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Race, Caste, and Other Invidious Distinctions in Social Stratification

A society is socially stratified when its members are divided into categories which are differentially powerful, esteemed, and rewarded. Such systems of collective social ranking vary widely in the ideologies which support them, in the distinctiveness, number, and size of the ranked categories, in the criteria by which inclusion in the categories is conferred and changed, in the symbols by which such inclusion is displayed and recognized, in the degree to which there is consensus upon or even awareness of the ranking system, its rationale, and the particular ranks assigned, in the rigidity of rank, in the disparity in rewards of rank, and in the mechanisms employed to maintain or change the system.

For purposes of study, such systems have been analysed variously depending upon the interests and motives of the analyst. One of the most frequently used bases for categorizing and comparing them has been whether people are accorded their statuses and privileges as a result of characteristics which are regarded as individually acquired, or as a result of characteristics which are regarded as innate and therefore shared by those of common birth. This dichotomy is often further simplified by application of the terms 'achieved' versus 'ascribed' status. Actually, what is meant is *non*-birth-ascribed status versus birth-ascribed status. The former is usually described as class stratification, referring to shared statuses identified by such features as income, education, and occupation, while the latter is frequently termed caste or racial stratification or, more recently, ethnic stratification, referring to statuses defined by shared ancestry or attributes of birth.

Regardless of its characteristics in a particular society, stratification has been described as being based upon three primary dimensions: class, status, and power, which are expressed respectively as wealth, prestige, and the ability to control the lives of people (oneself and others).¹ These dimensions can be brought readily to mind by thinking of the relative advantages and disadvantages which accrue in Western class systems to persons who occupy such occupational statuses as judge, garbage man, stenographer, airline pilot, factory worker, priest, farmer, agricultural

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labourer, physician, nurse, big businessman, beggar, etc. The distinction between class and birth-ascribed stratification can be made clear if one imagines that he encounters two Americans, for example, in each of the above-mentioned occupations, one of whom is white and one of whom is black. This quite literally changes the complexion of the matter. A similar contrast could be drawn if, in India, one were Brahmin and one untouchable; if in Japan one were Burakumin and one were not; if in Europe one were Jew and one were Gentile; or if, in almost any society, one were a man and one a woman. Obviously something significant has been added to the picture of stratification in these examples which is entirely missing in the first instance—something over which the individual generally has no control, which is determined at birth, which cannot be changed, which is shared by all those of like birth, which is crucial to social identity, and which vitally affects one's opportunities, rewards, and social roles. The new element is race (colour), caste, ethnicity (religion, language, national origin), or sex. The differences in opportunities and behaviour accorded people as a result of these criteria are described by such pejorative terms as racism, casteism, communalism (including especially ethnic and religious discrimination), and sexism. To be sure, the distinctions are manifest in class, status, and power, but they are of a different order than those considered in the first examples: they are distinctions independent of occupation, income, or other individually acquired characteristics. While the list includes a variety of criteria for birth-ascription and rank with somewhat different implications for those to whom they are applied, they share the crucial facts that: 1. the identity is regarded as being a consequence of birth or ancestry and hence immutable; 2. the identity confers upon its possessor a degree of societally defined and affirmed worth which is regarded as intrinsic to the individual; 3. this inherent worth is evaluated relative to that of all others in the society—those of different birth are inherently unequal and are accordingly adjudged superior or inferior, while those regarded as being of similar birth are innately equal. The crucial fact about birth-ascription for the individual and for society lies not so much in the source of status (birth), as in the fact that it cannot be repudiated, relinquished, or altered. Everyone is sentenced for life to a social cell shared by others of like birth, separated from and ranked relative to all other social cells. Despite cultural differences, therefore, birth-ascribed stratification has common characteristics of structure, function, and meaning, and has common consequences in the lives of those who experience it and in the social histories of the societies which harbour it.

The specific question motivating the present discussion is this: is social ranking by race absolutely distinctive, not significantly distinctive at all, or is race one criterion among others upon which significantly similar systems of social ranking may be based? While identifying the last of these as 'correct' from my perspective, I shall insist that the answer depends entirely upon what one means by 'race', and by 'distinctive', and what one wishes to accomplish by the inquiry. No satisfactory answer can be expected without comparative, cross-cultural analysis encompassing a number of systems of social differentiation, social separation, and social ranking, based on a variety of criteria, embedded in a variety of cultural *milieux*, analysed by reference to various models of social organization, and tested against accounts of actual social experience. The attempt to do this leads

to a number of issues central and tangential to the study of stratification and race, some of which have been overlooked or given short shrift in the scholarly literature, while others are well-discussed in particular disciplinary, regional, or historical specialities without necessarily being familiar to students of other academic domains to whose work and thought they are nevertheless relevant.

There is not space here to present ethnographic and historical documentation for particular instances of birth-ascribed stratification. I have done so briefly in another paper, citing five societies on which there is fortunately excellent published material vividly exemplifying the kinds of social systems I refer to in this paper, and their implications for those who comprise them: Ruanda, India, Swat, Japan, and the United States. I recommend those accounts to the reader.²

MODELS FOR ANALYSIS

In the course of scholarly debate concerning the nature and comparability of systems of collective social ranking, a number of models and concepts have been suggested, implied, or utilized. A framework can be provided for the present discussion by identifying some of these and analysing whether and to what extent each is relevant and applicable to all or some systems of birth-ascribed social separation and inequality, with special attention to the five societies cited above.

Stratification

By definition, stratification is a common feature of systems of shared social inequality—of ranked social categories—whether birth-ascribed or not. Where membership in those categories is birth-ascribed, the ranking is based on traditional definitions of innate social equivalence and difference linked to a concept of differential intrinsic worth, rationalized by a myth of the origin, effect, and legitimacy of the system, perpetuated by differential power wielded by the high and the low, expressed in differential behaviour required and differential rewards accorded them, and experienced by them as differential access to goods, services, livelihood, respect, self-determination, peace of mind, pleasure, and other valued things including nourishment, shelter, health, independence, justice, security, and long life.

Louis Dumont, in *Homo Hierarchicus*, maintains that the entire sociological notion of stratification is misleading when applied to South Asia, for it is of European origin, alien and inapplicable to India. He holds that the term implies an equalitarian ideology wherein hierarchy is resented or denied, and that it therefore obscures the true nature of India's hierarchical society, based as it is on religious and ideological premises peculiar to Hinduism which justify it and result in its endorsement by all segments of Indian society. Stratification, he maintains, is thus a 'socio-centric' concept which cannot cope with the unique phenomenon of Indian caste.³ My response to this is twofold: first, the caste hierarchy based on the purity-pollution opposition as Dumont insists, is well within any reasonable definition of stratification, for the latter refers to social structure and social relations rather than to their ideological bases; and second, Dumont's description of the functioning of, and ideological basis for, the caste hierarchy is idealized and similar to the one commonly purveyed by high caste beneficiaries of the system. Few low caste people would recognize it or endorse it. Yet their beliefs and understandings are

as relevant as those of their social superiors to an understanding of the system. The low caste people with whom I have worked would find Dumont's characterization of 'stratification' closer to their experience than his characterization of 'hierarchy'.⁴

Use of the stratification model focuses attention upon the ranking of two or more categories of people within a society, and upon the criteria and consequences of that ranking. Often, but not inevitably, those who use this concept place primary emphasis upon shared values and consensus, rather than power and conflict, as the bases for social ranking and its persistence. This emphasis is misleading, at best, when applied to systems of birth-ascribed ranking, as I shall show. It is obvious, however, that while many systems of stratification are not birth-ascribed, all systems of birth-ascribed ranking are systems of social stratification, and any theory of social stratification must encompass them.

Ethnic Stratification

Probably the most recent, neutral, and non-specific term for ascriptive ranking is 'ethnic stratification'. 'An ethnic group consists of people who conceive of themselves as being alike by virtue of common ancestry, real or fictitious, and are so regarded by others',⁵ or it comprises 'a distinct category of the population in a larger society whose culture is usually different from its own [and whose] members . . . are, or feel themselves, or are thought to be, bound together by common ties of race or nationality or culture.'⁶ Undoubtedly the systems under discussion fit these criteria. Use of the adjective 'ethnic' to modify 'stratification' places emphasis upon the mode of recruitment, encompassing a wide variety of bases for ascription, all of which are determined at birth and derive from putative common genetic makeup, common ancestry, or common early socialization and are therefore regarded as immutable. This commonality is held responsible for such characteristics as shared appearance, intelligence, personality, morality, capability, purity, honour, custom, speech, religion, and so forth. Usually it is held responsible for several of these. The ranked evaluation of these characteristics, together with the belief that they occur differentially from group to group and more or less uniformly within each group serves as the basis for ranking ethnic groups relative to one another.

Van den Berghe has held that 'ethnic' should be distinguished from 'race' or 'caste' in that the former implies real, important, and often valued social and cultural differences (language, values, social organization), while the latter are artificial and invidious distinctions reflecting irrelevant (and sometimes non-existent) differences in physiognomy, or artificial differences in social role.⁷ This is a useful point. In the recent sociological literature, however, 'ethnic' has increasingly been used to refer to *all* social distinctions based on birth or ancestry, be they associated with race, language, or anything else. This is the usage adopted here. Moreover, as I shall elaborate in discussing pluralism below, race and caste entail the kinds of cultural distinctions cited by van den Berghe as diagnostic of ethnic diversity, for the social separation implied by those systems ensures social and cultural diversity. For example, van den Berghe's assertion that 'notwithstanding all the African mystique, Afro-Americans are in fact culturally Anglo-American',⁸ has been countered by ample evidence that the African origin, social separation, and collective oppression of blacks in America *has* resulted in an identifiable Afro-American culture.⁹

All systems of ethnic stratification are thus based on ancestry, approximating a theory of birth-ascription, and if the definitions set forth by advocates of this term are accepted, most systems of birth-ascribed stratification can properly be designated ethnic stratification. Perhaps the only recurrent exception is sexual stratification, wherein inherent, birth-ascribed, and biologically determined characteristics which are *independent* of ancestry are the basis for institutionalized inequality. This instance, exceptional in several respects, will be discussed separately below, and hence will not be alluded to repeatedly in intervening discussions although most of what is said applies to it also.

Caste

A widely applied and frequently contested model for systems of birth-ascribed rank is that of 'caste', deriving from the example of Hindu India where the *jati* (almost literally 'common ancestry') is the type-case. *Jati* in India refers to interdependent, hierarchically ranked, birth-ascribed groups. The ranking is manifest in public esteem accorded the members of the various groups, in the rewards available to them, in the power they wield, and in the nature and mode of their interaction with others. *Jatis* are regionally specific and culturally distinct, each is usually associated with a traditional occupation and they are usually (but not always) endogamous. They are grouped into more inclusive, pan-Indian ranked categories called *varna* which are frequently confused with the constituent *jatis* by those using the term 'caste'. The rationale which justifies the system is both religious and philosophical, relying upon the idea of ritual purity and pollution to explain group rank, and upon the notions of right conduct (*dharma*), just deserts (*karma*), and rebirth to explain the individual's fate within the system. As an explanation of caste inequalities this rationale is advocated by those whom the system benefits, but is widely doubted, differently interpreted, or regarded as inappropriately applied by those whom the system oppresses.

Many students of stratification believe that the term 'caste' conveys an impression of consensus and tranquillity that does not obtain in systems of rigid social stratification outside of India. That notion, however, is no more applicable to, or derivable from, Indian caste than any other instance of birth-ascribed stratification.¹⁰

If one concedes that caste can be defined cross-culturally (i.e., beyond Hindu India), then the systems under discussion here are describable as caste systems. That is, if one agrees that a caste system is one in which a society is made up of birth-ascribed groups which are hierarchically ordered, interdependent, and culturally distinct, and wherein the hierarchy entails differential evaluation, rewards, and association, then whether one uses the term 'caste', or prefers 'ethnic stratification', or some other term is simply a matter of lexical preference. If one requires of a caste system that it be based on consensus as to its rationale, its legitimacy, and the legitimacy of the relative rank of its constituent groups, then none of the examples mentioned here is a caste system. If one requires social tranquillity as a characteristic, then too, none of these is a caste system. If one allows that a caste system is held together by power and the ability of people within it to predict fairly accurately one another's behaviour while disagreeing on almost anything or everything else, then all of these systems will qualify. If one requires a specifically Hindu rationale of purity

and pollution and/or endogamy and/or strict and universal occupational specialization, then one restricts caste to India and to only certain regions and groups within India at that. If one requires for castes, as some do, a tightly organized corporate structure, then too one would exclude even in India some *jatis* and other groups commonly called 'castes'. (This, however, does seem to me to be the structural criterion which comes closest to differentiating Indian *jati* from other systems of birth-ascribed stratification such as that of the United States. Corporateness evidently emerges as a response to oppression and as a mechanism for emancipation even where it has been previously minimal, e.g., in Japan, Ruanda, and the United States. Thus, the corporateness of Indian *jatis* may represent a late stage of development in caste systems rather than a fundamental difference in the Indian system.)

Jati in Hindu India and the equivalent but non-Hindu *quom* organization in Swat and Muslim India, are each unique, yet both share the criteria by which I have defined caste, as do the tri-partite system of Ruanda and the essentially dual systems of Japan and the United States, and all share in addition (and in consequence, I believe) a wide variety of social and personal concomitants. Caste is a useful and widely used term because it is concise, well-known, and in fact (as contrasted to phantasy), the structural, functional, and existential analogy to Indian caste is valid for many other systems.

Race

Systems of 'racial' stratification are those in which birth-ascribed status is associated with alleged physical differences among social categories, which are culturally defined as present and important. Often these differences are more imagined than real, sometimes they are entirely fictional and always a few physical traits are singled out for attention while most, including some which might differently divide the society if they were attended to, are ignored. Yet systems so described share the principle that ranking is based on putatively inborn, ancestrally derived, and significant physical characteristics.

Those who use this model for analysis generally base it upon the negative importance attached by Europeans to the darker skin colour of those they have colonized, exterminated, or enslaved. A good many have argued that racially stratified societies are *sui generis*; that they are unique and hence not comparable to societies stratified on any other basis.¹¹ There is often a mystical quality to these arguments, as though race were an exalted, uniquely 'real', valid, and important criterion for birth ascription, rendering it incomparable to other criteria. An element of inadvertent racism has in such instances infected the very study of race and stratification. In fact, as is by now widely recognized, there is no society in the world which ranks people on the basis of biological race, i.e., on the basis of anything a competent geneticist would call 'race', which means on the basis of distinctive shared genetic makeup derived from a common gene pool. 'Race', as a basis for social rank is always a *socially* defined phenomenon which at most only very imperfectly corresponds to genetically transmitted traits and then, of course, only to phenotypes rather than genotypes. Racists regard and treat people as alike or different because of their group membership defined in terms of socially significant ancestry, not because

of their genetic makeup. It could not be otherwise, for people are rarely geneticists, yet they are frequently racists.

To state this point would seem to be superfluous if it were not for the fact that it is continually ignored or contested by some influential scholars and politicians as well as the lay racists who abound in many societies. To cite but one well-known recent example, Arthur Jensen, in his article on intelligence and scholastic achievement, maintains that there is a genetic difference in learning ability between blacks and whites in the United States.¹² Nowhere, however, does he offer evidence of how or to what extent his 'Negro' and 'White' populations are genetically distinct. All of those, and only those, defined in the conventional wisdom of American folk culture to be 'Negro' are included by Jensen, regardless of their genetic makeup, in the category whose members he claims are biologically handicapped in learning ability. Thus, large numbers of people are tabulated as 'Negroes', a majority of whose ancestors were 'white', and virtually all of Jensen's 'Negroes' have significant but highly variable percentages of 'white' ancestry. Although, also as a result of social definition, the 'whites' do not have known 'Negro' ancestry, the presumed genetic homogeneity of the 'whites' is as undemonstrated and unexplored as that of the 'Negroes'. In short, there was no attempt to identify the genetic makeup or homogeneity of either group, the genetic distinctiveness of the two groups, or whether or how genetic makeup is associated with learning ability, or how learning ability is transmitted. This kind of reasoning is familiar and expectable in American racism, but not in a supposedly scientific treatise—a treatise whose author berates those who deplore his pseudo-science as themselves unscientific for failing to seriously consider his 'evidence'. The fallacy in Jensen's case is that he has selected for investigation two socially defined groupings in American society which are commonly regarded as innately different in social worth and which as a result are accorded widely and crucially divergent opportunities and life experiences. Upon finding that they perform differentially in the context of school and test performance, he attributes that fact to assumed but undemonstrated and uninvestigated biological differences. Thus, socially defined populations perform differently on socially defined tasks with socially acquired skills, and this is attributed by Jensen to biology. There are other defects in Jensen's research, but none more fundamental than this.¹³ One is reminded of E. A. Ross's succinct assessment of over fifty years ago, that "'race" is the cheap explanation tyros offer for any collective trait that they are too stupid or too lazy to trace to its origin in the physical environment, the social environment, or historical conditions'.¹⁴

The point to be made here is that systems of 'racial' stratification are social phenomena based on social rather than biological facts. To be sure, certain conspicuous characteristics which are genetically determined or influenced (skin colour, hair form, facial conformation, stature, etc.) are widely used as convenient indicators by which ancestry and hence 'racial' identity is recognized. This is the 'colour bar' which exists in many societies. But such indicators are never sufficient in themselves to indicate group membership and in some instances are wholly unreliable, for it is parentage rather than appearance or genetics which is the basis for these distinctions. One who does not display the overt characteristics of his 'racial' group is still accorded its status if his relationship to the group is known or can be discovered. The specific rules for ascertaining racial

identity differ from society to society. In America, if a person is known to have had a sociologically black ancestor, he is black regardless of how many of his ancestors were sociologically white (and even though he looks and acts white). In South Africa, most American blacks would be regarded as 'coloured' rather than 'black'. Traditionally, in a mixed marriage, one is a Jew only if one's mother is a Jew. In contemporary India, an Anglo-Indian has a male European ancestor in the paternal line; female and maternal European ancestry are irrelevant. In racially stratified societies, phenotypical traits are thus never more than clues to a person's social identity.

As Shibusani and Kwan have noted, 'a color line is something existing in the presuppositions of men,'¹⁵ '... what is decisive about "race relations" is not that people are genetically different but that they approach one another with dissimilar perspectives.'¹⁶ Van den Berghe makes a similar point: 'Race, of course, has no intrinsic significance, except to a racist. To a social scientist, race acquires meaning only through its social definition in a given society.'¹⁷

This is illustrated by the title of DeVos and Wagatsuma's book, *Japan's Invisible Race*, dealing with the hereditarily stigmatized and oppressed Burakumin. The Japanese believe that these people are physically and morally distinct, and their segregation and oppression are explained on that basis when in fact they are not so at all. Instead they are recognizable only by family (ancestry), name, occupation, place of residence, life style, etc. The Burakumin thus comprise a 'race' in the sociological sense of Western racism, but an 'invisible' (i.e., not genetic or phenotypic) one. The authors subtitled the book, *Caste in Culture and Personality*, shifting the analogy from that of race (in the West) to that of caste (in India). The book could as well have been entitled: *Caste in Japan: Racial Stratification in Culture and Personality*.

The Japanese example brings up a point which needs to be made about the alleged uniqueness of 'racial' stratification. All systems of birth-ascribed stratification seem to include a belief that the social distinctions are reflected in biological (i.e., 'racial') differences. That is, caste and other ethnic differences are said to be revealed in physical makeup or appearance. Associated with these supposed natural and unalterable inherited physical characteristics are equally immutable traits of character, morality, intelligence, personality, and purity. This is the case in Japan, where no actual physical differences can be detected; it is true in India and Swat where physical stereotypes about castes abound but actual differences are minimal; it is true in Ruanda where the ranked groups all are black but are said to differ in stature and physiognomy as well as in culture; it is true in the United States where the physical differences are commonly and erroneously thought to be absolute. Cultural factors have to be relied upon in addition to whatever biological ones may be present, in order to make the important discriminations upon which ranked social interaction depends, and even then mistakes are frequently made. Throughout the world, people who look distinctive are likely to be regarded as socially different; people who are regarded as socially different are likely to be thought to look distinctive. They are also likely to be required to dress and act distinctively.

I suggest that, just as societies frequently dramatize the social differences among kin groups (e.g., sibs, clans, phratries) by giving to them totemic names and attributing to them characteristics of animals or plants, thereby

identifying the social differences with biological species differences,¹⁸ so also, societies with birth-ascribed status hierarchies dramatize and legitimize *these* crucial social differences by attributing to them innate biological, hence 'racial', differences. As a result, the concept of miscegenation arises, based on an ideology of innate difference contradicted by a persistent and recurrent perception of similarity by people of opposite sex across social boundaries.¹⁹

Thus, caste organization and ethnic stratification include racism; racial stratification is congruent with caste and ethnic stratification. Their ultimate coalescence is in the imputation of biological differences to explain and justify birth-ascribed social inequality. In this regard, sexual stratification can be seen to be a phenomenon of the same order.

This universality of racism in birth-ascribed stratification can be understood in the fact that physical traits not only dramatize social differentiation, but can also explain and justify it. The effect of such explanation is to make social inequality appear to be a natural necessity rather than a human choice and hence an artificial imposition. Social distinctions are man-made and learned; what man makes and learns he can unmake and unlearn. What God or biology has ordained is beyond man's control. The former may be defined as artificial, unjust, untenable, and remediable; the latter as inevitable or divinely sanctioned. This is important because birth-ascribed stratification is widely or universally resented by those whom it oppresses (at least as it affects them), and advocated by those it rewards. Both categories share the human capability of empathy, and it inspires envy and resentment in the one and fear or guilt in the other. Racism—the self-righteous rationalization in terms of biology—is a desperate and perhaps ultimately futile attempt to counteract those subversive emotions.

In sum, 'race', as commonly used by social scientists, emphasizes common physical characteristics (as does 'sex'); 'caste' emphasizes common rank, occupational specialization, endogamy, and corporate organization; 'ethnic stratification' emphasizes cultural distinctiveness. These are real differences in meaning, but the degree of empirical overlap in systems so described, and the commonalities in the existential worlds of those who live within them are so great as to render the distinctions among them largely arbitrary, and irrelevant, for many purposes. Individual cases differ, but as types of social stratification, they are similar. With equal facility and comparable effect, they utilize as evidence of social identity anything which is passed on within the group: skin colour, hair form, stature, physiognomy, language, dress, occupation, place of residence, genealogy, behaviour patterns, religion. None is wholly reliable, all are difficult to dissimulate. In any case, strong sanctions can be brought to bear to minimize the temptation to 'pass' among those who might be capable and tempted. As the case of India suggests and Japan confirms, social criteria can be as rigid as physical ones.

'Race' versus 'Caste'

Considerable controversy has surrounded the terms 'race' and 'caste' when applied outside of the contexts in which they originated and to which they have been most widely applied: Western colonialism and Hindu India, respectively. This is understandable because there are important peculiarities in each of these situations, and to extend the terms beyond them requires that those peculiarities be subordinated to significant

similarities. Systems of birth-ascribed inequality are sufficiently similar, however, to invite comparative study, and some general term is needed to refer to them. 'Caste' has seemed to me more useful than 'race', because it refers to social rather than allegedly biological distinctions, and it is the social distinctions which are universal in such systems. If it were a catchier term, 'ethnic stratification' might replace both in the social scientific literature. Unfortunately it is not, so we must probably await a better term or tolerate continuing terminological dispute and confusion. In any case, it is the nature of birth-ascribed stratification—the ideas, behaviours, and experiences which comprise it, the effects it has on persons and societies and, quite frankly, the means by which it may be eliminated—in which I am interested. The words applied to it are of little importance. When I try to explain American race relations to Indians, I describe and analyse America as a caste stratified society, with attention to the similarities and differences in comparison with India. If I am trying to explain Indian caste stratification to Americans, I describe and analyse India as a racist society, with attention to the similarities and differences in comparison to the United States. I do this as a matter of translation from the social idiom of one society to the other. It is the most economic, vivid, and accurate way I know to convey these phenomena to people whose experience is limited to one system or the other. I do not think Indian caste *is* American race, or vice versa, but neither do I think that race stratification in America *is* race stratification in South Africa, or that caste in India *is* caste in Swat, or that caste in the Punjab *is* caste in Kerala. Neither do I think racial stratification and racism are the same for blacks, Chicanos, and whites in America, or that caste stratification and casteism are the same for sweepers, blacksmiths, and Rajputs in Hindu India. There are features in all of these which are the same in important ways, and by focusing on these I think we can understand and explain and predict the experience of people in these diverse situations better than if we regard each of them as unique in every way.

Objections to the cross-cultural comparison of race and caste depend either on an insistence that the two would have to be wholly identical to justify such comparison, or more commonly, on misconceptions about one or both of the systems being compared. It is worthwhile to identify and comment upon some of these objections.

1. The most prevalent objection among experts on Western social stratification is that caste status is accepted and endorsed by those in the system whereas racial stratification is objected to and striven against by those it oppresses. Thus Cox asserts that 'while the caste system may be thought of as a social order in stable equilibrium, the domination of one race by another is always an unstable situation. . . . The instability of the situation produces what are known as race problems, phenomena unknown to the caste system.' I have contended with this claim in some detail elsewhere.²⁰ Suffice it to say here that anyone who has known low caste people in India can affirm that this particular contrast is imaginary, as can anyone who knows the history of religious conversion, social reform, and social mobility striving in India, who has followed the reports of the Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, or who simply reads the news releases from India today.

2. It is often argued that caste in India is unique and noncomparable because of the elaborate religio-philosophical rationale which underlies

it, and that racial stratification is unique because it is based on colour.²¹ As I have pointed out, these contentions are questionable on empirical grounds. Few would deny, for example, that caste exists in Swat as well as India, and that it exists in Mysore, India, among both the Lingayats and the Hindus, yet the rationale is very different in each of these cases. On the other hand, few would deny that colour consciousness is an important part of the ideology and metaphor of caste in India.

But on another level, these arguments are not necessarily relevant to the issue of comparison. That phenomena are in some respects different does not make them incomparable. They may still be similar in crucial respects. Everything is, after all, unique, but there can be no science of the unique. The claim for comparability can be refuted by showing that the facts are in error, or that the interpretations of their significance are fallacious, not by citing differences extraneous to the argument being made. Moreover, comparability (or incomparability) for one purpose or in one context does not imply comparability (or incomparability) for another purpose or in another context. The test must be whether or not and how well explanation can be derived from a particular comparison.

If one knows that a society is characterized by birth-ascribed stratification, he can predict a great deal about the experiences and attitudes of people at different levels within it, about the social, political, and economic behaviour they are likely to engage in under various circumstances, and about the nature and consequences of social conflict.²² This, to my mind, justifies the comparison.

3. A number of specific characteristics of caste in India or race in the West have been cited as bases for non-comparability with other systems of birth-ascribed stratification. (a) *Endogamy* has been cited as essential to caste. However, what is crucial and universal in a caste system is not endogamy, but birth-ascribed membership in a ranked category or group. Endogamy is the most common method for achieving this in India and elsewhere, but a firm patrilineal or matrilineal rule of status assignment will do as well, and so will a rule which assigns to an individual the caste of his higher status parent or of his lower status parent, or one which designates that an individual whose parents are of castes A and B will be of caste C. All of these rules of birth-ascription occur in South Asian castes.²³

(b) *Occupational distinctiveness* has been cited as essential to caste. This is indeed an almost inevitable concomitant of social separation, stratification, and interdependence, be it birth-ascribed or not. But again, it is not universal among castes even in India, nor is it lacking in racial and sexual stratification. Some have maintained that caste, without a conspicuous racial basis, cannot exist in a complex society simply because the anonymity of such a society would make dissimulation and passing too easy to sustain a caste system where no physical indicators of identity existed.²⁴ It is probably true that in the anonymity and mobility of contemporary urban life, rigid ethnic stratification is increasingly difficult to maintain when the indicators of identity are learned, for learned characteristics can be unlearned, suppressed, or learned by those to whom they are inappropriate. To manipulate these indicators is often difficult, as the persistence of the Burakumin of Japan makes clear, because the identifying characteristics may be learned very early (language, gesture), and may be enforced from without as well as from within (dress, deference, occupation), but it is

possible, as instances of passing make clear.²⁵ The more personal relationships of traditional, small-scale societies, together with their formal and informal barriers and sanctions against casual or promiscuous interaction militate against the learning or expression of inappropriate status characteristics and conspicuous indicators of status are largely unnecessary. Reliable, immutable, and conspicuous indicators of identity are thus more important to systems of birth-ascribed stratification in the anonymity and mobility of the city than in the village, but the internal pressures of ethnic pride combined with the external pressures of ethnic discrimination and the vested interests which sustain it make such systems possible in even the most unlikely-seeming circumstances.

(c) Some have argued that the corporate structure of many Indian castes renders them incomparable to most instances of ethnic stratification, a point which I have discussed above (p. 390) and will therefore not repeat.

(d) The comparison between black-white stratification in America and Indian caste is occasionally contested on grounds that the former is a *dichotomy* while the latter is a *complex hierarchy*. This is a real difference between the two, but it does not make them incomparable. It is a difference in numbers of groups, not in race versus caste. For one thing, there are other racial or caste-like groups in American society: Native Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Asians, etc. In India, on the other hand, most interaction is not caste specific so much as it is specific to categories of castes (categories such as 'untouchables', 'twice-born', the *varnas*, etc.), thereby simplifying the interactional situation greatly. For example, the *Khas-Dom* (twice-born versus untouchable) dichotomy in the mountain area of my research²⁶ and the Brahmin-non-Brahmin dichotomy in South India are quite comparable to the situation described as the colour-bar elsewhere. One probable difference between dichotomous and multiple hierarchies may be that in the former the oppressed characteristically oppose the system as such. To rise within it would be to displace the privileged—to reverse the hierarchy—and that is impracticable. To overthrow the system is to erase their oppression and vice versa. They have nothing to lose but their inferiority. In multiple hierarchies, objection may more characteristically be made not to the system, but to the place of one's own group within it, the reason being that to overthrow the system is not feasible for any one of the many groups within it, each of which is relatively small, weak, and in competition with others. Moreover, successful overthrow would result not only in equality with elites, but equality with erstwhile inferiors. Therefore, it is regarded as more practicable and more rewarding to attempt to rise within the system than to eliminate the system itself. These remarks apply to systems of birth-ascribed stratification regardless of the criteria used.

(e) Finally, it is sometimes held that racial stratification is an outgrowth of Western colonialism, and hence India can be regarded as an example thereof only in the relationship of Indians to the British, not in the relationship among indigenous castes. I would maintain that caste in India is in fact a product of colonialism and that its present manifestations are closely analogous to the 'internal colonialism' which Blauner, among others, has described for the United States (see below).²⁷ In India this is an instance of what has recently been termed 'fourth-world' colonialism, i.e., exploitation inflicted by 'third-world' (non-Western) people on their

internal minorities, analogous to that they have often experienced themselves at the hands of 'first-' and 'second-world' colonialists (Western non-communist and communist nations, respectively).

In short, the further one probes into the nature and dynamics of race and caste, and into the experience of those who live them, the more it becomes apparent that they are similar, comparable, phenomena.

Colonialism

The concept of colonialism has gained popularity in recent years for the analysis of racism and racial stratification in the West.²⁸ It therefore merits further discussion. This model focuses on the history of Western expansion and the exploitation of alien peoples, emphasizing notions of the superiority of the dominant, Western, white society whose members arrogated privilege to themselves through the exercise of power (usually technological, often military) to dominate, control, exploit, and oppress others. Racism has been an integral aspect of this process, for there usually have been differences in colour between the colonizer and the colonized which were used to account for the alleged inferiority in ability, character, and mentality which in turn were used to justify colonial domination. Colonialism has been most often described as the result of overseas conquest, in which case the colonizing group has usually comprised a numerical minority. Less often colonialism has included conquest or expansion across national boundaries overland, but the results are the same, if the romance is less. These phenomena have recently come to be termed 'external colonialism', in contrast to 'internal colonialism' which refers to similar domination and exploitation, within a nation, of an indigenous, over-run, or imported minority. This distinction directs attention to the *locus* of colonial domination whereas the distinction between third-world and fourth-world colonies cited above, directs attention to the *sources* of that domination.

While it has not been much easier to gain acceptance of the colonial model for analysis of American race relations than it has been to gain acceptance of the caste model, it is clear that here again, the problem is semantic rather than substantive. Some of those who argue persuasively the cross-cultural and multi-situational applicability of the colonial model, deny such applicability for the caste model and in so doing use precisely the logic and data they deplore and regard as faulty when their intellectual adversaries deny applicability of 'colonialism' outside of the classical overseas context.²⁹

Colonialism, external and internal, is a process which has occurred repeatedly, in many contexts, with many specific manifestations and many common results. It long antedates the recent period of European and American expansion. Caste stratification, racial stratification, ethnic stratification, and 'pluralism' have been its recurrent products.³⁰ The point can be made with specific reference to caste in India. Rather than regarding colonialism as an antecedent condition which excludes traditional India from the category of racially or ethnically stratified societies, it can well be used as a basis for assigning India historical priority among such societies, in the contemporary world. That is, traditional India may represent the most fully evolved and complex post-colonial society in the world. It is easy to obtain explanations of caste from

informants or books in India which refer directly to the presumed early domination of primitive indigenes by advanced invaders. There is little doubt that the present caste system had its origins some 3,000 to 3,500 years ago in a socio-cultural confrontation that was essentially colonial. Low status was imposed on technologically disadvantaged indigenes by more sophisticated, militarily and administratively superior peoples who encroached or invaded from the north and west, arrogating to themselves high rank, privileges, and land. The large number of local and ethnically distinct groups on the sub-continent were fitted into a scheme of social hierarchy which was brought in or superimposed by the high status outsiders, culminating in the caste system we know today.³¹ Social separation and social hierarchy based on ancestry became the essence of the system; colonial relations were its genesis. Even today, most tribal people—those who are geographically and economically marginal and culturally distinct—are incorporated into Hindu society, if at all, at the bottom of the hierarchy (except in those rare instances where they have maintained control over land or other important sources of income and power).

If one were to speculate on the course of evolution which ethnic stratification might take in the United States in the context of internal colonialism, of rigid separation, hierarchy, and discrimination which are part of it, and the demands for ethnic autonomy which arise in response to it, one possibility would be a caste system similar to, though less complex than that of India. The historical circumstances may be rather similar despite the separation of many hundreds of years, many thousands of miles and a chasm of cultural difference. Actually, development of the degree of social separation common in India seems at this point unlikely given the mass communications and mass education in the United States, its relative prosperity, and the rather widespread (but far from universal) commitment to at least the trappings of social equality. But surely if anything is to be learned from history and from comparison, the case of the Indian sub-continent should be of major interest to students of American race and ethnic relations, social stratification, and internal colonialism.

In sum, colonialism is as inextricable from caste and race as caste and race are from one another. There may be instances of colonialism where birth-ascription is or becomes irrelevant, but every instance of caste, race, and ethnic stratification includes, and relies for its perpetuation upon, the kind of ethnic domination and exploitation that defines colonialism.

Class

Closely associated with each of the models discussed here is that of social class. Class is a matter of acquired status rather than of birth-ascription, and is in this respect distinct from race, caste, and ethnic stratification, with different social consequences. In a class system, one is ranked in accord with his behaviour and attributes (income, occupation, education, life style, etc.). In a birth-ascribed system, by contrast, one behaves and exhibits attributes in accord with his rank. In a class system, individual mobility is legitimate, albeit often difficult, while in ascribed stratification it is explicitly forbidden. Systems of acquired rank—class systems—prescribe the means to social mobility; systems of ascribed rank proscribe them. As a consequence, a class system is a continuum; there are individuals who are intergrades, there are individuals in the process of

movement, there are individuals who have experienced more than one rank. Miscegenation is not an issue because there are no ancestrally distinct groups to be inappropriately mixed. A birth-ascribed system is comprised of discrete ranks on the pattern of echelon organization, without legitimate mobility, without intergrades; the strata are named, publicly recognized, clearly bounded. Miscegenation is therefore a social issue. In a system of acquired ranks, the strata may be indistinct, imperfectly known, or even unknown to those within the system. In fact, there is considerable debate among students of stratification as to whether or not awareness of class is essential to a definition of class. Some hold that social classes are properly defined by social analysts who use such criteria as income to designate categories which may be entirely unrecognized by those in the society.

In a class system individuals regard themselves as potentially able to change status legitimately within the system through fortune, misfortune, or individual and family efforts. In a birth-ascribed system, individuals know that legitimate status change is impossible—that only dissimulation, revolution, or an improbable change in publicly accorded social identity can alter one's rank and hence life-chances.

Despite these differences, class is in no way incompatible with birth-ascribed systems. In fact, in so far as it is a term for categories of people ranked by income, occupation, education, and life style, it co-occurs with them. Low castes, despised races, ethnic minorities, and colonized people comprise economically and occupationally depressed, exploited classes who are politically and socially oppressed; high castes, exalted races, privileged ethnic groups, and colonizers comprise economically and occupationally privileged, power-wielding, elite classes who live off the labour of others. In this respect, class differences pervade and reinforce systems of birth-ascribed stratification. Furthermore, it is not unusual to find significant class differentials within a caste, racial, or ethnic group or within a colonized or colonial group.³² That is, class, in the conventional sense often occurs conspicuously within such groups, and may also bridge their boundaries without obscuring them. But it is not possible to analyse birth-ascribed stratification solely in terms of class, for no amount of class mobility will exempt a person from the crucial implications of his birth in such systems.

Those who have sought to identify the positions of European immigrants to America such as the Poles, Italians, and Irish, with the position of blacks, Native Americans, Chicanos, and Asians have failed to discern the essential fact that racism is the basis of American caste, and that it bestows upon those who experience it a unique social, political, and economic stigma which is not bestowed by class or national origin. Second generation white Europeans can meet all of the criteria for acceptance into the American white race-caste for they are regarded as being only culturally different. A fifteenth generation American black, or a fifteen-hundredth generation American Indian cannot, for their differences are regarded as innate, immutable, and crucial. Equalitarianism has produced no 'American dilemma' among racists, as Myrdal believed, simply because it is an equality for whites only, and its extension to other groups has moved slowly, painfully, and with vehement opposition, even where it has moved at all.

Systems of collective social rank, whether ascribed or acquired, are systems for retaining privilege among the powerful and power among the privileged, reserving and maintaining vulnerability, oppression, and want for those upon whom it can be imposed with minimal risk while retaining their services and their deference. In this way they are similar. In the principles of recruitment and organization by which that similarity is effected and in the individuals' prospects for mobility they differ, and those differences have important consequences for individual life experience and social processes in the societies which harbour them.

Pluralism

Pluralism is a model which has been applied to socially and culturally diverse societies since the writings of Furnivall on South-East Asia.³³ Cultural pluralism obtains when 'two or more different cultural traditions characterize the population of a given society'; it is 'a special form of differentiation based on institutional divergences'.³⁴ Systems of birth-ascribed stratification are inevitably systems of social and cultural pluralism because they are accompanied by social separation. In a caste system, 'Because intensive and status-equal interaction is limited to the caste, a common and distinctive caste culture is assured. This is a function of the quality and density of communication within the group, for culture is learned, shared and transmitted.'³⁵ The same is true for any system of racial or ethnic stratification. M. G. Smith has noted, 'it is perfectly clear that in any social system based on intense cleavages and discontinuity between differentiated segments the community of values or social relations between these sections will be correspondingly low. This is precisely the structural condition of the plural society.'³⁶ And I have noted elsewhere that,

. . . castes are discrete social and cultural entities. . . . They are maintained by defining and maintaining boundaries between castes; they are threatened when boundaries are compromised. Even when interaction between castes is maximal and cultural differences are minimal, the ideal of mutual isolation and distinctiveness is maintained and advertised among those who value the system. Similarly, even when mobility within, or subversion of the system is rampant, a myth of stability is stolidly maintained among those who benefit from the system.³⁷

Mutual isolation of social groups inevitably leads to group-specific institutions (an important criterion for pluralism according to Furnivall), because members are excluded from participation in the institutions of other groups.

Caste, race, and ethnic stratification, like all plural systems therefore, are systems of social separation and cultural heterogeneity, maintained by common or over-riding economic and political institutions rather than by agreement or consensus regarding the stratification system and its rationale.³⁸ This does not deny consensus, it only defines its nature:

In caste systems, as in all plural systems, highly differentiated groups get along together despite widely differing subjective definitions of the situation because they agree on the objective facts of what is happening and what is likely to happen —on who has the power, and how, under what circumstances, and for what purposes it is likely to be exercised. They cease to get along when *this* crucial agreement changes or is challenged.³⁹

The constituent social elements of plural societies need not be birth-ascribed, and they need not be (and sometimes are not) ranked relative to one another, although by Furnivall's definition, one element must be dominant. In fact, unranked pluralism is the goal many ethnic minorities choose over either stratification or assimilation. But a system of birth-ascribed stratification is always culturally, socially and hence institutionally heterogeneous, and thus pluralistic.

Hierarchy as Symbolic Interaction

I have elsewhere described the universality among social hierarchies of patterns of interaction which symbolize superiority and inferiority.⁴⁰ Social hierarchy, after all, exists only in the experiences, behaviours, and beliefs of those who comprise it. Interpersonal interaction becomes the vehicle for expression of hierarchy: for asserting, testing, validating, or rejecting claims to status. Almost every interaction between members of ranked groups expresses rank claimed, perceived, or accorded. When the hierarchy is birth-ascribed, the membership of its component groups is ideally stable, well-known, and easily recognizable. In such systems people are perceived by those outside of their groups almost wholly in terms of their group identity rather than as individuals. They are regarded as sharing the characteristics which are conventionally attributed to the group and they share the obligations, responsibilities, privileges, and disabilities of their group. In intergroup relations, therefore, one individual is substitutable for another in his group, for all are alike and interchangeable. This is the setting for prejudice, discrimination, bigotry, chauvinism, and is an ideal situation for scapegoating. These attitudes and their behavioural consequences are designated and deplored by such terms as racism, casteism, communalism (referring to ethnic chauvinism of various sorts), and recently, sexism. They are characterized by domination, deprivation, oppression, exploitation, and denigration directed downward; obedience, acquiescence, service, deference, and honour demanded from above. They result in envy, resentment, dissimulation, and resistance arising from below, balanced from above by fear, guilt, and that combination of arrogant self-righteousness and rationalization which is found in all such systems. Maya Angelou has aptly characterized the result in American race relations as 'the humorless puzzle of inequality and hate'; 'the question of worth and values, of aggressive inferiority and aggressive arrogance'⁴¹ which confronts and exacts its toll not only from black Americans, but from the denizens of all those jungles of inherited inequality I call caste systems. It is this quality of interpersonal relations rather than any particular event or structural feature which struck me most vividly, forcefully, and surprisingly as similar in Alabama and India when I first experienced them for over a year each within a period of five years.⁴² For me, this is the hallmark of oppressive, birth-ascribed stratification.

A specifically interactional definition of caste systems applies equally to all systems of birth-ascribed stratification: '*a system of birth-ascribed groups each of which comprises for its members the maximum limit of status-equal interaction, and between all of which interaction is consistently hierarchical.*'⁴³ The cultural symbols of hierarchical interaction vary; the presence and importance of such symbols is universal and essential to racism, casteism, and their homologues.

Hierarchy as Ideology

Dumont has emphasized the point that Indian caste is unique in that it is based on an ideology of hierarchy defined in terms of ritual purity and pollution.⁴⁴ He regards other systems of hierarchical social separation as non-comparable because of the inevitable differences in the ideologies supporting them. In the comparative framework which I advocate, I maintain simply that the Hindu rationale is one of several ideologies (cf. those of Islamic Swat, of the South Indian Lingayats to whom purity is irrelevant, of Ruanda, of Japan, and the United States) which can and do underlie and justify systems of birth-ascribed social hierarchy. Each is unique to the culture in which it occurs; each is associated with remarkably similar social structures, social processes, and individual experiences. I believe that anyone who has experienced daily life in rural India and the rural American South, for example, will confirm the fact that there is something remarkably similar in the systems of social relations and attitudes. I believe that anyone who has experienced daily life in an urban slum, a public market, or a factory in India and the United States would come to the same conclusion. That similarity is generated by birth-ascribed stratification and it is not concealed by differential ideologies.⁴⁵

Contrary to another of Dumont's assumptions (shared with Cox), there is nothing incompatible between an ideology which underwrites a hierarchy of groups and a notion of equality within each group. This combination, in fact, is found not only in the United States where it accounts for the above-mentioned absence of a real 'American dilemma' in race relations, but also in each of the other systems described here. Members of each ranked group are *inherently unequal* to those of each other group and are by birth *potentially equal* to those of their own group. More importantly, the existence of an ideology of hierarchy does not mean that this ideology is conceived and interpreted identically by all within the system it is presumed to justify or even that it is shared by them. Acquiescence must not be mistaken for concurrence. Dumont's assumption to the contrary is the most glaring weakness in his analysis of Indian caste.⁴⁶

Sexual Stratification

Finally, in my discussion of models for analysis, I turn to the controversial and sociologically puzzling matter of sex as a basis for social separation and inequality. The special problems which the sexual criterion poses for the student of stratification are both academic and substantive. The academic problems derive from the history of the study of stratification. Although the role of women in various non-Western societies has been discussed by anthropologists (including prominently Margaret Mead), and the position of women in European societies has been discussed by some social historians, the sexual dichotomy rarely appears in sociological works on stratification. That this criterion has been largely ignored or dismissed by stratification theorists is attributable to several factors not the least of which is no doubt that members of the privileged sex have authored most of the work and to them such ranking has not been a problem and hence has not been apparent. Also, their culturally derived biases have been such that this kind of ranking was taken for granted as a manifestation of biological differences. 'Many people who are very hip to the implications of the racial caste system . . . don't seem to be able to see the sexual caste system and if the question is raised they respond

with: "that's the way it's supposed to be. There are biological differences." Or with other statements which recall a white segregationist confronted with integration.⁴⁷ The biological rationale—what Millett refers to as the 'view of sex as a caste structure ratified by nature'⁴⁸—recalls also the justification offered for *all* birth-ascribed dominance–exploitation relationships be they caste in India, Burakumin status in Japan, sexual roles, or any other. In each instance the plea is that these are uniquely *real*, significant, unavoidable, and natural differences, and therefore they must be acted upon. Thus, in an interview about their new book, *The Imperial Animal*, which is said to claim that males have dominated human history because 'the business of politics . . . is a business that requires skills and attitudes that are peculiarly male,' anthropologists Robin Fox and Lionel Tiger were reported to have vehemently denied that their theory about the reasons for women's roles might be a sexist theory. "These are the facts, don't accuse us of making up the species," Tiger said. And again, "Because this is a racist country, people relate sexism to racism." But these two reactions are actually different because while there are no important biological differences between races, there are very important differences between the sexes.⁴⁹ Whether the differences are real or not (and who would deny that males and females differ in important ways?), the sociological and humanistic question is whether the differences require or justify differential opportunities, privileges, responsibilities, and rewards or, put negatively, domination and exploitation.

Birth-ascribed stratification be it sexual, racial, or otherwise, is always accompanied by explanations, occasionally ingenious but usually mundane and often ludicrous, as to why putative natural differences *do* require and justify social differences. Those explanations are widely doubted by those whose domination they are supposed to explain, and this includes increasing numbers of women.

The substantive issues which becloud the topic of sexual stratification have to do with the mode of recruitment, the socialization, membership, and structural arrangements of sexually ranked categories. First, there is the fact that while sex is determined at birth, it is not contingent upon ancestry, endogamy, or any other arrangement of marriage or family, and is not predictable. It is the only recurrent basis for birth-ascribed stratification that can be defensibly attributed solely to undeniably physical characteristics. Even here there are individual or categorical exceptions made for transvestites, hermaphrodites, homosexuals, etc., in some societies as in the case of *hijaras* in India.⁵⁰ The significance (as contrasted to the fact) of the diagnostic physical traits—of sexual differences—is, however, largely socially defined, so that their cultural expressions vary widely over time and space. Second, as a concomitant to the mode of recruitment, males and females have no distinct ethnic or regional histories. It must not be overlooked, however, that they do have distinct social histories in every society. Third, the universal co-residence of males and females within the household precludes the existence of lifelong separate male and female societies as such, and usually assures a degree of mutual early socialization. But note that it does not preclude distinct male and female social institutions, distinct patterns of social interaction within and between these categories, or distinguishable male and female subcultures (in fact the latter are universal) including, for example, distinct male and female dialects.

Partly as a consequence of these factors, the nature and quality of segregation of the sexes has not been defined by sociologists as comparable to that of the other ascriptive social categories discussed here. Nevertheless, most of the characteristics of birth-ascribed separation and stratification (racial, caste, ethnic, colonial, class, and pluralistic characteristics), and virtually all of the psychological and social consequences of inborn, lifelong superiority–inferiority relations are to be found in the relationship of males and females in most societies. These stem from similar factors in early socialization and from stereotypes and prejudices enacted and enforced in differential roles and opportunity structures, rationalized by ideologies of differential intrinsic capabilities and worth, sustained and defended through the combination of power and vested interest that is common to all birth-ascribed inequality. I have elsewhere contrasted some of the consequences of these assumptions and behaviours in the United States and India as reflected in the political participation of women in the two nations although this is dwarfed by Millett's more recent work on male domination, its sources, and manifestations in the West.⁵¹

If we agree with van den Berghe that 'race can be treated as a special case of invidious status differentiation or a special criterion of stratification,'⁵² I think we are bound to agree that sex is another.

CONSEQUENCES OF INHERITED INEQUALITY

Assuming that there are significant structural and interactional similarities among systems of birth-ascribed stratification, the question can still be legitimately asked, 'so what?' Is this merely a more or less interesting observation—even a truism—or does it have some theoretical or practical significance? My answer would be that it has both, for such systems have common and predictable consequences in the individual lives of those who live them and in the cumulative events which comprise the ongoing histories of the societies which harbour them.

Caste systems are living environments to those who comprise them. Yet there is a tendency among those who study and analyse them to intellectualize caste, and in the process to squeeze the life out of it. Caste is people, and especially people interacting in characteristic ways and thinking in characteristic ways. Thus, in addition to being a structure, a caste system is a set of human relationships and it is a state of mind.⁵³

Their 'human implications' are justification enough for studying and comparing systems of birth-ascribed stratification. There are neither the data nor the space to discuss these implications fully here, but I will suggest the nature of the evidence briefly, identifying psychological and social consequences. I am well aware that many features of such systems are found in all sharply stratified societies. Some are characteristic of all relationships of superordination and subordination, of poverty and affluence, of differential power. Others are found in all societies made up of distinct sub-groups whether stratified or not. It is the unique combination of characteristics in the context of the ideal of utter rigidity and unmitigable inequality which makes systems of stratification by race, caste, ethnicity, and sex distinctive in their impact on people, individually and collectively.

Psychological Consequences

Beliefs and attitudes associated with rigid stratification can be suggested by such terms as paternalism and dependence, *noblesse oblige*, arrogance, envy, resentment, hatred, prejudice, rationalization, emulation, self-doubt, and self-hatred. Those who are oppressed often respond to such stratification by attempting to escape either the circumstances or the consequences of the system. The realities of power and dependence make more usual an accommodation to oppression which, however, is likely to be less passive than is often supposed, and is likely to be unequivocally revealed when the slightest change in the perceived distribution of power occurs. Those who are privileged in the system seek to sustain and justify it, devoting much of their physical effort to the former and much of their psychic and verbal effort to the latter. When these systems are birth-ascribed, all of these features are exacerbated.

Kardiner and Ovesey conclude their classic, and by now outdated, study of American Negro personality, *Mark of Oppression*, with the statement: 'The psycho-social expressions of the Negro personality that we have described are the *integrated* end products of the process of oppression.'⁵⁴ Although it is appropriate to question their characterization of that personality in the light of subsequent events and research, there is no doubt that such oppression has recurrent psychological consequences for both the oppressor and the oppressed, as Robert Coles has demonstrated in *Children of Crisis* and subsequent works.⁵⁵

Oppression does not befall everyone in a system of birth-ascribed inequality. Most notably, it does not befall those with power. What does befall all is the imposition by birth of unalterable membership in ranked, socially isolated, but interacting groups with rigidly defined and conspicuously different experiences, opportunities, public esteem and, inevitably, self-esteem. The black in America and in South Africa, the Burakumin of Japan, the Harijan of India, the barber or washerman of Swat, the Hutu or Twa of Ruanda, have all faced similar conditions as individuals and they have responded to them in similar ways. The same can be said for the privileged and dominant groups in each of these societies, for while painful consequences of subordination are readily apparent, the consequences of superordination are equally real and important. Thus, ethnic stratification leaves its characteristic and indelible imprint on all who experience it.

The consequences of such stratification include many of the attitudes and responses vividly described in literature on black-white relations in the United States. Immediately to mind come accounts of the black experience, such as James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son*, *Nobody Knows My Name*, and *Go Tell it On the Mountain*; Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land*; Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*; Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*; Richard Wright's *Native Son* and *Black Boy*; and Malcolm X's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Outstanding among those dealing with the white experience in relation to blacks are W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South*; Lillian Smith's *Killers of the Dream* and *Strange Fruit*. The psychiatrist Robert Coles has provided insights into both sides of the American caste barrier in his works cited above.

Corresponding literature on other caste-like systems include, for India, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*; Hazari's *An Indian Outcaste: The Autobiography of an Untouchable*; Harold Isaac's *India's Ex-Untouchables*;

and, from the British side, E. M. Forster's *Passage to India*; and in Burma, George Orwell's *Burmese Days*. On Japan, we can refer to the contributors to DeVos and Wagatsuma's *Japan's Invisible Race*, and, cited therein, Ninomiya's 'An Inquiry Concerning the Origin, Development and Present Situation of the *Eta* . . .', and Shimazaki Tōson's *Hakai* (*Breach of Commandment*). Works on South Africa include Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* and *Too Late the Phalarope*; Albert Luthuli's *Let My People Go*; and van den Berghe's *Caneville* and *South Africa: A Study in Conflict*. Telling analyses of colonial situations include Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, and Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, both deriving from Algeria; O. Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban*, from Madagascar; J. C. Heinrich, *The Psychology of a Suppressed People*, on India. This listing does not do justice to the relevant literature, but is suggestive of it.

Research on the psychological consequences of racism in the United States is well-known and voluminous, though restricted almost exclusively to black-white relations. Although this literature has followed many blind leads and has been distorted by many subtle (and some not-so-subtle) biases, stereotypes, and prejudices, it nevertheless suggests that the public and self-disparagement or aggrandizement and the differential opportunities which go with birth-ascribed status, low and high, result in characteristic psychological problems and resort to characteristic psychological mechanisms.⁵⁶ Comparable literature on non-Western societies is scanty but increasing.⁵⁷

The consequences of birth-ascribed stratification are self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating, for although low status groups do not adopt views of themselves or their statuses which are consistent with the views held by their superiors, they are continually acting them out and cannot avoid internalizing some of them and the self-doubts they engender, just as high status groups internalize their superiority and self-righteousness. The oppression of others by the latter serves to justify and bolster their superiority complex and to rationalize for them the deprivation and exploitation of those they denigrate. 'Once you denigrate someone in that way,' say Kardiner and Ovesey, 'the sense of guilt makes it imperative to degrade the subject further to justify the whole procedure.'⁵⁸ Gallagher notes that in the southern United States,

By the attitudes of mingled fear, hostility, deprecation, discrimination, amused patronage, friendly domination, and rigid authoritarianism, the white caste generates opposite and complementary attitudes in the Negro caste. It is a touch of consummate irony that the dominant group should then argue that the characteristics which exhibit themselves in the submerged group are 'natural' or 'racial'.⁵⁹

The products of oppression are thus used to justify oppression.

Change and Emancipation

The self-reinforcing degradation described above combines with greed and fear of status-loss or revolt to comprise a dynamic of oppression which, in birth-ascribed stratification, probably accounts for the widespread occurrence of pariah status or untouchability. Elites characteristically justify oppression by compounding it; they enhance their own rewards by denying them ever more stringently to social inferiors, and they strive

to protect themselves from challenges to status and privilege from below by rigidifying the status boundaries, reinforcing the sanctions which enforce them, and increasing the monopoly on power which makes the sanctions effective. This assures increasing social separation and hierarchical distance between groups until such time as it generates rebellion, reform, or disintegration.

The fact that social order prevails most of the time in any given instance of inherited inequality does not mean that all of those in the system accept it or their places within it willingly, nor does it mean that the system is either stable or static. It most often means that power is held and exercised effectively by those in superordinate statuses, for the time being. Such systems are based on conformity more than consensus, and are maintained by sanctions more than agreement. Nevertheless, change is inherent, resistance and mobility-striving are universal, and effective challenges to such systems are probably ultimately inevitable because the response they elicit from those they oppress is subversive. The possibility of acting out the subversion depends largely upon the balance of power among the stratified groups and the definitions of the situation their members hold. The processes of change and patterns of conflict which lead to them are major areas of commonality in such systems.⁶⁰

The history of every caste system, of every racially stratified system, of every instance of birth-ascribed oppression is a history of striving, conflict, and occasional revolt. That this is not generally acknowledged is largely a result of the fact that most of these actions occur in the context of overwhelming power and uncompromising enforcement by the hereditary elites and are therefore expressed in the form of day-to-day resentment and resistance handled so subtly and occurring so routinely that it goes unremarked.⁶¹ Even conspicuous manifestations are likely to be quickly and brutally put down, confined to a particular locality or group, and knowledge of their occurrence suppressed by those against whom they have been directed. These phenomena often can only be discovered by consulting and winning the confidence of members of oppressed groups, and this is rarely done.

Only the most spectacular instances of resistance, and the few successful ones are likely to be well-known. Immediately to mind come such martyrs to the cause of emancipation of oppressed peoples as the Thracian slave Spartacus, who led a rebellion against Rome; the American slave rebellion leaders Gabriel and Nat Turner, the white abolitionist John Brown, and the contemporary leaders of black emancipation in America, Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers, and others (too many of them martyred) among their fellow leaders and supporters, black and white. No doubt there are many more, most of them unknown and unsung, in the history of all groups whose members society condemns by birth to oppression. In the folk history of every such group, and in the memory of every member, are instances of courageous or foolhardy people who have challenged or outwitted their oppressors, often at the cost of their own foreseeable and inevitable destruction.

Better-known and better-documented than the individuals who led and sometimes died for them, are the emancipation movements which have occurred in most such societies—movements such as those for black power and black separatism in the United States, anti-casteism and anti-untouchability in India, Hutu emancipation in Rwanda and Burundi, Burakumin

emancipation in Japan, and anti-apartheid in South Africa. All have depended primarily upon concerted efforts to apply political, economic, or military power to achieve their ends. They have comprised direct challenges to the systems. Most have followed after the failure of attempts less militant, less likely to succeed, and hence less threatening to social elites—attempts towards assimilation or mobility within the systems such as those of status emulation.

The movements among black Americans (and more recently among other ethnically stratified groups in America such as Chicanos and Native Americans, and among women), are too well-known and well-documented to require enumeration here.⁶² Anyone who reads the American press and especially the black and left press, cannot avoid being aware of the main currents in this area.

Emancipation movements outside of the West are less known to European and American readers, but they are more numerous than can be indicated here albeit quite poorly documented. Any list would have to include the following obvious examples:

India: Escape from the consequences of caste stratification has been a primary appeal of every religion and social reform movement to gain adherents in India from the beginnings of Jainism and Buddhism in the sixth century B.C., through Islam which became a significant religion in India from the eleventh century A.D.; Sikhism from the early sixteenth century; Christianity, dating from the 'Syrian Christians' of the first or sixth century A.D. in Kerala, followed in the sixteenth century by converts of Portuguese and French Catholic missionaries and in the nineteenth century by Anglican and Protestant converts; various Hindu reform movements including the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj of the early and late nineteenth century, respectively; the post-Independence resurgence of 'neo-'Buddhism among low castes as an explicitly anti-caste phenomenon under Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the revered leader of Indian untouchables for many decades and founder of the Scheduled Castes Federation and its successor in the later 1950s, the All-India Republican Party.

Regional movements have been many, among the best-known of which are the Maharashtrian anti-Brahmin movement under the leadership of Jotirao Phule in the 1870s, a largely middle-caste Maratha movement, and in the same area an emancipation movement among untouchable Mahars which matured into the above-mentioned Scheduled Caste Federation under Ambedkar.⁶³

Innumerable local and regional movements, primarily in urban centres, have arisen whose aim has been to emancipate the members of a caste or cluster of castes, to force public recognition of higher status for a caste, or to ameliorate their caste-based disabilities through solidarity and political action.⁶⁴ There can be little doubt that contemporary revolutionary parties and movements in India depend to a significant extent on their appeal to oppressed castes whose members see them as vehicles to emancipation.

In addition to these sophisticated efforts at emancipation, upward mobility movements among low castes are endemic to all regions of India, and have evidently been so throughout its history. These movements entail a claim to high status that has not been recognized. They co-ordinate and enforce among the members of a caste emulation of the behaviours and attributes of high castes in the hope that this will result in public recognition

of the claim. This process has been termed 'Sanskritization', in recognition of the fact that the behaviours adopted are often those prescribed for high castes in the sacred Sanskrit literature.⁶⁵ Emulation alone, however, no matter how successfully done, is not enough to confer status, for status in a caste system is not based on behaviour but on birth. To change the societal definition of a caste's status requires a concerted, sustained, and powerful group effort, and it is most often unsuccessful.

In addition, as Harold Isaacs has documented in *India's Ex-Untouchables*, individuals occasionally escape the consequences of their caste status into rewarding caste-free occupations in cities, often as a result of education and sometimes by the successful concealment of their caste identities (passing). In rural areas, some people emigrate to cities to escape the disabilities of their caste status; some cluster together in low-caste communities to avoid daily contact with, and humiliation by, their caste superiors; a few are able to acquire a degree of exemption at the cost of conventional family life through adoption of non-priestly religious roles or resort to various socially deviant identities.⁶⁶

Japan: Publicly recognized emancipation movements among the Burakumin of Japan have been many, militant, and frequently violent following the official Edict of Emancipation of 1871. They have been so well documented and conveniently summarized by Totten and Wagatsuma that to repeat the information would be superfluous. Wagatsuma has carried the chronology of political militance through the post-World War II period, and has also documented non-political, religious, and educational approaches to amelioration of Burakumin oppression.⁶⁷ The similarities to emancipation efforts in India and the United States are little short of uncanny. The occurrence and problems of 'passing' among Burakumin, and the limited rewards to be acquired through educational, occupational, and residential mobility are closely parallel to those reported for India and the United States.⁶⁸

Ruanda: In Ruanda and nearby Urundi, the dominant Tutsi seemed until fifteen years ago to be in firm control, with the subordinate Hutu and Twa relegated to dependent economic and political roles.⁶⁹ But this proves to have been a false calm. In 1957, while Ruanda was still part of the Belgian trust territory of Ruanda-Urundi, the Hutu issued the Bahutu Manifesto which initiated an emancipation movement. Opposing political parties then arose, advocating Hutu emancipation on the one hand and Tutsi supremacy on the other. The brutality of the latter unleashed a successful Hutu revolution in 1959, in which most of the Tutsi were driven from the country. The resultant Hutu government was confirmed when the emancipation party won overwhelmingly in a plebiscite in 1961. That party was in power when Ruanda became independent Rwanda in 1962, and has remained so despite frequent incursions by Tutsi from across the Rwanda borders. In the adjacent kingdom of Burundi (formerly Urundi and part of the same trust territory), the Hutu emancipation movement was suppressed by the Tutsi-dominated government after independence in 1962, and inter-caste tension thereafter increased. When the Hutu won a majority of governmental seats in the election of 1965, the king refused to name the majority government. This led to an unsuccessful Hutu coup, put down by the army, after which most of the Hutu leadership was shot. These Hutu emancipation efforts were perhaps a surprise to the Tutsi overlords, but they came as no surprise to any serious student of

birth-ascribed oppression, for such systems are always fraught with tension and resentment which await only a belief in the possibility of success for drastic change to be attempted from below.

Henry Adams characterized the slave society of Virginia in 1800 as 'ill at ease'.⁷⁰ This seems to be the chronic state of societies so organized—the privileged cannot relax their vigilance against the rebellious resentment of the deprived. That such rigid, oppressive systems do function and persist is a credit not to the consensus they engender any more than to the justice or rationality of the systems. Rather, it is a tribute to the effectiveness of the monopoly on power which the privileged are able to maintain. When in such systems deprived people get the vote, get jobs, get money, get legal redress, get guns, get powerful allies, get public support for their aspirations, they perceive a change in the power situation and an enhancement of the likelihood of successful change in their situation, and they are likely to attempt to break out of their oppressed status. These conditions do not generate the desire for change, for that is intrinsic; they merely make it seem worthwhile to attempt the change. Sometimes the triggering factor is not that the deprived believe conditions have changed so that success is more likely, but rather that conditions have led them to define the risk and consequences of failure (even its virtual certainty) as acceptable. Resultant changes are often drastic and traumatic of achievement, but they are sought by the oppressed and by enlightened people of all statuses precisely because of the heavy individual and societal costs of maintaining inherited inequality and because its inherent inhumanity.

An important difference between the dynamics of inherited stratification and acquired stratification results from the fact that in the latter, power and privilege accompany achievable status, emulation is at least potentially effective, and mobility and assimilation are realistic goals. Therefore energies of status resentment may rationally be channelled toward mobility. Most immigrant groups in the United States, for example, have found this out as they have merged with the larger society after one or two generations of socialization. But in a system where inherited, unalterable group identity is the basis for rewards, emulation alone cannot achieve upward mobility, and assimilation is impossible so long as the system exists (in fact, prevention of assimilation is one of its main functions). Only efforts to destroy, alter, or circumvent the system make sense. In the United States, blacks, Chicanos, and Native Americans have found this out. Only in response to changes in the distribution of power is such inherited status likely to be re-evaluated and the distribution of rewards altered.

CONCLUSION

'Race' as the term is used in America, Europe, and South Africa, is not qualitatively different in its implications for human social life from caste, *varna*, or *jati* as applied in India, *quom* in Swat and Muslim India, the 'invisible race' of Japan, the ethnic stratification of Rwanda and Burundi. Racism and casteism are indistinguishable in the annals of man's inhumanity to man, and sexism is closely allied to them as man's inhumanity to woman. All are invidious distinctions imposed unalterably at birth upon whole categories of people to justify the unequal social distribution of power, livelihood, security, privilege, esteem, freedom—in short, life chances. Where distinctions of this type are employed, they affect people

and the events which people generate in surprisingly similar ways despite the different historical and cultural conditions in which they occur.

If I were asked, 'What practical inference, if any, is to be drawn from the comparative study of inherited inequality—of ascriptive social ranking?' I would say it is this: There is no way to reform such institutions; the only solution is their dissolution. As Kardiner and Ovesey said long ago '*there is only one way that the products of oppression can be dissolved, and that is to stop the oppression*'.⁷¹ To stop the oppression, one must eliminate the structure of inherited stratification upon which it rests. Generations of Burakumin, Hutu, blacks, untouchables, and their sympathizers have tried reform without notable success. Effective change has come only when the systems have been challenged directly.

The boiling discontent of birth-ascribed deprivation cannot be contained by pressing down the lid of oppression or by introducing token flexibility, or by preaching brotherly love. The only hope lies in restructuring society and redistributing its rewards so as to end the inequality. Such behavioural change must come first. From it may follow attitudinal changes as meaningful, status-equal interaction undermines racist, casteist, communalist, and sexist beliefs and attitudes, but oppressed people everywhere have made it clear that it is the end of oppression, not brotherly love, which they seek most urgently. To await the latter before achieving the former is futility; to achieve the former first does not guarantee achievement of the latter, but it increases the chances and makes life liveable. In any case, the unranked pluralism which many minorities seek requires only equality, not love.

To those who fear this course on the grounds that it will be traumatic and dangerous, I would say that it is less so than the futile attempt to prevent change. Philip Mason spoke for all systems of inborn inequality when he called the Spartan oppression of the Helots in ancient Greece a trap from which there was no escape.

It was the Helots who released the Spartans from such ignoble occupations as trade and agriculture. . . . But it was the Helots who made it necessary to live in an armed camp, constantly on the alert against revolt. . . . They had a wolf by the ears; they dared not let go. And it was of their own making; they had decided—at some stage and by what process one can only guess—that the Helots would remain separate and without rights forever.⁷²

That way, I believe, lies ultimate disaster for any society. A thread of hope lies in the possibility that people can learn from comparison of the realities of inherited inequality across space, time, and culture, and can act to preclude the disaster that has befallen others by eliminating the system which guarantees it. It is a very thin thread.

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⁶⁵ M. N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1962), pp. 42-62; M. N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1966), pp. 1-45.

⁶⁶ Cf. Berreman, *Hindus of the Himalayas*, Epilogue, 'Sirkanda Ten Years Later'.

⁶⁷ George O. Totten and Hiroshi Wagatsuma, 'Emancipation: Growth and Transformation of a Political Movement', in DeVos and Wagatsuma, op. cit., pp. 33-67; Hiroshi Wagatsuma, 'Postwar Political Militance', and 'Non-Political Approaches: The Influences of Religion and Education', in DeVos and Wagatsuma, op. cit., pp. 68-109.

⁶⁸ George DeVos and Hiroshi Wagatsuma, 'Group Solidarity and Individual Mobility', in DeVos and Wagatsuma, op. cit., pp. 245-56.

⁶⁹ Maquet, op. cit.

⁷⁰ Henry Adams, *The United States in 1800* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 98.

⁷¹ Kardiner and Ovesey, op. cit., p. 387.

⁷² Philip Mason, *Patterns of Dominance* (London, Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations, 1970), p. 75.