prejudice and racism

jones

This Book is Dedicated to the Memory of

Stephen H. Bronz

a tragically lovely person, news of
whose death in an automobile accident
came to me today, January 21, 1971.
My debt to him for everything I have
written thus far is great. My sadness
at his death is greater.

Foreword

It is becoming increasingly difficult for anyone to be a generalist in social psychology. Not only is the number of published articles zooming, but new researchable areas of interest are multiplying as well. A researcher finds more fascinating topics these days than he used to, but he also finds himself behind in his reading of all but one or two of them. As a result, the quality of the broad introductory book in social psychology has suffered. No one can any longer be an expert in all of social psychology.

As an alternative, we offer the present series, *Topics in Social Psychology*, directed toward the student with no prior background in social psychology. Taken as a whole, the series adequately covers the field of social psychology, but it has the advantage that each short book was written by an expert in the area. The instructor can select some subset of the books to make up his course, the particular subset depending upon his biases and inclinations. In addition, the individual volumes can be useful in several ways: as supplementary reading in, perhaps, a sociology course; to introduce more advanced courses (for example, a graduate seminar in attitude change); or just for peeking at recent developments in social psychology.

This volume discusses perhaps the most pressing problem in our society today—prejudice and racism. In spite of so much already written on this topic, Professor Jones' book fills and important need. Previously, a concise but comprehensive treatment of prejudice and racism has not been readily available to most undergraduates. Dr. Jones neatly interrelates a broad spectrum of data from psychology, sociology, and history. Equally important, he shows his own angry and passionate feelings about these long-standing inequities. The combination makes this an exciting book to read.

Charles A. Kiesler

Preface

The touchstone of "scientific method" is objectivity. Social science, too, demands objectivity of its practitioners. However, we are all human beings with values. In matters of race relations particularly, it is not possible (nor in my opinion desirable) to divorce one's values from one's writing or research. I admit that the approaches taken in this book are influenced by my personal experiences and points of view. I have attempted to state things as clearly as I see them, and not to let traditional or commonly accepted viewpoints go unchallenged, if I feel a challenge is warranted.

At the same time, I do not want to give the impression of *simply* having an ax to grind. I have biases, and I am sure they will show. I hope that I have successfully labeled my biases so that personal views not tested by research and/or careful public analysis will not be mistaken for unsupported arguments. If you disagree with what I say, or reject it for lack of "objective" support, that is your prerogative. However, I ask you to contemplate the ideas carefully and try to relate these ideas to your own personal experience.

Racism in America is as old as the country itself, and older. I have attempted in the following pages to place the issues in their appropriate sociocultural historical context. Racism will not end with this book, but maybe, for some of you, awareness of the depths and complexities of racism in America will begin.

One of the clearest lessons I have learned in writing this book, is that it takes the interested concern of a lot of people to see it through. I would like to thank Chick Canfora, Susan Willard, and Margaret Morse, who did the bulk of the typing on the manuscript. Not only did they type swiftly and accurately while tolerating my excesses of disorganization and

confusion, but their comments on various points in the manuscript have been provocative in my writing.

I would also like to thank Alvin Ramsey and Ronald Johnson for their assistance in researching background materials, compiling the bibliography, and reading and commenting on various portions of the manuscript. A great deal of gratitude is also expressed to Kelly Gersick for reading the entire manuscript and offering useful opinions and comments. I also found several discussions with him to be helpful in considering the way in which certain audiences would likely react to the book. Much appreciation is extended to Alvia Branch for her careful preparation of the index.

I owe a great deal to my colleagues Herbert Kelman, Thomas Pettigrew, and Zick Rubin for generously giving their time to reading various portions of the manuscript and providing comments and criticisms which were absolutely essential to the creation of a higher quality work. There are always several perspectives one can take on racial issues, and the comments of my colleagues have helped to make this book more representative.

Abundant gratitude is offered to Charles Kiesler who guided me through graduate school with thoughtfulness and sincere consideration. His confidence in me was always reassuring and ultimately was responsible for my writing this book. In addition, Professor Kiesler has been a most helpful critic of the entire manuscript. My own revisions in response to his criticisms have helped to make this a better book.

Finally and foremost, I am grateful to my entire family, my wife Olive, and my daughters Shelly and Itenash for their love and friendship during the writing of this manuscript. Shelly's gentle prodding, "How many more pages, Daddy?" helped keep me pointed ahead. Nashe always

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provided a cuddly, babbly, and energetic diversion when the writing was going slowly (and often when it was not, as well). Olive's ability to withstand a year and a half of "I can't, I've got to work on the book" is a tribute to Understanding. Not only did she support my writing, but her careful editorial hand over the entire manuscript, her comments and criticisms on reading and rereading draft after draft of various sections, and our numerous long discussions provided the most consistent input to the final manuscript. The ultimate criterion for the acceptability of a sentence or necessity of a particular point in many cases came to be Olive's judgment. I thank Olive, Shelly, and Nashe for their substantial contribution to my own contentment, without which this book could never have come about.

Boston, Massachusetts J.M.J.
February 1972

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction – The Problem of the Color Line

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.

W.E.B. DuBois

With nearly three-quarters of the century as evidence, the truth of this simple statement endures in stark defiance of all our efforts to contradict and destroy it. In 1903 the Wright brothers launched a feeble vehicle airborne for 59 seconds. Sixty-nine years later we watch men cavorting on the moon. In 1903 DuBois stated "the problem" of the twentieth century, and 69 years later we continue to affirm his diagnosis.

Recently a white Midwestern college student on a work trip to Cambridge came to my office to describe his study and obtain any assistance I could give him. His project was to investigate "why racial tension and conflict exist now in 1971." He felt perplexed that racial antagonism could persist so long when the fundamental ideals of the society were so egalitarian. I smiled and suddenly felt older than my years. The history of race relations was so ingrained in my mind that I felt as though I had been here from the beginning–since 1619. His idealism was refreshing but also wearisome. I thought of the task that his question set. I thought of my own attempts to answer this question.

When I tell graduate students I am writing a book on prejudice and racism, some say, "Ugh! Is there anything to it that hasn't already been said a thousand times?" With their cynicism they rebuff my young student's idealism. I have weighed these two perspectives and have decided to attempt to balance them by providing an historical perspective on the antecedents to contemporary racial conflict. Perhaps the young will get new information which enables them to see the problems in greater

perspective. Perhaps those more experienced on the subject will find some of the ideas provocative enough to reawaken their interest and involvement.

I would like to believe that no one can dispassionately observe the thoughts and ideas expressed in the following pages. Many of the issues of prejudice and racism are still quite open. I will venture to frame these issues as I see them, hoping thereby to benefit the thinking of all who read this book.

WHAT IS PREJUDICE?

We know that the term "prejudice" is used by many people in many different ways. Some use the term to indicate petty, sometimes arbitrary, but generally quite personal dislikes (H.L. Mencken devoted six volumes to his *Prejudices*). In other cases the term can have *lethal* connotations, as when a Green Beret officer issues orders to "terminate with extreme prejudice" association with a particular individual. An even more subtle use of the term has recently come to light in the case of Jack Shaw, a former FBI agent. Having fallen into disfavor with the head of the Bureau, Agent Shaw was transferred to Butte, Montana. Rather than face exile, he tendered his resignation to the Bureau Director, who accepted it *with prejudice.* Because of this prejudicial acceptance the former agent has been unable to get a law-enforcement job anywhere in the country as of this writing.

In the American context, the term "prejudice" has usually been reserved for those attitudes and behaviors that have characterized particular kinds of relations between the white Protestant majority and the racial, ethnic, and religious minorities.* This emphasis is captured in the definition offered by Gordon Allport in his classic book on prejudice:

> Ethnic prejudice is an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group. (1954, p. 10)†

Allport concludes that "The net effect of prejudice, thus defined, is to place the object of prejudice at some disadvantage not merited by his own misconduct."

*We also speak of prejudice against Jews (anti-Semitism) and various other kinds of ethnic hostility. The present book is restricted to issues concerning black-white relations. For a general discussion of other kinds of majority-minority relations, see Robin Williams' *Strangers Next Door* (1964), Selznick and Steinberg's *The Tenacity of Prejudice* (1969), and Simpson and Yinger's *Racial and Cultural Minorities* (1965).

†References are listed at the end of the book.

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There are two important elements in Allport's view of prejudice: (1) it is basically a negative attitude; (2) its existence puts the object of prejudice at an unjust disadvantage. Since an overwhelming amount of literature has focused on the white majority and black minority, and since these relations pose the most dramatic threat to the rather worn fabric of American society, in my own discussion of prejudice I will examine the negative racial attitudes whites have toward blacks, and the resultant social malaise.

The *psychological* position, which emphasizes feelings and attitudes, is in contrast to the *sociological* position, which emphasizes the primacy of "groupness." For example, Blumer (1958) argues that

> Race prejudice exists basically in a sense of group position rather than in a set of feelings which members of one racial group have toward the members of another racial group. (p. 3)

This statement makes explicit what the psychological view assumes. That is, to develop a negative attitude there must be some positive referent for comparison. Blumer suggests that this referent is the group to which the prejudiced individual belongs. However, the sociological view goes too far when it attempts to ignore the feelings which members of one racial group have toward members of another. Ultimately we must be concerned with the attitude one person has toward another and with what behavior that attitude implies for a specific situational interaction.

A thorough discussion of prejudice depends upon a socio-psychological concept–social comparison. Social comparison theory, first stated formally by Leon Festinger (1954), describes very simply the processes by which individuals come to place themselves accurately in their social milieu. If you want to know whether you are pretty or ugly, rich or poor, a fast or slow runner, smart or dumb, nice or mean, you must compare yourself with others. But you don't compare yourself to just *any* other person, only to people who are reasonably similar to yourself. For example, you would not estimate your own intelligence through comparison with that of a five-year-old child. Thus one formulates his perceptions and beliefs about himself on the basis of comparison with other members of his reference group.

Each individual, of course, belongs to many specific reference groups, but the sense of group position referred to by Blumer is a consequence of social comparison processes within a given group. The problem of prejudice follows from using the standards of one's own group when comparing the self to someone in another group. Moreover, this standard is unfairly used if one's own-group identification is always seen as the *positive pole* in the comparison process.

Prejudice is a negative attitude toward a person or group based upon a social comparison process in which the individual's own group is taken as the positive point of reference. The behavioral manifestation of prejudice

is *discrimination*–those actions designed to maintain own-group characteristics and favored position *at the expense of* members of the comparison group. I agree with Raab and Lipset (1959) when they state that the behavioral manifestation of prejudice creates the social problem. Therefore, behavior is of more concern to us than the attitude view of prejudice.

WHAT IS RACISM?

In describing the "basic causes" of the wave of race riots that swept the United States in the summers of 1964 through 1967, the riot Commission made the following observation:

> Race prejudice has shaped our history decisively in the past; it now threatens to do so again. White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II. (*U.S. Commission on Civil Disorders,* 1968, p. 203)

Note that *history's* problems were blamed on "race prejudice," while present racial tensions are blamed primarily on "white racism." Are racism and race prejudice interchangeable terms or is there discontinuity of history? Or has racism generally supplanted prejudice as a more inclusive term which encompasses, in addition to prejudice, ". . . hostility, discrimination, segregation, and other negative action expressed toward an ethnic group . . ." (Marx, 1971, p.101)?

Van den Berghe (1967) attempts a rather specific definition of racism when he defines it as ". . . any set of beliefs that organic, genetically transmitted differences (whether real or imagined) between human groups are intrinsically associated with the presence or the absence of certain socially relevant abilities or characteristics, hence that such differences are a legitimate basis of invidious distinctions between groups socially defined as races" (p.11). This suggests that racism is the natural process by which the physical and/or cultural characteristics of one group of people (e.g., black Americans) acquire negative social significance in a racially heterogeneous society.

Racism puts as much emphasis on the positive attributes of one's own race as on the considered negative attributes of the other. The following example from Abraham Lincoln is revealing.

> I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races; I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor qualifying them to hold office. . .I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will ever forbid the two

> races living together on terms of social and political equality. And in as much as they cannot so live, while they do remain together, there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race. (Abraham Lincoln, complete works, edited by Nicolay and Hay, the Century Company, 1894, pp. 369, 370, 457, 458)

Nor is black skin color the only criterion, as the following statement, made in 1909 by California *Progressive* Chester Powell, indicates:

> [Racial discrimination] is blind and uncontrollable prejudice . . . yet social separateness seems to be imposed by the very law of nature. [An educated Japanese] would not be a welcomed suitor for the hand of any American's daughter [but] an Italian of the commonest standing and qualities would be a more welcomed suitor than the finest gentleman of Japan. So the line is biological, and we draw it at the biological point–at the propagation of the species. (Daniels, 1968, p. 49)

These statements represent what most writers call *individual racism.* Of the three types of racism–individual, institutional, and cultural–individual racism is closest to race prejudice and suggests a belief in the superiority of one's own race over another, and the behavioral enactments that maintain those superior and inferior positions.

Individual racism and race prejudice do not differ to a major degree. However, the white racism indictment of the Kerner Commission goes beyond the level of individual racism to the more general, more insidious, and more debilitating *institutional racism.* Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) describe institutional racism as

> . . .[when] five hundred black babies die each year because of lack of proper food, shelter and medical facilities, and thousands more are destroyed and maimed physically, emotionally and intellectually because of conditions of poverty and discrimination in the black community. . .or when black people are locked in dilapidated slum tenements, subject to the daily prey of exploitative slumlords, merchants, loan sharks and discriminatory real estate agents. (p. 4)

This view represents one of two meanings of institutional racism, the conscious manipulation of institutions to achieve racist objectives. To this end, racist institutions are but extensions of individual racist thought. Thus, for example, "grandfather clauses" and "poll taxes" can be seen as the manipulation of the political process to achieve individual (or collective) racist ends.

Institutional racism also operates on another, subtler level. Colleges, graduate schools, and professional schools have for many years relied heavily on standardized test scores as criteria for admission. Black children and students routinely have inferior training in both test taking and the

content of test materials. Therefore, in many cases the 600 SAT's or 700 GRE's requirement might as well be a "white only" sign on the gates of the educational institutions.*

We ask how *free* is free enterprise, how *equal* is equal opportunity employment, how *fair* are fair housing statutes? Is there a difference between *de jure* inequality and *de facto* inequality?

Institutional racism has two meanings, then: First, it is the institutional extension of individual racist beliefs; this consists primarily of using and manipulating duly constituted institutions so as to maintain a racist advantage over others. Second, it is the byproduct of certain institutional practices which operate to restrict on a racial basis the choices, rights, mobility, and access of groups of individuals. These unequal consequences need not be intended, but they are not the less real for being simply *de facto.*

Cultural racism, the third type, contains elements of both individual and institutional racism. Cultural racism can generally be defined as the individual and institutional expression of the superiority of one race's cultural heritage over that of another race. Racism is appropriate to the extent that racial and cultural factors are highly correlated and are a systematic basis for inferior treatment. When the Europeans first encountered the Africans they differed in fundamental cultural ways. African religion was polytheistic and utilized magic and superstition to a considerable extent. Western religion was monotheistic and emphasized rational thought. The invention of Johann Gutenberg made literacy an important value in Western society. African society had an oral tradition, but whites did not see that tradition as simply another way of communicating, teaching, and preserving the past—they saw it as a symptom of basic illiteracy.

It is cultural racism that has been most transparent to the eyes of American race-relation analysts. It is a matter of cultural racism when the achievements of a race of people are fully ignored in education. It is a matter of cultural racism when the expression of cultural differences is unrewarded or is interpreted negatively. It is not just black people who have been victimized by the cultural melting-pot myth, but all ethnic minorities. White Western-European religion, music, philosophy, law, politics, economics, morality, science, and medicine are all without question considered to be the best in the world.

Within the United States we are led to believe that black people contributed absolutely nothing to the American expression of these

*Of course, test scores can be "rich only" criteria also. Poor whites, however, have options which blacks never have, because racism restricts opportunity. Here, as in many other places in this book, the analysis of black problems can be applied to the poor or to other minorities. In the main, the analysis of racism can be applied on a case by case basis to other groups.

cultural forms. More significantly, any person, regardless of his cultural background, who cannot function well according to the dictates of white Western cultural norms does not have much opportunity for success in this society. Black Americans are now reacting to cultural racism by asserting their blackness, their African heritage, their cultural uniqueness.

To summarize briefly, racism has three faces: individual, institutional, and cultural. Individual racism is closely akin to race prejudice, but differs from the latter in (a) the importance of biological considerations and (b) the role of behavioral enactments. The concept of institutional racism has gained prominence since Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) and the United States Commission on Civil Disorders (1968) (hereafter known as the Kerner Report after the Illinois governor who chaired the commission) have sought to clarify and elaborate on it. I have introduced the term "cultural racism" to define the intersection of cultural and racial differences where superiority on *both* factors is assumed.

A CONCISE HISTORY OF EARLY RACE RELATIONS IN AMERICA

As I walk down the main street of a small town in northern Ohio I am aware of the curious stares of little children. I watch them tug at their mothers' skirts and point at me as if I had stepped from a TV fantasy. I see their mothers try to suppress this infantile curiosity in the interest of proper public behavior ("It's not nice to point!") while they themselves wait to stare daggers into my back.

Racial tension is probably higher now than at any time in American history. My idealistic undergraduate friend asks, Why now? Why now do black students willfully absent themselves from high schools, segregate themselves on predominantly white college campuses, and speak of revolution? Why haven't we righted the obvious wrongs of slavery? Why can't we make peace with our fellow man?

When we look around us we do not find answers, we find only symptoms of a diseased relationship. What do white rural farmers of southern Illinois know of 12-year-old black boys nodding on 137th Street in Harlem or dead of an overdose in a vacant tenement? What does the President of the United States know of a 15-year-old white girl hanging herself in an upper-middle-class northern Ohio community? Why is it that now a majority of white Americans would not even sign the original Bill of Rights? The country has become quite complex. Each of us is sheltered from the experiences of others by emotional rhetoric, selective reporting of the media, and growing urban sprawl. We cannot know for sure what others feel, why or if they hate, whether or not there exists a chance for humane interaction. Laws, plans, policies and programs come churning out of state houses and federal buildings at a rapid clip, but the problems do not get simpler–they become more complex.

It is difficult, indeed impossible, to make any sense out of the contemporary social, political, cultural scene without the benefit of history. History tells different stories to different people. Black Africans looked strange to the British in 1550, but the white menace evoked its own reaction in the black soon-to-be captives:

> The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was connected with terror, when I was carried on board . . . I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke (which was very different from any I had ever heard), united to confirm me in this belief.*

On this score did race relations begin: white Europeans shanghaiing black bodies for the long middle-passage.

Let us now briefly extract the salient aspects of the history of race relations. We are not so much interested in names and dates, or even events, but rather in the philosophical, ideological, attitudinal underpinnings of racial animosity in America.

Racist Attitudes–Racist Behavior–The Beginning

The first fact of history is that the British attitude was predisposed toward racism before any Englishman even beheld a black African. The very color black had long possessed strong negative meaning and emotional ties. You can well imagine how the British responded to *people* who were that color! Not only was black bad; its opposite, white, was *very good.*

We can call the reactions of white Englishmen to black Africans racist attitudes, but as with any attitudes, they are of little consequence unless conditions are present which link them to specific, correlated behaviors. The conditions of sixteenth-century England which started the long chain of events leading to the present were (a) the social, political, and economic consequences of the Renaissance and (b) the Protestant Reformation.

The Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries represented a formal break from religious domination of life and thought to an intense, individualistic world view. The measure of a man was his achievements on earth–the more numerous his capacities, the more impressive his personal worth. Leonardo da Vinci was perhaps the prototypical Renaissance man.

The upshot of this individualism was, in the social sphere, the dissolution of the feudal system and a heavy emphasis on individual

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*From *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African. Written by Himself,* 1791.

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