

Journal of Negro Education

Race Relations

Author(s): Oliver C. Cox

Source: *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Spring, 1943), pp. 144-153

Published by: Journal of Negro Education

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2292965>

Accessed: 16-01-2019 03:34 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Journal of Negro Education is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Negro Education*

Race Relations

OLIVER C. COX

At a time when the majority of American sociologists who are writing on this subject have come to the conclusion that race relations in the United States are caste relations, it may be well to re-examine the phenomena of race relations. The modern caste school of race relations is a counterpart of the race school of caste relations, which maintains that caste relations are fundamentally race relations. We do not propose in this article to test the caste hypothesis of race relations, but rather to present a different statement of the subject; our mention of caste, then, will be only incidental.¹

If we think of an ethnic as any people culturally or racially differentiated from another people or peoples living in one area of economic competition, the concept of race relations may be more clearly defined. Both cultural and racial ethnics are power groups; hence, the prestige of any is based upon implicit or actual force. The kind of prestige which exists between ethnics must be clearly distinguished from status ranking within any ethnic. The internal status relationship is peaceful and cooperative; the inter-ethnic relationship always turns, at least implicitly, upon a threat of trial of strength.

The term "race" has come in for a goodly share of criticism on the ground

that it is too indefinite a concept. The biologist and physical anthropologist might indeed have considerable difficulty with this, but for the sociologist a race may be thought of as any group of people within some competitive area that is generally believed to be a race. In other words, a white man in Cuba who is called a Negro when he comes to the United States, is white in Cuba and black in the United States.

Furthermore, by race relations we do not necessarily mean all social contacts between persons of different races, but only those contacts the social characteristics of which are determined by a consciousness of racial difference. The feeling aspect of race relations is one kind of prejudice. Caste prejudice, for instance, is culture prejudice; it serves as a basis for the regulation of the behavior of persons in one society. Race prejudice, on the other hand, is color-and-physique prejudice; it serves as a basis for socially differentiating peoples in the aggregate. So far as we know, race prejudice is a white man's invention. It was initiated in the period of discovery, when Europeans commenced long-range mass-contacts with other peoples. There has been fear for the strange, or cultural antagonism among most peoples; but no organized people of color has ever barred white men from social intercourse on the grounds of race prejudice. Of course, reactionary racial attitudes have been common.

Our hypothesis is, then, that to achieve a simple understanding of race

¹ Elsewhere the present writer has considered critically the theories of the caste school of race relations. See *Social Forces*, 21:218-26, D 1942.

relations it is necessary to observe the interracial situation from the point of view of the initiating factor, that is to say, the white race in the relationship. In the contact of color groups whites have set the stage for the pattern which the phenomenon will assume. This pattern changes according to their needs and aspirations, while the colored groups attempt to meet the aggressor on whatever seems to them the most favorable grounds. The methods employed by whites have been consistent with the way of life developed in the capitalistic economy of the city dwellers of Europe. We shall not, however, consider this specifically.

What the policy of whites will be in an interracial situation, then, will depend upon the character of the color situation. Let us now examine some *modern* situations of free relationship between whites and persons of color.

1. Situations in which the colored person is a stranger in a white society, such as a Hindu in the United States or a Negro in many parts of Canada.

2. Situations of original white contact where the culture of the colored group is very simple, such as the Conquistadors and Indians in the West Indies and the Dutch and Hottentots in South Africa.

3. Situations in which a small minority of whites in a colored society is bent upon maintaining a ruling-class status, such as the British in the West Indies or the Dutch in the East Indies.

4. Situations in which there are large proportions of both colored and white persons seeking to live in the same area, with whites insisting that

the society is a "white man's country," as in the United States and South Africa.

5. Situations in which colored and white amalgamation is far advanced, and in which a white ruling class is not established, as in Brazil.

6. Situations in which a minority of whites have been subdued by a dominantly colored population, as that which occurred in Haiti during the turn of the eighteenth century.

A little more detail should help to elucidate these situations. The section numbers which follow refer to the preceding analysis.²

(1) In cases where colored persons in the total population are so few that they cannot be expected to compete with whites there is usually little racial antagonism against them—until, perhaps, they attempt to enter the higher rungs of society where participants are fewer and competition keener. In certain parts of Canada, for example, Negroes have relatively wide social opportunities, and Negro-white intermarriage goes on with a freedom that is unknown in the United States (or at least it did some years ago). Although in the United States Hindus suffer far greater legal disabilities than Negroes, no Hindu will willingly exchange his status for that of a Negro. He falls within a general Asiatic ban which is a sort of official prophylaxis against his coming into the country in numbers large enough to make him a significant competitor; but socially he

² There may be other situations of interracial contact; however, a permutation of those presented here may result not only in situations which do not exist but also in some totally fanciful ones.

is a stranger. There have been cases of West Indian Hindus in the United States who had long since given up the turban and the sari; as they came to understand the nature of Negro-white relationship, however, they returned to the Oriental dress. As Hindus they are conceded certain privileges and opportunities which are denied Negroes of much lighter complexion. But, not so in Natal. In the United States the Hindu is still a romantic figure, but in South Africa he is a "damn coolie." Yet fewness in number is not necessarily the prime factor in the situation. If the individual goes into a community where a negative attitude has been indirectly nurtured, he will not then really be a stranger. He will be singled out for differential treatment on the basis of prepared racial sentiments. An individual Negro is not a stranger in all-white communities of the South. Moreover, developed attitudes may be transferred to new communities.

If a man with African ancestry known as a Porto Rican goes to a certain barber shop in Honolulu—one that seeks to attract tourist patronage—he can get his hair cut. But if a man with African blood is identified as a Negro of mainland origin, he, when he seeks the service of this shop, is told that he has come to the wrong place.³

(2) This situation is not so much a type as a stage in the process of race contacts. It may precede others which we are considering. When the native colored groups have a very simple culture, they are almost completely at the disposal and mercy of the whites. They are subordinated and awed by

³Romanzo Adams, *Interracial Marriage in Hawaii*, New York: Macmillan Co., 1937, p. 24.

the latter's sophistication and calculations. In some cases the preliterates are looked upon practically as game to be exploited and dispossessed at will. Civilized ethics are abandoned; and the law of the frontier is justice. The tendency is to consider native women, booty; hence miscegenation is common but intermarriage rare. Indeed, there is ordinarily such great disparity between the cultures that the common understanding necessary for intermarriage is seldom attained.

If there is great exploitative zeal among the whites, and the native population is comparatively small, it may be exterminated, as was the case of the Indians in the West Indies and the Tasmanians of Australasia; or, in case there is a sufficient hinterland, it may be pushed back as were the Indians of the United States and the Negroes of East Africa.⁴ Here they may be

⁴The authority and decision with which native peoples may be dispatched are indicated by Warren Thompson: "In Kenya there are highland areas in which the white man can live in reasonable comfort even though they are under the equator. This was called by the British a 'white man's country,' and it was desired to reserve it for future white settlement. In order so to reserve considerable parts of it, it was necessary to clear out some of the native tribes, and this was done with what looks to the outsider like complete indifference to their right and with much unnecessary suffering. It so happened that one of the people whose lands were coveted was a particularly friendly group of Negroes which had been of great assistance to the British in actually bringing the country under their control. They thus merited special consideration at the hands of their masters, but instead of receiving it, they were compelled to leave their native lands for much poorer lands in a less favorable situation. Moreover, the migration was not well planned and resulted in great hardship both in direct suffering on the road and through the loss of a very considerable part of their cattle, on which they depended for a living. . . .

"When this land became available, the

able to endure the pains of acculturation more easily. In time, however, they become more or less adapted to western culture, in the process of which race problems develop and multiply.

(3) Where whites are mainly sojourning rulers their numbers are usually relatively small. Ordinarily "home" is in Europe or America, and they do not set their roots in the area. Here there is little hope of developing a significant white population; therefore a premium is put upon degrees of whiteness among the people of color. The ruling class adopts a policy of "co-operation," and favors are distributed to the mixed-bloods on the basis of their apparent degree of admixture. Thus, other things being equal, the lighter the complexion the greater the economic and social opportunities. In this situation, then, there are significant color distinctions among the colored people. Usually a color scheme is established, with generally recognized names for the different shades and color problems of a more or less crucial nature are developed.

The system tends to generate among even those of light complexion a painfully morbid bitterness against fate;

a diffused attitude of hatred and despair, the basis of which appears to be without social definition.⁵ They tend to become perennially preoccupied with the problem of degrees of pigmentation, and lament the luck of their dusky progenitors. Brothers of different color may become estranged; and dark parents keep out of the way of their lighter children. Indeed, children may implicitly disavow their darker parent, while lighter persons who have been awarded in social status for their lightness may become rigid and even fierce at any attempt of darker persons to recognize them familiarly. They tend to group themselves and to clique darker aspirants into oblivion; true friendship between lighter and darker young people is scarcely possible, for even school boys estimate the color of their pals.

In business and official positions darker colors are particularly penalized. These may go farthest in occupations such as the professions which call for unusual talent. In this situation, therefore, colored people cannot be asked to recognize all white persons as superior to themselves; yet the color obsession has its being in that very fact. Coveted goals are made to appear available to all men alike, and the oc-

British found that they needed laborers to develop it. For a 'white man's land' in east Africa does not mean land in which the white man expects to do his own work as a settler in Canada or Australia would, but a climate in which he can live in moderate comfort and ease, provided he can get cheap labor to do the actual field work. It being necessary to have labor now that the land was available, it was decided that the natives should work for the white man whether they cared to do so or not. It would be for their good to be kept busy, and would prevent their getting into mischief and having so much time to 'plot against the whites.'" *op. cit.*, pp. 165-166.

⁵ Many students of race relations have resorted to a biological interpretation of this attitude, and with rather sterile results. The conclusion of Olive Schreiner is at hand. "I could bite my own arm," a coloured girl once said in our presence, 'when I see how black it is. My father was a white man!' The half-caste alone of all created things is at war within his own individuality. The white man loves the white man incarnate in him, and the black man loves the black."—*Thoughts on South Africa*, London, 1896 and 1923. Quoted with approval by Everett V. Stonequist, *The Marginal Man*, New York, 1937, p. 21.

casional attainment of high position by a darker colored person is all the more tantalizing. The color question is seldom if ever discussed in the press or on the platform, yet it has extensive currency in esoteric discussion. Among the colored people there may be pride in lightness of color, but pride of race is a meaningless imponderability.

Ordinarily the basis of the system is only vaguely recognized. In an ideal situation the position of the white ruling class is impregnable. Its members are envied, admired, and imitated religiously, but they are never questioned. The rest of the population is too absorbed with the immediate business of achieving increments of whiteness or its equivalent to give much attention to the inciting social force in the system. The system tends to be self-regulating. The colored people as a whole do not look upon whites as a people particularly prone to race prejudice, but rather each aspiring color stratum is preoccupied with the problem of holding its own and of whittling away the distance attitudes from the stratum above. Therefore, to any given color group the persons who are most exasperatingly color prejudiced are not necessarily white people but rather the cold-shouldering, snubbing color group immediately above.

The ambitious individual who has been rebuffed is particularly disconsolate, for he must usually bear his ill fortune alone. He cannot appeal to color groups below him, since to do so might induce familiarity; neither could he allow the latter groups to observe his misfortune, for they might take the situation as an opportunity for gloating. He cannot disclose the whole

truth even among his own group without revealing that he had planned to steal a march on them. He is left finally to reconstruct his self-respect and to devise new methods of approach. To many the struggle is exceedingly exhausting, for ground gained is seldom secure. The goal is apparently attained when the mixed-blood has become so light in complexion that he is generally accepted as a *native white*.

The white ruling class seldom contests the claim of such a person. It merely assigns him a different and more insidious social task, that of the social climber. The latter is usually sufficient to maintain the desired distance; for the social life of the white upper class is carefully organized on a "private club" basis, and it is a past master of the blackball. The native whites are the real bulwark of the *status quo*. To the colored people of darker shades, they are serious, sensitive, and meticulous in their demands that the full etiquette of class distinction be observed; while the European whites, free from any suspicion, are able to relax in the easy assurance that deference comes to them *naturally*.

In this situation there is never a lynching; interracial conflicts are practically unknown and, though they are in the majority, colored men are never stigmatized with a propensity to, say, rape white women. Colored men may marry white women with impunity; and laws are never openly biased in favor of whites. When the colored population consists of many colored races, the situation becomes particularly favorable for amalgamation. The small white ruling class already lim-

ited in its power to segregate, now finds it practically impossible to identify any one group for racial discrimination. "Equality among all peoples" tends to become the social philosophy. Instances of this are found in the island of Trinidad and in Hawaii especially.

(4) Where whites are in numbers large enough to fill all preferred occupations or where there is possible competition with a large colored population along the whole cultural hierarchy, definite racial attitudes are developed. Here the tendency is to dichotomize the society into color groups, for any system of increasing acceptability according to degrees of lightness of color will quickly threaten white dominance. We do not have, in this case, merely a white ruling class, but a white population; therefore anything short of dichotomy will leave masses of white persons subordinated to numbers of enterprising colored persons, a situation extremely favorable for rapid amalgamation and consequent depreciation of color *per se* as a social value.

Unlike situation (3), intermarriage cannot be condoned. The social definition of the dominant place of husbands in the family tends to put the white wife of a man of color in a situation embarrassing to the whites. She is the embodiment of their pretensions; hence their sympathies must follow her in her yielding and subordination to the "inferior" colored man. In a most realistic way this tends to abrogate the claims of all whites to dominance. Indeed, in the United States even Negro women are not fundamentally displeased over the

marriage of Negro men and white women.

In situation (3) there are colored "ladies" in the upper social classes; but in the present situation the whites ordinarily define all colored women as "negresses" or "nigger women." This is necessary because, should it appear that colored womanhood possesses some remarkable degree of refinement and elegance, it would be inconsistent to characterize all white men who marry colored women as depraved. There must be some tacit, if not expressed, suggestion, that all colored women are prostitutes, polluted, and carnal, so that only the most disreputable white men may reach moral depths sufficiently low to marry them. In this situation, then, it is ordinarily second nature for whites to say that "only low-class white men have anything to do with colored women." This attitude—legal restrictions aside—has made most colored women in the South, for instance, particularly opposed to the idea of marrying white men. Indeed, other things being equal, even Negro men who look white are no ideal of colored women. The latter abhor the suggestion that they are concubines.

But this technique of racial characterization is not so effective in the case of Negro men. Ordinarily, a man's character is not nearly so delicate as that of a woman. Once it has been established that all Negro women are wenches, the white man who marries one automatically identifies himself as degenerate. In the case of the Negro-man-white-woman marriage, however, the principal attack is shifted, not to all white women but to those particu-

lar white women who marry Negroes. These are women with ungovernable sexual passions, who may find satisfaction only in the assumed animal appetites of Negro men. A "white lady" with refined sensibilities will never marry a Negro man; and, of course, the white policy makers must inevitably insist that all white women are white ladies. But this defense does not cause Negro men to recoil from the relationship as Negro women tend to do. The accusation of animal virility is not necessarily a derogatory one; furthermore, the man brings his white spouse among Negroes, where the white stereotypes are largely impotent. It is to Negro society that he looks for approbation; and the character of his wife tends to be measured by his own social stature.

Therefore those white persons who conceive of themselves as being charged with the maintenance of continued white dominance, will contrive segregation barriers and rationalizations to secure a bipartite racial system.⁶ Here the term "social equality" is taboo; interracial laws are always partial; and cultural merit among people of color is given minimal recognition.

In this situation lightness of color within the colored group is not nearly so highly prized as in the preceding illustration. In fact it appears that a certain shade of brownness,⁷ rather

⁶This situation is frequently misunderstood. Many students observing the more spectacular instances of race conflict among the commonality of whites and blacks conclude forthwith that here lies the basis of racial antagonism. Thus, for example, André Siegfried writes: "In the wealthy families some of the old-time sentimentality still survives from the slave days, but the 'poor

than increasing whiteness, may become an ideal. Here the lighter person is hardly rewarded with wider opportunities; and the possession of a darker complexion is not nearly so unfortunate an attribute.

Furthermore, the tendency of whites is to be less discriminating about color values within the colored group, a fact which naturally tends to make degrees of color a social factor of less moment to colored people themselves. The social distance between shades of color is narrowed. Some colored people, especially those who are definitely dark, may even welcome the definition of the whites: "If you are not white, you are black." However, the vulgarity that all Negroes or all Hindus look alike may be particularly poignant to an accomplished light-complexioned person. None the less, colored persons who try, in a way that would be acceptable in the preceding situation, to capitalize their light color are, in this situation, marked men within their race.

Thus we may conclude that the

whites' see in the Negro nothing but a brutal competitor who is trying to rob him of his job. His hatred is unrelenting, merciless, and mingled with fear. To understand the South, we must realize that the lower we descend in the social scale, the more violent the hatred of the negro."—*America Comes of Age*, New York, 1937, p. 97. See also Edwin R. Embree, *Brown America*, New York, 1931, p. 201.

In fact, however, poor whites are merely the obedient rank and file; they are officered from above by those influential whites who really have something to lose from the advancement of Negroes. Senators, university regents, judges, chambers of commerce, lawyers, publishers, and distinguished members of old families are the real policy makers. On this point see: W. H. Skaggs, *The Southern Oligarchy*, New York, 1924.

⁷See Charles S. Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt*, Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1941.

greater the insistence of the dominant whites upon a bipartite system of social segregation of the races, the less the social advantage of lightness of color within the colored group. Because marriage is ordinarily more important in the life of women than in that of men, and because the tendency of colored men to marry lighter is scarcely abated in this situation, we should expect the foregoing principle to be truer for colored men than for colored women. Incidentally, it may be mentioned also that the greater the insistence upon, and accomplishment of, a bipartite racial system, the greater the relative cultural advantage of being white.

When there is more than one significant colored group in the population, it becomes the interest of the whites to prevent their coalescence. In the United States, for example, laws are enacted prohibiting intermarriage between Negroes and Indians or Negroes and Malays and so on, while in South Africa the Negro-East Indian mixed-blood is particularly detested. Dominance can always be more easily maintained by keeping these people apart; the dissemination of ingenious pure-blood myths facilitates this purpose. Whereas in our third situation the white-colored mixed-bloods are generally welcomed as a racial liaison group, in the present one they are usually branded inferior mongrels.

Although both the United States and South Africa are "white men's countries," they differ somewhat in the potentialities of their racial dichotomy. In the United States the great majority of the population is white, in South Africa it is black.

There is comparatively little fear in the United States that Negroes will use force in asserting themselves. Hence segregation and discrimination practices may be adopted with a high degree of finality. In South Africa, however, the whites are concerned about the mixed-bloods. In a sense the latter occupy a position similar to that of the *gens de couleur* in pre-revolution Santo Domingo; and the whites are not unaware of the possibility that they may assume a similar rôle in a racial crisis. They are allowed only so much social privilege as will keep them apart from the natives, yet not enough to close the social breach between them and the whites.

(5) Where there is no white ruling class answerable to a foreign white power, and where amalgamation between the white and black populations is far advanced, it becomes practically impossible to make lightness of complexion a definite mark of status. The color scheme is confused, and attempts to arrange it become a delicate and socially distasteful issue. Even though a preponderance of dark colored people are in the lower economic strata, the population is necessarily marbled with color. Therefore the group cannot attain a white "universe of discourse" and consensus sufficiently strong to achieve clear-cut white dominance. In the interest of social peace, therefore, an official policy of non-interference with color relationships must be followed. Inter-marriage becomes a matter of personal tastes and there is no organized sentiment for or against it. Individual cultural achievements tend to be estimated on their merits. Unless some powerful foreign

white economic clique, like American tourists and businessmen in Brazil, initiate opposite racial tendencies, such a population is well on its way to complete amalgamation.

It is interesting to inquire into the reasons for these highly amalgamated populations. Europeans of Mediterranean stock settled Latin America and they have mixed comparatively readily with the colored peoples. The Anglo-Saxons have also mixed their blood in the North. But there are no intermarriage prohibition laws in Latin America. We have suggested that in race relations the desires of the whites are controlling, and that these will manifest themselves differently in different situations. These desires are affected, however, by still other factors. Among these are the nationalistic and imperialistic social attitudes of the European nation from which the whites come. Nationalism gives the individual his group conception of himself. The greater the nationalism, the more inflated will be the individual's conception of himself, and the greater the unwillingness to intermarry with other peoples. Nationalism emphasizes to the individual the vital necessity for retaining and enhancing group identity. It may even result in the feeling that he is an altogether superior being. While the sex urge may overcome nationalistic sentiments, the latter may be strong enough to retard intermarriage significantly. Among Japanese, a people of color, intense nationalism and exploitative zeal have evidently limited the possibility of their amalgamating with their conquered peoples. Nationalism has been most thoroughly developed among the British, who have

been fairly consistent in maintaining their identity among peoples of color. One has simply to glance at the teachings of modern Germany and Italy to perceive the relationship between nationalism and its effect upon race relations.

(6) In reaction to white dominance, a large colored population may possibly become restless and revolt against the system. Usually, for a short period of time, whiteness becomes exceedingly depreciated, and black men may assume the prestige of former white rulers. There is such a budding reaction in India today; the Mutiny of 1857 almost succeeded in turning the color scheme. "In Haiti discrimination runs against the white man rather than against the Negro. A public career for a person of purely Caucasian origin would be rarely if ever possible."⁸

Such a country, however, cannot be isolated from the rest of the world; hence, in spite of possible local desires, its world policies must be couched in terms of world opinion, and with this goes an ever present insistence upon white superiority.⁹ In fact all the local

⁸ Chester Lloyd Jones, *Caribbean Backgrounds and Prospects*, New York: Prentice Hall, 1931, p. 28.

⁹ Jacques Barzun expresses this idea: "Equally important, though generally overlooked, is the fact that articulate minorities in other countries than Germany are fully as much engaged in thinking and talking about race. The only difference is that no other government has yet done so far as the Nazi régime in adopting race as a popular slogan. . . . But read attentively the press and political literature, not only of England, France, Italy, and the United States, but also Mexico, Turkey, Rumania, and Scandinavia: You will not read very far before you are told or left to infer that whites are unquestionably superior to the colored races: that the Asiatic Peril is a

variants of race relations are more or less conditioned by this international belief. The idea of white superiority hangs over the world like a great mist; and former attempts to lift it have resulted only in its condensation over the intractable area.

We have presented here some typical patterns of race relations; some of their features, however, may vary from case to case. Cuba and the Dominican Republic are countries with highly mixed populations; they should be like Brazil in racial adjustment, but they are smaller and too dependent upon the United States and Great Britain. Thus they are more like those countries where there is a small white ruling class. A number of

race-peril; that the Japanese of late seems to have become very yellow indeed . . . that the great American problem is to keep the Anglo-Saxon race pure from the contamination of Negro (or southern European, or Jewish) 'blood.' The quarrel about race and blood is often carried even closer home, as when we are informed that among the whites the tall blond Nordics are a superior breed, destined to rule the world, and that brown-eyed, round-headed Latins, whether in Europe or in South America, are a degenerate, revolutionary lot. . . ."—*Race. A Study of Modern Superstition*, New York, 1937, pp. 3-25. Quoted by A. Locke and B. J. Stern, *When Peoples Meet*, New York, 1942, pp. 428-429.

favorable circumstances have contributed to Hawaii's celebrated racial structure. It is, however, true to type. "Sometimes the darker part-Hawaiians feel that their lighter complexioned cousins are trying to avoid recognizing them. Commonly part-Hawaiians prefer to marry lighter part-Hawaiians, other things being equal; and a mother is congratulated when her child is especially light colored. With the part-Hawaiians of the last fifty years, the superior social and economic status has seemed to be pretty definitely associated with lightness of complexion."¹⁰ Haiti ought to be free from "color consciousness"; if it were, however, it would be further atrophied in isolation. There are also such groups as the Eurasians of India and China who would seem to be classified with the color groups in situation (3). But the Indian Eurasians are hemmed in between race prejudice and caste prejudice; thus they are isolated. On the other hand, the Chinese Eurasians are hedged about by race prejudice and nationalism; they also face isolation.

¹⁰ Romanzo Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 67. See also p. 104.