

SPECIAL REVIEW

GAIL E. THOMAS (Ed.): *U.S. Race Relations in the 1980s and 1990s: Challenges and Alternatives*. Hemisphere, New York (1990). 281 pp. Price: Cloth \$31.00.

This collection of 20 essays by as many different authors originated as a national conference on race and ethnic relations held at the University of Texas in 1988. The authors are mostly sociologists and anthropologists, many of them racial or ethnic minority persons themselves, and many of them teaching in departments of ethnic studies, in which the kind of content represented in this book is an important part of the curriculum. The various chapters, dealing with such topics as education, poverty and segregation, black teachers (called 'an endangered species' because of recently instituted competency testing) and professional sports, focus mainly on the problems and progress or the lack of it in the conditions of what are labeled the 'under-represented' racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, namely, blacks, Hispanics and American Indians.

The conditions of these groups are indeed often disturbing and increasingly demand the widest recognition, not only by the general public, but by students of the social and behavioral sciences as well. Blacks and Hispanics are the fastest growing proportion of the U.S. population and their problems are not just theirs, but clearly impact on the general welfare of everyone else as well.

While the middle-class segment of the black American population has shown marked educational, economic and political advances in recent decades, the poor, or 'non-middle-class' blacks (as they are termed in this book) have shown little or no gains in education or employment status, and in some ways they have even lost ground and their conditions have worsened since the 1970s, as seen in the increasing 'social pathology' of the predominantly black 'inner-cities'. The black American population itself appears to be splitting into two subpopulations, the 'haves' and 'have-nots', each with distinctive characteristics that are highly correlated with the chances of either success or failure in any modern technological society.

Between many of the lines of this book, readers will detect a good deal of anger, and in fact not just between the lines. The various authors' accounts of these minority problems are not merely dry sociological abstractions but are clearly meant to provoke the public's social conscience and political action. To be sure, there are lots of purely descriptive statistics - entirely dismal statistics - on the conditions of minorities in education, in the teaching profession, in employment (especially these minorities' conspicuous under-representation in higher-status jobs) and over-representation in crime and punishment. On this score, the point is more than proved. But the theoretical frameworks within which occasional attempts are made to explain these statistics seem curiously flimsy indeed.

The fact that universal public education has not proved to be the 'great equalizer' that so many social scientists had expected is an especially sore point. As one author (Ogbu) notes, blacks have developed a "deep distrust" for white Americans and their institutions. He states, "Faced with the most sustained and most extreme discrimination in American history, particularly a job ceiling, blacks seem to have learned that social and economic rewards are not proportional to educational efforts; consequently they tend to develop a different maxim: 'What's the use of trying?'" (p. 24). This excerpt characterizes the general level of causal hypotheses regarding the statistical shortfall of blacks in education and employment, and their marked under-representation in many high status occupations. The explanatory terminology throughout consists largely of the rhetoric of *blame*: one reads "white racism", "white caste thinking", "oppression", "discrimination" and "white supremacy".

The nurturing of almost an incipient social paranoia in the groping for explanations of the achievement deficit of the black underclass, despite the billions appropriated by federal programs in compensatory education, work training and the like, is suggested by passages such as the following: "... the gatekeepers of power have devised new and more complex strategies for circumventing the attainment of equity ... institutions now have seized the 'quality' criterion as a mechanism for denying equity in higher education" (p. 58). The belief still holds sway in the black community that aptitude tests are biased - even *purposely* biased - to act as a major barrier to black advancement in education and higher level occupations. We are told "Black students, parents, and spokes persons seem to think that the tests or requirements, whether administered by whites or by their black representatives, are designed to keep black people down, not to help them succeed" (Ogbu, p. 26). Also, "The black students and parents ... said that they did not trust white people and the schools to teach black people the truth, that the schools taught only white people's knowledge and only what white people wanted blacks to know" (p. 30). Occasionally black suspicion extends to the whole of Western civilization and even to science itself: "You can see the cracks in the structure by the loss of faith in itself that permeates Western civilization. Science, one of the great kingpins of the edifice, is under challenge from several quarters" (p. 205), with a footnote reference to "feminists, Marxists, Afrocentric scholars and even scientists themselves". This author's (E. Bonacich) argument is summarized by a discussant (W. R. Allen): "... the American system is bound to inequality and depends on inequality for its very survival ... racial oppression is an inherent feature of capitalism; thus we can never rid ourselves of the problem without effecting profound change in our economic system" (p. 209). What is proposed is "societal change within a neo-Marxist paradigm". Many readers may see the promulgation of this kind of thinking, if it ever catches on in a big way, as a portent of still further troubles ahead for race relations.

The general level of diagnosis and proposed solutions throughout is almost entirely sociological and political, broadly speaking, and disparages or shuns any mention of the psychological and psychometric levels of analysis of many of the problems discussed. The recent research of Linda Gottfredson (see *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 1986, Vol. 29, No. 3; and 1988, Vol. 33, No. 3), for example, shows that the proportional representation of blacks in the various levels of occupational status are highly predictable strictly from the distribution statistics of mental ability test scores in the black and white populations. And expert opinion overwhelmingly agrees that the extensive research on test bias shows that the widely used standard tests in educational and employment selection are *not* predictively biased against blacks, although blacks, on average, score about one standard deviation below whites.

In short, massive evidence clearly indicates that there is a whole other level of analysis—that of psychometrics and differential psychology—that is virtually unrecognized in the present book and which will need to be fully and compatibly integrated with the sociological and anthropological facts and formulations—and, if science is allowed to run its course, eventually even with biological and evolutionary facts and theories as well. The popular sociological and anthropological theories of educational disparities and all their social consequences are weakest in considering the direction of cause-effect relationships, and they seem much too broad and indirect for 'zeroing in' and trying to understand precisely what is going on at the cognitive level when children achieve or fail to achieve in school. A quite different order of research and analysis is required to discover the psychological processes through which broad cultural and social factors, to whatever extent they may be involved, actually exert their effects on scholastic achievement and other socially important behavior that manifests problematic racial and ethnic differences.

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