

An influential American sociologist endeavors to clear away the ideological cant and slogan in which the discussion of minorities has been enveloped recently.

Some Neglected Aspects of the "Minorities" Problem

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I

ONE OF THE most popular subjects of current discussion is the so-called "minorities" problem. *Public* discussion is uniformly of a pious, rhetorical, legalistic-moralistic character. Any other approach, it is felt, constitutes "prejudice," and this is regarded as a very damaging characterization. What is meant, I suppose, is that prejudices which conflict with the publicly accepted ones are deplorable, for nothing is more respectable than the "right" prejudices. To share the *respectable* prejudices which constitute, in large part, the culture of every community is always praiseworthy.

A considerable agitation by highly articulate minorities, a large segment of the press, and a multitude of "civic" organizations has resulted in a kind of "party line" on the subject of relationships between ethnic, religious, racial, and other groups. This "line" is so well established that any deviation therefrom in *public* discussion is much censored and censured. Few can

afford to write a realistic discussion on the subject, and almost no agencies of mass communication can afford to carry any other than the accepted "line."

Why is this kind of nonsense necessary? Why cannot we have a frank and realistic discussion of the minority problem just as one discusses questions of wealth, poverty, disease, divorce, and delinquency? These are problems that also involve deep human tragedies, personal and social. They are problems that also invoke sympathy, indignation, and a desire on the part of nearly all decent people to remedy injustice, unhappiness, and suffering. Why should not the "minority" problem be accorded *in public* a type of discussion it has long received in private?

There are doubtless many reasons for this state of affairs. I should like to call special attention to only one of them because, although it reveals a laudable human quality, it is inimical to objective analysis. I refer to the sympathy of social scientists, as well as most other people, for certain currently disadvantaged minorities. One shrinks from too rigorous or objective examination of the predicament of people whose misfortunes one recognizes and deplores. As one of my friends (the editor of a leading journal of opinion) put it on reading the analysis which follows below: "*Regardless of the logic and the facts, we must lean over backwards* in the special cases before us because a more realistic view would merely be seized upon by the prejudiced as vindication of their hostility. Any aid or comfort to this group is in the direction of Hitlerism, convent-burning, etc. That danger transcends all other considerations." This attitude is certainly understandable, and one cannot help

but admire it as a finely motivated position. Yet I believe that in the long run it only injures the cause it seeks to advance. In objective *scientific analysis* there can be no "leaning over" *backwards or forwards*, of the type contemplated. Any leaning toward or away from conclusions *scientifically warranted* in order to conform to desired ulterior ends, however laudable under existing mores, is recognized by all scientists as a negation of science.

It is the general thesis of the present paper that the confusion, conflict, and frustration in our management of minority problems derives largely from a refusal to face and discuss certain facts and realities on which intelligent progress toward a workable solution depends. I do not contend that the aspects here to be discussed are *all* the aspects of the problem — on the contrary, I merely believe that they are important *neglected* aspects.

II

In every society men react selectively to their fellow men, in the sense of seeking the association of some and avoiding the association of others. Selective association is necessarily based on *some* observable differences between those whose association we seek and those whose association we avoid. The differences which are the basis for selective association are of indefinitely large variety, of all degrees of visibility and subtlety, and vastly different in social consequences. Sex, age, marital condition, religion, politics, socio-economic status, color, size, shape, health, morals, birth, breeding, and B.O. — the list of differences is endless and varied, but all the items have this in common: (1) They are observable; and (2) they are *significant* differences to those who react selectively to people with the characteristics in question. It is, therefore, wholly absurd to try to ignore, deny, or talk out of existence these differences just because we do not approve of some of their social results.

Yet it is not hard to find anthropolo-

gists who, suffering from the semantic delusion that if you get rid of a word you get rid of what the word stands for, have been trying to abolish *the word* "race." Franz Boas, a distinguished anthropologist in many ways, was a leader in this campaign. Some of his students were badly infected with his mania. The main proposition, namely, that the word "race" has no referent, breaks down rather badly in the face of simple observation. The argument therefore tends to shift to the contention that while the alleged characteristics and differences that constitute the referent of the word "race" do exist, they are *not significant*. It is also contended that unfavorable differential behavior toward possessors of certain racial traits are of rather recent (and illegitimate) origin. Finally, it is held that the differential behavior toward groups characterized by certain differences can and should be wiped out by simple legislation. Thus, two learned anthropologists at Columbia University instruct us as follows: "All races of men can either plow or fight, and all the racial differences among them are in nonessentials such as texture of head hair, amount of body hair, shape of the nose or head, or color of the eyes and the skin."¹ Doubtless the characteristics mentioned have no essential relationship to the business of either plowing or fighting. Nevertheless, as characteristics of groups, these traits individually or in configuration are essential in accounting for selective association, prejudice, or by whatever word the resulting discriminative behavior may be called. Having declared that the differences are "nonessential," these authors also have a quick and easy remedy for certain troubles that have arisen throughout history because of such differences; "The Russian nation has for a generation shown what can be done to outlaw race prejudice in a country with many kinds of people. They did not wait for people's minds to change. They made racial discrimination and persecution illegal."² Today it would be both inadvisable and unnecessary to draw such

an illustration from Russia—we, too, have made “discrimination and persecution illegal.” Yet, strangely, no one seems quite happy with this simple solution. Another illustration would have to be found today, but the remedy doubtless remains the same.

Another widely publicized notion is the doctrine that while ethnocentrism and discrimination are perhaps both a universal and an age-old phenomenon, their occurrence with reference to racial groups is a rather recent and especially obnoxious development. Benedict and Weltfish claim that the notion of race and racial prejudice is hardly a hundred years old. A recent UNESCO bulletin puts it at three-hundred years.³ Lord Bryce is quoted as unable to find much evidence of it before the French Revolution. He solemnly tells us that before that time people did not think of themselves in terms of ethnology; that they made war for every other sort of reason but never “for the sake of imposing their own type of civilization.” Yet I have always read that the word Arab and the word Navajo mean “the people,” which seems to me to indicate that these groups regarded non-Arabs and non-Navajos, respectively, as non-people. Is this thinking of themselves in terms of ethnology or is it not? Were there wars and crusades before the French Revolution for the explicit purpose of “imposing one type of civilization” upon another or were there not? In short, the word *race* refers to a classification which may be as meaningful and objective as many other categories found useful in science. Any time biologists and social scientists want to drop the word and adopt another to designate a certain observable complex of characteristics, “inherent” or acquired, I have no objection. Likewise, ethnocentrism and discrimination are words denoting social behavior not only usually practiced but enforced according to stipulated patterns in every society as a condition of group survival. It is entirely ludicrous to agitate against “race,” “discrimination” and “ethnocentrism” in general when in fact all we are

opposed to is *particular patterns* of this behavior, especially when they affect ourselves adversely.

III

We have seen that (a) detectable differences among human groups do exist, and that (b) these differences are regarded as significant by the people who make them the basis for discriminatory behavior. In much current discussion of “minorities” these facts are hopelessly mixed up with the entirely separate question of whether among all these groups all conceivable abilities will be found similarly distributed. This is a question of fact to be determined in each case as adequate tests become available. Until such tests become conclusive, we cannot assume the existence of differences in abilities, *nor can we assume that such differences do not exist*. All that can be said is that *we do not know*.

It is perfectly true that wholly unwarranted assumptions have been made about inherent differences and ability among racial and ethnic groups, and that the demonstrable differences can be shown quite conclusively to be merely the results of cultural differentials. The fact that absurd contentions regarding the inferiority of some races have been made does not seem to warrant an equally absurd assumption that *there cannot be* statistically significant differences between racial, ethnic, religious, and any other classification of the human species, in any or all abilities whatsoever. When valid tests of a great variety of abilities become available, we shall be able to answer these questions. In the meantime, there appears to be no warrant for denying the possibility of such differences.

Not that more conclusive tests of ability will make much difference in solving discrimination based on *prejudice*, because it is the essence of prejudice that it should be based on less than scientifically adequate objective grounds. It is quite unlikely, furthermore, that tests will ever be invented which will measure so-called in-

herent abilities *entirely* uninfluenced by cultural factors. In the end we shall have to be content with testing different groups for the abilities which they do possess at the time tested, however these abilities are acquired and however they are influenced by cultural opportunities.

It is probably rather to be taken for granted that the scores achieved by all groups would be different if their cultural opportunity had been different. The fact remains that people will be treated according to the abilities which they *have* at a given time, place, and circumstance, not according to what abilities they *might have had* under different circumstances. Class structure, discrimination, and prejudice are based on detectable, observable differences of some kind *as they exist in a given social context*, regardless of the fact that this context, under different circumstances, might have been different. It does not follow that *all* differences are discriminated against. Only deviations in a *disapproved direction* become the basis of discrimination. And what determines disapproval? Broadly speaking, people disapprove (rightly or wrongly, on the basis of experience or superstition) of that which they *believe* threatens some value of their own.

I do not believe for a moment that the present status structure is the only possible one, that it is the "best," the "most just," or necessary. I do believe that in all but possibly the simplest societies, class structures with variable status, and "discrimination" on the basis of such status, have always existed, now exist, and will continue to exist. Many people are not prepared to admit this because it flies in the face of certain notions of democracy, human brotherhood, and certain other legalistic-moralistic premises to which most of us have prior emotional commitments. The difference between these preconceptions and the requirements of strictly objective analysis is not apparent to many people. Yet it is such analysis which the problem most needs in order that we may deter-

mine what, if anything, can be done about it.

IV

Closely related to the error of trying to talk out of existence demonstrable differences between racial and ethnic groups is the failure to recognize and emphasize the universality of the phenomenon of discrimination by groups against each other on the basis of all kinds of differences, physical and social. Many people seem to think that if only discrimination against Jews, Catholics, Negroes, Orientals, and perhaps a few other groups could be abolished in this country, "discrimination" as such would disappear and the so-called minority problems would cease to exist. Yet data to the contrary are overwhelming and may be observed about us on every hand.

Collins⁴ has shown that in a New England factory the Irish discriminate against the Yankees, the Yankees against the Poles, etc. Alexander⁵ found that college students admitted antipathies and prejudices against people regardless of ethnic group on the basis of some five hundred characteristics, including such features as large nostrils, black watery eyes, and oily hair. They also admitted prejudice against bowlegged persons, persons whose hands have stubby fingers, people who sniff vigorously when talking, etc., etc. Other studies have shown pioneers discriminating against newcomers, the innumerable discriminations against women, and, of course, the discriminations of in-groups against all out-groups whatsoever, which is one of the most basic generalized facts that sociologists have come up with.

Yet discussions of minority problems are carried on with a fine disregard of everything we know about the subject as a natural phenomenon in favor of the most elaborate legalistic-moralistic philosophizing and psychoanalysis. The popularity of the psychoanalytic approach is not surprising in view of the fact that it usually absolves all minorities from any responsibility whatsoever for any prejudice that

may exist against them for any reason whatsoever. All people who treat members of a minority in a way that the latter do not like are simply deranged, that's all, and it becomes the heavy duty of all minorities and their friends who have seen the light to proceed with the only remedy, namely, psychoanalysis of the "prejudiced." Innumerable books, special courses, institutes, workshops, and lectures give advice as to how to abolish "prejudice," "discrimination," and selective association—all of them entirely normal and necessary social processes in the maintenance of the mores and the social order generally.⁶

In most cases, of course, these efforts do not deal with the general problem. Their discussion usually boils down to how two or three or half a dozen specific minorities can maintain and enjoy their ethnocentric identity and *at the same time* suffer no differential behavior of a negative or out-group sort from the rest of the community. In other words, a substantial part of the agitation on behalf of minorities is directed at the old problem of how to have one's cake and eat it too.

Here it is necessary to distinguish sharply between two types of agitation on behalf of minorities. One of these types is perhaps best represented by certain Jewish and Negro groups. They recognize the basic nature of the problem essentially as

set forth in this paper. They are content to insist upon equal rights under the law, but reserve for themselves the privilege of selective association on religious, cultural, racial, or any other grounds that please them, including the privilege of discriminating against outsiders on these bases and accepting the penalty of being similarly discriminated against by other groups. These groups work quietly and effectively for the achievement of that changed status in the estimation of the community which in the long run is the only solution of the so-called minorities problem, to the extent that it is subject to solution. Such groups fall wholly outside the criticisms of the present paper.

On the other hand, there are those minority groups who appear to have set for themselves the impossible and psychopathic task of maintaining an exclusive group identity (through negative discrimination against outsiders) and at the same time abolishing differential (discriminatory) behavior toward themselves on the basis of precisely the exclusive identity sought. I call it psychopathic because it seeks to advance mutually exclusive values. Most minority movements have at least a lunatic fringe interested in those impossible goals.

Exactly what goals have minority pressure groups set for themselves? Do they actually contemplate a state of affairs un-

der which, for example, they will suffer *no* differential behavior of a type displeasing to themselves? If so, they have set a goal which is, in fact, enjoyed by no other group, majority or minority. It has been shown that within the majority group there exists innumerable cliques, fraternal organizations, socio-economic strata, and other groupings which discriminate against each other quite as severely as they discriminate against the minority groups in question.⁷ Such discriminations are accepted for the most part, are taken as a matter of course, and are regarded as a universal phenomenon of normal social organization.

In cases where a group finds itself discriminated against by being denied the equal protection, immunity, and privileges guaranteed by law to all citizens, they have, of course, an obviously legitimate ground for protest which no one questions. This has been, and is, notoriously true in the case of the Negro in the United States, and if minority agitation were directed solely at discriminations which violate the law, there could be no more question about it than there is about other cases of failure of law enforcement. The *wisdom* of a particular law or a particular interpretation of the law may still be questioned, and agitation for its modification is always in order. The same is true of the mores.

It is unfortunate that entirely proper agitation on this subject has been allowed to assume the form of a distinctively minority concern, because differential and discriminatory enforcement of the law is a very general phenomenon and not distinctively a minority problem at all. That is, Negroes are not the only group subjected to gangsterism, lynching, and other forms of violations of the law. The bombing of a respectable and public-spirited Negro in the South is in no way fundamentally different in principle from the beating administered to a white citizen of Illinois for taking his duties of citizenship seriously and opposing gangsters.

It is true that the incidence of some

types of deprivation of equal protection and privileges under the law is *much greater* against certain groups. But it is a mistake to allow agitation against these discriminations to take the form of a particular minority problem, because it implies that we are chiefly interested in redressing these grievances only for the minority in question, which in turn carries the implication of *special protection* for that minority. This approach becomes, of course, increasingly objectionable in proportion as it can be shown that the discrimination complained of is the common lot also of many other groups without organized means of protest. I do not question here the propriety of a particular minority protesting and agitating for the redress of such grievances. I merely point out that such agitation should be undertaken in the name of *all* persons and classes who suffer the deprivation.

The question of special privilege reduces to this: If hostility and criticism by other groups would be the inevitable consequence of a certain type of behavior *no matter who engages in it*, then any minority (or majority) which insists on engaging in the behavior and at the same time expects immunity from criticism is flagrantly engaged in seeking special immunities and privileges for itself. Among the aspects of the minority problem neglected in current discussion is surely the failure to point out that *some* of the hostility complained of by *some* minorities is not based on prejudice at all, but on grounds warranted by community consensus.

What are some of these behaviors which are likely to encounter hostility on the part of contemporary American communities no matter what group engages in them? Doubtless they are very numerous. As a partial list, I submit the following:

1. Race, color, nationality, religion or *any observable characteristic whatsoever* on the part of some groups become the basis of hostility and discrimination if their aspirations to equality are regarded by the dominant group as a threat to their

own identity and their own relative status.

2. Conspicuous (i.e., more than usual) ethnocentrism on the part of any group in a community is likely to incur a certain hostility on the part of other groups regardless of particular racial, religious, or other characteristics.

3. Political influence out of all proportion to their numbers, especially when exercised in ways regarded by the rest of the community as contrary to the public interest is likely to incur hostility toward the group which for one reason or another happens to be in a position to exert such disproportionate influence.

4. Conspicuous allegiance to any foreign culture, cult, religion, or political group, or other connection commanding prior, competing, or higher obligation than their allegiance to the nation in which they live and enjoy citizenship is likely to be regarded with hostility, by the rest of the community, regardless of other characteristics of minority or majority groups.

5. Great activity and coercive techniques on behalf of such foreign and alien groups is likely to be resented by other groups. Money-raising campaigns, and other conspicuous agitation, are liable to arouse widespread hostility on the part of the public which feels imposed upon by those coercive intrusions, regardless of how worthy the cause.

6. Monopoly or undue concentration on the part of any minority in any profession or occupation of high status will be resented by other groups. The legitimacy of such objection may be debatable but there is no question about the offensiveness of such concentration to the rest of the community. When the minority group in question is also the object of hostility on one or more of the other counts here enumerated, the un-wisdom of a minority's concentration in strategic occupations is a proper subject for dispassionate, rational consideration, especially on the part of the minority concerned.

7. Attempts on the part of *any* group to secure for itself special privileges and

immunities are recognized, in the United States, at least, as a legitimate ground for hostility. Organizations aiming to suppress criticism of themselves by means of censorship of movies, books, and other works of art are of this character.

V

But why not treat each individual on his merits regardless of classification? This proposal seems so obviously fair and reasonable that it has become the great rallying cry for all of the admirable people genuinely concerned about unfortunate and unjust discriminations against individuals because of their group membership or classification. Nation-wide campaigns and "brotherhood weeks" are devoted to the propagation of this idea. Unfortunately, for all its merits, the proposal is impractical and is, especially in large impersonal societies, perhaps destined to be increasingly violated.

It may be regrettable, but I fear it is a fact that large-scale secondary group societies are as a matter of practical necessity compelled to classify people in an increasing number of ways, and then to accord them privileges and immunities of all kinds on the basis, not of their individual characteristics and abilities, but on the basis of their classification. Innumerable illustrations immediately come to mind.

The privilege of voting and holding office and many other rights accrues to a citizen by virtue of his membership in the age group 21 and over, and are denied to age groups under 21. Legislation specifies that only college graduates may be considered for certain employment. Countless other classifications of human beings on the basis of which they are accorded or denied certain privileges, i.e., are discriminated against, will occur to the reader. Now surely no one would contend that there are not people under 21 who in every relevant respect are better qualified for the privileges reserved for people 21 and over. Likewise, I suppose no one will deny that large numbers of people who have never

been to college are incomparably better qualified in all the fields in which college is supposed to give one special training than are some college graduates. Yet all these people are unjustly discriminated against by all regulations limiting participation to college graduates.

We may deplore the necessity of practicing such discrimination, but we defend it on the practical ground that the probability is higher (at least slightly higher) that, for example, a college graduate can read and write than the probability that non-college people possess these skills. In the same way, knowing what we know about the inferior educational advantages of Negroes, it is probably safe to say that in our culture the probability of a white man knowing how to use a typewriter or operate a slide-rule is greater than the corresponding probability for Negroes. Practical necessities in large secondary group societies unfortunately make necessary such classifications of people on the basis of the *differences in probabilities regarding their possession or non-possession of certain relevant traits*.

To be sure, there is in most such cases no basis for any true computation of probabilities. If we have been bitten by one dog, we are likely to be "prejudiced" against a number of dogs we meet subsequently without much reference to the actual probability of their biting. To be sure, this attitude is doubtless an injustice to the dog population in general. Also, it can doubtless be shown that many people with anti-dog "prejudices" have never been bitten by dogs at all. But we do know some things about the biology and psychology of conditioning and learning, which makes it unnecessary for most of us to attribute the "prejudice" against dogs to sexual repression, scapegoatism, racism, or economic infelicity.

In proportion as the criteria for the classification are irrelevant to the functions to be performed, great waste and inefficiency, as well as injustice, result. The advancement of the social sciences should

result in greatly improving our methods of classification. I am here merely calling attention to the fact that nearly everyone suffers discriminations every day on the basis of the classification to which one is assigned by the existing rules of the social order, regardless of the applicability of these rules to his individual case. Recognition of this fact would do much to put many minority and discrimination problems into proper perspective.

The whole matter is well summarized by the following news item (*Time Magazine*, February 18, 1952, p. 67): "The grand jury (Los Angeles) made up its mind about the question of the telephone operators, declared that the board has 'condoned' discrimination against 'colored, Jewish, Oriental applicants, and *applicants of middle-age!*'" (Italics mine.) Now, according to the current "line," discrimination against colored, Jewish, and Oriental applicants results from prejudice and constitutes a minority problem, whereas exactly the same behavior against "applicants of middle-age" is neither discrimination nor a minority problem. And what about discrimination against spastics and the facially deformed? Or consider the exclusion from apartment houses of couples with small children *as well as* colored, Jewish, and Oriental persons. The reader will have no difficulty in multiplying illustrations.

VI

In summary, it should be pointed out that the right to discriminate and to choose one's primary group associates on whatever discriminatory basis one pleases is among the most generally recognized in our culture by both common and statute law. It is frequently overlooked that the rights in this respect are correlative and that implied in all our rights to do certain things is also the right not to do them. The right to speak includes the right to be silent. The right to vote includes the right to abstain from voting. The right to join a labor union has, until the Roosevelt dispen-

to join. The right to associate with Negroes includes the right not to associate with them. The right to drink alcoholic liquor implies the right to abstain therefrom. Has it ever occurred to some of our staunchest crusaders for civil rights that among these rights may be the *right* to dislike and discriminate against colored persons, Oriental persons, poets, sociologists, men, women, children, cats, and dogs?

I have no illusions about the nature of these rights or about any others, including the most "inalienable." They come into existence by community consensus and continue to exist only as long as community consensus supports them. It is the privilege of those who disagree with the consensus to attempt to alter it by whatever means the mores allow. In the meantime it is the privilege of others to exercise without apology the rights which by consensus are recognized. Among these are the right to practice certain discriminations not yet prohibited by community sentiment, mores, or laws.

In short, the right to practice certain discriminations is among the most cherished rights of any people. Indeed, as we saw at the outset, the mores *require* us to discriminate against the disreputable and the disapproved. The exercise of these rights may frequently work a hardship upon those against whom they are exercised. Nevertheless, most people are willing to pay that price for the maintenance of their own right to do likewise. Which of these rights we are willing to give up in return for the achievement of certain other results which we also value becomes, therefore, fundamentally a question of balancing the values we attach to mutually exclusive social situations. In the end, it is on this basis that the question of discrimination against minorities will be settled.

The right of a group to exclude from a private housing area (from clubs, from fraternities, from employment, etc.) whatever classification of people they wish to exclude, *for whatever reason or lack of reason*, may be neither "rational," "just,"

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"democratic," or conducive to community peace and good feeling. *Yet to deny them this right may violate a principle of individual freedom that is still more highly valued by nearly everyone, including most of the members of the groups which object to the particular case in which it operates against themselves.* A restriction upon such discrimination involves a cost in the incidental abandonment of that set of privileges or freedoms which today constitutes the discriminatory behavior. For it must not be forgotten that to those who discriminate, this behavior constitutes a value, and frequently a very high ranking value. To those who suffer the discrimination, *this particular behavior is not a value at all because it affects them adversely.* But this does not mean that they do not value highly their own discriminatory behavior against other groups. Nor is it a question of whose values are "best." The values which an individual holds are always by definition, "best" *to him*. What is "best" in general obviously depends upon the criteria of goodness we adopt.

Accordingly, the issues of prejudice and discrimination that have been treated as special problems turn out to be merely another case of reconciling or choosing between conflicting values. In that choice, every community has over the centuries decided that for itself certain discriminations shall be maintained. Those who disagree with the valuations in force, may attempt to change them. But in the meantime, the discriminations represent the community's estimate of *which* freedoms must yield to others. Under this rule, everyone will find at some time or other that his own hierarchy of values do not coincide with that of the community. He will then feel persecuted and "discriminated" against. He is also likely to feel that he is the victim of personal malice on the part of some individuals and groups. But he will look in vain for a society in which the phenomenon is non-existent, although it may affect different individuals and groups in radically different ways.

It seems never to have occurred to some "minority" analysts that *sometimes* "prejudice" and discrimination need no other explanation than the fact that the case in question is simply a disagreeable person (or group) of a type which would be discriminated against by practically everyone in any community. At other times discrimination is more or less incidental to congenial interpersonal relations in the interest of harmony, efficiency, morale, etc. This, it seems to me, is an adequate explanation of Mrs. Roosevelt's decision to discharge her white employees in favor of an all Negro kitchen force for the White House.⁸ But such explanations of *some* discrimination will not satisfy the dedicated anti-discriminationist. He must explain even the simplest case in recondite terms of "authoritarian personality," "racism," or simple personal malice.

The causes of "prejudice" and "discrimination" are doubtless often numerous and involved. (The professional "anti" aggravates the problem by insisting on "*the*" cause instead of *causes*.) But the multiplicity of causes constitutes no reason for refusing to include among them quite obvious and objective factors.

VII

Finally, we may call attention to rather generally observed facts that parochial and other private schools, fraternal organizations, and the like, by virtue of their exclusiveness, inevitably incur a certain hostility as in-groups deliberately discriminating in the choice of clients and members as against the rest of the community. Ordinarily, exclusive groups accept such hostility as a matter of course and as an inevitable cost of exclusiveness. Those who are excluded likewise usually accept the fact and compensate by retaliation when possible, by "sour grapes" rationalizations, or by simply indulging in the luxury of resentment. Only in the case of a few groups is the matter regarded as a "problem" requiring community action. The fact is that, rightly or wrongly, freedom to es-

establish private fraternal and other organizations and to stipulate the criteria for membership is one of the most generally recognized freedoms of our culture. To permit such organizations and at the same time to deny them the privilege of choosing their members seems utterly ridiculous in view of the fact that perhaps their primary reason for existence is precisely this exclusiveness and selectiveness.

The same may be said regarding the much discussed "discrimination" of *private* schools and colleges in the selection of students. I know that it has been argued that since private colleges are tax-free they are in fact quasi-public institutions. The fact remains that under their present charters, they were clearly intended to have the right of selecting their students on any basis they see fit, in spite of their exemption from taxation.

In colleges of limited enrollment, *selection* of students on *some* basis is inevitable. This may result in flagrant discrimination against well-to-do students in favor of less well-to-do students (and *vice versa*) if the college wishes to maintain as a definite part of its educational program a socioeconomic distribution of students more nearly resembling that which exists in the country at large. The same kind of selection is in practice in some institutions with respect to the geographic distribution of their student body. The complete exclusion of one sex, in men's and women's colleges respectively, needs hardly be mentioned.

Any number of other classifications of students might be in force either for the purpose of excluding entirely certain categories or assigning them to a stipulated quota. Such selection can be defended on entirely rational grounds in a society where all cultural minorities as well as the majority are free to establish institutions and fraternities of their own. Note that I do not pretend that there is anything self-evident or "scientific" about that conclusion or its opposite. I am merely saying that *according to my scale of values*, I would rather live in a society where this

freedom is allowed than in a society where it is not allowed. I have no quarrel with any person who takes the opposite position, *provided* he does not pretend that *his preference* in the matter has some inherent, self-evident, moral, or "scientific" warrant which mine does not. I insist that there is no "scientific" warrant for either conclusion. It is purely a question of relative values held by an individual or a community.

In this connection should be mentioned one particular type of discrimination because discussions of it illustrate so admirably the confused state of thinking on the subject. I refer to the periodic agitation on the somewhat childish subject of college fraternities.

Before me lies a brochure entitled "Stepping Stones to Fraternity," representing the aims of a (presumably self-appointed) "national committee on fraternities in education." The officers and directors are chiefly professors and clergymen, and they are agitated by the well-known and indubitable fact that college fraternities exercise "discrimination" in the selection of members. The committee is especially indignant at the practice of some national fraternities for expelling local chapters which desire to admit classes of students barred by the national organization. Accordingly Point 5 of the Committee's objectives is categorically declared to be "permitting young people to select their own companions, free from outside pressures." This goal seems admirable to me and has my enthusiastic support. But on the same page the Committee also solemnly declares that "discrimination in fraternity membership can and should be overcome." This is a clear contradiction of Point 5 as stated above. "Free to select" *means* "free to discriminate."

Further examination of the brochure only increases the confusion. On Page 3 it is asserted that "about half of these societies (national fraternities) have restrictive membership policies." Now obviously the fact is that *all* of them have such policies, because *some* kind of selective and restric-

tive membership policy is the essence of these organizations. On the same page it is asserted that "sixty per cent opposed *any* discrimination." [Italics in the original.] If they did, it shows that they do not even recognize discrimination when they practice it. The reason for the whole confusion, of course, is that the word *discrimination* is used by the Committee to mean only *those discriminations* to which the Committee objects.

What the Committee means, obviously, is not that it is opposed to discrimination but that it deplores the exclusion of *certain classes* of students from membership. I think it quite likely that I share the Committee's prejudices and tastes in this matter, and if so I gladly join them in a program of education and moral suasion to convert all other men to accept *our* criteria for membership in fraternities—for criteria there *must* be. If this is in fact the Committee's objective, why not say so, instead of claiming to favor "free choice" which may operate just as frequently to exclude as to include prospective members.

And what of the threat on the part of national fraternity organizations to expel local chapters if the latter admit classes of students barred by the national organization? To be sure, this is an attempt to limit the freedom of choice of the local chapter. But what could be more commonplace than a national organization specifying what categories of people may become members? Local chapters that do not approve of the membership specifications laid down by the national organization are under no compulsion to affiliate with the national organization, or to continue their affiliation if already affiliated. This solution of the "problem" is so obvious that even college fraternity men have actually discovered it and acted accordingly. They have also displayed a certain realism in accepting as a reasonable price of freedom whatever penalties secession from the national organization entails. All this can be done and has been done without the help of any organized outside help whatever.

I am quite willing to admit that the Committee is animated by genuine sympathy for individuals and classes in some respects underprivileged and discriminated against on grounds which I, too, consider absurd. I am even more concerned with the possibility that, (as so often happens), in its laudable attempt to correct some evils, the Committee invokes principles and methods a thousand times more objectionable than the conditions it aims to correct. The principle of free association (in such matters as fraternities) may well be such a consideration.

I rejoice when I hear that a white fraternity has admitted a Negro, especially when doing so involves certain penalties, such as expulsion from the national organization. But I also rejoice when I hear that any purely private and social organization has refused to be coerced into admitting someone whom *for any reason* they prefer not to admit.⁹ *Both* cases represent to me what is meant by freedom of choice.

VIII

The phenomenon of intergroup discrimination is as widespread and as old as human society. All people belong to "in-groups" ("we-groups") with reference to which all other groups are "out-groups" ("they-groups"). Any distinguishable characteristic which has implications of subordination or superordination in a status scale becomes the basis for discriminatory behavior.

Fortunately, most of these distinctions and discriminations are taken for granted, and, indeed, are strongly supported by the community mores. Under conditions of rapid social change, however, *certain* distinctions and discriminations become matters of dispute. These special cases constitute the so-called "minority" problems of a given time and place. The controversy in the current stage of social thinking is largely in terms of "rights," "justice," "brotherhood" and other ideals and principles, the definition of which remains largely subjective.¹⁰ We need more objective criteria

of "right" and "justice". In the meantime, the necessary adjustments tend to be achieved on a functional basis, though often with a serious time-lag.

The right and the desirability of attempting in specific times and places to change the existing class and status alignments have not been questioned. We have been concerned rather with certain neglected aspects of the processes through which such changes take place. Above all, we have emphasized that the attainment of some freedoms and some values for some people usually involve the sacrifice of other freedoms and other values for other people. It is for "minorities" (or more especially their organized pressure groups) to consider whether some of their efforts are not self-defeating in that they may involve the sacrifice for everyone of the very freedoms from which the minorities themselves have the most to gain. The right to form *exclu-*

sive organizations for the advancement of any common interest is one of those freedoms.

We have noted the basic role of values in determining the status of cultural minorities in all times and places. An effective program of *modification* of values depends first of all on an accurate determination of *existing* values. What is the content, the intensity, the hierarchical position, the diffusion, the trends, etc., of existing value systems? To what extent do pressure groups truly represent the values of the constituents for whom the leaders undertake to speak? Fortunately, the last fifteen years have seen the development of techniques for answering such questions with a degree of validity hitherto unknown.¹¹ With more adequate information of this type before us, the problem can be approached in a manner which will yield maximum satisfaction to all.

NOTES

¹R. Benedict and G. Weltfish, *The Races of Man*, p. 7.

²*Ibid.*, p. 39.

³M. Leiris, *Race and Culture*, Columbia University Press.

⁴O. Collins, "Ethnic Behavior in Industry," *American Journal of Sociology*. January, 1946.

⁵C. Alexander, "Antipathy and Social Behavior," *American Journal of Sociology*. January, 1946. One critic of my conclusions from this study apparently feels he has somehow refuted it by pointing out that the antipathies are culturally conditioned and not "innate." Of course neither the original author nor the present writer has said one word implying that we believe these or other antipathies to be innate. The reaction of the critic is interesting as an indication of his preoccupation with the reform aspects of the situation. He is eager to point out, although it has no relevance in the present argument, that possibly people with prejudice against sniffers, etc., can be reformed!

⁶Note that I am *not* saying that current prejudices, discrimination, etc., are "necessary or desirable social processes." All I have said is that the mores—approved conduct—are defined and maintained by exactly these behaviors that are called "prejudice" and "discrimination," at least by those against whom these behaviors are directed. It is gross carelessness in speech and writing to declaim against "prejudice" and "discrimination" when all that is meant is *certain* prejudices and discriminations, namely, those deplored

by some individual or group.

⁷G. Lundberg and L. Dickson, "Selective Association Among Ethnic Groups in a High School Population," *American Sociological Review*. February, 1952.

⁸"But the first criticism I heard against our housekeeping was when Mrs. Roosevelt brought in all colored help instead of the mixed staff the Hoovers had in the kitchen, until it was solid Negro. . . . We had our reasons for making this change. Mrs. Roosevelt and I agreed that a solid staff in any one color (segregation?) works in better understanding and maintains a smoother-running establishment." Henrietta Nesbitt, *White House Diary* (Doubleday, 1948), p. 78. (Parenthesis mine).

⁹Dean Roscoe Pound has pointed out the unenforceability of any purely legal compulsion in matters of this kind. (*Social Control through Law*, Yale University Press, 1942, pp. 73-74.)

¹⁰See my essay "Conflicting Orientation in Law and National Policy," Chapter 10 in R. W. Taylor (ed.), *Life, Language, Law*, Antioch Press, 1957.

¹¹Charles Morris and Lyle V. Jones, "Value Scales and Dimensions," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. 51, Nov. 1955, pp. 523-535. S. C. Dodd, "How to Measure Values," *Research Studies of the State College of Washington*, Vol. 18, 1950, pp. 163-168. G. A. Lundberg, "Human Values—A Research Program," *Ibid.*, 1950, pp. 103-111.