

BLACK PARTICULARITY RECONSIDERED

by Adolph L. Reed Jr.

Over forty years ago Benjamin pointed out that “mass reproduction is aided especially by the reproduction of masses.”¹ This statement captures the central cultural dynamic of a “late” capitalism. The triumph of the commodity form over every sphere of social existence has been made possible by a profound homogenization of work, play, aspirations and self-definition among subject populations — a condition Marcuse has characterized as one-dimensionality.² Ironically, while U.S. radicals in the late 1960s fantasized about a “new man” in the abstract, capital was in the process of concretely putting the finishing touches on *its new individual*. Beneath the current black-female-student-chicano-homosexual-old-young-handicapped, etc., etc., *ad nauseum*, “struggles” lies a simple truth: there is no coherent opposition to the present administrative apparatus.

Certainly, repression contributed significantly to the extermination of opposition and there is a long record of systematic corporate and state terror, from the Palmer Raids to the FBI campaign against the Black Panthers. Likewise, cooptation of individuals and programs has blunted opposition to bourgeois hegemony throughout this century, and cooptative mechanisms have become inextricable parts of strategies of containment. However, repression and cooptation can never fully explain the failure of opposition, and an exclusive focus on such external factors diverts attention from possible sources of failure within the opposition, thus paving the way for the reproduction of the pattern of failure. The opposition must investigate its own complicity.

During the 1960s theoretical reflexiveness was difficult because of the intensity of activism. When sharply drawn political issues demanded unambiguous responses, reflection on unintended consequences seemed treasonous. A decade later, coming to terms with what happened during that period is blocked by nostalgic glorification of fallen heroes and by a surrender which Gross describes as the “ironic frame-of-mind”.³ Irony and nostalgia are two sides of the coin of resignation, the product of a cynical inwardness that makes retrospective critique seem tiresome or uncomfortable.⁴

1. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations* (New York, 1968), p. 251.

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

3. David Gross, “Irony and the ‘Disorders of the Soul,’” *Telos* (Winter, 1977-78), p. 167.

4. Possible sources of the left’s failure to interpret its past meaningfully are discussed also by Christopher Lasch, “The Narcissist Society,” *New York Review of Books XXIII* (September 30, 1976), p. 5 ff; Russell Jacoby, “The Politics of Objectivity: Notes on the U.S. Left,” *Telos*

At any rate, things have not moved in an emancipatory direction despite all claims that the protest of the 1960s has extended equalitarian democracy. In general, opportunities to determine one's destiny are no greater now than before and, more importantly, the critique of life-as-it-is disappeared as a practical activity; i.e., an ethical and political commitment to emancipation seems no longer legitimate, reasonable or valid. The amnesic principle, which imprisons the social past, also subverts any hope, which ends up seeking refuge in the predominant forms of alienation.

This is also true in the black community. Black opposition has dissolved into celebration and wish fulfillment. Today's political criticism within the black community — both Marxist-Leninist and nationalist — lacks a base and is unlikely to attract substantial constituencies. This complete collapse of political opposition among blacks, however, is anomalous. From the 1956 Montgomery bus boycott to the 1972 African Liberation Day demonstration, there was almost constant political motion among blacks. Since the early 1970s there has been a thorough pacification; or these antagonisms have been so depoliticized that they can surface only in alienated forms. Moreover, few attempts have been made to explain the atrophy of opposition within the black community.⁵ Theoretical reflexivity is as rare behind Dubois' veil as on the other side!

This critical failing is especially regrettable because black radical protests and the system's adjustments to them have served as catalysts in universalizing one-dimensionality *and* in moving into a new era of monopoly capitalism. In this new era, which Piccone has called the age of "artificial negativity," traditional forms of opposition have been made obsolete by a new pattern of social management.⁶ Now, the social order legitimates itself by integrating potentially antagonistic forces into a logic of centralized administration. Once integrated, these forces regulate domination and prevent disruptive excess. Furthermore, when these internal regulatory mechanisms do not exist, the system must create them. To the extent that the black community has been pivotal in this new mode of administered domination, reconstruction of the trajectory of the 1960s' black activism can throw light on the current situation and the paradoxes it generates.

A common interpretation of the demise of black militance suggests that the

(Winter 1977-78), pp. 74-88 and *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Conformist Psychology From Adler to Laing* (Boston, 1975), pp. 101-118; and by Andrew Feenberg, "Paths to Failure: The Dialectics of Organization and Ideology in the New Left" and David Gross, "Cultural Life-Style and Cultural Criticism," both forthcoming, along with other papers from the Symposium on Race, Politics and Culture held at Howard University, Washington, D.C., October, 1977.

5. The work of Alex Willingham is the most consistent and noteworthy exception. See the following: "Ideology and Politics: Their Status in Afro-American Social Theory," *Endarch I* (Spring, 1975), pp. 4-25; "California Dreaming: Eldridge Cleaver's Epithet to the Activism of the Sixties," *Endarch I* (Winter, 1976), pp. 1-23.

6. Paul Piccone, "Beyond Critical Theory," mimeo, and "The Crisis of One-Dimensionality," *Telos* (Spring, 1978), pp. 43-54. See also Tim Luke, "Culture and Politics in the Age of Artificial Negativity," *ibid.*, pp. 55-72.

waning of radical political activity is a result of the satisfaction of black aspirations. This satisfaction allegedly consists in: (1) extension of the social welfare apparatus; (2) elimination of legally sanctioned racial barriers to social mobility, which in turn has allowed for (3) expansion of possibilities open to blacks *within* the existing social system; all of which have precipitated (4) a redefinition of "appropriate" black political strategy in line with these achievements.⁷ This new strategy is grounded in a pluralist orientation that construes political issues solely in terms of competition for the redistribution of goods and services within the bounds of fixed system priorities. These four items constitute the "gains of the 1960s".⁸ Intrinsic to this interpretation is the thesis that black political activity during the 1960s became radical because blacks had been excluded from society and politics and were therefore unable to effectively to solve group problems through the "normal" political process. Extraordinary actions were thus required to pave the way for regular participation.

This interpretation is not entirely untenable. With passage of the 1964 and 1965 legislation the program of the Civil Rights movement appeared to have been fulfilled. Soon, however, it became clear that the ideals of freedom and dignity had not been realized, and within a year, those ideals reasserted themselves in the demand for black power. A social program was elaborated, but again its underpinning ideals were not realized. The dilemma lay in translating abstract deals into concrete political goals, and it is here also that the "gains of the sixties" interpretation founders. It collapses ideals and appropriateness of the programs in question.

To be sure, racial segregation has been eliminated in the South, thus removing a tremendous oppression from black life. Yet, the dismantlement of the system of racial segregation only removed a fetter blocking the *possibility* of emancipation. In this context, computation of the "gains of the sixties" can begin only at the point where that extraordinary subjugation was eliminated. What, then, are those "gains" which followed the passage of civil rights legislation and how have they affected black life?

In 1967 black unemployment was over seven percent; for the first five months of 1978, it averaged over twelve percent.⁹ Between 1969 and 1974 the proportion of the black population classified as "low income" has remained virtually the same.¹⁰ Black median income did not improve significantly in

7. See, for example: Thomas R. Brooks, *Walls come tumbling down: A History of the Civil Rights Movement, 1940-1970* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1974), pp. 290ff; Eddie N. Williams, *From Protest to Politics: The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Washington, D. C.).

8. This slogan has risen to prominence on the back of the black elite's voluble reaction to the Bakke case, which is said to portend reversal of those alleged "gains." One interpretation of these gains is found in Richard Freeman, "Black Economic Progress since 1964," *Public Interest* (Summer, 1978), pp. 52-68.

9. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings XXV* (1978); the National Commission for Manpower Policy, Special Report 9, *The Economic Position of Black Americans: 1976* (Washington, D.C., 1976), provides confirming trend data.

10. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *The Social and Economic Status of the Black Population in the United States: 1974* (Washington, D.C., 1975), p. 42.

relation to white family income in the decade after passage of civil rights legislation,¹¹ and between 1970 and 1974 black purchasing power actually declined.¹² Moreover, blacks are still far more likely to live in inadequate housing than whites, and black male life expectancy has declined, both absolutely and relative to whites, since 1959-61.¹³

Thus, the material conditions of the black population as a whole have not improved appreciably. Therefore, if the disappearance of black opposition is linked directly with the satisfaction of aspirations, the criteria of fulfillment cannot be drawn from the general level of material existence in the black community. The same can be said for categories such as "access to political decision-making." Although the number of blacks elected or appointed to public office has risen by leaps and bounds since the middle 1960s, that increase has not demonstrably improved life in the black community.

The problem is one of focus. The "gains of the sixties" thesis seems to hold only as long as the "black community" is seen as a monolithic social aggregation. Although black life *as a whole* has not improved considerably beyond the elimination of racial segregation, in the 1970s certain strata within the black community have actually benefited. This development is a direct outcome of the 1960s activism: of the interplay of the "movement" and the integrative logic of administrative capitalism. And this "gains of the sixties" interpretation cannot spell out what "satisfaction" is because it is itself the ideology of precisely those strata which have benefited from the events of the 1960s within the black community. These "leadership" strata tend to generalize their own interests since they see their legitimacy and integrity tied to a monolithic conceptualization of black life. Indeed, this conceptualization appeared in the unitarian mythology of late 1960s black nationalism. The representation of the black community as a collective subject neatly concealed the system of hierarchy which mediated the relation of the "leaders" and the "led".¹⁴

To analyze the genesis of this new elite is to analyze simultaneously the development of domination in American society in general. Consequently, the following will focus on sources of the pacification of the 1970s and will expose the limitations of any oppositionist activity which proceeds uncritically from models of mass-organization politics. This approach tends to capitulate to the predominant logic of domination.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

12. Barbara Jones, "Black Family Income: Patterns, Sources and Trends," unpublished paper presented at the annual meetings of the National Economic Association, American Economic Association, Atlantic City, New Jersey, September, 1976, p. 2.

13. Bureau of the Census, *Social and Economic Status*, pp. 123 and 137.

14. That the leadership elite projects its interests over the entire black population is neither unique or necessarily suggestive of insidious motives; however, it is just in the extent to which the elite's hegemony develops unconsciously that it is most important as a problem for emancipatory action. Cf. Gouldner's critique of intellectuals and intelligentsia; Alvin W. Gouldner, "Prologue to a Theory of Revolutionary Intellectuals," *Telos* (Winter, 1975-76), pp. 3-36 and *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology: The Origins, Grammar and Future of Ideology* (New York, 1976), pp. 247-248 and *passim*.

Black resistance to oppression hardly began in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. Yet, it was only then that opposition to racial subjugation assumed the form of a mass movement. Why was this so? Despite many allusions to the impact of "decolonization" in Africa, international experiences of blacks in World War II, and so on, the reasons why black activism exploded in the late 1950s have seldom been addressed systematically.¹⁵ Although resistance before 1955 was undoubtedly reinforced by the anti-colonial movements abroad, what was significant for post-1955 growth of Civil Rights activity were those forces reshaping the entire American social order. An historically thorough perspective on the development of black opposition requires an understanding of the Cold War era in which it took shape.

Although popularly symbolized by "brinkmanship," "domino theory," fallout shelters and the atmosphere of terror characterized by McCarthy, HUAC and legions of meticulously anti-communist liberals, the Cold War was a much broader cultural phenomenon. Ultimately, it was a period of consolidation of the new mode of domination which had been developing for over two decades. Piccone has noted that the Cold War era was the culmination of a dynamic of political and cultural adjustment over the American economy by the 1920s.¹⁶ On the political front, the New Deal re-defined the role of the state apparatus in terms of an aggressive, countercyclical intervention in the economy and everyday reality. At the same time, mass production required intensification of consumption. This requirement was met by the development and expansion of a consciously manipulative culture industry and by the proliferation of an ideology of consumerism through mass communications and entertainment media.¹⁷

15. John Hope Franklin does not raise the question in his standard volume, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, third edition (New York, 1969); nor surprisingly does Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: From Its Origins to the Present* (New York, 1967) which is a seminal contribution to a reflexive theory of black political activity. That Cruse and Franklin fail to raise the question is perhaps because both — reflecting an aspect of the conventional wisdom — see an unbroken, if not cumulating, legacy of black activism in the twentieth century. Franklin sees the civil rights movement simply as the culmination of a century or more of protest. Cruse, in establishing the continuities of the poles of integrationism and nationalism, projects them back and forth from Douglass and Delaney to Black Power, glossing over significant historical differences in the process. In *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (New York, 1972), James Forman is so consumed by the movement's manifest and organizational unfoldings that he is unable to subordinate it to history. His account of the 1950s focuses entirely on his personal awakening. Louis Lomax, *The Negro Revolt*, revised edition (New York, 1971); Lewis Killian, *The Impossible Revolution? Black Power and the American Dream* (New York, 1968); and the two period volumes by Lerone Bennett Jr., *The Negro Mood* (New York, 1964) and *Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America, 1619-1964*, revised edition (Baltimore, 1969), all raise the question only to answer casually or to beg the question further. An all too common shortcoming, exemplified by each of the writers cited and extending throughout the study of black political activity, is a tendency to abstract black life from the currents of American history. The resulting scenarios of black existence suffer from superficiality.

16. "Crisis of One-Dimensionality," p. 45-46, "Beyond Critical Theory," p. 6.

17. John Alt observes that: "The problem of legitimating industrial reorganization was solved through a new social practice and ideology structured around the pursuit of money, material comfort, and a higher standard of living through consumerism. Mass consumption, as the necessary otherness of Tylorized mass production, was itself offered as the ultimate justification for the rationalization of labor." "Beyond Class: The Decline of Industrial Labor

Consumerism and the New Deal led to an intensification of Taylorization of labor, which homogenized American life according to the dictates of bureaucratic-instrumental rationality. By the 1950s, Americanization had been institutionalized. Rigid political, intellectual and cultural conformism (Riesman's "other directedness") evidenced a social integration achieved through introjection and reproduction of the imperatives of the system of domination at the level of everyday life.¹⁸

Pressures toward homogenization exerted for decades at work, in schools and through the culture industry had eliminated any authentic cultural particularity among ethnic groups. What remained were residues of the lost cultures — empty mannerisms and ambivalent ethnic identities mobilizable for Democratic electoral politics.¹⁹ Moreover, the pluralist model was already available for integrating the already depoliticized labor movement. In this context, the ruthless elimination of whatever opposition remained through the witch-hunts was only the *coup de grace* in a battle already won.

For various reasons, throughout this period, one region was bypassed in the monopolistic reorganization of American life and remained unintegrated into the new social order. At the end of World War II, the South remained the only internal frontier available for large-scale capital penetration. However,

and Leisure," *Telos* (Summer, 1976), p. 71. Stuart Ewen identifies the Cold War period as the apotheosis of consumerism, whose enshrinement during those years was aided by the continued spread of popular journalism and the "mass marketing of television... (which) carried the consumer imagery into the back corners of home life." *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York, 1976), pp. 206-215.

18. Cf. David Riesman (with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney), *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, abridged edition (New Haven, 1961), pp. 19-22 and Jules Henry's perceptive and telling study of the period, *Culture Against Man* (New York, 1963). Marcuse went so far as to suggest that even the concept of introjection may not capture the extent to which the one-dimensional order is reproduced in the individual on the ground that: "Introjection implies the existence of an inner dimension distinguished from and even antagonistic to the external exigencies — an individual consciousness and an individual unconscious *apart from* public opinion and behavior... (However, mass) production and mass distribution claim the *entire* individual... 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." *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 10.

19. The point is not that ethnicity has lost its power as a basis for self-identification or associational activity. What has been obliterated, however, is the distinctiveness of the institutional forms which were the source of group consciousness in the first place. Warner and Srole proudly acknowledge the centrality of the prevailing order in the determination of ethnic consciousness: "The forces which are most potent both in forming and changing the ethnic groups emanate from the institutions of the dominant American social system." W. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole, *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups* (New Haven, 1945), pp. 283-284. Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen, "Americanization and Consumption," *Telos* 37 (Fall, 1978), observe that the dynamic of homogenization began with integration into the system of wage labor which: "created great fissures and, ultimately, gaps in people's lives. Money... rendered much of the way in which non-industrial peoples understood themselves, and the reproduction of their daily lives, useless. The money system itself was a widely disseminated *mass medium* which ripped the structure of peoples' needs from their customary roots, and by necessity transplanted these needs in a soil nourished by the 'rationality' of corporate industry and the retail marketplace," (p. 47). Traditional ethnic ways of life hardly stood a chance under conditions in which the terms of survival were also those of massification! See also Maurice R. Stein, *The Eclipse of Community: An Interpretation of American Studies* (New York, 1960).

even though the South could entice industry with a docile work force accustomed to low wages, full domestication of this region required certain basic adjustments.

For one thing, the caste-like organization of southern society seriously inhibited development of a rational labor supply. While much has been made of the utility of the segregated work force as a depressant of general wage levels, the maintenance of dual labor markets creates a barrier to labor recruitment.²⁰ As a pariah caste, blacks could not adequately become an industrial reserve army since they were kept out of certain jobs. Consequently, in periods of rapid expansion the suppressed black labor pool could not be fully used. Nor could blacks be mobilized as a potential strike-breaking force as readily as in other regions since employment of blacks in traditionally "white" jobs could trigger widespread disruptions.

The dual labor system was irreconcilable with the principle of reducing *all* labor to "abstract labor."²¹ Scientific management has sought to reduce work processes to homogeneous and interchangeable hand and eye motions, eventually hoping to eliminate specialized labor.²² A work force stratified on the basis of an economically irrational criterion such as race constitutes a serious impediment to realization of the ideal of a labor pool comprised of equivalent units. (Consider further the wastefulness of having to provide two sets of toilets in the plants!) In addition, the existing system of black subjugation, grounded in brutality, was intrinsically unstable. The racial order which demanded for its maintenance constant terror raised at every instant the possibility of rebellion and to that extent endangered "rational" administration. Given this state of affairs, the corporate elite's support for an anti-segregationist initiative makes sense.

The relation of the corporate liberal social agenda to Civil Rights protest is not a causal one. True, the Supreme Court had been chipping away at legal segregation for nearly 20 years, and the 1954 Brown decision finally provided the spark for intensified black protest. Yet, the eruption of resistance from southern blacks had its own roots. Hence, to claim that the Civil Rights movement was bourgeois conspiracy would be to succumb to the order's myth of its own omnipotence. Thus, the important question is not whether sectors

20. See, for example: John V. Van Sickle, *Planning for the South: An Inquiry into the Economics of Regionalism* (Nashville, 1943), pp. 68-71; Gene Roberts, Jr., "The Waste of Negro Talent in a Southern State" in Alan F. Westin, ed., *Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Struggle in America* (New York, 1954).

21. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the 20th Century* (New York, 1974), notes the ironic circumstance that capital has appropriated as a conscious ideal Marx's "abstraction from the concrete forms of labor" (pp. 181-182). In the logic of monopoly capitalism — characterized in part by constant reduction of labor's share of the overall costs of production and increasing sensitivity for optimizing profits over time in a stable production environment, cf. Andreas Papandreu, *Paternalistic Capitalism* (Minneapolis, 1972), esp. pp. 80-89 — the short-term benefits likely to accrue from a dual labor market situation need not be expected to hold any great attractiveness.

22. Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, p. 319 and *passim*. Also see David Noble, *America by Design: Science, Technology and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (New York, 1977), pp. 82 and 257-320.

of the corporate elite orchestrated the Civil Rights movement, but instead what deficiencies within the Civil Rights movement were sufficiently compatible with the social agenda of corporate elites to prompt the latter to acquiesce to and encourage them. In order to answer this, it is necessary to identify both the social forces operative *within* the black community during segregation and those forces' engagement in Civil Rights activism. An analysis of the internal dynamic of the 1960s activism shows overlaps between the goals of the "New Deal offensive" and the objectives of the "movement" (and, by extension, the black community).²³

For the purposes of this analysis, the most salient aspects of the black community in the segregated south lie within a management dimension. Externally, the black population was managed by means of codified subordination, reinforced by customary dehumanization and the omnipresent spectre of terror. The abominable details of this system are well known.²⁴ Furthermore, blacks were systematically excluded from formal participation in public life. By extracting tax revenues without returning public services or allowing blacks to participate in public policy formation, the local political system intensified the normal exploitation in the work place. Public administration of the black community was carried out by whites. The daily indignity of the apartheid-like social organization was both a product of this political-administrative disenfranchisement as well as a motor of its reproduction. Thus, the abstract ideal of freedom spawned within the Civil Rights movement addressed primarily this issue.

Despite the black population's alienation from public policy-making, an internal stratum existed which performed notable, but limited, social management functions. This elite stratum was comprised mainly of low-level state functionaries, merchants and "professionals" servicing black markets, and the clergy. While it failed to escape the general subordination, this indigenous elite usually succeeded by virtue of its comparatively secure living standard and informal relations with significant whites, in avoiding the extremes of racial oppression. The importance of this stratum was that it stabilized and coordinated the adjustment of the black population to social policy imperatives formulated outside the black community.

23. A clarification is needed concerning use of the constructs "black community" and "black activism". Racial segregation and the movement against it were southern phenomena. Black Power "nationalism" was essentially a northern phenomenon for which legally sanctioned racial exclusion was not an immediate issue. Although the two historical currents of rebellion were closely related, they nevertheless were distinct. Consequently, they must be considered separately.

24. See, for example: Charles S. Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation* (New York, 1943) and *Growing Up in the Black Belt* (Washington, D.C., 1941); C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York, 1966); Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941); Robert Penn Warren, *Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South* (New York, 1956); John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New York, 1957); James W. Vander Zanden, *Race Relations in Transition* (New York, 1965); George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South: 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge, 1967); Arthur Raper, *Preface to Peasantry: A Tale of Two Black Belt Countries* (Chapel Hill, 1936) and *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill, 1938); William L. Patterson, *We Charge Genocide* (New York, 1951); Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York, 1964). The following discussion draws freely from these sources.

Insofar as black public functionaries had assimilated bureaucratic rationality, the domination of fellow blacks was carried out in "doing one's job." For parts of the black elite such as the clergy, the ministerial practice of "easing community tensions" has always meant accommodation of black life to the existing forms of domination. Similarly, the independent merchants and professionals owed their relatively comfortable position within the black community to the special, captive markets created by segregation. Moreover, in the role of "responsible Negro spokesmen," this sector was able to elicit considerable *politesse*, if not solicitousness, from "enlightened" members of the white elite. Interracial "cooperation" on policy matters was thus smoothly accomplished, and the "public interest" seemed to be met simply because opposition to white ruling group initiatives had been effectively neutralized. The activating factor in this management relation was a notion of "Negro leadership" (later "black" or even "Black") that was generated outside the black community. A bitter observation made from time to time by the radical fringe of the movement was that the social category "leaders" seemed only to apply to the black community. No "white leaders" were assumed to represent a singular white population. But certain blacks were declared opinion-makers and carriers of the interests of an anonymous black population. These "leaders" legitimated their role through their ability to win occasional favors from powerful whites and through the status positions they already occupied in the black community.²⁵

This mode of domination could not thoroughly pacify black life: only the transformation of the segregated order could begin to do that. Furthermore, the internal management strategy generated centrifugal pressures of its own. In addition to segregation, three other disruptive elements stand out within the black community in the 1950s. First, the United States' emergence from World War II as the major world power projected American culture onto an international scene. Thus, the anti-colonial movements that grew in Africa and Asia amid the crumbling of French and British colonial empires had a significant impact on black resistance in this country.²⁶ Secondly, the logic of one-dimensionality itself became a disruptive element. The homogenizing egalitarianism of the "New Deal" generated a sense of righteousness able to sustain a lengthy battle with Southern segregation. The challenge to racial domination was justified in terms of the "American Dream" and an ideal of freedom expressed in a demand for full citizenship.²⁷ Thus, the same forces

25. Certainly, the bizarre notion of black leadership was not an invention of the post-war era. That strategy of pacification had been the primary non-terroristic means for subduing black opposition since Booker T. Washington's network of alliances with corporate progressives and New South Bourbon Democrats. Moreover, the notion of a leadership stratum which was supposed to speak for a monolithic black community became the ideological model and political ideal for 1960s radicalism — especially in its "nationalist" variants.

26. King's fascination with Satyagraha suggests, although exaggeratedly, the influence which decolonization abroad had on the development of Civil Rights opposition. Cf. David L. Lewis, *King: A Critical Biography* (Baltimore, 1970), pp. 100-103 and King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in *Why We Can't Wait*, pp. 76-95.

27. Lomax, *The Negro Revolt*, p. 21 and *passim*; Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a

that since the 1920s had sought to integrate the various immigrant populations also generated an American national consciousness among blacks. By the 1950s a sense of participation in a national society had taken root even in the South, fertilized by the mass culture industry (including black publications), schools and a defensive Cold War ideology. In the face of this growing national consciousness "separate but equal" existence was utterly intolerable to blacks. This is not to say that a perception rooted in the nation-state was universal among southern blacks in the 1950s, especially since the chief mechanisms of cultural adjustment such as television, popular films, compulsory schooling, etc., had not fully invaded the black community. Yet, mass culture and its corollary ideologies had extensively penetrated the private sphere of the black elite: the stratum from which systematic opposition arose.²⁸

Thirdly, given the racial barrier, social mobility for the black elite was limited, relative to its white counterpart. Because of *de facto* proscription of black tenure in most professions, few possibilities existed for advancement. At the same time, the number of people seeking to become members of the elite had increased beyond what a segregated society could accommodate as a result of population growth and rising college attendance. In addition, upward mobility was being defined by the larger national culture in a way that further weakened the capability of the black elite to integrate its youth. Where ideology demanded nuclear physics and corporate management, black upward mobility rested with mortuary service and the Elks Lodge! The disjunction between ideals and possibilities delegitimized the elite's claim to brokerage and spokespersonship. With its role in question, the entrenched black elite was no longer able to effectively perform its internal management function and lost any authority with its "recruits" and the black community in general. As a result, a social space was cleared within which dissatisfaction with segregation could thrive as systematic opposition.

From this social management perspective, the sources of the "Freedom Movement" are identifiable within and on the periphery of its indigenous elite stratum. As soon as black opposition spilled beyond the boundaries of the black community, however, the internal management perspective became inadequate to understand further developments in the Civil Rights movement. When opposition to segregation became political rebellion, black protest required a response from white ruling elites. That response reflected the congruence of the interests of blacks and of corporate elites in reconstructing southern society and helped define the logic of all subsequent black

Dream," in *Speeches by the Leaders: The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom* (New York, n.d.); Whitney Young, *To Be Equal* (New York, 1964); and Samuel DuBois Cook, "The American Liberal Democratic Tradition, the Black Revolution and Martin Luther King, Jr.," in Hanes Walton, *The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Westport, Conn., 1971), pp. xiii-xxviii.

28. This does not mean that *Life* magazine and "Father Knows Best" taught blacks to "dream the dream of freedom." Rather, the integrative logic of massification exacerbated disruptive tendencies already present within the black elite.

political activity. Both sets of interests shared an interest in rationalizing race relations in the South. The Civil Rights movement brought the two sets together.²⁹

The alliance of corporate liberalism and black protest was evident in the aggressive endorsement of Civil Rights activity that was mobilized by the New Deal coalition. Major labor organizations and “enlightened” corporate sectors immediately climbed aboard the freedom train through the “progressive” wing of the Democratic party and private foundations. Moreover, it was through its coverage of black resistance in the South that television developed and refined its remarkable capabilities for creating public opinion by means of “objective” new reportage (a talent that reached its acme years later with the expulsion of Richard Nixon from the presidency). But television was not alone on the cultural front of the ideological struggle. *Life*, *Look*, *Saturday Evening Post*, major non-southern newspapers and other national publications featured an abundance of photo-essays that emphasized the degradation and brutalization of black life under Jim Crow.

Even popular cinema sought to thematize black life in line with civil rights consciousness in films such as *The Defiant Ones* (1958), *All the Young Men* (1960), *Raisin in the Sun* (1961), *Band of Angels* (1957), and the instructively titled *Nothing but a Man* (1964). Those and other films were marked by an effort to portray blacks with a measure of human depth and complexity previously absent from Hollywood productions. By 1957 even the great taboo of miscegenation could be portrayed on the screen in *Island in the Sun*, and a decade later the cultural campaign had been so successful that this theme could be explored in the parlor rather than in back streets and resolved with a happy ending in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. It is interesting that Dorothy Dandridge became the first black in a leading role to be nominated for an academy award for her role in *Carmen* in 1954 — the year of the Brown decision — and that the most productive periods of civil rights activism and Sidney Poitier's film career coincided. Poitier's lead performance in the maudlin *Lilies of the Field* won an Oscar for him in 1963, on the eve of the passage of the Public Accommodations Act! Thus endorsed by the culture industry (which affronted White Supremacy in the late 1950s by broadcasting a Perry Como show in which comedienne Molly Goldberg kissed black ballplayer Ernie Banks) the Civil Rights movement was virtually assured success.

While the Civil Rights coalition was made possible by the compatibility of the allies' interests in reorganizing the South, its success was facilitated by the ideals and ideologies generated in the protest. Even though there had been

29. Concepts such as duplicity and cooptation are inadequate to shed light on why corporate and liberal interests actively supported the Civil Rights movement. Interpretations so derived cannot fully explain programs and strategies which originated in the black community. They suggest that naive and trusting blacks, committed to an ideal of global emancipation, allowed themselves to be led away from this ideal by bourgeois wolves in sheep's clothing. This kind of “false consciousness” thesis is theoretically unacceptable. Consciousness is false not when it is a lie forced from outside but when it does not comprehend its historical one-sidedness.

ties between black southern elites and corporate-liberal elements for a long time, if the civil rights program had raised fundamental questions regarding social structure, the corporate-elite response may have been suppression rather than support — especially given the Cold War context. Instead, from the very beginning the American establishment outside of Dixie supported the abolition of segregation.³⁰ At any rate, it is clear that the civil rights ideology fit very well with the goals of monopoly capitalism. The Civil Rights movement appealed to egalitarianism and social rationality. On both counts segregation was found wanting while leaving non-racial features of the social order unquestioned.

The egalitarian argument was both moral as well as constitutional. The moral argument was in the bourgeois tradition from the Reformation to the French Revolution. It claimed equal rights for all human beings as well as entitlement to equal life chances. This abstract and ahistorical moral imperative did not grasp social relations beyond their phenomenal forms and therefore could only denounce racial exclusion as an evil anomaly. The predominant form of social organization was uncritically accepted and the moral imperative was predictably construed in terms of American constitutional law. Equality before the law and equality of opportunity to participate in all areas of citizenship were projected as needed extension to blacks in the backward South to fulfill the promise of democracy.

Coexisting with this egalitarian ideology was the Civil Rights movement's appeal to a functionalist conception of social rationality. To the extent that it blocked individual aspirations, segregation was seen as restricting artificially social growth and progress. Similarly, by raising artificial barriers such as the construction of blacks' consumer power through Jim Crow legislation and, indirectly, through low black wages, segregation impeded, so the argument went, the free functioning of the market. Consequently, segregation was seen not only as detrimental to the blacks who suffered under it, but also to economic progress as such. Needless to say, the two lines of argument were met with approval by corporate liberals.³¹

It is apparent now that the egalitarian ideology coincided with corporate-liberalism's cultural program of homogenization. Civil Rights' egalitarianism demanded that any one unit of labor be equivalent to any other, that one citizen-consumer be considered equivalent to another, and that the Negro be

30. Of course, suppression was the reaction of certain elements, most notably within the state apparatus whose bureaucratized priorities urged suppression of any disruptive presence in the society. Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston, 1965), as well as Forman and Sellers, shows that the federal apparatus, which later developed a reputation at the "grass roots" as the patron saint of equality, was at best lukewarm in response to black demands for enforcement of constitutional rights and often set out to suppress tendencies and distinct personalities in the movement. Nevertheless, the movement was not suppressed, and not because it "forced" its will upon history. That bit of romantic back-slapping has as little credence as the one that contends that the anti-war movement ended the Vietnam War. The state hardly was mobilized against the Civil Rights activism; the Supreme Court had authorized its legitimacy before it even began.

31. John F. Kennedy picked up the line and ran it as if it were his own; see his "Message to Congress," *Congressional Record* 88th Congress, 1st Session, Feb. 28, 1963.

thought of as “any other American.” There is more than a little irony that the Civil Rights movement demanded for blacks the same “eradication of otherness” that had been forced upon immigrant populations. The demand hardly went unheard; through the blanket concept “integration” and the alliance with a corporate elite that was all too ready to help clarify issues and refine strategies and objectives, the abstract ideals of Civil Rights activism were concretized in the corporate elite’s plan for pacification and reorganization.

The elimination of segregation in the South destroyed the specificity of both the South as a region and blacks as a group, and the rationality in whose name the movement had appealed paved the way for reconstruction of new modes of domination of black life. The movement had begun as a result of the frustrations of the black elite, and it ended with the achievement of autonomy and mobility among those elements. Public Accommodations and Voting Rights legislation officially defined new terms for the management of blacks and an expanded managerial role for the elite.

Although the Civil Rights movement did have a radical faction, this wing failed to develop a systematic critique of civil rights ideology or the alliance with corporate liberalism. Moreover, the radicals — mainly within SNCC — never repudiated the leadership ideology which reinforced the movement’s character as an elite brokerage relation with powerful whites outside the South. Thus, the radicals helped isolate their own position by acquiescing to a conception of the black community as a passive recipient of political symbols and directives. When the dust settled, the black “mainstream” elements and their corporate allies — who together monopolized the symbols of legitimacy — proclaimed that freedom had been achieved, and the handful of radicals could only feel uneasy that voting rights and “social equality” were somehow insufficient.³²

Outside the South, rebellion arose from different conditions. Racial segregation was not rigidly codified and the management sub-systems in the black community were correspondingly more fluidly integrated within the local administrative apparatus. Yet, structural, generational and ideological pressures, broadly similar to those in the South, existed within the black elite in the Northern, Western, and Midwestern cities that had gained large black populations in the first half of the 20th century. In non-segregated urban contexts, formal political participation and democratized consumption had long since been achieved: there the salient political issue was the extension of the administrative purview of the elite within the black community. The centrality of the administrative nexus in the “revolt of the cities” is evident from the ideological programs it generated.

32. It was out of this milieu of muddled uneasiness that Rev. Willie Ricks gave the world the slogan, “Black Power!” on the Meridith march in 1966. A flavor of the frustration of the radicals at the time can be gotten from Julius Lester, *Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama* (New York 1968). In some respects Lester’s account, though more dated, has greater value for understanding this period than either Forman’s or Sellers’ because *Look Out, Whitey!* is written from within Black Power, rather than retrospectively from the vantage point of new ideologies and old involvements that need to be protected. Also, Stokely Carmichael, “Who Is Qualified?” in *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism* (New York, 1961).

Black Power came about as a call for indigenous control of economic and political institutions in the black community.³³ Because one of the early slogans of Black Power was a vague demand for "community control," the emancipatory character of the rebellion was open to considerable misinterpretation. Moreover, the diversity and "militance" of its rhetoric encouraged extravagance in assessing the movement's depth. It soon became clear, however, that "community control" called not for direction of pertinent institutions — schools, hospitals, police, retail businesses, etc. — by their black constituents, but for administration of those institutions by alleged representatives *in the name of* a black community. Given an existing elite structure whose legitimacy had already been certified by federal social-welfare agencies, the selection of "appropriate" representatives was predictable. Indeed, as Robert Allen has shown,³⁴ the empowerment of this elite was actively assisted by corporate-state elements. Thus, "black liberation" quickly turned into black "equity," "community control" became simply "black control" and the Nixon "blackonomics" strategy was readily able to "coopt" the most rebellious tendency of 1960s black activism. Ironically, Black Power's supersession of the Civil Rights program led to further consolidation of the management elite's hegemony within the black community. The black elite broadened its administrative control by uncritically assuming the legitimacy of the social context within which that elite operated. Black control was by no means equivalent to democratization.

This state of affairs remained unclear even to Black Power's radical fringe. Such a failure of political perception cannot be written off as crass opportunism or as underdeveloped consciousness. Though not altogether false, explanations of this kind only beg the question. Indeed, Black Power radicalism, which absorbed most of the floundering left wing of the Civil Rights movement and generated subsequent "nationalist" tendencies, actually blurred the roots of the new wave of rebellion. As Civil Rights activism exhausted itself and as spontaneous uprisings proliferated among urban blacks, the Civil Rights radicals sought to generate an ideology able to unify and politicize these uprisings. This effort, however, was based on two mystifications that implicitly rationalized the elite's control of the movement.

First, Black Power presupposed a mass-organizational model built on the assumption of a homogeneity of black political interests to be dealt with through community leadership. It is this notion of "black community" that has blocked development of a radical critique in the Civil Rights movement by contraposing an undifferentiated mass to a leadership stratum representing it. This understanding ruled out any analysis of cleavages or

33. See, for example, Carmichael, "Power and Racism" in *Stokely Speaks*. This essay is perhaps the first attempt to articulate a systematic concept of the notion Black Power.

34. *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (Garden City, 1969), pp. 129-192. Allen's interpretation, however, cannot move beyond this descriptive point because he accepts a simplistic notion of cooptation to explain the black corporate elite nexus. Julius Lester, charged by 1968 that the "principal beneficiaries of Black Power have been the black middle class." *Revolutionary Notes* (New York, 1969), p. 106.

particularities within the black population: "community control" and "black control" became synonymous. The implications of this ideology have already been discussed: having internalized the predominant elite-pluralist model of organization of black life, the radical wing could not develop any critical perspective. Internal critique could not go beyond banal symbols of "blackness," and thus ended up by stimulating demand for a new array of "revolutionary" consumer goods. Notwithstanding all its bombast, Black Power construed racial politics within the ideological universe through which the containment of the black population was mediated.

Acceptance of this model not only prevented Black Power from transcending the social program of the indigenous administrative elite, but it also indicated the extent to which, as Cruse was aware at the time,³⁵ Black Power radicalism was itself a frantic statement of the elite's agenda — hence the radicals' chronic ambivalence over "black bourgeoisie," capitalism, socialism and "black unity." Their mystification of the social structure of the black community was largely the result of a failure to come to terms with their own privileged relation to the corporate elite's program of social reconstruction. This state of affairs precipitated a still more profound mystification that illuminates the other side of Black Power rebellion: the reaction against massification.

The Civil Rights movement's demand for integration was superfluous outside the South, and Black Power was as much a reaction against integrationist ideology as against racial domination. Thus, while militant black nationalism developed as a reaction to the assimilationist approach of the Civil Rights movement, it simultaneously envisioned an obsolete model of black life. This yearning was hypostatized to the level of a "black culture" — a romantic retrieval of a vanishing black particularity. This vision of black culture, of course, was grounded in residual features of black rural life prior to migrations to the North. They were primarily cultural patterns that had once been enmeshed in a lifeworld knitted together by kinship, voluntary association and production within a historical context of rural racial domination. As that lifeworld disintegrated before urbanization and mass culture, black nationalism sought to reconstitute it.³⁶

In that sense, the nationalist elaboration of Black Power was naive both in that it was not sufficiently self-conscious and in that it mistook artifacts and idiosyncrasies of culture for its totality and froze them into an a-historical theory of authenticity. Two consequences followed. First, abstracted from its

35. Harold Cruse, *Crisis*, pp. 544-565.

36. Jennifer Jordan notes this "nostalgic" character of 1960s culturalism and its grounding in the black elite in an essay, "Cultural Nationalism in the Sixties: Politics and Poetry," forthcoming in Barnette and Reed, eds., *The Circles in the Spiral*. In the most systematic and thorough critical reconstruction of black cultural nationalism to date, Jordan identifies two core nationalist tendencies: one Afro-American preservationist, the other African retrievalist. Presumably, Ron Karenga is to be seen as a bridge between those tendencies with his commitment to "creation, recreation and circulation of Afro-American culture." "From the Quotable Karenga," in Floyd Barbour, ed., *The Black Power Revolt* (Boston, 1968), p. 162.

concrete historical context, black culture lost its dynamism and took on the commodity form (e.g., red, black and green flags, dashikis, Afro-Sheen, "blaxploitation" films, collections of bad poetry, etc.). Secondly, while ostensibly politicizing culture by defining it as an arena for conflict, black nationalism actually depoliticized the movement inasmuch as the reified nationalist framework could relate to the present only through a simplistic politics of unity.³⁷ Hence, it forfeited hegemony over political programs to the best organized element in the black community: the administrative elite. In this fashion, black culture became a means of legitimation of the elite's political hegemony.

Black culture posited a functionalist, perfectly integrated black social order which was then projected backward through history as the *Truth* of black existence. The "natural" condition of harmony was said to have been disrupted only when divisiveness and conflict were introduced by alien forces. This myth delegitimated internal conflicts and hindered critical dialogue within the black community. Correspondingly, the intellectual climate which came to pervade within the "movement" was best summarized in the nationalists' exhortation to "think black," a latter-day version of "thinking with one's blood." Thus was the circle completed: the original abstract rationalism that had ignored existing social relations of domination for a mythical, unitarian social ideal had turned into a militant and self-justifying irrationalism. Truth became a function of the speaker's "blackness," i.e., validity claims were to be resolved not through discourse but by the claimant's manipulation of certain banal symbols of legitimacy. The resultant situation greatly favored the well-organized and highly visible elite.

The nationalist program functioned also as a mobilization myth. In defining a collective consciousness, the idealization of folkishness was simultaneously an exhortation to collectivized practice. The folk, in its Afro-American manifestation as well as elsewhere, was an ideological category of mass-organizational politics. The community was to be created and mobilized as a passively homogeneous mass, activated by a leadership elite.

While the politicized notion of black culture was a negative response to the estrangement and anomie experienced in the urban North, as a "solution" it only *affirmed the negation* of genuine black particularity.³⁸ The prescription

37. Cf. Imamu Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), "Toward the Creation of Political Institutions for All African Peoples," *Black World XXI* (October 1972), pp. 54-78. "Unity will be the only method, it is part of the black value system because it is only with unity that we will get political power." Baraka, *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze* (New York, 1971), p. 109.

38. The fascination shared by most of the nationalists with the prospects of consciously creating a culture revealed both the loss of genuine cultural base *and* the extent of the nationalists' acceptance of manipulation as a strategy (cf. Karenga's "seven criteria for culture," *Black Power Revolt*, p. 166). The farther away the nationalists chose to go to find their cultural referent, the more clearly they demonstrated the passage of a self-driving, spontaneous black existence from the arena of American history. The ultimate extension of escapism came with the growth of Pan-Africanism as an ideology; that turn — at least in its most aggressive manifestations — conceded as a first step the inauthenticity of *all* black American life. See: Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, pp. 175-227; Ideological Research Staff of Malcolm X Liberation

of cohesion in the form of a mass leadership relation betrayed the movement's tacit acceptance of the agenda of the black management stratum. The negatively immanent in the cultural myth soon gave way to an opportunistic appeal to unity grounded on an unspecifiable "blackness" and a commodified idea of "soul." Black unity, elevated to an end in itself, became an ideology promoting consolidation of the management elite's expanded power over the black population. In practice, unity meant collective acceptance of a set of demands to be lobbied by a leadership elite before the corporate-state apparatus. To that extent, "radical" Black Power reproduced on a more elaborate ideological basis the old pluralist brokerage politics. Similarly, this phony unity restricted possibilities for development of a black public sphere.

To be sure, the movement stimulated widespread and lively political debate in the black community. Although it hardly approached an "ideal speech situation," various individuals and constituencies were drawn into political discourse on a considerably more democratized basis than had previously been the case. Yet, the rise of unitarian ideology, coupled with a mystified notion of "expertise," effectively reintroduced hierarchy within the newly expanded political arena.³⁹ At any rate, "grass roots" politics in the black community can be summarized as follows: the internal management elite claimed primacy in political discourse on the basis of its ability to project and realize a social program, and then mobilized the unitarian ideal to de-legitimize any divergent positions. On the other hand, the "revolutionary" opposition offered no alternative; within its ranks the ideology of expertise was never repudiated. The radicals had merely replaced the elite's pragmatism with a mandarin version of expertise founded on mastery of the holy texts of Kawaida, Nkrumanism or "scientific socialism." By the time of the 1971 National Black Political Convention in Gary, the mainstream elite strata were well on the way to becoming the sole effective voice in the black community. By the next convention in 1974 in Little Rock — after the election of a second wave of black officials — their hegemony was total.⁴⁰

By now the reasons for the demise of black opposition in the U.S. should be clear. The opposition's sources were formulated in terms of the predominant ideology and thereby formulated in terms of the predominant ideology and thereby readily integrated as an affirmation of the reality of the system as a whole. The movement "failed" because it "succeeded," and its success can be

University, *Understanding the African Struggle* (Greensboro, N.C., 1971), Owusu Sadaukai (Howard Fuller), *The Condition of Black People in the 1970s* (Chicago, 1972).

39. In this regard expertise translates into superficial articulateness and ability to negotiate with the social management apparatus.

40. Ronald Walters was able to gloat after Little Rock that the black elected officials had become the vanguard political force in the black community. "The Black Politician: Fulfilling the Legacy of Black Power," unpublished. Baraka, its former chairman and a central organizer, was very nearly expelled from the National Black Assembly in 1975 by a force of elected officials put off by his new-found "Marxism." Note, however, that even he had to admit the activists' marginality and weakness compared to the mainstream elite as early as 1970 at the Congress of African Peoples. Baraka, ed., *African Congress: A Documentary of the First Modern Pan-African Congress* (New York, 1972), p. 99.

measured by its impact on the administration of the social system. The protest against racial discrimination in employment and education was answered by the middle 1970s by state-sponsored democratization of access to management and other "professional" occupations. Clear, quantifiable racial discrimination remained a pressing public issue only for those whose livelihood depended on finding continuous instances of racial discrimination.⁴¹ Still, equalization of access should not be interpreted simply as a concession: it also rationalized recruitment of intermediate management personnel. In one sense the affirmative action effort can be viewed as a publicly subsidized state and corporate talent search.

Similarly, the protest against external administration of black life was met by an expansion in the scope of the black political-administrative apparatus. Through federal funding requirements of community representation, reapportionment of electoral jurisdictions, support for voter "education" and growth of the social welfare bureaucracy, the black elite was provided with broadened occupational opportunities and with official responsibility for administration of the black population. The rise of black officialdom in the latter 1970s signals the realization of the reconstructed elite's social program and the consolidation of its hegemony over black life. No longer do preachers, funeral directors and occasional politicians vie for the right to rationalize an externally generated agenda to the black community. Now, black officials and professional political activists represent, interact among, and legitimate themselves before an attentive public of black functionaries in public and

41. This is not to say that blacks no longer are oppressed, nor that that oppression no longer has racial characteristics. Nor still is it possible to agree with Wilson's simplistic claim that race is receding as a factor in the organization of American society; as Harold Barnette notes, the integration of affirmative action programs into the social management apparatus suggests race's continuing significance. See William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago, 1978) and Barnette's review in *Southern Exposure* VII (Spring, 1979), pp. 121-122. With legitimation and absorption of anti-racism by the social management system, race has assumed a more substantial and pervasive function than ever before in American life. Moreover, this function is often life-sustaining; controlling discrimination has become a career specialty — complete with "professional," "paraprofessional," and "sub-professional" gradations — in public and private bureaucracies. However, "racial discrimination" fails as a basis from which to interpret or address black oppression.

"Racism" is bound to an "equality of opportunity" ideology which can express only the interests of the elite strata among the black population; equality of access to the meaningless, fragmented and degrading jobs which comprise the bulk of work, for example, hardly is the stuff of "black liberation" and is ultimately a retrograde social demand. It is not an accident, therefore, that the only major battle produced by the struggle against racism in the 1970s has been the anti-Bakke movement, whose sole objective was protection of blacks' access to pursuit of professional employment status.

Racism makes its appearance as an opaque reification grafted onto otherwise acceptable institutions. Small wonder it is the only issue the black elite can find to contend! Not only does racism carry the elite's sole critique of U.S. society, but the claim that racism creates a bond of equivalent victimization among blacks is one of the sources of the elite's legitimation. It is interesting to recall in this context that "racism" became the orthodox explanation of black oppression when the Kerner Commission annointed it as the fundamental source of the 1964-1967 urban uprisings. *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York, 1968), p. 203. This document goes far toward articulating the outlines of what became the new strategy for management of the black population.

private sectors of the social management apparatus.⁴² Even the ideological reproduction of the elite is assured: not only mass-market journalists, but black academicians as well (through black "scholarly" publications, research institutes and professional organizations) almost invariably sing the praises of the newly empowered elite.⁴³

It was in the ideological sphere as well that the third major protest, that against massification of the black community, was resolved. Although authentic Afro-American particularity had been undermined by the standardizing imperatives of mass capitalism, the black nationalist reaction paved the way for the constitution of an artificial particularity.⁴⁴ Residual idiomatic and physical traits, bereft of any distinctive content, were injected with racial stereotypes and the ordinary petit bourgeois *Weltanschauung* to create the pretext for an apparently unique black existence. A thoroughly ideological construction of black uniqueness — which was projected universally in the mass market as black culture — fulfilled at least three major functions. First, as a marketing device it facilitated the huckstering of innumerable commodities designed to enhance, embellish, or glorify "blackness".⁴⁵ Second, artificial black particularity provided the basis for the myth of genuine black community and consequently legitimated the organization of the black population into an administrative unit — and, therefore, the black elite's claims to primacy. Finally, the otherness-without-negativity provided by the ideologized blackness can be seen as a potential antidote to the new contradictions generated by monopoly capitalism's bureaucratic rationality. By constituting an independently given sector of society responsive to administrative controls, the well-managed but

42. The most significant shift in the occupational structure of the black population in the decade after the 1964 Civil Rights Act was relative expansion of its elite component. Between 1964 and 1974 the percentage of minority males classified as "professional and technical" workers increased by half; the percentage classified as non-farm, salaried "managers and administrators" quadrupled over that period. Similar increases were realized by minority females. *Social and Economic Status of the Black Population*, pp. 73-74.

43. The celebration of the new elite is not, as once was the case, restricted to black media. Stephen Birmingham has testified to their presence and allowed them to expose their personal habits in his characteristically gossipy style of pop journalism in his *Certain People: America's Black Elite* (Boston, 1977). The *New York Times Sunday Magazine* twice at least has lionized the beautiful black stratum of the 1970s. See Peter Ross Range, "Making It in Atlanta: Capital of 'Black is Bountiful,'" *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, April 7, 1974, and William Brashler, "The Black Middle Class: Making It," in the Dec. 3, 1978, magazine. Each of these brassy accounts tends, despite occasional injections of "balance," to accept and project the elite's mystical view of itself and exaggerates its breadth and force in society. However, that the *Times* even would care to make the statement made by these two articles suggests minimally that the elite has been integrated into the corporate marketing strategy on an equal basis.

44. The distinction of "authentic" and "artificial" particularity is similar to Habermas' distinction of "living" and "objectivistically prepared and strategically employed" cultural traditions. A cultural particularity is "authentic" in so far as it: (1) reproduces itself within the institutional environment that apparently delimits the groups, i.e., outside the social administrative system; and (2) is not mobilized by the mass culture industry. Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston, 1975), pp. 70-72.

45. Jordan even contends that radical culturalism was most susceptible among all the 1960s oppositional forms to the logic of commodification because of its tendency to reduce identity to the artifact. Cf. "Cultural Nationalism in the Sixties."

recalcitrant black community justifies the existence of the administrative apparatus and legitimates existing forms of social integration.

In one sense, the decade and a half of black activism was a phenomenon vastly more significant than black activists appreciated while in another sense it was far less significant than has been claimed.⁴⁶ As an emancipatory project for the Afro-American population, the "movement" — especially after the abolishment of segregation — had little impact beyond strengthening the existing elite strata. Yet, as part of a program of advanced capitalist reconstruction, black activism contributed to thawing the Cold War and outlined a model to replace it.

By the latter 1960s the New Deal coalition had become obsolete and it was no longer able to fully integrate recalcitrant social strata such as the black population.⁴⁷ The New Deal coalition initiated the process of social homogenization and depoliticization Marcuse described as one dimensionality. As Piccone observes, however, by the 1960s the transition to monopoly capitalism had been fully carried out and the whole strategy had become counterproductive.⁴⁸ The drive toward homogenization and the total domination of the commodity form had deprived the system of the "otherness" required both to restrain the irrational tendencies of bureaucratic rationality and to locate lingering and potentially disruptive elements. Notwithstanding their vast differences, the ethnic "liberation struggles" and counterculture activism on the one side and the "hard hat" reaction on the other, were two sides of the same rejection of homogenization. Not only did these various positions challenge the one-dimensional order, but their very existence betrayed the inability of the totally administered society to pacify social existence while at the same time remaining sufficiently dynamic.

The development of black activism from spontaneous protest through mass mobilization to system support indicated the arrival of a new era of domination based on domesticating negativity by organizing spaces in which it could be legitimately expressed. Rather than suppressing opposition, the social system now creates its own. The proliferation of government generated reference groups in addition to ethnic ones (the old, the young, battered wives, the handicapped, veterans, retarded and gifted children, etc.)⁴⁹ and

46. Compare for example: S.E. Anderson, "Black Students: Racial Consciousness and the Class Struggle, 1960-1976," *Black Scholar* VIII (January-February 1977), pp. 35-43; Muhammad Ahmad, "On the Black Student Movement — 1960-1970," *Black Scholar* IX (May-June 1978), pp. 2-11; James and Grace Lee Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1974), pp. 174ff.

47. The coalition's bankruptcy was demonstrated by the defections from its electoral constituency to Nixon's "silent majority" in 1968 and wholesale collapse in the face of McGovernite and Republican challenges in 1972. Unable to end the Vietnam War and adjust to a new era of imperialism or to address the concerns of such post-scarcity era advocacy centers as the student and ecology movements, the productivist liberal-labor forces who had controlled the Democratic party for a generation also found it impossible to establish a common discursive arena with the ethnic and feminist consciousness movements of the 1960s.

48. "Crisis of One-Dimensionality," p. 46; "The Changing Function of Critical Theory," *New German Critique* (Fall 1977), pp. 35-36.

49. Habermas calls these "quasi-groups" and maintains that they perform the additional

the appearance of legions of "watchdog" agencies, reveal the extent to which the system manufactures and markets its own illusory opposition.

What makes the "age of artificial negativity" possible is the overwhelming success of the process of massification undertaken since the Depression and in response to it. Universal fragmentation of consciousness, with the corollary decline in the ability to think critically and the regimentation of an alienated everyday life⁵⁰ set the stage for new forms of domination built in the very texture of organization. In mass society, organized activity on a large scale requires hierarchization. Along with hierarchy, however, the social management logic also comes into being to (1) protect existing privileges by delivering realizable, if inconsequential, payoffs and (2) to legitimate the administrative rationality as a valid and efficient model. To the extent that the organization strives to ground itself on the *mass* it is already integrated into the system of domination. The shibboleths which comprise its specific platform make little difference. What is important is that the organization reproduces the manipulative hierarchy and values typical of contemporary capitalism.

Equally important for the existence of this social-managerial form is that the traditional modes of opposition to capitalism have not been able to successfully negotiate the transition from entrepreneurial to administrative capitalism. Thus, the left has not fully grasped the recent shifts in the structure of domination and continues to organize resistance along the very lines which reinforce the existing social order. As a consequence, the opposition finds itself perpetually outflanked. Unable to deliver the goods — political or otherwise — the left collapses before the cretinization of its own constituency. Once the mass model is accepted, cretinization soon follows and from that point the opposition loses any genuine negativity. The Civil Rights and Black Power movements prefigured the coming of this new age; the feminist photocopy of the black road to nowhere was its farcical re-run.

The role of the mass culture industry in this context is to maintain and reproduce the new synthesis of domination. Here, again, the history of the "black revolution" is instructive. In its most radical stage Black Power lived and spread as a media event. Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown entertained nightly on network news, and after ordinary black "militancy" had lost its dramatic appeal, the Black Panther Party added props and uniforms to make radical politics entirely a show business proposition. Although late 1960s black radicalism offered perhaps the most flamboyant examples of the peculiar relation of the mass media to the would-be opposition, that was only an extreme expression of a pattern at work since the early days of the Civil Rights movement. Since then, political opposition has sought to

function of absorbing the "secondary effects of the averted economic crisis," *Legitimation Crisis*, p. 39.

50. Russell Jacoby, "A Falling Rate of Intelligence?" *Telos* (Spring 1976), pp. 141-146; Stanley Aronowitz, "Mass Culture and the Eclipse of Reason: The Implications for Pedagogy," *College English* 38 (April 1977), pp. 768-774 and *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (New York, 1973).

propagandize its efforts through the mass media. Given the prevailing cretinization and the role of the culture industry in reproducing the fragmented, commodified consciousness, such a strategy, if pursued uncritically, could only reinforce the current modes of domination.⁵¹

That all forms of political opposition accepted the manipulative, mass-organization model gave the strategy a natural, uncomplicated appearance and prevented the development of a critical approach. The consequence was a propagation of a model of politics which reinforced over-simplification, the reduction of ideals to banalized objects of immediate consumption — i.e. the commodity-form — and to an alienated, dehumanized hero cultishness with the “revolutionary” replacing either hero or villain. In short, opposition increasingly becomes a spectacle in a society organized around reduction of all existence to a series of spectacles.⁵²

So monopoly capitalism has entered a new stage typified by the extension of the administrative apparatus throughout everyday life. In this context, genuine opposition is checkmated *a priori* by the legitimation and projection of a partial, fragmented criticism which can be readily made functional in further streamlining the predominant rationality. And in cases where existing bureaucratic structures need control mechanisms to prevent excesses, diffused uneasiness with predominant institutions ends up artificially channelled into forms of negativity able to fulfill the needed internal control function. Always a problem for opposition which seeks to sustain itself over time, under the new conditions of administered negativity, this one step backward required by organized opposition's need to broaden its constituency and conduct “positional warfare,” becomes a one-way slide to affirmation of the social order. The logic of the transition to new forms of bourgeois hegemony requires adjustment of administrative rationality. The unrestrained drive to total integration now is mediated by peripheral, yet systematically controlled, loci of criticism; one-dimensionality itself has been “humanized” by the cultivation of commodified facsimiles of diversity.

An important question remains: what of the possibilities for genuine opposition? The picture that has been painted seems excessively pessimistic.

51. Julius Lester was one who saw the prominence of a media cult in the movement. *Revolutionary Notes*, pp. 176-180. On the peculiar style of the Panthers see Earl Anthony, *Picking Up the Gun* (New York, 1970).

52. “The spectacle presents itself as an enormous unalterable and inaccessible actuality. It says nothing more than ‘that which appears is good, that which is good appears.’ The attitude which it demands in principle is this passive acceptance, which in fact it has already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance.” Par. 12, Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, 1970).

53. A recent incident captures contemporary life: during the national telecast of the 1978 Miss Black America pageant, General Motors, a sponsor of the broadcast, featured a commercial in which a utility-man at a plant listed the attractions of his job. Among them were pay, fringe benefits, security, opportunity to perform various tasks (a function solely of his particular position), congenial supervision and a good union! In the metaphor of a colleague who is one of a vanishing breed of baseball fans, the bourgeoisie has a shut-out going with two away in the bottom of the ninth!

Yet, this should not be understood to mean that opposition is futile. It is necessary, though, to closely examine the customary modes of opposition. The theory of artificial negativity historicizes the critique of the post-Cold War left and suggests at the same time some broad outlines for a for a reconceptualization of emancipatory strategy.

This examination of black radicalism in the wake of its integration offers a microcosmic view of the plight of the left as a whole. Having accepted an organizational model based on massification, the radicals were forced to compete with the elite on the latter's terms — an impossible proposition since the elite had access to the cultural apparatus designed for mass mobilization. Moreover, even when opposition tried to reconstruct itself, it failed to generate systematic critique of its own strategy and was therefore unable to come to terms with shifts in the structure of capitalist social relations. Instead, it remained caught within a theoretical structure adequate only for an earlier, pre-administrative stage of capitalist development. Thus, the failure of mysticized black nationalism is reproduced in today's "ideological struggles" which reached their nadir in the 1978 dispute over whether Mao Tse-tung was really dead!

Still, what of possibilities? Certain implications follow from the previous analysis. It points in the direction of attempts to cultivate areas of unorganizable free space in the interstices of the social system and to reduce the scope of appropriate political intervention from mass organization to the reconstitution of individuality. Clearly, this sketch provides no blueprint. In fact, it does not point to any really "concrete" direction. Yet, charges of pessimism are unwarranted. Hope must seek its possibilities in the darkest moments of the present; it is despair which hides its head from history and refuses to see the undesirable.⁵⁴

54. "The main thing is that utopian conscience and knowledge, through the pain it suffers in facts, grows wise, yet does not grow to full wisdom. It is *rectified* — but never *refuted* — by the mere power of that which, at any particular time, *is*. On the contrary it confutes and judges the existent if it is failing, and failing inhumanly; indeed, first and foremost it provides the *standard* to measure such facticity precisely as departure from the Right." Ernst Bloch, *A Philosophy of the Future* (New York, 1970), p. 91.