

- 2) To foster and advocate change, knowledge disconfirmation, and personal liberation.
- 3) To socialize and prepare women and men for roles in the academic, industrial, political and social structure of the society.

These roles may be in conflict. Certainly they are in conflict if one concentrates on a particular role to the exclusion of the others.

But it does seem to me that if we accept as valid and tenable a particular set of directives, which I shall now formulate, we can bring the three roles and functions into a constructive and productive balance.

What, then, are these directives?

1. That our colleges and universities must enter into the preparation of talent — and not solely respond to indicants of such talent as they appear in the entering classes. This means that universities must be engaged in outreach which in our system certainly means engaged in the high school level preparation of their future students. I do not believe that our universities and colleges — and surely not our urban universities and colleges, can presume that students will enter “prepared” and “talent-ready” as evaluated by standards of 30 years ago;
2. That our colleges and universities must be advocates for pluralism, on the principle that fundamental to the conservation and transmittal of the cultural and knowledge base is that there is communication and mutuality of respect;
3. That our colleges and universities must strengthen the connective link between the conservation of knowledge and the application of knowledge to solve societal problems. There is no great attraction to a transmittal process that insures a continually increasing reservoir of knowledge that seems to have no role in advancing, in nurturing and in enriching the present society and helping it solve its problems;
4. That our colleges and universities must confirm the egalitarian principle of equality of opportunity for access to knowledge;
5. That our colleges and universities confirm the validity of the power of knowledge to be a force for change.

These directives give integrated purpose and significance to the roles and functions articulated earlier. They also give validity to both the longitudinal and situational considerations I discussed earlier.

### Conclusion

Now, perhaps more than ever before, this nation cannot afford to lose the talents of one American mind; not one, and so, beyond issues of equity and social justice, there is or ought to be a motivation and collective will to arrange educational experiences so that we can maximize productivity and human resource development. Basic to this must be our ability to use our diversity and our pluralistic society. Our role and our place in the world community urgently now depend on our success in this challenge.

## The Puzzle of Race and Class in American Society and Social Science

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“With race theories you can prove and disprove anything you want.”  
Max Weber<sup>1</sup>

Does race still matter in America twenty-five years after the Civil Rights Revolution? And how much does it matter? Or has class taken over, now single-handedly determining the social fate of black Americans? Such are the questions that we have been called upon to address today. As Reynolds Farley has shown in his book *Blacks and Whites: Narrowing the Gap?*, there are three ways of answering these questions and plenty of convincing research data can be marshalled in support of each, for trends in racial inequality over the last quarter-century have been confusing and conflicting.<sup>2</sup>

The *optimists* will say that skin color now has little to do with one's opportunities in American society, and they can, to buttress this claim, legitimately point to the substantial decline of racial differences in educational attainment, to the spectacular upgrading of the occupations held by employed blacks, to the notably improved annual earnings of minority workers, and even to the decrease in overt racial hostility and delegitimation of discriminatory attitudes. The *pessimists*, on the other hand, will dismiss these very same trends by pointing to the fact that in none of these areas have blacks reached parity with their white counterparts; they will further stress that unemployment rates, labor force participation, and family and child poverty have all witnessed racial regress, not racial progress, while residential segregation and school segregation in large metropolises have changed little, if at all, since the 1960s. A third view will reinterpret these same facts as proof that black America is becoming increasingly *polarized* into a successful, relatively secure middle-class of college-educated blacks who have gained access to the package of goods and services that embody the “American dream” and are increasingly able to transmit their privileged status to their offspring; and a downtrodden, impoverished “underclass” trapped in blighted inner cities with no prospect other than the mounting marginalization, despair and daily violence that ravages today's ghettos.<sup>3</sup>

Now, we must wonder: if all three answers — the optimist, the pessimist and the polarization thesis — can be correct at the same time, perhaps it is because the question was not the right one to ask, or was not articulated in a scientifically fruitful fashion? French epistemologist and historian of science Gaston Bachelard shows in *The Psychoanalysis of the Scientific Mind* (1934) that only scientific problems can receive scientific answers. The central argument of this article is that,

its illustrious if brief history notwithstanding, the controversy around the "Inclining or Declining Significance of Race" is a *false problem which does not, in this form, warrant a scientific solution* and thus needs first of all to be reformulated.

This reformulation, I contend, must avoid three recurrent fallacies that have plagued the study of race in American social science: *essentialism* (the belief that there is an unchanging essence to race discrimination and that it necessarily pervades the whole of the social system), objectivist *determinism* (the idea that race or class are purely "objective" factors that command position and conduct irrespective of the subjective experiences and representations of agents), and unidimensional *reductionism*, (the often implicit assumption that one and only one principle must control the generation of social outcomes). It must instead bring to center stage three ingredients of fruitful social-scientific thinking that have been sorely lacking in this debate: *reflexivity, historical complexity, and agency*. Bachelard also wrote that "nothing is simple but the simplified" and if I can convey but one message in this short paper, it is that the problematics of race and its relationship to class (and other bases of domination, most notably gender) is immensely more complicated than the title of our panel would suggest. And this complexity stems in no small part from the overlap that exists, in this case, between subject and object, as well as from the fact that a considerable degree of historical agency is involved in the creation and reproduction of racial inequality — much more than our current theories allow. The opening epigram by Weber is meant as a warning that we must make our views of the race-class nexus more complex by making each of its terms, as well as their connection, problematic.

### I. The Wilson Thesis, or "The Inclining Significance of Class"

Our session takes its theme from the title of Wilson's now-classic study *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*, which triggered a vigorous and sometimes vicious controversy upon its publication in 1978 by the University of Chicago Press.<sup>4</sup> Since this book has been so often distorted and misread, I will first recapitulate its essential claims. Wilson's core thesis, as I read it, is essentially an *historical* one, spanning a full century of black-white relations. This thesis states that an interrelated set of changes in the economic structure and state autonomy and policies of the United States have moved race relations through three distinct stages and progressively made class position an increasingly powerful determinant of the life-chances of individual blacks.<sup>5</sup>

In the first phase, that of *racial-caste oppression* associated with the plantation economy of the antebellum South, the system of production was dominated by a hegemonic white planter elite that effectively rendered other whites powerless and suppressed blacks into slavery, while the state served as an instrument of unmitigated white dominance by reinforcing and legitimating the exploitation of slave labor. A paternalistic racial ideology justified asymmetric interactions characterized by a mix of close physical proximity and unbridgeable social distance between the races. The second phase was one of *white class conflict-cum-racial oppression* during the period of industrial expansion (roughly 1880-1945). The epochal economic and urban dislocations that accompanied rapid capitalist industrialization undermined the hegemony of the white ruling class and brought about industrial strife and increased competition and tension between white and black workers. The efforts by white workers to eliminate the threat posed by black labor generated an elaborate system of Jim Crow segregation reinforced by a virulent ideology of biological racism. The institutionalization of these new, sharper racial restrictions was success-

ful largely because white ethnics controlled the political machines of large cities. Again, changes in the system of production caused a shift in race relations while state power was instrumental in consolidating white rule. In the post-World War II era, argues Wilson (1980:3) there occurred a "*progressive transition from racial inequalities to class inequalities*" that fully crystallized after the 1960s. The distinctive mark of this period is a dramatic bifurcation of the fates of middle-class and working-class blacks: while the former benefited from the increasing demand for white-collar salaried employees, governmental pressures for affirmative action, and the growth of corporate and public-sector employment, the latter found themselves shut out in the lower-tier of the secondary labor market at a time when unskilled manual jobs were being destroyed en masse by technological innovation, industrial relocation and the sectoral shift to services. But perhaps the most dramatic change of this period was the deracialization of the polity: whereas the state used to be "quite clearly an instrument of this white population in suppressing blacks," it now turned "to promote racial equality" (Wilson 1980:17).

Two subsidiary theses follow from this historical-structural argument. First, the *locus of racial conflict has shifted from the economic realm to the socio-political order*. Wilson (1980:111) proposes that the combined effects of industrial decentralization and restructuring, and racially progressive state policies have all but eliminated racial conflict in the economic realm. Racial strife now centers around the control of space, neighborhood schools and local political apparatuses rather than on access to jobs. Secondly, the *growing class schism that has recently emerged within the black community* is making it meaningless to speak of a uniform black experience. In particular, the ability of middle-class blacks (i.e., those who hold credentialed white-collar and professional positions) to avail themselves of the new occupational opportunities were created by affirmative action programs and to protect their offspring from downward mobility, contrasts sharply with the basic inability of the ghetto poor simply to enter the wagelabor economy and to secure the means to raise themselves and their families out of persistent poverty.

It must be emphasized that Wilson nowhere says or implies that racial bias is a thing of the past and that America is now the color-blind society that its ideologues are celebrating. Indeed, he takes pain to insist that "[w]hen I speak of the declining significance of race, I am neither ignoring the legacy of previous discrimination nor am I arguing that racial discrimination no longer exists" (Wilson 1980:167).<sup>6</sup> The reason why he devotes scant attention to the newer and more subtler forms of discrimination in the contemporary period is that he believes that the roots of racial inequality are no longer to be found in intentional discriminatory practices motivated by skin color: rather, they are built into race-neutral, impersonal economic mechanisms that polarize blacks and impact primarily those who are at the bottom of the class ladder. It is macro-economic dislocation, not racial prejudice, that is key to understanding the plight of the growing black subproletariat mired in the decaying urban core. Race-specific programs designed to implement racial equality will primarily benefit the black middle class, not the black poor who are fast falling behind. The task of social policy therefore becomes to confront head on "the pervasive and destructive features of class subordination" that go well beyond racial discrimination (Wilson 1980:154).

In this sense, *The Declining Significance of Race* is as provocative a catchphrase as it is deceptive, for Wilson in no way contends that race has become insignificant, or even less significant in absolute terms: only that racial inequality is now generat-

ed by the mismatches between various spatial, economic and social structures; and that class position, which used to be nearly irrelevant in prior eras, has now taken on critical importance within the black community, as it long has among whites. Indeed, "The Inclining Significance of Class" would have been a much more appropriate title for the book.

## II. The Controversy: Object or Relation to the Object?

I have indicated that "the declining significance of race" is a misleading capsule for Wilson's theory. Yet commentators and critics were quick to fasten on it and to unleash a barrage of fiery rhetoric — often degenerating into *ad hominem* attacks — based on it. What immediately struck me when I first became acquainted with this controversy is how most of Wilson's critics, but especially black academics, concentrated on the "middle class" portion of his thesis and almost entirely overlooked his historical model or his argument about the black poor. They devoted most of their energies to refuting Wilson's alleged contention that middle-class blacks were no longer suffering from discrimination and had "made it" just like their white counterparts. There is an unmistakable element of self-defense in the vigor, sometimes furor, with which Afro-American social scientists have tracked down and reviled at the slightest pronouncement of Wilson on the "privileges" of educated blacks, while nearly ignoring the center-piece of his theory. *De te fabula narratur*: may I suggest that the reason why this part of Wilson's model — which I consider entirely subsidiary — attracted so much attention and created so much intellectual discontent and unease was that it disturbed its critics, not in their capacity as scientists, but as private persons, because it challenged their sense of self? Even a cursory analysis of the social and academic positions of the protagonists reveals that much of the controversy surrounding the "declining significance of race" finds its origins not in the object itself, but rather in the contrasted relation that various analysts entertain with it a relation that spans a whole gamut ranging from pride, resentment and envy to insecurity and guilt, which most often are unconscious.

One of the main reasons why the debate around race and class has so far generated so much heat and so little light is a striking *lack of reflexivity* on the part of its participants, that is, a failure clearly to separate the object from the relation to the object and to make this relation part of the puzzle to be solved.<sup>7</sup> Most parties to this debate, being black academics, are themselves personally as well as scientifically implicated in it and, whether they realize it or not, they are defending, not only scientific, but also academic and personal stakes; they strive, consciously or not, to protect a definite image of themselves as scholars and as Afro-American individuals. Much of their stance on this issue results thus from a *projection, into the object of inquiry, of their relation to this object, i.e., of their particular experience of class and race in their biographical and academic trajectory.*

But there is a second dimension to this reflexivity. With a little hindsight it is easy to discern that theories of race, like theories of class or of other social collectives liable to make claims on collective resources (citizens, gender groups, religious communities, etc.), are, to varying degrees, both responses to preexisting sociopolitical perceptions of racial-realities and, in turn, attempts to influence these perceptions.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the reason for such a heated contention around the issue of race and class is not solely that it touches participants very deeply in their own identity; it also has effects on reality itself. It has often been remarked that theories of race are often framed in a strong normative cast and deliberately or unwittingly orient

themselves towards public policy issues and concerns (e.g., Van den Berghe 1967; See and Wilson 1988). This is because the symbolic structures produced by academics, i.e., the taxonomies of class and race they elaborate, are, like all cognitive structures, endowed with a constitutive power, a *worldmaking power* as philosopher Nelson Goodman (1978) puts it, and they can, under certain social conditions, help fashion the reality they purport merely to describe.

No wonder, then, that a central target of the controversy surrounding *The Declining Significance of Race* was what Wilson's critics mistook to be its "neo-conservative" implications in the realm of state policies. For instance, the Association of Black Sociologists promptly passed a resolution condemning Wilson's book at the 1978 meeting of the American Sociological Association in characteristically emotional, morally-laden, terms (cited in Pinkney 1984:15, my emphasis):

The Association of Black Sociologists is *outraged* over the *misrepresentation* of the black experience. We are also *extremely disturbed* over the policy implications that may derive from this work and that, given the nature of American society, are likely to set in motion equally objectionable trends in funding, research and training.

My contention here is that all theoretical discourses on both race and class have an *inescapably performative dimension* to them. They fulfill functions that are inseparably descriptive and prescriptive, cognitive and political. Through them, academics attempt, more or less consciously, to shape reality by "doing things with words," to use philosopher John Austin's (1964) apt expression. Indeed, we are dealing here with a web of material and symbolic relations in which what Pierre Bourdieu (1985) has called the "theory effect" is particularly powerful. This is why the academic struggle for imposing class or race as the preeminent base of social cleavage in American society has been riddled with such acrimony and with excessively bitter and passionate exchanges. Consciously or not, black scholars have viewed themselves and their rivals as spokespersons for their community and they have defended the scientific position congruent with what they took to be the latter's interest. What is at stake in this contest, then, is not some kind of socially-neutral "truth" that would be attained independently by direct, unadulterated contact with the naked "facts" of racial and class inequality, but the monopoly over the legitimate authority to tell the truth of the black community and of its changing place in American society. Scholars engage in this controversy partly in an attempt to change or preserve the world (and their "sense of place" in this world, to borrow Goffman's expression) by changing or preserving its (scholarly) representation.<sup>9</sup>

The controversy sparked by Wilson's book *The Declining Significance of Race* provides us with a vivid illustration of this symbolic struggle to impose the scientifically legitimate vision of race and the correct assessment of its significance. The very virulence of this partly academic, partly political debate proves how the specific interests of academics interfere and shape its investigation, indeed constitute part of it — there is an unmistakable element of self-analysis in it. Secondly, it reveals the crucial contribution that symbolic work makes to the making of groups, even such seemingly evident ones as racial communities: for if scientific theories of race and class were without effort on the reality they purportedly describe, if the latter consisted of natural entities that evolve independently of our perception of them, why then bother? It is precisely because of the potency of the "theory effect" that this controversy has grown.

Insofar as this debate has an inherently reflexive dimension, an adequate theory of race and class must be reflexive, i.e., it must turn its theoretical and conceptual instruments upon itself in order to show that it is part of the very object it pretends

to capture and how, in turn, it contributes to shaping that object and is shaped by it. It will then become obvious that the "significance of race" is first and foremost the stake of a struggle among academics and the form and the content of the stances taken on this issue depend in part on the specific interests tied with membership in the university field and with the position occupied within that field.<sup>10</sup> We must analyze this contest, not to satisfy a narcissistic impulse, but because it is part and parcel of the full reality of the object we are trying to construct. Such a reflexive analysis of the race-class puzzle should start by asking: Who is speaking? To whom? From what position in academic space (small college or elite university, tenured or untenured position, established or marginal discipline, etc.) and at the end of what trajectory through social space? However irrelevant on first impression, such questions would help neutralize the effects of the fact that the subject is in the object and the analyst sits under his or her own microscope and under that of his rivals.

### III. Critique of the "Declining Significance of Race" Controversy

Wilson and his critics alike have failed to recognize this reflexive dimension of the controversy. Consequently, they have converged in ignoring the fact that the variable geometry of race in sociological writings has as much to do with the desires of academics to act upon the world as with their will to explain it. But this is not all. For it is not so much the *specifics* of the debate that need to be challenged as the very terms in which it has been framed and waged. For by asking "Race: Declining or Increasing Significance?," we are misled to believe that this extremely complex and multifaceted problem can be reduced to a clear-cut alternative, adjudicated by means of rigorous empirical "tests," and resolved by a few commonsensical arguments leading to a simple positive or negative opinion.

The implicit presupposition behind such a question is that race is a uniform, essential property whose "significance" is one-dimensional and admits of some kind of purely objective — preferably quantitative — evaluation, either in itself or relative to some other social criterion, implicitly class. I submit that what is needed to make this controversy a progressive one, as opposed to a degenerative one (to borrow Lakatos' terms), is to recognize the following three propositions.

1. Race is not an *ens realissimum*, an unchanging essence that necessarily and uniformly pervades the whole of society. The idea that if race is determinant, and its influence increasing or declining in one institutional sector, then it must of necessity be equally determinant, increasing or declining, in all or most other sectors, is fallacious. Racial markers and meanings operate differently across class and gender lines. The relative "significance" of each of these bases of domination and their interaction further varies across institutions and across regions of a multi-dimensional social space.

2. Race cannot be reduced to an *objective factor* that mechanically determines, "behind the backs of agents," their conduct and opportunities. Most researchers worry that race, when entered into a regression equation, still seems to "explain" a large portion of the black-white differential in income, education, home ownership, employment rate, etc. — or, more precisely, that no other "control" eliminates this racial differential, which is therefore residually attributed to race, that is to discrimination. But race is not an abstract variable that mechanically pushes people as gravity draws objects towards the earth: race consists of a set of *politically negotiated meanings*, a *symbolic structure of power* that must be activated to be efficacious (Omi and Winant 1986). It is inscribed not only in the unequal distribution of

resources and material powers, but also in people's minds in the form of practical taxonomies and mental categories that guide their perception and evaluation of the social world and shapes their action in it. Thus the subjective experiences of agents are far from being irrelevant to this debate. The "significance" of race and its variations have two interwoven dimensions, the subjective and the objective, which do not necessarily covary in the same fashion.

3. We must give up the urge to *reduce* a multidimensional social space to one or other of its dimension.<sup>11</sup> The persistent belief that one and only one principle must necessarily operate (or predominate) to shape social outcomes or "overdetermine" the impact of other variable mutilates reality. Against this view, we must maintain that class and race can both be relevant at the same time, indeed, that their significance can increase simultaneously in ways that either aggravate or mitigate the effects of each, and that racial effects vary across class and gender levels, just like the impact of gender and class are mediated by race.

This is where the notion of *complexity* comes in, as a first antidote to essentialism. We must introduce complexity at three levels: in our conceptualization of society, in our understanding of race and class, and in our investigation of their relations. We must recognize that society is neither of one piece, nor structured around one all-encompassing axis. Rather, we should think of it as a series of relatively autonomous, partially overlapping and hierarchically interconnected *fields* or games, each with its own rules of play and with its own effects and hierarchies.<sup>12</sup> Race may be highly relevant in one and not in another, its significance declining in one and increasing in another. I do not believe that an acceptable procedure can be devised to "sum up" these varying "significances" of race across regions of social space, inasmuch as the criteria for such an evaluation are themselves the stake and outcome of struggles over race. We must also recognize that race and its significance are not exhausted by the concept of racism.<sup>13</sup> Racism may abate and its form change without race necessarily becoming irrelevant. Indeed, I believe that this is the case today in American society: by all measures, current black-white relationships in the United States are more involved, indirect and ostensibly nonracial than earlier forms; yet race unquestionably remains, in Everett C. Hughes' term (1980), a "master status trait" defining individual and collective identity and chances in America. Finally our view of the relationship between class and race must be rendered more complex. This area of research has witnessed a pandemics of misplaced empiricism, with much of it being in characteristic violation of Aristotle's injunction not to try to treat a subject with a degree of exactness it will not admit of — or an instance of what Stanley Lieberson (1985) calls "trying to do the undoable." Put differently: while our empirical investigations of race have often been overly complicated, involving methodologies or models of inference whose validity is often tenuous if not dubious, theoretical thinking about race and class has remained surprisingly simple, if not simplistic.

Too often, race is treated merely as a demographic variable to be thrown into regression equations, as if it had a reality of its own, independent of the action and experiences of concrete social agents. Against this "metaphysics of social structure" (Elias 1978:16), we must assert forcefully that racial identity is "more a political-cultural stance than a clear-cut category with well-defined boundaries" (Duster and Wellman 1987:136). Participants in this debate have rarely explored how race operates in reality, how racial boundaries are created, marked and maintained or challenged as a result of observable patterns of individual and collective action, how racial and other forms of identity contribute to this process. Thus both Wilson

and his critics commit various forms of the three fallacies I have listed. But it is the lack of *agency and struggle* that I find to be the most crucial shortcoming of Wilson's analysis of contemporary race relations, particularly in *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Wilson 1987). Race, class, the economy have all been reified into self-moving entities whose logic seem to unfold inexorably as a sort of natural process.<sup>14</sup> The political origins and continued maintenance of today's racial inequalities (in housing, education, welfare and urban policies) is largely obfuscated. And because economic structures are taken as quasi-natural forces, as "extra-human entities with their own inner laws and thus quite independent of human action or inaction" (Elias 1978: 20), culture must likewise be reduced to the status of a mere reflex of "the structure of opportunities." In short, there is no agency left anywhere as poor blacks are portrayed as passive victims who simply react, as they are pushed and pulled by objective factors on which they have no grip and for which no one seems to be politically accountable — this is what we may call the *fallacy of mechanism*. Overlooking concrete struggles and power relations forces Wilson to frame his analysis in a quasi-evolutionist and functionalist cast, where each stage in the transformation of the system of production begets the ideology and state policies fit to stabilize it. But in fact, to take the example of the polity, the state was partially deracialized because of black voter mobilization and disruption caused a shift in political realignments (Piven and Cloward 1976, McAdam 1982), not because some functional requisites dictated it to suddenly treat everybody equally as a first-class citizen. And clearly the state has been *racialized* again with the coming of Reaganism. (Omi and Winant 1986).

But Wilson's critics have, in their reaction to what they perceived to be a neglect of racism, committed the opposite *fallacy of intentionalism* by reintroducing agency in racial theory only in the limited guise of voluntary racial discrimination, of race-motivated practices between blacks and whites. By doing this, however, they have overlooked the fact that there is considerably more to racially-based or racially-relevant action than intentional discrimination and that intra-racial relations are just as important in this respect as are inter-racial ones. Here a Weberian-type distinction between racially determined, racially conditioned and racially relevant action would be useful. For there is no need for an action to be racially motivated in order for it to have differential consequences across races. Indeed, I concur with Wilson that most racial inequality today is not generated by racially-conscious action of the type his critics continually bring up to attention.

#### IV. An Alternative Approach: Making Class and Making Race

I propose that we must move beyond essentialism and simple one-variable or even interaction models (Pettigrew 1985) to look at the mutually dependent *structuring of and contest over* race and class. To do this, we can draw on recent work in class theory that has shifted its focus away from structure and abstract taxonomy toward an analysis of the material and symbolic processes by which classes constitute themselves (see Wacquant 1989). This new current in class analysis emphasizes agency and process; it moves away from abstract questions of composition and objective determination of classes "on paper" to focus on the struggles whereby classes constitute themselves as effective collectivities in historical reality. It suggests a fruitful way of reconceptualizing the relationship of class and race. Most contenders in the "significance of race" controversy continue to work with excessively simple and static concepts of class and race. They treat both class and racial groups as if they were self-evident categories composed of distinct populations; in

sort, ready-made entities already constituted as such. We must instead recognize that all groups, whether classes or racial communities, have to be made, actively constructed, through a specific symbolic and organizational labor of *grouping* (class-making or race-making). Max Weber wrote in *Economy and Society* (1978, vol I: 387):

Of course, race creates a 'group' only when it is subjectively perceived as a common trait: this happens only when a neighborhood or the mere proximity of racially different persons is the basis of joint (mostly political) action, or conversely, when some common experiences of members of the same race are linked to some antagonism against members of an *obviously* different group.

Recent work by Bourdieu, Boltanski, Parkin, Kocka, Maresca and Przeworski demonstrates that the same is true of class. Race or class exist only to the extent that people act on their basis. They are competing modalities, or principles of vision and division, rooted in material structures, by which social agents can be identified, individuals marked and their subjectivities constituted, and collectives mobilized and demobilized. Furthermore, both class and race lead a dual existence: each exists first in materiality, as objective differences that can be observed, measured in the form of distributions of efficient resources and goods; and second in subjectivity, as schemes of perception, appreciation and action, in the form of symbolic distinctions produced and reproduced via socially engrained dispositions. Bourdieu (1985).

Whether class or race prevails in structuring identity and reality depends on historically contingent struggles that are waged simultaneously in theoretical space (by intellectuals, academics, politicians, and other specialists of the representation of the social world such as journalists), and in social space, by real groups as they are mobilized and constituted politically over economic or racial issues. Which prevails and where and in what ways depends on these contests: *there is a struggle over race before there is a struggle between races*.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, the intersection of race and class is determined, on the one hand by the objective structure of social space, and on the other by the strategies pursued by individuals and groups in their efforts to impose this or that base of identity. In other words, races and classes are continually organized, disorganized and reorganized as an effect of struggles — economic, political and ideological — which are not fully determined at the level of the structure. In short, we must learn to comprehend race and class as variable and reversible outcomes of historical, collective action. Neither race, nor class are essential categories that uniquely and mechanically determine social processes. Both are socially constructed systems of material and symbolic relations. This in no way implies that they can be constructed "anyway anyhow," in the minds of actors or in the micro-exchange of interpersonal relations. Quite the contrary: the symbolic work necessary to establish race or class as salient subjective principles of vision and division can be successful only to the extent that it corresponds to the material differences inscribed in objectivity.

What we need, then, is not more sophisticated statistical evaluations of the contribution race makes to "explaining" the variance of this or that dependent variable, not only because such empirical tests will never settle the issue (it is a positivist illusion to believe that social science progresses by "refuting" hypotheses),<sup>16</sup> but more crucially because *it is the dependent variables of race and class themselves that need to be explored and elaborated in their double reality*, as systems of objective differences rooted in materiality or institutions and as subjective dispositions and categories of understanding of reality.

## Coda

The central argument of this paper is that the problem of the "Inclining or Declining Significance of Race" is a false problem that does not, in this form, warrant a scientific answer — or a *controversy that has become scientifically degenerative rather than progressive*. This is because race, as a principle of vision and division of the social world (or a basis of identity and determinant of life-chances) is not a unidimensional, purely objective category that operates mechanically and undifferentially throughout society. Thus its "significance" cannot be univocally measured.

I have argued that, to go forward, the analysis of the relationship between race and class in the United States must forsake the naturalist essentialism that underlays the search for the "one determinant factor" (race or class, inclining or declining), a search that often reveals more about the analyst's relation to the object (i.e., her or his personal class and racial experiences as well as academic position measuring) than about the object itself. The epistemic ambition of measuring, once and for all, the "significance of race" is doomed to failure inasmuch as it is predicated on a flawed understanding of the ontological status of groups: neither races, nor classes, exist ready-made in reality. They have to be constituted through material and symbolic struggles waged simultaneously over the criterion of class/race and between classes/races.

The salience of race in social life and social consciousness is a *historically contingent and sectorally variable outcome of ongoing classification struggles*, which take place both in academia and in the larger society and polity, as interested contenders strive to impose the criterion which best fits their specific interest. It is these struggles themselves, not their final product, that must constitute the object of our inquiries. The task of an adequate theory of the class/race nexus, then, is not to determine *ex cathedra* which factor actually prevails over the other in the end at the cost of "naturalizing" historical outcomes, but to construct a true model of the struggles through which professionals in the representation of the social word (academics, politicians, lawyers, journalists, etc.) and social movements, collective and individual agents (racially-based as well as non-racial) succeed or fail to impose one or the other criterion as the sole legitimate principle of identity and action.

The study of the interplay of race and class must thus move from the description of their differential impact to an explanation of their changing constitution and to the politics that underlies their "significance;" from the descriptive anatomy of evolving forms of racial and class inequality and domination to their genesis and reproduction in structurally-shaped social struggles. This requires a shift in focus from the composition to the *formation of racial and/or class collectives*, i.e., from the demography to the genealogy of groups.

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### Footnotes

1. Rejoinder to Franz Oppenheimer, Second Meeting of the German Sociological Association, 1912, in Weber (1924:489) Revision of this paper or publication was made possible by a Tocqueville Fellowship from the Foundation Franco-Americaine in Paris. (1924:489).
2. Farley's (1984: 193) guarded caution in his conclusion is revealing: "I have examined many different indexes concerning the status of blacks. I have stressed that changes must be interpreted cautiously. Sometimes the requisite data are not available; sometimes the data are adequate but the interpretations are ambiguous. The differences between relative and absolute measures of change raise questions that do not have clear answers. Looking at all these indicators has not made it possible to conclude that one of three views is correct and the other two are wrong."
3. See Landry (1987) for a descriptive portrait of the "new black middle class" and Wacquant and Wilson (1989) for a sociography of the plight of ghetto blacks in Chicago.

4. See Washington (1979) for a sample of this debate and Wilson (1988) for reflections on the impact of this controversy on his scholarship and subsequent intellectual development.
5. More precisely, Wilson works with three independent variables: the system of production and its functional requirements, the policies and laws of the state, and the relationship between the two; together they determine the origins and form of racial domination, while racial ideologies and systems of belief evolve accordingly.
6. "My argument that race relations in America have moved from economic racial oppression to a form of class subordination for the less privileged blacks is not meant to suggest that racial conflicts have disappeared or have even been substantially reduced. On the contrary" (Wilson 1980: 23). "For the first time in American history, class issues can meaningfully compete with race issues in the way blacks develop and maintain a sense of group position" (Wilson 1980: 22). Note that Wilson writes "compete with," not replace.
7. The centrality of this distinction to an adequate social epistemology is argued in Bourdieu ([1980] 1989).
8. See Wacquant (1989) for a detailed discussion of this thesis in the case of theories of the middle class.
9. A paradigmatic instance of this interference of the biographical and political into the scientific is Alphonso Pinkney's (1984) book *The Myth of Black Progress*, in which scholarship is entirely subordinated, if not coldly sacrificed, to the desire decisively to snatch the authority to speak about blacks away from those who emphasize class and convergence.
10. This point is drawn by analogy with Bourdieu's (1987, pp. 178-184) discussion of "The Uses of 'the People'."
11. Typically, some will try to absorb race into class, others to hide class differences behind racial discrimination; yet others claim primacy for gender or collapse race into culture or human capital differences or nationality. It could be argued that Wilson tends to reduce race to class or economic position while his opponents reduce everything to race largely because of the positions they occupy in the structure of the discursive (and academic) field within which they operate.
12. The notion of society as made up of *fields* (i.e., partially autonomous space of positions defined by objective relations of struggle and force lines over specific stakes) is developed by Bourdieu (1985, 1989). A comparable notion of society as a set of overlapping games is proposed by Bowles and Gintis (1986).
13. Defined as an ideology and practice of exploitation and domination based on skin color, cf. Wilson (1973).
14. The absence of politics and struggle is a sharp regress from his earlier work (especially Wilson 1973), in which relations of power are central to an understanding of race relations. An elementary sociology of knowledge suggests that this de-emphasizing of politics is due in part to the shift in Wilson's primary audience, from the academic community to policy-making circles, and to the specific censorship that the discursive field of policy research imposes on all of its participants.
15. With apologies to Adam Przeworski (1985) who makes exactly this argument about the working class.
16. For instance, the same procedure (measuring residual inequality between races after controlling for a range of background variables) yields contrasting estimates depending on whether the white mean is substituted into the black equa-

tion or the black mean into the white equation. Not to mention problems of selectivity (indirect discrimination operating through control variables), contagion and asymmetric causality (cf. Lieberman 1985).

## **Impact of FAME Program On Recruitment and Retention of Black Students into Florida Community College at Jacksonville**

Howard R.D. Gordon, Ed.D.

Many minority and other young persons of limited socio-economic backgrounds are unaware of the opportunities that exist for increasing their knowledge and developing marketable skills. The same individuals are often impeded by families that do not encourage or have not encouraged their young people to improve their situations because of their own lack of knowledge, concern or financial ability to assist them. Many high school students have not envisioned themselves as surpassing the status of their parents and/or grandparents. The development of positive attitudes and the existing skills or potentialities in these minority and low-income young people would help them move toward attainable career goals that can be met by enrolling at Florida Community College. Factors Affecting Minority Enrollment (FAME) is a program designed to address these needs.

The need to increase Black and other minority student enrollment at Florida Community College at Jacksonville was made evident from the results of the President's Blue Ribbon Task Force Committee Report. Of the approximately 75,000 students enrolled at FCCJ during 1986, less than 3,000 were black. These figures reflected a minority population at FCCJ that was far less than that in the Duval County School system and less than the percentage of Black people in the City of Jacksonville. According to the 1980 census, Black people were 25.4% of the 570,981 persons living in Jacksonville; other minorities were 3%. One of the College's affirmative action goals was to achieve the same ethnic percentage in the student body as is reflected in the community. Consequently, one of the Task Force recommendations was to encourage Black people of all ages to consider college for themselves. FAME is a program that for the past five years has helped reach these families in an effort to increase minority student enrollment at FCCJ.

The FAME program is intended to reach those students attending high school each year who have not been offered academic and/or athletic scholarships to college, need financial aid for thier college expenses, have not had adequate counseling and guidance in setting career goals for themselves, and yet have the ability to become an asset in the labor market. The program will assist the seniors in understanding that enrollment at FCCJ is one way of making the transition from high school to adult life. It will also encourage sophomores and juniors to consider the possibility of college enrollment at a later date.

### **Background Information of FAME**

FAME started as a recruitment program at Kent Campus in 1985, FAME has



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