of institutional roles and Baldwin's analysis of the white consciousness constitute the new image of American society which accounts for the Negro's identity conflict with American society. When these writers complete their dissection of the white mentality, they discover the value that they feel epitomizes their true identity--sensuality. One must not think that they merely embrace the white stereotype of the Negro--

the laughing, dancing clown--calling it "good" rather than "bad." They have learned that this figure is actually a parody of the sensuality that white people fear and try to avoid by presenting it to themselves as something ludicrous. They define the black as a sensual man--a truly human man--and the black race as a sensual race, whose unique genius the white is unable to grasp. "There are rockets and super cars. But, again, the loss? What might it have been if my people were turning the switches? I mean, these have been our White Ages, and all learning has suffered."³ Having discovered themselves and what they feel is their unique identity, these black writers taunt whites for their alleged lack of sensuality. The atrophy of this faculty is seen as the source of various features of contemporary American life which are viewed by these writers as barren, banal, anemic, or insidious:

The Beatles can make millions of dollars putting on a sophisticated coon show... but it is still the Chuck Berrys, the Muddy Waters, etc., who first harnessed that energy. The Ornette Colemans. No matter the use such changed and weakened fare might be put to in Winosha, Wisconsin, or by Lynda Bird's fake Watusi, the real power remains where it naturally falls.⁴

Cleaver pokes fun at a "nation of peep freaks who prefer the bikini to the naked body, the white lie to the black truth, Hollywood smiles and canned laughter to a soulful

³Jones, op. cit., p. 240.

⁴Ibid., p. 193.

Bronx cheer."⁵

LeRoi Jones is typically less good natured in the following:

For instance with the idea of art, what is done now, in the present, or with promise of some stronger future is always treated shabbily by the mainstream white society, for one reason because it makes reference to living humanity, which is always threatening to what is "established." The white man worships the artifact; his museums are full of dead things, artifacts, which at best, can only make reference to life. But the stupidity is not in keeping the artifacts, which all societies do, and should do to better understand the various roads that man has come along, it is the worship of these artifacts, these dead things, that is finally evil. The worship of these dead things, in opposition to things which are alive.⁶

Sensuality is the value that lies at the base of black identity and black consciousness. It is the content of the utopia projected by black consciousness. Utopias are "situationally transcendent ideas which when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time." Because the order of things prevailing in American society is an expression of the administrative mentality, the black consciousness would tend to "shatter" it to the extent it succeeded in finding adequate forms of social and political expression

⁵Cleaver, op. cit., p. 84.

⁶Jones, op. cit., p. 232.

CONCLUSION

Black consciousness effectively denies the consensus in American society that Bell postulated. It develops from a conflict of identities which in itself indicates opposing values. The black person experiences his identity as a problem, but it does not appear to him that the white individual does so as long as the Negro fulfills his expectations, which are themselves the source of the Negro's identity problem. Blacks and whites do not concur on the subject of the desirable relationship between blacks and whites. The identity problem which confronts the Negro appears to him inconsistent with the normative values of the prevailing liberal ideology. The white individual, on the other hand, does not seem to perceive any inconsistency between those values and the identity he achieves at the expense of the Negro. This conflict is the basic relationship to or "perspective" on American society which generates a black consciousness that is utopian in the sense that it opposes the existing institutional order. Bell's consensus breaks down even in face-to-face interaction between the Negro and the white.

This face-to-face conflict turns into a perceived conflict with the social order per se as white behavior is perceived as inconsistent with the values of the prevailing

ideology. The black writers we have studied perceive white behavior toward blacks as a consistent system of social action whose goal is the maintenance of the white individual's identity. Their analysis of this behavioral syndrome illustrates Berger and Luckmann's contention that a problematic identity can generate a new "psychology" to explain it. The analysis of this syndrome that they offer indicates that liberal ideology is a mis-representation of the institutional order and their psychology of white behavior thereby constitutes the alternate symbolic universe that Berger and Luckmann expect to develop from a new psychology. Their analysis of the white mentality constitutes a new symbolic universe in the sense that it interprets white behavior and the institutional order according to a different system of value and meaning than the white individual uses to explain it. While the white views his behavior as consistent with liberal ideology, the black sees it as an expression of an altogether different set of values. The black individual and the white conflict in their respective images of the social order as well as in their face-to-face interaction.

The image of American society articulated by the black writers under discussion opposes the image of it presented in liberal ideology. Their analysis of the gap between ideology and actuality reveals the value of sensuality which

appears as both his "real" identity and the content of the utopia which has the potential to shatter the existing institutional order. Bell's consensus would be shattered explicitly at the point when black consciousness articulates itself as a political philosophy. We noted at the beginning of this paper that Bell tended to equate "ideologies" (by which term he apparently means to refer to utopias) exclusively with political philosophies which oppose the social order. Mannheim indicated that utopias, while their ultimate significance is political, refer to more than the political sphere of social life and grow out of areas of experience that are not explicitly political.

Black consciousness seems to have become conscious of itself as a political force (under the name of Black Power) before it articulated itself as a political philosophy. As Mannheim suggested, opposition itself seems to precede articulation. The works of the writers we have dealt with do not address matters of political principle and organization directly. As might be expected, however, they suggest a general perspective on black political action--a context that should inform and direct specific political acts--which they call Black National Consciousness. The only writer who might be excluded here is Baldwin, who has never explicitly supported any form of nationalism. It is possible, however, to exaggerate his distance from the other three

writers. He is not an "integrationist", for he does not believe the "racial problem" in America is susceptible to legislative solution.⁷ Furthermore, Black National Consciousness is less a call to secession from the Union than an attempt to reinforce and consolidate the sense of black identity. It represents a turning inward on the part of black people which is based on their awareness that because they are a minority, integration inevitably means absorption. And this is not an attractive prospect when one has only recently reclaimed a unique and positive identity. This turning inward confirms the sense of being a separate people and serves to harness the new sense of national identity and pride to the tasks of rebuilding black communities and dealing with the white world as a unit. Black consciousness should, in the minds of people like LeRoi Jones, unite black people in such a way that they identify themselves as Blacks rather than Americans. He says: "We do not want a nation, we are a Nation."⁸ The goal of black consciousness is national power. In this context "power" means the ability of the black nation to live outside the world defined by the administrative mentality in order to develop and savor the identity--the unique sensual genius--of black people. The political interpretations of black consciousness that

⁷For an indication of Baldwin's current reorientation toward a nationalist position, see his recent interview in The Los Angeles Free Press, March 27-April 2, 1970.

⁸Jones, op. cit., p. 239.

have appeared to date, such as Carmichael and Hamilton's Black Power, have been concerned with tactics rather than strategy or theory. It should be evident, however, that black consciousness has the potentiality for developing a political philosophy that would justify its opposition to American society in terms of the values of the utopia it projects. In the meantime, one does not need a theoretical statement of the black utopia to detect the opposition to the prevailing order implicit in black consciousness. That opposition is apparent, if not in theory, then in the streets of America today.

These black writers are aware, nevertheless, that the ability of black people to act out their identity, to truly realize it, is intimately bound up with the state of mind of white Americans. Baldwin once wrote that "we (blacks) cannot be free until they are free"⁹ and that this could not come about until white society "reexamines itself and discovers what it really means by freedom."¹⁰ What Americans presently mean by freedom is their ability to carry on various forms of self-aggrandizement and consumption in conformity with the requirements of the administrative mentality. The black writers find that the kind of freedom that will allow both black and white to be free is the ability to practice self-realization, whether or not doing

⁹Baldwin, The Fire Next Time, p. 22.

¹⁰Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, p. 66.

so conforms to the principles of efficiency and technological rationality. These writers find, therefore, that for the black nation to be free, it must play a major role in the sensualization of the white nation. Cleaver feels that the process of sensualizing the white world--that is, subverting the administrative mentality--is gaining momentum due to the very achievements of technological rationality. He finds in this process the true nature of the confrontation between black and white in America today:

In the increasingly mechanized, automated, cybernated environment of the modern world-- a cold, bodiless world of wheels, smooth plastic surfaces, tubes, pushbuttons, transistors, computers, jet propulsion, rockets to the moon, atomic energy--man's need for affirmation of his biology has become that much more intense. He feels need for a clear definition of where his body ends and the machine begins, where man ends and the extensions of man begin...This is the central contradiction of the twentieth century; and it is against this backdrop that America's attempt to unite its Mind with its Body, to save its soul, is taking place.¹¹

This impulse confirms what Mannheim suspected, that utopian mentalities can project the fulfillment of the values of ideology. The continuity of ideology and utopia is illustrated in these black writers' recognition that the integrity of the black person's identity depends on the white individual's ability to come to terms with his own. While utopian mentalities shatter consensus, they attempt, in order to realize their own goals, to reconstitute consensus on a new ground.

¹¹Cleaver, op. cit., pp. 202-03.

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