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SHREWSBURY, Carolyn M., 1943-  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY IN  
THE BLACK COMMUNITY AS REVEALED IN NOVELS  
1945 TO 1968.

The University of Oklahoma, Ph.D., 1974  
Political Science, general

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY  
IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY AS REVEALED  
IN NOVELS 1945 TO 1968

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY  
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Mankato, Minnesota  
1974

THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY  
IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY AS REVEALED  
IN NOVELS 1945 TO 1968

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DISSERTATION

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This study examines the elements of ideology and identity that appear in novels written by blacks during the period from 1945 to 1968. Although no single coherent ideology is identified, a number of elements that might be a part of such an ideology do appear. The reasons for the failure to develop an ideology are examined.

The political and social context in which individuals perceive themselves is the basis from which ideological thought begins. From an examination of the novels, blacks seem to have very ambiguous attitudes about the American political community. Part of this ambiguity is a result of an insufficient understanding of the role of discrimination in society. Part is due to uncertainty over the desirability of key American values. Politics as currently practiced in the United States is rejected. Attitudes toward political institutions, particularly the police and the military, were as distrustful as those toward politics in general. Even existing black groups were viewed negatively. But these perceptions were not consolidated into an ideological viewpoint.

Three general strains of ideological thought could be discerned in the novels. The assimilationist strain fails to account for racism in American society or any way to deal with that racism. Separatist thought was based on racism, but failed to either accept or deal with the interrelatedness of black and white in American society. The pluralists accepted and described racism and interrelatedness, but were unable to present positive ways to deal with them.

Black identity was broached in each strain of ideological thought and each strain might have been able to develop had it a clear sense of black identity, just as its sense of black identity might have been more clearly developed had there been a clear statement of ideology.

Thus, elements existed that could be part of an ideological statement for blacks. That such development had not yet taken place was primarily due to the real dilemmas that exist in the lives of black people in America. A new synthesis of thought that could place those dilemmas in clear perspective is not easy to develop. The novelists had merely begun that task.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to a great many people without whose advice and encouragement this dissertation would not have been possible. Particularly deserving of mention is Harry Holloway, my major advisor, and John W. Wood whose encouragement at several points inspired me to continue.

I particularly wish to thank Mankato State College for providing a grant to sustain the writing of this dissertation and to the Political Science Department at Mankato State whose policy of reduced loads allowed time at the early stages of the writing.

Lucille Northenscold typed the manuscript and provided expert editorial advice for which I am deeply grateful.

For his encouragement, advice, and moral support at every stage of this endeavor, I wish to express my sincere thanks to Scott Shrewsbury, my husband and colleague.

Of course, I must bear the responsibility for any shortcomings found in this dissertation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	iii
 Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION. . . . .	1
Ideology. . . . .	4
Methodology . . . . .	5
Social Sciences and the Novel . . . . .	7
History . . . . .	7
Sociology and anthropology. . . . .	12
Psychology. . . . .	17
Political science . . . . .	20
Reflection Theory . . . . .	24
Methods . . . . .	35
Organization. . . . .	38
II. COMMUNITY . . . . .	41
The United States as One's Country. . . . .	43
The Political Community . . . . .	43
The Social Community. . . . .	55
Attitudes towards whites. . . . .	56
Discrimination. . . . .	60
Summary . . . . .	66
Dominant Values . . . . .	67
Equality. . . . .	69
Achievement . . . . .	77
Violence. . . . .	80
Other values. . . . .	83
Summary . . . . .	84
III. POLITICS, POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND GROUPS . . .	86
An Overview of Politics in the Novels . . . . .	87
Politics as a Process . . . . .	89
Political Figures . . . . .	90
White liberals. . . . .	91
Communists. . . . .	93
Politicians . . . . .	94
Summary . . . . .	96
Major Institutions. . . . .	97

Chapter		Page
	The Presidency and Congress . . . . .	99
	Police. . . . .	103
	Military. . . . .	109
	Courts and penal systems. . . . .	114
	Service agencies. . . . .	117
	Summary . . . . .	118
	Groups. . . . .	119
	The church. . . . .	119
	Interest groups . . . . .	121
	Summary . . . . .	124
IV.	IDEOLOGY. . . . .	126
	Three Strains of Thought: An Overview. . . . .	127
	Assimilationists. . . . .	130
	Separatists . . . . .	136
	Pluralists. . . . .	139
	Three Novelists . . . . .	143
	Richard Wright. . . . .	145
	William Melvin Kelley . . . . .	148
	John A. Williams. . . . .	150
	Summary . . . . .	153
V.	ATTITUDES TOWARD SELF: BASES FOR IDENTITY. . . . .	155
	Elements of Identity: Color. . . . .	157
	Elements of Identity: Historical Experiences . . . . .	162
	Elements of Identity: Patterns of Everyday Life . . . . .	166
	Speech Patterns . . . . .	166
	Music . . . . .	171
	Food. . . . .	173
	Summary . . . . .	175
	Solidarity. . . . .	175
VI.	THE FAILURE OF IDEOLOGICAL THOUGHT . . . . .	179
	Limitations of Novels and Novelists . . . . .	180
	Limitations Because of the Nature of American Society. . . . .	186
	Dilemmas of the Black Condition . . . . .	195
	Dilemmas of Description . . . . .	197
	Inequality. . . . .	197
	Racism versus classism. . . . .	201
	Nature of racism. . . . .	202
	Change. . . . .	204
	Summary . . . . .	205
	Strategies and Implications . . . . .	207
	Prospects for the Future. . . . .	212

Chapter	Page
VII. CONCLUSION. . . . .	215
Summary . . . . .	215
Some Cautionary Notes . . . . .	219
For Further Research. . . . .	222
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	226



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The 1960's were times of turmoil in the United States. Whether one turned on the television set, read the newspaper, magazines or books, or just talked to friends and neighbors one could not miss a sense of "unsettledness." Something was happening and everyone seemed to have his own version of what. One heard serious people speaking of revolution and of repression. There were commissions to study violence and racial turmoil, and even pornography. College students asked for courses that were "relevant" and Wallace suggested that bureaucrats be tossed into the Potomac. The decade started with a new young President perceived as calling people to new ideals and ended deeper than ever in the muck of Vietnam.

What brought all this on and more importantly, what does it all mean? How do we go about searching for the answers to that question--or indeed, should serious and concerned scholars

seek such answers when so much needs to be done now as involved persons? Can one separate times to act and times to reflect?

Many persons have seriously considered these questions and have come to a variety of different understandings concerning them. Some people have become revolutionaries intent upon changing society, others have bought extra locks for their doors so as to more firmly isolate themselves from a changing world. Some scholars have sought to interpret the "whole scene" so to speak, while others have chosen to emphasize a highly specialized little nook or cranny of that "scene."

Political scientists have tried to adjust their writings to more adequately describe the processes of politics and in so doing found that at least some questioned the normative aspects of such descriptions. One thing on which political scientists seemed to agree was that there was no one paradigm on which they could agree.

This turmoil both within the country and within the profession prompted the central question of this thesis. The turmoil in the country centered, in some respect, around the attempt to change the process of allocative politics, either by increasing the numbers and kinds of groups which were legitimately a part of the decision-making process, or indeed even to change the ways in which decisions could be made. The turmoil in political science reflected in part a concern about the ability of existing theories

in accounting for political turmoil and the process of political change.<sup>1</sup>

In the middle of this turmoil and controversy was the black American. This paper deals with one dimension of that turmoil and of the problems American blacks faced in the midst of that turmoil. Specifically, this dissertation centers on problems of theory related to ideology. It considers what political goals American blacks have posited and what degree of consistency and unanimity exists on these goals. It considers what instruments to achieve those goals have been posited and to what degree are those instruments consistent with the goals. It considers what tactics have been agreed to and if they are consistent with the instruments and goals. It considers if there is an overall world view to explain and rationalize and give coherence to the goals, instruments, and tactics that have been posited. Implicit in these questions is the underlying question of change which the reader will encounter throughout. What is the direction and degree of change desired by blacks as manifested by goals and methods expressed in the novels.

A secondary theme of the thesis concerns the methodological question; to what extent can an examination of novels written by blacks supply the answers to the substantive questions asked by the thesis.

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<sup>1</sup>David Easton, "The New Revolution in Political Science," American Political Science Review 63 (1969), pp. 1051-1061.

### Ideology

Perhaps the clearest statement of the need for an adequate ideological basis for black Americans was made by Harold Cruse in The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual.<sup>2</sup> However, from the very title of the book, it is obvious that Cruse felt that no adequate ideology had yet been articulated, although he felt that the elements necessary for an ideology existed and merely needed synthesized.

A number of questions must be voiced when considering the question of ideology. There is within the discipline a considerable amount of disagreement over the definition of ideology.<sup>3</sup> Rather than entering the debate on definition we accept that of Mullins:

(Ideology is) a logically coherent system of symbols which within a more or less sophisticated conception of history, links the cognitive and evaluative perception of one's social condition--especially its prospects for the future--to a program of collective action for the maintenance, alteration or transformation of society.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, (New York: Morrow and Co., 1967).

<sup>3</sup>The interested reader might examine Giovanni Sartoni, "Politics, Ideology, and Belief Systems," American Political Science Review 63 (1969), pp. 398-411. Robert E. Lane, Political Ideology, (New York: Free Press, 1962). Phillip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David Apter (ed.), Ideology and Discontent, (New York: Free Press, 1964). Steven R. Brown, "Consistency and the Persistence of Ideology: Some Experimental Results," Public Opinion Quarterly 34 (1970), pp. 60-68. Harry R. Wilker and Lester W. Milbrath, "Political Belief Systems and Political Behavior," Social Science Quarterly 51 (1970), pp. 477-493.

<sup>4</sup>Willard A. Mullins, "On the Concept of Ideology in Political Science," American Political Science Review 66 (1972), p. 510.

Actually, as will be evident in the following pages, a single developed and coherent ideology is not found in the black novels. We will then actually be looking at the components which might be welded into an ideology.

We thus will be examining separately the conception of history expressed through the novels including the ways in which the novelists define the situation in which blacks find themselves. We must also then examine the expressed perceptions of American political institutions and political processes, at alternative goals and the means of reaching those goals. We must look at self-identity as a prelude to collective action and at the attempts which have been made to develop an ideology which not only presents desired goals but illuminates a realistic way to reach those goals.

The question is raised then, why use novels to examine the thesis questions, and in the novels, how are ideological components recognized. We turn to these methodological questions in the next section.

### Methodology

There are a variety of alternative ways to investigate problems related to the existence and content of ideology and ideological beliefs. One might engage in survey research (or do a secondary analysis of someone else's survey research),<sup>5</sup> engage in depth interviews with selected members of the target

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<sup>5</sup>See, e.g. Converse, op. cit. or Brown, op. cit.

population,<sup>6</sup> develop and use alternative techniques like associative group analysis,<sup>7</sup> analyze personal and other histories and autobiographies or essays or polemical writings,<sup>8</sup> or one might use fictional materials as one's data base. Each of these and other techniques and methods has its own peculiar strengths and weaknesses, and to some extent, we will, from time to time, employ each of them to shed light upon substantive material derived from the novels.

However, our major source of data will be fictional materials, specifically novels written by blacks about blacks between 1945 and 1968. This selection was made in part because of some weaknesses in the other methods for the particular subject at hand, in part out of methodological curiosity, and in part because of the strengths for the study of ideology that a study of novels has.

The use of fictional materials as a data source is not new. However, because it is not frequently done in political science, and because one of the purposes of this thesis is to explore the potentiality of novels as a data source to examine the substantive question of ideology, we shall spend some time examining the uses the social sciences have made of fictional

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<sup>6</sup>See, e.g. Lane, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup>See, e.g. Lorand B. Szalay, Rita M. Kelly, Won T. Moon, "Ideology: Its Meaning and Measurement," Comparative Political Studies 5 (1972), pp. 151-174.

<sup>8</sup>See, e.g. Cruse, op. cit.

materials. We shall then discuss the way in which we have used the novels.

### Social Sciences and the Novel

History. Because historians have traditionally been concerned with the past, they have relied on written documents to a greater extent than those scholars in the more behavioral sciences. Historians have often used literature to determine the mood of a particular time and to gain insights into the most important controversies of the period. Indeed, some historians seem to feel, that at least for certain periods of time, an interpretation of society can be entirely wrong unless its literature is included in the analysis of that society.<sup>9</sup>

Of particular interest to political scientists is Williams' study of the Romantic era in England.<sup>10</sup> The study of the nature of man in society has been a central concern to the political scientist. During the 1800's, this question of the nature of man pervaded intellectual society. Furthermore, the Romantic poets were often engaged in the writing of political tracts as well as poetry. The poets themselves saw the roles of poet and sociologist as interlocking interests and only by an examination of their poetry could the historian obtain a

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<sup>9</sup>See particularly, Bernard DeVoto, "Interrelations of History and Literature," in William E. Lingelback (ed.), Approaches to American Social History, (New York: Appleton-Century Co., 1937), pp. 44-45.

<sup>10</sup>Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950, (New York: Harper and Row, 1958).

rounded picture of the debate revolving around the nature of man.<sup>11</sup>

Two other societies in which the examination of literature seems particularly important to the historian (and the political scientist) are 18th Century France and 19th Century Russia. These two societies shared the characteristic that literature was the only way by which political questions could be discussed. In fact, literature became the main forum for debates in these societies.<sup>12</sup> The historian who chose to ignore such literature would be blinded to the nature of much of the political turmoil present in the society; or at best he would be forced to rely upon very indirect evidence.

A similar problem exists for the student of American history, although for somewhat different reasons. As David Aaron noted, American literature, "is the most searching and unabashed criticism of our national limitations that exists."<sup>13</sup> The United States has, typically, been a pragmatic society, too impatient to engage in reflection, and constantly driven on by a faith in the feelings of hope and a belief in the American dream. However, more than one American historian has misrepresented the

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 30 passim. For corroborating evidence, see Wylie Sypher, Loss of Self in Modern Literature and Art, (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 22.

<sup>12</sup>Walter Laquerer, "Literature and the Historian," in Walter Laquerer and George L. Morse (eds.), Literature and Politics in the Twentieth Century, (New York: Harper and Row, 1967, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup>David Aaron, Writers on the Left, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), p. 1.



realities of America's past by neglecting a study of the realistic fiction of the period, as DeVoto has so clearly shown.<sup>14</sup> One might suggest that this neglect by some historian has been reflected even more in the works of political scientists who have long avoided a focus on the conflicts in the fabric of our political system.<sup>15</sup> If then, American literature is biased, it might be a useful bias for the political scientist to consider.

One of the more positive and generally applicable contributions made by historians to the use of the novel as a social document was made by A. G. Lehman. Lehman noted that, "imaginative writers can sometimes use their intuitive powers to see the patterns forming that the common run of their contemporaries have not yet detected."<sup>16</sup> Yet, they too, he notes, may make mistakes. To guide the historian in detecting these mistakes, he listed three cautionary principles:

1. Writers can only be relied upon to be addressing (or talking to or overheard by) fairly determinate social groups.
2. The creative writer can only be relied upon to represent to a climate of feeling (or set of values) specific to a given group. If it was entirely or largely a "common-place," it might or might not retain attention.
3. Each interpretation is itself potential historical evidence, of a very precise kind, in addition to the presumed or explicit intention or "project" of an author.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>DeVoto, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

<sup>15</sup>For a good illustration of this, see especially, Jack L. Walker, "A Critique of the Elitist Theory of Democracy," American Political Science Review 60 (1966), pp. 285-295.

<sup>16</sup>A. G. Lehman, "The Writer as Canary," in Laquerer and Morse, op. cit., pp. 22-24.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

Dan Jacobson has also indicated a way to separate what is useful to the historian in the novel from what is merely interesting. In writing specifically about D. H. Lawrence, he noted that:

What is merely self-willed or self-serving or unexamined . . . is likely to betray itself by arbitrariness and incoherence in the fiction . . . . To know how much public, salutary truth there is in what Lawrence has to tell us, and how much private paranoia and special pleading, we have to decide whether his characters, scenes, and dramatic actions bear out in the fullness of their imagined life the conclusions which are being drawn from them, or whether we feel the conclusions to be a priori, thrust upon his work, a distortion of it.<sup>18</sup>

The extension of this comment seems to be that what is viewed as great or good literature is more apt to be useful to the historian in so far as it presents a more accurate (or at least better thought out) portrayal of the period than poor literature.

Finally, above all, while making use of the novel, historians have been careful to note the limits of novels and to issue the appropriate warnings for anyone else who desires to use them. The novelist, because of the situational nature of the novel, may tell a great deal in detail, but may not tell (or may not be able to tell) the truth in perspective.<sup>19</sup> The novel must not be used alone, but only in conjunction with other data. Perhaps the best history to illustrate this caveat (by a man not a

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<sup>18</sup>Dan Jacobson, "D. H. Lawrence and Modern Society," in Laquerer and Morse, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>19</sup>See especially, W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South, (New York: Vintage Books, 1941), p. 388, for an elaboration of this point. Also see Bernard DeVoto, The Literary Fallacy, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1944), especially p. 22.

professional historian but an English scholar) is Vernon Parrington's Main Currents in American Thought. To Parrington, literature expressed the result of economic forces which influenced the social, political, and religious institutions. Thus, by studying literature in conjunction with other data sources, he was able to illuminate the social and intellectual nature of a nation as it changed over time. For example, in Volume 1, he traces the dialectic of the liberal political philosophy based on the natural rights of men and the reactionary philosophy of New England Puritanism. He also notes (contrary to Jacobson's view presented above) that esthetically pleasing literature is not the only source from which one can find the values and ideas of an era.<sup>20</sup> Even the rather stilted writings of the Puritans offer a great deal of insight into the intellectual and political history of the age.

From the historians then, we might remember two major points. Literature is a particularly useful data source in those societies or during those times when fiction is one of the few ways that alternative viewpoints can be presented. Such might well be the case with black Americans in the middle of the twentieth century. And secondly, at least most of the time, any one novel will represent only a part of the "truth" of any age. One should not depend only on fictional materials or on any given novel. Corroborating evidence should be sought when possible.

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<sup>20</sup>Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought: Volume One, 1620 - 1800: The Colonial Mind, (New York: Harvest Books, 1954), p. xii.

Sociology and anthropology. Sociologists have paid more critical attention to the possibilities of literature than any other group of behavioral scientists, for reasons peculiar to that discipline. The first reason was well expressed by Barnett in a collection devoted to an exploration of the scope of sociology:

The argument for a sociological investigation of art is, rather, that it might ultimately contribute to the solution of technical sociological problems, such as the nature of social interaction, the formation of maintenance of collectivities, and the ways of cultural change. The study of art, in all its ramifications, may shed considerable light on these social phenomena because their existence is dependent upon the communication of meanings, and art is concerned, in its very essence, with the expression and transmission in its symbolic forms of emotions and ideas. Study of what the artist has to "say," of how he says it, and of how his message is received may advance our understanding of the broader process of social communication which makes society possible.<sup>21</sup>

The second primary reason that sociologists have kept a lively interest in the sociology of art is that two of the most important theorists in sociology saw this as an important and legitimate concern of the discipline and applied their own talents in exploring the area. Max Weber accepted the importance of such study<sup>22</sup> as did Pitirim Sorokin, who in fact devoted an entire

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<sup>21</sup>James H. Barnett, "The Sociology of Art," in Robert K. Merton, Leonard Bloom, and Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr. (eds.), Sociology Today Volume I, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), p. 198. For a similar view, see A. C. Sewter, "The Possibilities of the Sociology of Art," American Sociological Review 27 (1935), pp. 441-453, and Herbert A. Block, "Towards the Development for Sociology and Literary and Art Forms," American Sociological Review 8 (1943), pp. 313-320.

<sup>22</sup>See Julian Freund, The Sociology of Max Weber, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), especially page 267, for a discussion of this.

volume in his series, *Social and Cultural Dynamics to the sociology of art*.<sup>23</sup>

Sociologists have particularly explored the extent to which and the ways in which the novel is reflective of society. The unanimous conclusion of the studies considered is that fiction tends to be a fairly sensitive indicator of values and attitudes, but a much less sensitive indicator of the facts of life (that is, the distribution of categories of class, race, occupation, residence, etc.).<sup>24</sup> Of particular importance is the finding that magazine fiction and pictures tend to preserve stereotypes and myths, particularly of the American Negro.<sup>25</sup> Since these studies were done before the civil rights "revolution," and since other studies clearly show the sensitivity of fiction to change in attitudes and values,<sup>26</sup> this stereotyping is probably diminishing.

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<sup>23</sup>Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics, Volume I, Fluctuations of Forms of Art*, (New York: American Book Company, 1937).

<sup>24</sup>See especially James H. Barnett and Rhoda Green, "Recent American Divorce Novels, 1938 - 1945: A Study in the Sociology of Literature," *Social Forces*, 26 (1948), p. 326; Ruth A. Inglis, "An Objective Approach to the Relationship Between Fiction and Society," *American Sociological Review* 3 (1938), p. 531; Patrick Johns-Heine and Hans H. Gerth, "Values in Mass Periodical Fiction, 1921 - 1940," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 13 (1939), pp. 105-113; Bernard Berelson and Patricia J. Salter, "Majority and Minority Americans; An Analysis of Magazine Fiction," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 10 (1946), pp. 168-190.

<sup>25</sup>Berelson and Salter, op. cit. Audrey M. Shriey, "Stereotyping of Negroes and Whites: An Analysis of Magazine Pictures," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 17 (1953), pp. 281-287. For comparison with the stereotypes of businessmen, see Van R. Halsey, "Fiction and the Businessman: Society Through All its Literature," *American Quarterly* 11 (1959), pp. 391-402.

<sup>26</sup>Inglis, op. cit. and Barnett and Green, op. cit.

Two caveats in analyzing literature as reflective of values have also emerged from the literature. First, correction must be made for the preoccupations of the author.<sup>27</sup> In a pluralist society, a short story or novel can only (under normal conditions) reflect one aspect of that society. Social class seems to be a particularly important variable (or rather, social class identification), especially among whites. Novelists normally write from a middle class orientation or as *declassé* rebels. This must be taken into account.

Secondly, when some group or object appears obviously out of proportion or seems to be overly glorified, this may be an important indicator of feelings in the society not directly expressed. Coulthard pointed out, for example, that the idealization of the Indian in literature in the Caribbean is an important indicator of nationalist feeling.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Duncan illustrated the necessity of seeing symbolic actions as relative to societal values.<sup>29</sup> In other words, the analyst must be sensitive to the possibilities of symbolism in the novel. Indeed, as Duncan suggests, alienation may first be suggested in literature through an attack (overt or disguised) on the sacredness of

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<sup>27</sup>Barnett and Green, op. cit., p. 326.

<sup>28</sup>B. R. Coulthard, Raza Color en la Literatura Antillana, (Secilla, 1958), p. 5.

<sup>29</sup>Hugh D. Duncan, "Sociology of Art, Literature and Music: Social Contexts of Symbolic Experience," in Howard Becker and Alvin Boskof (eds.) Modern Sociological Theory, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1957), p. 488.

traditional symbols.<sup>30</sup> Even when this attack is through an individual character, if the analyst keeps in mind the idea that in the concept of the role, personality and social systems interact,<sup>31</sup> the analyst can, then, as Lowenthal suggests, "transform the private equations of themes and stylistic means into social equations."<sup>32</sup>

One study of particular relevance to political scientists concerning national character differences in Germans and Americans was done by McGranahan and Wayne. They first thematically analyzed popular plays in each country for two time periods, by categorizing them into basic themes, level of action, endings, central characters, time of action, and thematic content. They found real and persistent differences in the national character (insofar as national character consists of a set of attitudes and values) of the two nations.<sup>33</sup> That this has since been partially

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<sup>30</sup>Hugh Daniel Duncan, Language and Literature in Society, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 135. Also see Radhakamal Mukerjee, "The Meaning and Evolution of Art in Society," American Sociological Review 10 (1945), pp. 496-503.

<sup>31</sup>See Milford Spiro, "Social Systems, Personality, Functional Analysis," in Bert Kaplan (ed.), Studying Personality Cross-Culturally, (Evanston: Row, Peterson, 1961), pp. 93-128 for elaboration.

<sup>32</sup>Leo Lowenthal, Literature and the Image of Man, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), introduction, no pagination.

<sup>33</sup>Donald V. McGranahan and Ivor Wayne, "German and American Traits Reflected in Popular Drama," Human Relations 1 (1948), p. 451. Also see Otto Klineberg, Tensions Affecting International Understanding, (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1950), p. 96.

validated by an empirical attitude study gives support to the potentiality of such studies.<sup>34</sup>

Anthropologists have been particularly concerned with using literature to determine the dimensions of national character. Ruth Benedict, for example, used Japanese stories to point out the peculiarities (to the American mind) of Japanese culture.<sup>35</sup> Malinowski discussed folklore to discover the repressed wishes of a society.<sup>36</sup> Wolfenstein noted how national differences in folk tales (in this case, English and American versions of "Jack and the Beanstalk") illustrate differences in the primary myths and values of a nation.<sup>37</sup> Wolfenstein and Leites found similar results in a study of movies.<sup>38</sup>

Sociologists and anthropologists have then done much to validate the usefulness of fictional materials. In particular, they have pointed out that fiction is a better data source if one

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<sup>34</sup>The validation was indirect since the study was concerned with a more specific purpose, but the findings do generally agree with McGranahan and Wayne. See Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965).

<sup>35</sup>Ruth Benedict, The Chrysanthemum and the Sword, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1946), pp. 98-113.

<sup>36</sup>Bronislaw Malinowski, Sex and Repression in Savage Society, (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Company, 1961), p. 98 and Chapter 4.

<sup>37</sup>Martha Wolfenstein, "Jack and the Beanstalk: An American Version," in Margaret Mead and Martha Wolfenstein (eds.), Childhood in Contemporary Cultures, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 243-245.

<sup>38</sup>Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, Movies, A Psychological Study, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1950).



is examining value and attitudes than if one is examining the distributions of classes or occupations or like categories. They have also pointed out the importance of considering the biases of authors but of also considering that those biases may reflect hidden (or previously unarticulated) sentiments in a society or in a group in that society.

Psychology. Literary scholars and artists have increasingly used the knowledge of psychologists. Indeed, one branch of the Modern Language Association concerns itself with literature and psychology and has its own publication dealing with this theme.<sup>39</sup> The works of Shakespeare have been discussed with special thoroughness from the viewpoint of psychology and psychoanalysis.<sup>40</sup> However, psychologists themselves have been slower to use literature, except for its casebook appeal, and for the insights it can offer:

The relationship between literature and psychology is an intimate one--and if psychology has done much to clarify some literary problems, literature in its turn has offered its insights to the psychologist . . . . Occasionally the fiction emerges as a case study. Equally often, however, we can perceive the Janus-face of the relationship; the fiction itself offers us a profound psychological knowledge that transcends our intellectual awareness of meaning and offers us an emotional experience of truth that it is more vital and compelling than any psychological study-in-depth could hope to be.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Called Psychology and Literature.

<sup>40</sup>Rather than cite the hundreds of studies here, the interested reader is referred to Norman H. Holland, Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), which is a collection of studies that had been written by psychoanalysts or from a psychoanalytic viewpoint about Shakespeare.

<sup>41</sup>G. B. Levitas (ed.), The World of Psychology, (New York: George Braziller, 1963), p. vii.

Nevertheless, psychologists did recognize as early as 1942 that personal documents, a category which would include fictional materials, could be analyzed in terms of statistical generalizations as one attempt at obtaining an understanding of behavior.<sup>42</sup> Only rarely has this awareness been translated into actual study of published fiction.

One of the most imaginative studies to pursue the latter approach was McClelland's The Achieving Society.<sup>43</sup> McClelland and his students used children's stories to measure the need for achievement in several different societies. One of the criteria which they used to select the stories used was popularity. "The position taken here is that successful authors are in part successful because they manage to put into writing what is in everyone's mind, the hopes, dreams, strivings and motives of their audience."<sup>44</sup> Of secondary interest here is that the authors, using fiction to determine achievement needs, did find a positive correlation existing between a society's need for achievement and its level of economic development.

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<sup>42</sup>Gordon W. Allport, The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science, (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1942).

<sup>43</sup>David C. McClelland, The Achieving Society, (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1961).

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 112-113. It is possible that the use of "popular" literature would exclude some "good" literature which historians indicate should be used in studies. This is partially relevant, however, to the different attitudes, etc., which each discipline is attempting to analyze.

An earlier study based on the same assumption that fiction expresses what might be called the daydreams of a culture was Wolfenstein and Leites' study of movies.<sup>45</sup> One particular finding is of special importance for the purposes of this paper if the assumption that movies and novels have similar expressive patterns is made:

The ways in which movies pattern the expression of impulses such as those of hostility which are strongly interfered with in real life can yield many clues to an understanding of the culture in which the movies are produced. There are many different ways of interfering with the all-out hostility which would make social life impossible. These ways of repressing or re-channeling hostility will depend on the image of what would happen if hostility were further unleashed.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, HSU indicates how art and literature can also get at the society's ambiguities concerning the expression of sex.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, men interested in psychology and literature have pointed out how "social forces impinge upon and are transmuted into the idiom of individual experience."<sup>48</sup> Fiction can often

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<sup>45</sup>Wolfenstein and Leites, op. cit.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 306. Frederick J. Hoffman, Freudianism and the Literary Mind, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1945) shows how the acceptance of Freud made this particularly true. Similarly, Simon O. Lesser, Fiction and the Unconscious, (New York: Vintage Books, 1962) extends the thesis to fiction as a device for experimenting to find ego harmony. Note also, O. Mannoni, Prospero and Caliban, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964).

<sup>47</sup>Francis L. K. Hsu, "Suppression versus Repression," Psychiatry 12 (1949), p. 225.

<sup>48</sup>Leonard Manheim and Eleanor Manheim, Hidden Patterns: Studies in Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism, (New York: Mac-Millan Co., 1966), p. 76.

indicate the process by which this is done. Furthermore, in modern times there seems to be a reciprocity between what scientists are thinking and what artists are doing.<sup>49</sup> With this in mind, a careful study of the arts cannot only help illustrate the dynamic processes in society, but can indicate the possible resolutions of those processes.

Perhaps then the major contribution psychologists have made to our understanding of the potential use of novels is to point out that they can suggest alternative courses the future might take. The novelist can, by creating a manipulable environment, explore the consequences of different actions. Those results that work out artistically might well be the results that would work out in a "reality" situation.

Political science. Probably more controversy over the potential of fictional materials has occurred in political science than in the other social sciences. Boynton suggested that fiction could be used as an aid in conceptualization, especially to help the scientist escape from the conservatism which is normally a part of science.<sup>50</sup>

All scientists tend to be naturally conservative, to value their methods and accomplishments highly, to believe that their approach says all that is important to say about the phenomenon they are investigating. As new methods emerge there necessarily develops clashes between the new and the

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<sup>49</sup>Sypher, op. cit.

<sup>50</sup>Thomas S. Kuhn, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions," International Encyclopedia of Unified Sciences II, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

old. The development of new methods results from a new sense of reality. The old and the new methods, if they are to be harmonized, must find a basis in a new and substantially broader image of reality than that possessed by either one of them. These new realities are as much the task of poetry as they are of science.<sup>51</sup>

Bloom and earlier Jaffa suggested much the same point when they noted that fiction can be an aid in understanding the complexity of problems and in probing the meaning and relationships of ultimate ends of traditional concern to political scientists.<sup>52</sup> Waldo, Bock, and Egger have also shown how the novel can be used in this manner in the study of public administration.<sup>53</sup> Such an approach has not won universal acceptance in the discipline. Burckhard's criticism, "they have not yet learned to distinguish between the poet's voice and their own . . ."<sup>54</sup> must be taken seriously as a general warning. Nevertheless, as Hacker so well pointed out, there is a cultural lag between the theorists of academy and the rest of the world, and literature, when carefully

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<sup>51</sup>Robert Boynton, "A Poetic Approach to Politics: A Study in the Political Philosophy of George Santayana," Journal of Politics, 20 (1958), p. 692.

<sup>52</sup>Allan D. Bloom, "Cosmopolitan Man and the Political Community: An Interpretation of Othello," American Political Science Review 54 (1960), pp. 130-157, Harry V. Jaffa, "The Limits of Politics: An Interpretation of King Lear, Act I, Scene I," American Political Science Review 51 (1957), pp. 405-427.

<sup>53</sup>Dwight Waldo, The Study of Public Administration, (New York: Random House, 1955), Edwin A. Boch, "P.I.E.E.," Public Administration Review 17 (1958), pp. 63-64. Also, Roland Egger, "The Administrative Novel," American Political Science Review 53 (1959), pp. 448-455.

<sup>54</sup>Sigurd Burckhard, "English Bards and APSR Reviewers," American Political Science Review 54 (1960), p. 728.

used, can play a constructive role in indicating the discrepancies in current theory and the parameters for new conceptualizations.<sup>55</sup>

An important variation of the use of literature as an instrument of conceptualization has been indicated by several political scientists. These men have noted that political scientists have long been concerned with how things work rather than the values the system promotes or excludes.<sup>56</sup> "It seems the obvious duty of political men to look again at our situation and to see whether there are not realities to which they have been blinded by obsolete slogans and outworn commitments.<sup>57</sup> Artists, who are intimately concerned with conflict and accommodation, provide the concrete situations which make re-examination by the political scientist possible.

Several political scientists have shown how literature can be used as one form of data. Davidson noted how soapbox novels can be used in the study of present and past opinion,<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Andrew Hacker, "Dostoevsky's Disciplines: Man and Sheep in Political Theory," Journal of Politics 17 (1955), p. 590. Hacker's analysis is particularly interesting in that he tries to show how the liberal view of the individual is misleading in a world of mass conditioning.

<sup>56</sup>An exceptionally clear statement of this can be found in Martin Kessler, "Power and the Perfect State: A Study in Disillusionment as Reflected in Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four and Huxley's Brave New World," Political Science Quarterly 72 (1957), pp. 565-579. Also see Morton Knoll, "The Politics of Britain's Angry Young Men," Western Political Quarterly 12 (1959), pp. 555-557.

<sup>57</sup>Glenn Tinder, "Human Estrangement and the Failure of Political Imagination," Review of Politics 21 (1959), p. 616.

<sup>58</sup>James F. Davidson, "Political Science and Political Fiction," American Political Science Review 55 (1961), p. 856. Also see Walter B. Rideout, The Radical Novel in the United

and how other fiction can be used "as one test of the currency and acceptability of political attitudes and political concepts."<sup>59</sup> Willhoite has shown how a consideration of the works of a novelist who has had great influence among his contemporaries can aid in the understanding of the political attitudes of the influenced group.<sup>60</sup>

Of particular interest for this paper are some observations Passin has made concerning the modernizing society. In many ways, Negroes in the United States have been in a position similar to the peoples in the new nations of the world. Thus, it is possible to view the current entrance of the Negro into the political process on a mass scale as having characteristics similar to those of a transitional society. For example, Passin notes that, "this close relation of literature, politics, and journalism is one of the striking features of the intense phases of the transitional process."<sup>61</sup> A similar situation exists in the United States.<sup>62</sup> As Passin points out, literature is developed "for the benefit of the writers but also on behalf of the

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States, 1900-1954, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956) where this is actually done.

<sup>59</sup>Davidson, op. cit., p. 856.

<sup>60</sup>Fred N. Willhoite, Jr., "Albert Camus' Politics of Rebellion," Western Political Quarterly 14 (1961), pp. 400-414.

<sup>61</sup>Herbert Passin, "Writer and Journalist in the Transitional Society," in Lucian W. Pye, Communications and Political Development, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 110.

<sup>62</sup>See Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1967), for example.

people to provide a better medium of communication, of leading and modernizing the people, or of carrying through of reform."<sup>63</sup> If Passin is correct, novels should be especially helpful, then, in examining the elements of an emerging ideology as black Americans become politically mobilized.

In summary, political scientists have shown that literature can be successfully used as a data source and is a particularly important source during periods in which a society is in transition. A major warning of political scientists in using literature concerns the ease with which the analyst can inject him/herself into the fiction and misinterpret it. This again emphasizes the need to also examine alternative sources of data.

#### Reflection Theory

Although each of the disciplines discussed above have added something to an understanding of how novels might be used as data sources, none of the disciplines have definitely dealt with all the methodological problems that use of novels entails. The central theme in each discipline has been that literature as "the symbolic expression of aspects of the human situation"<sup>64</sup> is in some sense a reflection of the society in which the novel was written and in this sense, a valuable source of data. But the question, "reflective of what and under what conditions?" remains.

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<sup>63</sup>Passin, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>64</sup>Baldwin, op. cit., p. 113.



Thus, the phrase, literature as a reflector of the social condition, is a common but indeterminate one which must be carefully developed to be useful. The novel may say no more about a society than a carefully conceived social science study.<sup>65</sup> Both are operations on reality rather than microcosms of reality. Laing puts this most clearly:

The "data" (given) of research are not so much given as taken out of a constantly elusive matrix of happenings. We should speak of capta rather than data. The quantitatively interchangeable grist that goes into the mills of reliability studies and rating scales is the expression of a processing that we do on reality, not the expression of the processes of reality.<sup>66</sup>

The artist faces the same problem as the scientist. He must make sense of a large mass of data. In doing so, his own process of perception introduces distortions, distortions of both the commission and omission variety. When Baldwin stated that:

All art is a kind of confession, more or less oblique. All artists, if they are to survive, are forced, at last, to tell the whole story, to vomit the anguish up. All of it, the literal and the fanciful.<sup>67</sup>

He was right only in so far as the whole story is perceived by the artist. The novel does not and cannot (at least given the present psychological limits of man) reflect all of society or even all of a piece of it. It can and in large measure usually does reflect one man's perception of that society and of its truths.

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<sup>65</sup>It certainly may say it more poignantly however.

<sup>66</sup>R. D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), p. 37.

<sup>67</sup>Baldwin, op. cit., p. 113.

A number of studies have made more explicit the reflective capabilities of the novel. The first point to be noted is that art is not uniformly reflective. There appear to be conditions which contribute to the development of a more reflective art. Guerard indicated that one of the conditions concerns the nature of oppression in a society. Some states attempt to oppress all thought which does not conform to the ideas of the dominant group in the society (a typical goal of a totalitarian and many dictatorial regimes). However, such states are not always successful in that repression, for example, Russia in the nineteenth century. Guerard felt then, that the most reflective literature would develop in those circumstances where the state desires to oppress thought and speech and makes some attempts to do so, but ultimately fails at this task.<sup>68</sup>

Howe makes a similar point in talking about Dostoevsky:

The seriousness we all admire in Russian literature is thus partly the result of a social impasse; energies elsewhere absorbed by one or another field of thought are here poured into the novel.<sup>69</sup>

If this is indeed true between societies, it might apply equally within a single society. Thus, in the United States, oppression of the Negro was relatively complete until the 1950's. In the 1960's oppression of the Negro still existed, but it was not nearly so total as earlier. The oppression more closely

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<sup>68</sup>Albert Guerard, Literature and Society, (Boston: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Company, 1935), p. 81.

<sup>69</sup>Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel, (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Company, 1957), p. 51.

resembled the Russia of the nineteenth century. Novels could be one place where thought not yet legitimated in the political or social spheres could be expressed. Thus, the novels of the 1960's might be more reflective than those of the 1940's.

Guerard also suggested that reflectiveness is influenced by the groups which control literature, whether it is society (courts and salons in earlier days, universities and academies today) or whether it is more or less autonomous groups of writers themselves.<sup>70</sup> The latter would offer the more reflective possibility. A group which Guerard failed to mention but which has been of prime importance to the Negro novelist is the publisher. There is some evidence that until recently, and to some extent, even today, some publishers would not or could not consider works which were highly reflective of the Negro's position in American society.<sup>71</sup> Again then, more recent novels should be more reflective.

Besides these general considerations of reflectiveness, some novelists intend their works for purposes other than literary content alone. In the United States, the best illustration of this type of work are those novelists who were associated with early socialist and later communist movements. The idea that art

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<sup>70</sup>Guerard, op. cit., p. 279.

<sup>71</sup>Mel Watkins, "The Black Revolution in Books," The New York Times Book Review, (August 10, 1969) which points out the editorial problems of an editor for the black writer. Also see John A. Williams, "My Man Himes: An Interview with Chester Himes," in John A. Williams and Charles F. Harris (eds.), Amistad 1, (New York: Vintage Books, 1970).

must be subordinated to the ends of a political ideology was common with these groups. As Rideout points out, the proletarian novel reflected a change in the perception of the writers (because of an interest in revolutionary Marxism) rather than a change in society itself.<sup>72</sup> Workers were not newly oppressed; rather, the writer had just learned that workers were oppressed. Whole new conflicts in society became fair game for the writer. Whole new sectors of society began to find their problems reflected in the novel (or at least to find the novelist's perceptions so reflected). For example, Max Eastman noted:

We are distinguished, we literary and artistic people, by our ability to realize--to feel and express the qualities of things. We express vividly the existing facts, and the revolutionary ideal, and the bitterly wonderful long days of struggle that lies between these two.<sup>73</sup>

One would not expect novels written with this understanding to reflect the same facets of society as earlier or later novels did.

Similarly, overtly political novels<sup>74</sup> reflect by intent some aspect of the political system. Again, these novels are more reflective of the political debates of the time to the exclusion of other concerns of the society.<sup>75</sup> That is, these

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<sup>72</sup>Rideout, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>73</sup>Quoted in Aaron, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>74</sup>The political novel is variously defined, but most writers identify it much as Edmund Spere, The Political Novel, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1924) did, where he notes that it displays the overtly political and is concerned with ideas rather than emotions.

<sup>75</sup>Gordon Milne, The American Political Novel, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), especially p. 9.

novels were intended to be reflective, but they were intended, and usually were, reflective of only one narrow aspect of society.

Other genres of novels exhibit similar characteristics.<sup>76</sup> They are often intended to be reflective only of a particular part of society. There are, for example, economic novels, sports novels, etc. Insofar as possible, the intention of the author ought to be considered when the novel is used to corroborate and supplement other data concerning the social system being researched.

Several theses concerning the reflective nature of the novel which were implicit in the preceding need be made explicit here. First, as Albrecht has shown, one of the most common conceptions of what is often termed the reflection theory is that literature reflects the significant values and the norms of a culture.<sup>77</sup> That is, the attitudes and beliefs or opinions of a society or of a particular segment of it are expressed by the characters in the novel. These characters "mirror" attitudes held by persons in the actual society. However, the novel itself would not be a mirror-image of society. Certain social classes or occupations, for example, would be over- or under-represented in the novel. There would be more doctors and fewer plumbers in a novel about Main Street, USA, than one would find if one actually counted the doctors and plumbers in such a place.

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<sup>76</sup>Especially Sorokin, op. cit., pp. 595-672.

<sup>77</sup>Milton C. Albrecht, "The Relationship of Literature and Society," American Journal of Sociology 59 (1954), p. 426.

To determine then, exactly what the novels of a period are reflecting, one must have some knowledge of the relationship between the author and the society in which he lives. A nation which meets its artists with hostility is likely to find social criticism (open or veiled) a more preponderant theme of literature than that society that makes heroes of its artists.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, in a nation like the United States where the political issues have rarely taken the form of ideologies, political issues will often appear in novels, although in disguised form, for example, as religious, cultural, or sexual issues.<sup>79</sup> In determining what the novels of the United States have reflected, one must certainly take this into account. Indeed, as we shall later note, this is particularly true of black novels of the early part of the period examined where sexual issues often represent political issues in disguise.

Furthermore, one must take into account the psychology of the individual writer. Above all else, the novel reflects the consciousness, the memories, the conflicts, the fantasies of the writer. As one interview cannot constitute a reliable gauge of public opinion, one novel cannot constitute an adequate gauge of the conflicts and characteristics of a society and its culture.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Aaron, op. cit., p. 1 for a statement of this relationship in the United States.

<sup>79</sup>Howe, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>80</sup>Note particularly Kenneth Lynn, "Violence in American Literature and Folklore," in Hugh Graham and Ted Gurr (eds.), Violence in America, (New York: Signet Books, 1969), p. 219 for the dangers inherent in abstracting from literature to society.

Finally, in an era when we are surrounded by echoes of McLuhan's emphasis on "the medium is the message,"<sup>81</sup> it is important to note that literary style is not necessarily reflective of the events of a culture. As Meyer's study shows, culture change and style change are not related causally.<sup>82</sup> At a given period of time, similar themes are dealt with by a variety of styles and techniques, factors which may influence the effectiveness of the novel or which may be necessitated by the point of view the author is taking, but which are only peripheral to the substantive content, but not significantly change it.<sup>83</sup>

Insofar as novels reflect some aspects of society, they sometimes reflect and exaggerate the processes of social change. It is this aspect of reflection which leads many to consider literature as a kind of predictor of social change. Bowra's expression of this role of literature can clarify the point:

If poetry preserves the continuity of civilization by passing to coming generations what matters most in its discoveries, so it also shapes the future by seeing where tendencies still obscure and generally unmarked may lead and what their fulfillment means . . . . Their vision pierces into the distance and sees forms which even they themselves may not fully understand or appreciate, but which, in due course, come into being . . . . In this sense, poetry is indeed a kind of prophecy, but what it foretells are not events but movements of the spirit, the emergence of hitherto unrecognized powers of the will and intelligence, stirrings in the

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<sup>81</sup>Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1964).

<sup>82</sup>Leonard B. Meyer, Music, the Arts and Ideas, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 110.

<sup>83</sup>David Daiches, A Study of Literature, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1948), see p. 28 especially.

heart which will change the texture of human life and open vast new vistas to the imagination and affection.<sup>84</sup>

Although literature may foreshadow social and political change, there is little evidence that literature in itself is a creator of massive social change.<sup>85</sup> Rather, the artist in reshaping reality for his purposes can explore the consequences of trends existent in society. In writing about a character who is faced with conflicts within himself or within a sector of society, the artist deals with those conditions leading to conflict.<sup>86</sup> In so doing, he may often deal with undercurrents in the system which may in the future be a more central part of the system.<sup>87</sup> The novelist, then, may be sensitive to incipient changes, and this sensitivity is reflected in the content of the novel.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>C. M. Bowra, "Poetry and Tradition," in Maurice Stein, Arthur J. Vidich, and David Manning (eds.), Identity and Anxiety, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960), pp. 526-527.

<sup>85</sup>There is some evidence, however, that insofar as literature and communications media provide a wide-range of role-taking models, they do have some indirect influence on behavior. See especially, Duncan, op. cit., Erwin Edman, Arts and the Man, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1939); Frederick Elkin, The Child and Society, (New York: Random House, 1962); Passin, op. cit.; David Riesman, Abundance for What? (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1964); David Riesman with Nathan Glazer and Revel Denny, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); Betty Wang, "Folk Songs as a Means of Social Control," Sociology and Social Research, 19 (1934), pp. 64-69; Betty Wang, "Folk Songs as Regulators of Politics," Sociology and Social Research, 20 (1935), pp. 161-66.

<sup>86</sup>Ralph Fox, The Novel and the People, (New York: International Publishers, 1945), especially pp. 28-31.

<sup>87</sup>Again, insofar as the novel serves as an agent of anticipatory socialization, it may indirectly contribute to the manifestation of change. See sources cited in footnote 85.

<sup>88</sup>Barnett, op. cit., p. 209.



Novels can vary in the degree of sensitivity to change. Daiches suggests that the novel is most predictive in periods of transition in a society.<sup>89</sup> Such a period is one in which massive change is taking place and only the direction of this change is uncertain. Daiches' point appears to be theoretically valid if one accepts the reflection theory. The point should perhaps be extended to obtain within a society also.<sup>90</sup> Different parts of a society experience differential rates of change. A group of writers representing a sector undergoing more rapid transition would probably be more "prophetic" than other writers. If this is so, Negro novels of the 1950's and 1960's should exhibit the characteristic of anticipation of change.

Some novels have as their explicit goal or as one of their purposes the anticipation of social change, or the anticipation of the results of certain types of social change.<sup>91</sup> Utopian and anti-utopian novels are certainly of this kind. Insofar as these novels are meant for the purposes of advocacy, it is doubtful whether they have any more predictive value than any other more or less polemical tract. The advantage which literature has in exploring societal trends is in the author's ability to take a

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<sup>89</sup>David Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 2.

<sup>90</sup>The extension of Daiches' hypothesis would not necessarily be proven if the Negro novels do exhibit this awareness. If they do not, however, the hypothesis would be fairly well discredited--unless the assumption regarding social change in the black community is wrong.

<sup>91</sup>Hugh Daniel Duncan, Language and Literature in Society, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

personal situation, manipulate it by subjecting it to a variety of forces, without having to subordinate characterization and action to some external political theory. The artist is free to let his imagination roam so long as it remains within the limits of responsibility (or, as some would say, credibility on some level).<sup>92</sup> The novelist engaged in polemics often loses this ability. The novel, or more particularly characterization, must be subordinated in such an instance. Insofar as this is true, the prophetic value of the novel is usually minimized.

Novels then differ in their reflective capabilities. Some are obviously polemical and as such may well be less reflective than those that let "artistic" concerns take precedence. Others rely more on symbolism to reflect dominant conflicts than others. But, as a reflector, a novel can also prophesy. It can indicate "the inner face of their time and the impulses and conflicts, both conscious and unconscious, that contains its history,"<sup>93</sup> and in so doing, they can give some indication of the resolution of those conflicts and of new impulses and conflicts to come. Novels ought then to be a good source to examine not only the existing ideologies of a group, but also the elements of an ideology yet being formed, yet being strived for. And it is both the reflective and the predictive property of novels that makes them useful

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<sup>92</sup>Margaret Church, Time and Reality, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 233.

<sup>93</sup>Chester E. Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 1.

as a data source in examining the central substantive questions of this thesis.

### Methods

We are interested in what political goals, instruments, and tactics American blacks have posited for themselves and whether these goals and tactics have been integrated or might be integrated into an ideology. The major data source for investigating this will be novels written by blacks, especially because of the reflective and predictive nature of such fictional materials. Novels alone, however, can be misleading as data sources and so we have supplemented the novels by also looking at survey research studies, biographical materials, essays and polemical writings and other data sources. Where especially appropriate theses sources will also be introduced in this paper.

The selection of the novels used can be critical. First, since we were interested only in black attitudes, the novels used had to be written by blacks, either American citizens or living in the United States.<sup>94</sup> Secondly, the novel had to have at least one significant black character.<sup>95</sup>

The first problem presenting itself in making the selection of novels was the identification of all such novels published

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<sup>94</sup>This later allowed the inclusion of West Indians living in the U. S. As Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, (New York: Wm. Morrow & Co., 1967) makes clear again and again, the West Indian black has had and now has an important influence on black Americans and thus should be included.

<sup>95</sup>This primarily served to exclude the many historical novels of Frank Yerby.

between 1945 and 1968. To my knowledge, no single list of such works exists. Novels written between 1945 and 1952 were listed in a bibliography in Hill's The Negro Writer in the United States.<sup>96</sup> For the remaining period, a list was constructed by examining books and articles about Negro writers and from the review sections of Phylon and The Negro Digest. Other review magazines were also scanned, particularly Saturday Review and The New York Times Sunday Review Magazine, but they tended to totally ignore black writers until the late 1960's.

It was originally hoped to examine all books in the list. That quickly proved impossible. Many were printed in very small numbers and were in print only a very short time. They could not, in short, be located. This loss did not seem too unfortunate, however, since, as noted above, McClelland stated that more popular books (evidenced here by availability) are more likely to be reflective of a society's hopes (goals) and feelings (attitudes).<sup>97</sup>

This left us with a total of thirty novels, about the maximum possible for non-machine analysis. Although this is not a random sample, the purpose of this study was not to obtain exact distributions of variables, a task for which novels are unsuited anyway. We feel we have used a representative sample of the novels published by blacks during the specified time period. About half of the novels studied were published prior to 1960,

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<sup>96</sup>Herbert Hill, The Negro Writer in the United States, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

<sup>97</sup>McClelland, op. cit., pp. 112-113.

about half after that date so we also have a reasonable temporal spread among the novels selected.

A variety of means of analysis of the novels was employed. For some kinds of data, simple counting procedures were employed--e.g. whether or not the novel dealt with interracial marriage. Most commonly, a variant of White's value analysis procedure was employed.<sup>98</sup> A series of values were listed which were important to the analysis--e.g. attitudes toward police. Everytime such a value appeared in the novel it was noted and coded for direction. In the case of the example discussed, if the context of the statement concerning police expressed a favorable attitude towards the police, it was coded as positive, an unfavorable attitude was coded negative. if partly favorable and partly unfavorable, it was coded neutral. These codes were then interpreted in light of the novel as a whole. That is, once the statement was coded out of context so to speak, it was interpreted by referring back to the context of the statement.

White's technique and cautions were followed insofar as possible. In particular, an attempt was also made to "consider the person's probable attitude toward his audience and the impression he may be trying to create,"<sup>99</sup> and to "consider all the possible mechanisms of self-deception."<sup>100</sup> While these two points

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<sup>98</sup>Ralph K. White, Value Analysis, the Nature and Use of the Method, (Glen Gardner, N. J.: Libertarian Press, 1951).

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

are particularly important when using value analysis on autobiographies, they also need be considered in interpreting the novels.

The novels varied widely in terms of their usefulness to this study. On a whole, as a data source for this study, they supplied an abundance of riches--and also were particularly useful in suggesting alternative ways of looking at things. A major weakness in using the novels was that the analyst can investigate only those items which appear in the novels. If the novels do not deal with, e.g. city councils, little can be said about city councils, attitudes toward them, or how that particular institution could fit into an ideological scheme. How serious a weakness this is must be evaluated in the conclusion of this thesis.

The data source shall then consist primarily of novels written by blacks about blacks and published between 1945 and 1968. The techniques used to analyze the novels are partly quantitative, primarily evaluative. While some novels were more useful than others, the novels together covered a variety of topics in a variety of ways and provided a rich source for looking at questions surrounding the concept of ideology.

### Organization

Black's beliefs, attitudes, and feelings about a series of politically relevant issues are a key aspect of an ideology. They are particularly relevant to the attainment of black political goals. The next chapter then deals with the political

context in which blacks find themselves. It examines that context from the point of view of the political and social community. Of major importance is what do the novels express about America herself? Are there specific goals concerning the political community that seem to be emphasized? A second concern is that of white Americans. A final concern is that of basic cultural values (at least of those that relate to politics).

The third chapter examines more specific aspects of the context out of which an ideology would grow. It examines the views expressed toward governmental structures and politically relevant groups.

In the fourth chapter the question of ideology in the novels is examined directly. Three strains of ideological thought, assimilation, pluralism, and separatism are examined. The weaknesses of these strains are elaborated by a more detailed look at the works of three of the best known novelists represented in this study.

Since questions of identity are clearly related to questions of ideology, and since the examination of the strains of ideological thought indicate the necessity of a focus on identity, Chapter Five addresses identity directly.

Chapters Two through Five suggest the conclusion that the novels fail to develop ideological thought. Chapter Six, therefore, examines that failure by abstracting and integrating the major points of the earlier chapters.

Chapter Seven concludes and summarizes the paper. In the seventh chapter the reader may find some suggestions for further research.



## CHAPTER II

### COMMUNITY

To examine the ideology of a group or of individuals, it is very important to understand the social and political context which they perceive themselves to be in and to understand how they relate to that context. In this sense, community becomes a situational variable with the temporal elements of past, present, and future. However, like most concepts in the social sciences, community is a term used by many persons to mean many different things. The reference in this chapter to community is to "a functionally related aggregate of people who live in a particular geographic locality at a particular time, share a common culture, are arranged in a social structure, and exhibit an awareness of their uniqueness and separate identity as a group."<sup>1</sup>

A nation-state like the United States is then a community and is at the same time composed of a variety of other communities. At the same time, the definition precludes blacks from being a community since they do not uniquely inhabit a particular geographic locality. While we may at a later point wish to

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<sup>1</sup>B. E. Mercer, The American Community, (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 27.

question the usefulness of the definition given above, we shall accept its usefulness here and deal only with community insofar as it is bounded by geography.

This still presents us with certain problems. If, as stated, the United States is both a community and is comprised of communities, in what sense can one talk about a common culture? Certainly, there are levels of generalities and the level on which one might describe southern Minnesota is different than one on which one might describe the Plains States. The level of specificity would differ; more probabilistic statements would be made about the larger unit; and one would naturally expect larger deviations from the descriptive statements of the larger unit than the smaller. And we are implicitly aware of this when someone talks about an area. We make certain assumptions and indeed allowances about statements meant to be generalized over a large unit (be it people, terrain, or whatever) than over smaller units.

Similarly, in talking about a common culture, we also must expect different levels of generality about a community coterminous with the United States versus one coterminous with the boundaries of a Hopi reservation. Thus, in this chapter when we talk about dominant values of the American society, we do not mean that everyone holds these values, nor even that those who do hold them agree on their meanings and implications nor their priorities. We only mean that those people who have looked as a whole at American society and have articulated their findings

have ascertained that in some sense these values seem to characterize this nation.<sup>2</sup>

A caution is in order here. Our analysis is limited by our data base. We are not then describing the community of America and the communities therein, but the aspects of those communities which black novelists have felt moved enough to write about. We are dealing with perceptions of those with a particular point of view that must surely differ in scope, intensity, and focal points from that of a Bryce, a Tocqueville or a Reich.<sup>3</sup> We are, instead, dealing with the point of view of the oppressed, of those who have been excluded from positions of power or influence. The choice of subject matter by the novelists becomes an important variable itself.

### The United States as One's Country

#### The Political Community

Most socialization studies have indicated that a sense of what many call the political community and what we here are referring to more specifically as the United States as one's nation and a sense of identification with that nation are among

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<sup>2</sup>Although some disagreement on the American value system, Devine argues that there is an amazing consensus. See Donald J. Devine, The Political Culture of the United States, (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1972), Chapter II especially.

<sup>3</sup>These are three of many possible references to writers who looked more comprehensively at the U. S. James Bryce, The American Commonwealth, (New York: McMillan, 1912), Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), and Charles A. Reich, The Greening of America, (New York: Random House, 1970).

the first political learnings of children.<sup>4</sup> Because this learning takes place so early in life and normally has such a positive content, these investigators feel that this sense is among the most enduring of political feelings and among the most difficult feelings to change.<sup>5</sup>

White children have very positive feelings about America. For example, Hess and Torney found that about 95% of the children in their sample agreed that "the American flag is the best flag in the world."<sup>6</sup> However, similar studies of black children alert one to certain cautions before one paints an entirely sanguine picture concerning black attitudes about their homeland and suggest that certain cautions should be exercised in interpreting poll data. Simply stated, black children acquire positive attitudes for the political community at a later time than do white children.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, this affective attachment lessens as the black child grows older. In short, such attitudes may be less firmly held by blacks than whites. Therefore, although black adults seem to express little separatist sentiment<sup>8</sup> (and separatist

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<sup>4</sup>See e.g., Robert D. Hess and Judith V. Torney, The Development of Political Attitudes in Children, (Chicago: Aldine, 1967), pp. 30-37.

<sup>5</sup>David Easton and Jack Dennis, Children in the Political System, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), p. 107.

<sup>6</sup>Hess and Torney, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>Edward S. Greenberg, "The Political Socialization of Black Children," in Edward S. Greenberg (ed.), Political Socialization, (New York: Atherton Press, 1970), p. 181.

<sup>8</sup>Consider, for example, the responses found in two different studies regarding Negro desire for a separate nation. One

sentiments must be seen to imply a rejection of the United States as one's nation), there still remains a possibility that highly ambiguous attitudes about the United States could be held.

Here, novels can help us interpret these findings. In general, the novels indicate the ambiguous meaning of America to blacks, a deep belief in the political community, but a belief that is constantly challenged by reality and thus vulnerable to change. In many novels, one can sense the struggle that this contradiction poses to individuals--and most importantly, in the period of 1945 - 1968 this struggle becomes more severe over time and more central to the novel itself, a clear indication of how stresses do undermine the sense of political community, but also

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should also note that while there is little separatist feeling, the numbers who do so feel are large enough to provide a firm base of support for those who might wish to change their beliefs, perhaps in reaction to output failures. Thus, besides emphasizing a generally high level of support, the responses to these questions ought also emphasize the need for caution in interpreting them.

Reply to "It would be a good idea to give American Negroes their own country and let them set up their own nation."

	All Metropolitan Areas	New York	Chicago	Atlanta	Birming- ham
Agree	17%	16%	25%	26%	20%
Disagree	79	79	68	68	75
Don't Know	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>
Total					
Number	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Gary A. Marx, Protest and Prejudice, (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 28. Interviews were given in 1964.

In a Newsweek survey 5 years later 21% answered yes to a similar question and 69% answered no. "Report from Black America," Newsweek, LXXIII (June 30, 1969), p. 20.

an indication of how deep-seated that sense of political community is among blacks.

In many respects, the word that might express one affective dimension of the political community would be sorrow--not a very comforting term for those who would hope that feelings would be very positive.

There is, first of all, the question of whether the United States really is the country for American Negroes, not out of choice by the Negro, but of the whites who dominate the country,<sup>9</sup> and secondly there is the question of whether there is any hope that America can redeem her promise.

It's confusing for me to try to talk about America! I feel so many things about it, mostly a big sadness, and a fear, like a sailor must feel about a great, lovely ship that's still in pretty good shape when it begins leaking. . . . Oh, America had it once, and lost it.<sup>10</sup>

America, is seen by the characters in the novels in all of its ambiguities. In the first place, differences between North and South are recognized. In every novel set in the South but one, the major character leaves the South or intends to, but is killed first. In one exception, written in 1947, the major character "becomes" white, thus obliterating the necessity to leave. In only one, does a character make a sustained argument for remaining--and the essence of that argument is that if

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<sup>9</sup>Particularly appropriate to this point of William Melvin Kelley's dedication in dem, (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1967). "This book is dedicated to the Black people in (not of) America."

<sup>10</sup>John A. Williams, Sissie, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1963), p. 29.

everyone left, things would never change. Sacrifice must be made for a better future; no one sees any real hope for the South in the present.

Two things about this lack of commitment to the South should be noted.<sup>11</sup> First, blacks do distinguish between political communities or sub-communities. Very negative feelings about Yazoo, Mississippi, do not necessarily extend to nor result in negative feelings or the same negative feelings about the nation as a whole. And secondly, the novels indicate that both positive and negative feelings about community depend at least in part on the outputs of the political system. That is, if black needs and desires are not fulfilled, negative feelings increase. If they are fulfilled, negative feelings decrease. In other words, black attitudes toward the political community seem to be particularly responsive to the policies of a government.

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<sup>11</sup>Note that while the novels seem to exaggerate the feelings, there has been considerable sentiment that, within the country, the South deserves less commitment than the North. In the study by Marx, op. cit., p. 9, the response to the question "Do you think Negroes are better off in the South, in the North, or isn't there any difference?" for the metropolitan sample was 60% who felt the Negroes were better off in the North. Donald Matthews and James Prothro, Negroes and the New Southern Politics, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966) asked Negro students (in Southern Black Colleges) where they would like to live after college, 48% said somewhere outside the South. Migration levels to the North fully support these sentiments. More and more one sees evidence that his view of the South is changing. See, e.g., Thomas A. Johnson, "Decade of Change in South Owes Negroes High Hopes," New York Times, August 16, 1970, pp. 1 and 54. However, this change in sentiment is always noted to be based upon the perception of where the chance of political change is greatest. The general point that blacks do distinguish sub-political communities by their outputs remains.

This is further confirmed by the feeling about the North. It certainly was not viewed as the promised land. But, although the going was rough in the North, at least some freedom was possible; one had at least some sort of a chance. New York, particularly, was envisioned as a desirable place for the Negro, at least relative to the rest of the country.

"Do you like living in New York?"

"I think if you have to live in the States it's the only place, if you're colored."<sup>12</sup>

For some, better than the North was Europe or Africa. The problems the black man had with America are represented by the fact that in one-fourth of the books, a major Negro character was either a voluntary expatriate, or seriously intended to become one.<sup>13</sup> However, expatriation is not viewed as the answer to the problems of the black man. What is desired is to become of America, for it to be a real homeland. In other words, there remains that positive sense of community, but the emigration rate indicates that it is under severe strain.

The idea of expatriation to Africa further indicates the ambiguity of feelings about America. One may feel unwanted in a land, but it is one's country and the way one views the world has been bounded by the culture of that country. It is hard to envision another way of life.

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<sup>12</sup>Williams, Sissie, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>13</sup>This might be compared to the at least five authors in the group of twenty-two studied who, to my knowledge, were or are expatriates.



When the Nationalist finished, Hubert was so moved that he could not help joining in the loud applause, although he did not want to go to Africa or any other place where there were so many Negroes. He walked on.<sup>14</sup>

And so one's emotions tug in different directions. A sense of pride in one's self and one's race and a knowledge of the rightness in statements about the duplicity of White America pull one way, but everything else in one's life pulls another. The result is an ambiguity, indeed an antagonism, latent in some, manifest in others, about what one really feels about America.

The very pervasiveness of this ambiguity already begins to suggest that blacks might have some difficulty in developing an ideology that is clear cut, cohesive, and consistent. An ideology would need a stronger base than ambiguity about a subject as basic as the political community.

The major obstacle to becoming of America is, according to the novelists, the lack of comprehension on the part of white Americans of the undeniable fact that the Negro exists and that he has not been allowed to become an integral part of society including the political community. This lack of comprehension extends to the top of the government as well as among the people in the street. Williams illustrates this by a conversation between the President's two top aides and Max, then a special aid to the President on civil rights, concerning the racial picture in the United States.

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<sup>14</sup>Julien Mayfield, The Hit, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1957), p. 14.

Three pots of tea and two packs of cigarettes later and Carrigan said, "Max, you've got to be kidding."

"Yes, that's pretty glum, what you've served up," Bonnard added.

"In the words of a sergeant I once had," Max said, "I shit thee not."

"Our sources don't print the picture that dark," Carrigan said with a sigh.<sup>15</sup>

A week after this conference, the President, with the advice of Carrigan and Bonnard among others, allowed American participation in an invasion of Cuba. Oppression of peoples in other lands was not to be tolerated. There was no realization of oppression in this country.

This double standard is particularly emphasized in If We Must Die.<sup>16</sup> A Hungarian refugee received his citizenship papers and immediately went to register to vote, accompanied by representatives of the local press to record the beneficence of America. Will Harris, a Negro who had just been discharged from the army after serving in Korea, was also trying to register. The refugee registered and made his speech about how wonderful freedom was and what a duty as well as a right it was to vote. Will was not allowed to register--and he lost his job and then his life for being presumptuous enough to even try to do so.

These kinds of incidents suggest the myriad challenges blacks face concerning their attitudes about America. Most

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<sup>15</sup>John A. Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 301.

<sup>16</sup>Junius Edwards, If We Must Die, (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1963), p. 12.

Americans' attitudes about America are much less frequently challenged.<sup>17</sup> What this suggests is that if indeed one major component of attitude change is the existence of contradictory feelings and beliefs,<sup>18</sup> blacks are much more likely to change their attitudes regarding the nation than whites. And this clearly illustrates one of the cautions one must use in interpreting poll data which indicate consistently positive attitudes about the political community. What they may fail to indicate is that such attitudes rest on a rather shaky base.

The fact that America and her political leaders fail to comprehend the black's perception that he is, at least at times, excluded from the definition of the political community helps explain the black view that whites feel that change should be made gradually (or "prudently") if it is to be forced at all. The response of the black to this is one of disbelief, but a disbelief tempered by resignation, by the knowledge that in some ways, the black is excluded from the white understanding of community.

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<sup>17</sup>Although perhaps challenged in America more than in most systems, for one hears the term "Unamerican" fairly frequently. It is difficult to conceive of "Unbritish" or "Unswedish" in the same sense. The proliferation of "America--Love it or Leave it" bumper stickers gives one the same feeling. For a further discussion of this see Sidney Verba, "Comparative Political Culture" in Lucien W. Pye and Sidney Verba, (eds), Political Culture and Political Development, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 532.

<sup>18</sup>See, e.g. Leon Festinger, A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, (Evanston: Row, Peterson, 1957); Milton J. Rosenberg, C. I. Hoveland, et al., Attitude, Organization & Change, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960); Robert P. Abelson et al., Theories of Cognitive Consistency: A Sourcebook, (New York: Rand McNally, 1968) among others.

As another example, in one novel, at a school board meeting in which the integration play was set aside, the following transpired:

"Look Dr. Schuster," MacMillan was saying, "I'm for obeying the law as much as the next one, but if there's any danger of setting off a riot, then I'm for delay. Not cancellation, mind you, but delay. Let's exercise prudence. . . ."

It's odd, Bishop was thinking, how prudent they can be when discussing my God-given rights. They will never understand, I really don't think they will ever understand.<sup>19</sup>

Besides finding the necessity for gradualism unconvincing, the Negro considers the use of political expediency to be folly when civil rights are involved. There will never be a "proper" time to push for change. The time for action is now--if, indeed, it is not too late already.<sup>20</sup> At least one author, William Melvin Kelley, suggests that it is already too late. Each of his novels has expressed more disaffiliation with white America than its predecessor. In his first novel,<sup>21</sup> the hero, by example, inspires the mass migration to the North of all the Negroes of the Southern state involved. In the second,<sup>22</sup> a blind jazz musician cracks up after his white mistress leaves him. His recovery follows his

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<sup>19</sup>Juleen Mayfield, The Grand Parade, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1961), p. 315. This quotation very much goes to the question of regime, but it also has overtones of political community.

<sup>20</sup>This is the majority view in the novels. However, there are some characters who wish to wait for the "proper" time. These characters were minor ones, however.

<sup>21</sup>William Melvin Kelley, A Different Drummer, (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1962).

<sup>22</sup>William Melvin Kelley, A Drop of Patience, (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1965).

understanding of the folk values of the Negro people--and it is for those people that he wants to play. In the third novel,<sup>23</sup> Kelley bitterly satirizes white people, illustrating the absurdity of their ways and suggesting that integration into such a dismal society is not really a favor. Perhaps it is not yet too late for society to change, but the necessary changes will require more than greater acceptance of the Negro; they will require a reevaluation of what America is to stand for in all of its values. Kelley's first novel questioned a sub-political community of the United States. His third questions America as well as the regime, that is the values, norms, and authority structure, in the United States.

Indeed, in novels of the late sixties, one sees serious questioning of whether the whites of the United States would not wish to overtly redefine the political community by ejecting black Americans.

For example, the King Alfred Contingency Plan is an American plan coordinated with similar plans by other imperialist powers to detain and exterminate all American Negroes should racial disturbances get out of hand.<sup>24</sup> Fantastic--perhaps. But Williams makes clear what most of the other novelists hint at; that if the United States does not restructure itself in order to make a place for the Negro, the society will have to rid itself of the Negro. The apartheid of which many have warned us would

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<sup>23</sup>Kelley, dem, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup>Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, op. cit.

only be the most "humane" way of ridding America of the Negro. The Union of South Africa provides ample precedent. And Nazi Germany provides a precedent of a different kind.

Should such sentiments become widespread among blacks (and there are indications that such beliefs are becoming more common) what is already a challenged sense of community could quickly change to a negative one.

But again, both the novels and survey data indicate that it would take a very strong blow to change such ingrained beliefs as blacks share about America. For example, while separatist movements are mentioned in over half the novels, they receive little attention. They are generally shown to be natural responses to the horrors of life of those destined to remain in the ghettos, destined never to attain the American dream; but they are also shown to be ineffective responses.

In the same vein, cultural nationalists are more frequently mentioned in the sixties than before (although they still remain minor characters). But, by and large, they too are ignored. They seem to be more window dressing than serious challengers to the sense of community of the majority of blacks. Indeed, they really seem to be examples of the potentiality of a real pluralism in this country rather than precursors of a separatist movement.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>As used in this thesis, pluralism refers to a mode of social organization in which a group has loyalty to a larger society while seeking toleration for values of its own which are compatible with those of the larger society (as opposed to

In summary, in spite of the fact that polls tend to show blacks rejecting separatist sentiments and instead supporting America as a political community, the novels indicate that black attitudes about the political community are quite ambiguous. Separatists and cultural nationalists are rejected in the novels. But positive feelings about America are constantly challenged; challenged by the maintenance of a segregated and prejudiced society; challenged by a foreign policy that seems hypocritical; challenged by a political style that emphasizes prudence and gradualism; challenged by a feeling of being an outsider. This ambiguity makes it very possible for events and governmental policies to have a greater than normal impact on black attitudes. It makes such positive attitudes as exist more unstable than the professional literature might lead us to believe. And it makes it more difficult for blacks to develop and articulate an ideology on which the majority of blacks could agree.

### The Social Community

Another dimension of feeling for America concerns what might be referred to as the social community. Here we shall consider attitudes toward whites as a group and toward a policy

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conflicting with) and tolerating values held by other groups, again as long as they are compatible with the overall values of the society. It refers to an openness between groups, to a situation where a considerable number of transactions occur between groups, but where groups remain identifiably distinct. The distinctness may be based on ethnicity, religion, class, region or any number of other characteristics.

Separatist sentiment implies conflicting values, at least some of which cannot be compromised.

covering interactions between whites as a group and blacks as a group, discrimination.

Attitudes towards whites. It is a rather common human trait to dislike those people who dislike you. When that dislike is emphasized by irrational prejudice, rigidly enforced discrimination, and often substantial cruelty, it becomes even more difficult to have favorable feelings toward those individuals and groups. Thus, one would not expect to find Negroes feeling favorably toward whites. And one does not. The comment often heard in the South, "We love our nigras and they love us," finds almost no support in novels written by Negroes. What one does find is a generalized dislike for whites, softened by friendships with some whites, and hope that the gap between peoples of a different color need not endure forever.

In about one-third of the books examined, there were few or no whites in the novel, and the ones which did appear had only minor importance. All of these books were written in the 1940's and 1950's; all but one were written prior to 1957. Two-thirds of the novels did involve whites to some major extent, and of these twenty books, only three were written prior to 1958. The conclusion must be that it became more acceptable to write about Negro-white relationships or that those relationships had more importance to the Negro or a greater frequency of occurrence in the sixties than the forties.

Certain stereotypes of whites as a group stand out in many of the novels. Whites are believed to see Negroes as



inferior beings. They expect Negroes to act in certain ways and if the Negro does act in the manner the white deems he should, the Negro can fool the white into giving the black what he wants. In The Outsider, Cross needed to obtain a birth certificate for his new-found identity.

How was he to handle it? He thought hard, calling up everything he knew about black and white race relations to help him. If he could ever act the role of a subservient Negro convincingly, this was the time to do it. He would have to present to the officials a Negro so scared and ignorant that no white American would ever dream that he was up to anything deceptive.<sup>26</sup>

Cross played the fool well, and the white officials were happy to present him with the certificate.

White men want to be pleased. Truth is not the object when questions are asked. Rather, the white wants his beliefs to be reinforced.

Please him? And here you are a junior in college! Why the dumbest black bastard in the cotton patch knows that the only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie!<sup>27</sup>

And, in the short run, such lies are successful.

More recent novels are only more sophisticated in expressing these views. The white, they indicate, wants or needs proof of his believed superiority. The Negro who will give him such proof is rewarded, but the cost of such behavior is too great for the modern black. And any action at all, either giving or denying

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<sup>26</sup>Richard Wright, The Outsider, (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), p. 156. Note also what this suggests about attitudes toward authorities.

<sup>27</sup>Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, (New York: New American Library, 1952), p. 124.

the proof the white demands seems to make the black dissatisfied with himself and with his position in society.

Part of the price of being a Negro was that he was never satisfied with the fight he put up for his dignity and pride.<sup>28</sup>

The novels also indicate that blacks believe that the white needs constant proof of his "superiority" because of deeply imbedded fears going back to slavery days when the thought of a Nat Turner was a constant source of terror to the plantation owner. This repressed fear takes many forms, according to the black. One of the more interesting is found in dem when Mitchell fails to recognize Cooley. He had seen him once, but in his imagination built him up to be a tall, heavy set, cruel and dangerous-looking man. Seeing him in less-threatening circumstances, Mitchell failed to make a connection between the man who had stood at his back door and the man now ostensibly trying to help him.<sup>29</sup> This belief in the fear of the white complicates the Negro's responses to whites.<sup>30</sup>

At the very least, it makes it very difficult for the black to maintain a sense of political trust towards the majority of whites in the political community. Although a sense of trust is not essential to a positive sense of political community, it is certainly conducive to such a sense and in the same way, under

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<sup>28</sup>Julien Mayfield, The Hit, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1957), p. 93.

<sup>29</sup>Kelley, dem, op. cit.

<sup>30</sup>Verba, op. cit., p. 537.

conditions of stress, the lack of trust could increase the probability of that sense of community being undermined.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, in terms of generalized attitudes toward whites, there is some tendency in the most recent novels to wonder whether white society is worth bothering with. Kelley carries this furthest.<sup>32</sup> In dem<sup>33</sup> both white society and white individuals are characterized as ridiculous to the unbiased observer (i.e., the non-white). They are not even worth hating anymore. This can be usefully compared with the often heard question of why would I want to integrate a burning house.<sup>34</sup> The question is still a serious one, asked by one who wishes an answer, rather than a statement of definitive fact implying action to follow the words. But it clearly indicates there are serious strains on black feelings about the community, tempered as those strains are by the desire to find a workable relationship within the existing community.

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<sup>31</sup>See, e.g. David Easton, A Systems Analysis of Political Life, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965), chap. 11.

<sup>32</sup>His position has greatly changed since his first novel in 1962 when many whites were indeed absurd, but there were a few who recognized reality and tried to deal with it honestly. In his latest book, there are no whites who are not patently absurd.

<sup>33</sup>Kelley, dem, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup>See, e.g. James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time, (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 126-127.

"(The Negro) is the key figure in his country, and the American future is precisely as bright or as dark as his. And the Negro recognizes this, in a negative way. Hence the question: Do I really want to be integrated into a burning house?"

Discrimination. Certainly one important aspect of the social community for the black American is discrimination. And one of the more outstanding changes that occurs in the novels is that concerning attitudes toward discrimination, particularly concerning the causes and effects of discrimination.

The predominant view of discrimination in the novels of the 1940's and 1950's is one of what might be called the first level of reaction. Discrimination may mean that one cannot buy a house just anywhere or eat in any restaurant, but it does not affect the very essence of how one lives. Personal defeat comes from other sources, forces only tangentially viewed as resultants of discrimination, forces such as poverty or personal feelings, or of a rather impartial quest for power. In essence, discrimination on this level has little to do with the sense of community.

The major characters in the novels which emphasized this surface view of discrimination had white middle-class attitudes and ambitions. They accepted the view that there was no distinctive black culture, or at least none of any value. Furthermore, those whom white society termed deviants, the prostitutes, the pimps, the con men, the addicts, the delinquents, the drunks, the unemployed, the ones who had lost hope, were disgraces and should be avoided and even hated. In other words, class identification rather than race identification was the essential reference point for these major characters, and class identification was a characteristic shared with the rest of the community.

Ann Petry's The Street<sup>35</sup> is one example of this attitude. Lutie Johnson had absorbed all the desires of the white middle class. Finances forced her and her son to live in a small apartment on an undesirable Harlem street. She hates the street because of its material poverty, but also because there is no one there she can associate with but the undesirables. Even though the white world tries to keep Negroes down, there are ways to escape, legal ways which anyone could accept. It is poverty that must be overcome and this has a greater importance than race in shaping the individual.

In a society in which race was regarded by the dominant majority as all important, this emphasis on class as the primary reference point rested on very shaky ground. It represented more of a wish than a reality and as such was an inherently unstable attitude. Even this instability is illustrated in the novels, for even while the surface view of discrimination was pervasive, there were occasional insights (where perhaps the unconscious of the author took over or where his sense of reality overrode his sense of marketability).<sup>36</sup> Usually these were inconsistent with the rest of the novel in which the more total view of discrimination

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<sup>35</sup>Ann Petry, The Street, (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1949).

<sup>36</sup>The well-known phenomena that people seek out material to reinforce rather than controvert already held attitudes undoubtedly applies to what publishers are willing to publish and readers willing to buy. See John A. Williams, "My Man Himes: An Interview with Chester Himes," in John A. Williams and Charles F. Harris (eds.), Amistad 1, (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 30-42.

seemed to break through. In Taffy by Phillip B. Kaye<sup>37</sup> this duality of discrimination was quite clear. Taffy was smothered by a class-conscious mother who is middle-class values personified. Taffy, growing up in Harlem, had never accepted these values of his mother, although he never openly challenged them either. At crucial points in his life, his contacts with whites were characterized by extreme unfairness to him as a result of the discrimination ethic. When everything else seemed to fall upon him, he senselessly murdered a white man, rationalizing his rage and hopelessness into a belief that the man deserved it because he was white. But Taffy, who felt, if he could not verbalize, the totality of discrimination was shot and killed by the police. At the end, his mother had learned something about herself, but not about discrimination. Taffy remained the aberration. His chaos was not that of the Negro, but of one troubled boy. Kaye hinted at the totality of discrimination, but in the end he backed away from it.<sup>38</sup>

This view that discrimination was just another small, bothersome barrier in life, was all to change in the 1960's.

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<sup>37</sup>Philip B. Kay, Taffy, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1950).

<sup>38</sup>This does not, by the way, imply that all black novels must be "race" novels dealing with the problems of being black. Certainly though, one problem of man has been the exclusion of and discriminatory behavior towards one group after another. Group isolation seems to be as much of a human problem as individual isolation. Dealing with such a topic in terms of black and white does not necessarily mean merely just another "race" novel nor does it mean that such a subject could not be the makings of great literature.

During this decade, the predominant view of discrimination in the novel has been that the system affects the totality of personality. Other influences, particularly class and family relationships, affect the person's concept of self and his view of his role in society; but discrimination, even when the particular characters' contact with it are minimal, becomes the primary determinate of perception of the world and the way one fits himself into it.<sup>39</sup>

Most simply expressed, the nature of discrimination, in the recent novels, makes it very difficult for a person to have pride in himself and a sense of unity with those to whom he is socially and politically bound. There is a tendency for a person to either react in a "something must be wrong with me if I can't eat in there" way or in equally destructive way of hating those who practice the discrimination. And hate, whether of self or of oppressor is seen as equally destructive. The intertwining of these two hates, and the necessity to overcome them is seen in And Then We Heard The Thunder.

One day he was reading the book Twelve Million Black Voices by Richard Wright and it suddenly came to him, and he said to himself, if I'm proud of me, I don't need to hate Mister Charlie's people. I don't want to. I don't need to. If I love me, I can also love the whole damn human race.<sup>40</sup>

These novels see the tragedy of discrimination in the resultant

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<sup>39</sup>Not all of the novels dealt with this, but most of those which did not were "pure" protest novels which were primarily concerned with the brutality and absurdity of whites.

<sup>40</sup>John Oliver Killens, And Then We Heard The Thunder, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), p. 362.

necessity of each and every black man's having to struggle to this realization before he can be able to live (and not just get along) in this world. They also suggest that this may have more than tangential importance to the sense of community.

Another example of this, one more specifically directed at the problem of finding a secure identity,<sup>41</sup> is Curling.<sup>42</sup> Chelsea, a 28-year-old engineer in Boston had been raised by a wealthy white man and his second wife. Chelsea's were not the problems of the poor and although he was at times the victim of prejudice, his friends were white and he related to white society. But, therein was the rub. Chelsea was not white, and he did not reject being Negro. He seemed to both love and hate other Negroes. And it was in an old, dying Negro derelict that he discovered the source of his general dissatisfaction. Blackness was not something you "overcome" like low status. White society had made blacks different. It discriminated against the middle-class black as well as the poor black, and in so doing gave blacks a reason for solidarity that crossed class lines. And consequently, a Negro could not find his own identity, could not

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<sup>41</sup>The term identity is here used in its specific, psychological sense which goes beyond the answer to the question, "Who am I?" The reader unaware of the implications of this might particularly look at Erik H. Erikson, "The Concept of Identity in Race Relations: Notes and Quiries," in Daedalus 95 (1966), pp. 145-171 or Erik H. Erikson, Identity Youth and Crisis, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1968), which includes the Daedalus article and also discussed other aspects of identity, including the historical development and usefulness of the concept. Also see chap. 6.

<sup>42</sup>Robert Boles, Curling, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968).



become a unified person, unless he accepted that blackness and until he understood how blackness affected his attitudes, desires, and fears.<sup>43</sup> Discrimination was (is) not, according to Boles, just being refused a cup of coffee in a restaurant. It was (is) at the heart of how whites saw him--and how he saw whites and himself. Although it was not impossible for black and white to obtain intimacy, the black would lose himself unless he understood the forces which acted on him and why. The Negro cannot say, as Solly did, ". . . color, color, color! These people are obsessed with color. Don't they know the world is bigger than the colored race?"<sup>44</sup> Color, as Solly discovered by the end of the novel, is imperative. The white man made it so, but that does not allow the black to forget it.

This unity of race for blacks meant that in the sixties, deviants from middle-class values were no longer looked down upon in novels.<sup>45</sup> The junkie and the prostitute have not become the

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<sup>43</sup>Counter this perception of Boles with Richard Wright's in The Outsider, op. cit., p. 288. "Could he allow her to love him for his color when being a Negro was the least important thing in his life?"

<sup>44</sup>Killens, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>45</sup>The major exception to this was a novel published in 1961, Julien Mayfield, The Grand Parade, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1961), where you find: "They meant 'bad' in the colored sense. To be a 'bad Negro' meant to be unreconciled to the order of things, not giving a damn about either black or white folks who talked about 'progress' and 'freedom.' It meant you drank as much as you wanted to, sang and laughed as loud as the spirit moved you to, and acted as mean as you dared without caring if you were 'disgracing the race.' . . .," p. 97. This does not appear to be Mayfield's view, but it is one that predominates among the characters in his novel.

heroes of the novels,<sup>46</sup> but neither are they people who are just holding the Negro back. Instead, they are people trying to make their way, people who are reacting to an environment they did not make in the only way they know how. Class identification is then transcended by a higher sense of identification, a sense which serves to separate more than unite individuals with the existing social community.

The perception of discrimination changed in the novels from a view in which discrimination was received as subservient to and a result of economic forces and thus not of major concern to one in which discrimination was viewed as a major factor affecting every aspect of the life of black people. This latter view of discrimination forced issues of color to the fore and by doing so forced the issues of social community in a way the earlier view of discrimination failed to do.

Summary. Black attitudes toward the social community are less ambiguous than those toward the political community and are more negative. Whites are perceived as believing in the inferiority of blacks and as fearing blacks. Some of the later novels make a direct connection between the social community and the political community when they raise questions about integrating what they see as a corrupt white society. The same negative views are

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<sup>46</sup>Although they may be a major (and sympathetic) character as Richie Stokes in John A. Williams, Night Song, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1961).

reinforced as discrimination is seen as a pervasive force in the lives of black people, a force which requires some reexamination of questions concerning particularly self-identity and the ways in which blacks might achieve their life goals. At the very least, these attitudes toward the social community reinforce the ambiguous nature of the attitudes toward the social community. But, they also begin to suggest a basis on which one or more ideologies might be developed. To expand on that, we must turn to a more specific examination of dominant community values.

#### Dominant Values

One important aspect of community is the existence of shared values. Such shared values serve to provide basic rules and procedures by which relationships can be regularized and ordered. Such values serve to bound a milieu in which individuals can have some set of stable expectations. They serve as broad limits to one's own behavior and to what can normally be expected as the behavior of others.<sup>47</sup>

As mentioned above, the determination of what values are actually shared by a community is not an easy task. Indeed, even deciding what is meant by shared presents certain conceptual problems.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the best discussion of the views of different

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<sup>47</sup>For a good discussion of this see Easton, op. cit., chap. 12.

<sup>48</sup>Besides Easton, op. cit., one might also see Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David E. Apter, Ideology and Discontent, (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), pp. 206-261; James W. Prothro and C. W. Grigg, "Fundamental Principles of Democracy: Bases of Agreement and

analysts can be found in Lipset<sup>49</sup> who also notes that the hierarchical ordering of values is subject to change depending upon events like the existence of a particular problem or crisis in the society at a given time.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, some values may be ideologically accepted but seemingly unimportant in actual behavior.<sup>51</sup> Should one focus on the ideal or upon the practice in examining values?

Interestingly, the problems for the analyst as mentioned above are equally problems for the community member. The black novels illustrate the problems in accepting or rejecting a community on the basis of willingness to share in its values. For example, equality may seem to be a real value and yet seem to be constantly violated. Does one accept a community on the basis of its promise or reject it on the basis of its practice?

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Disagreement," Journal of Politics 22 (1960), pp. 276-94; Herbert McClosky, "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics," American Political Science Review, LVIII (1964), pp. 361-379.

<sup>49</sup>See Seymour Martin Lipset, The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective, (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pt. 2, esp. chap. 3, for a discussion of the opposing views of many different social analysts. For a slightly different perspective, see the recent work of J. Zvi Namenwrith and Harold D. Lasswell, "The Changing Language of American Values: A Computer Study of Selected Party Platforms," Comparative Politics Series 01-001 of Harry Eckstein and Ted R. Gurr, (eds.), Sage Professional Papers in Comparative Politics, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1970).

<sup>50</sup>See Amitai Etzeoni, "Comment a Leaning to the Right?" Transaction 7 (Sept., 1970), pp. 12, 14, 16, 18, 77.

<sup>51</sup>And as Amitai Etzeoni notes, "There has never been a society that does not fall short of its values," in The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes, (New York: The Free Press, 1968), p. 6.

Before we can answer that question (in terms of what blacks opt for) we must first look to those values which are discussed in the novels and to the feelings about those values.

Equality. Perhaps the most obvious value for the American community is equality.<sup>52</sup> Virtually all novels of all time periods supported this value. Indeed, very explicitly political comments were often made when this value was enforced or not enforced, or when policies which would implement this value were adopted or rejected. This is, of course, an expected finding since blacks, as individuals or as members of a group, have suffered the practical effects resulting from a lack of actual equality. In the same manner, blacks have rejected the value "equality for all except" (and except refers to a variety of groups--minorities, those who don't help themselves, etc.). And, the novels indicate that they are well aware that in the United States there seems to be a great discrepancy between the ideological value of equality and the actual practice of equality.

Most values are tightly bound up with symbolism, and as indicated in Chapter I, novels often symbolically disguise conflicts over values. Equality as a value is often dealt with symbolically and, particularly in terms of racial equality, is

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<sup>52</sup>See Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955) for the primacy of this value.

At this point we do not wish to carefully define the meaning of equality. The reason for this should be clear as this chapter unfolds.

often tied to symbols of sex.<sup>53</sup> And within the novels, discussions of interracial sexual relationships have heavy overtones and sometimes very explicit comments of how such relationships really do have a great deal to do with black attitudes about equality.

Eldridge Cleaver, e.g., underscores with particular clarity, the relationship of sex to equality and the political nature of the relationships between black males and white women.<sup>54</sup> He notes that such a relationship is an extremely complex one involving both the sense of equality/inequality between black and white and the sense of inferiority/superiority of the white male. It is bound up with white desires to maintain a segregated society in a presumably equalitarian nation.<sup>55</sup> It is, he suggests, a relationship very much mixed up with the past, and with feelings of guilt and shame. All of this is to say that it is a relationship inextricably mixed up with values, particularly equality.

This is not a latent issue. In over half of the novels examined, sexual relationships between a Negro male and a white

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<sup>53</sup>See, e.g. Winthrop D. Jordan, White Over Black American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), esp. chaps. 1, 4.

<sup>54</sup>Eldridge Cleaver, Soul on Ice, (New York: Delta Books, 1968), particularly pt. 4.

<sup>55</sup>"But the overwhelming view of white America toward miscegenation remains intractable. In 1963, 90 percent of all whites would object to their teenage child dating a Negro. Three years later, 88 percent felt the same way. In 1963, 84 percent would be upset by a close friend or relative marrying a Negro and in 1966, 79 percent said they would look on such an eventuality with a fair amount of horror," from William Brink and Louis Harris, Black and White, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 132.

female serve as one of the major or as an important minor source of tensions. In five of the remaining novels, such relationships were at least mentioned, although they never became more than a subject of conversation or thought. The pervasiveness of this subject should testify to the importance which black novelists place on it.

The reasons why the white woman is such a potent symbol of freedom to the Negro are obvious. At one time, even looking at such a woman was reason enough to the Southern white to form a lynching party (or an acceptable excuse to justify a lynching for whatever purpose). Hanging was not always enough revenge for the enraged mob. Mutilation of the sexual organs of the victims was not unusual. And in the near past, as though to say that white women were as untrustworthy as Negro men, the white community would not allow Negro males to entertain them in night clubs, although females had long been allowed to sing in the same clubs.<sup>56</sup> The essence of the night club atmosphere is sex; the white male would not even tolerate the possibility of a Negro male being the instigator of sexual feelings.<sup>57</sup>

The varied manners in which whites reinforced the fear of violating this sexual ethic defies the imagination of whites today, but to the Negro the humiliations and fears involved were

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<sup>56</sup>See Charles Keil, Urban Blues, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 56.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

all too real. Richard Wright's autobiography, Black Boy,<sup>58</sup> of his fictional account in The Long Dream<sup>59</sup> regarding, for example, the problems Negro workers in hotels encountered may help bridge this gap between white imagination and black knowledge, but total understanding is impossible. But, to the black to whom the horrors perpetuated by whites were real, the worth of the black was proven by "the promise that if you look at a white woman, you'll be killed."<sup>60</sup>

Many of the realities of equality and freedom are unattainable for the Negro. He is discriminated against in employment. He is told where to live. He is told where he may go and where he may not go. And, to change all of that requires group action. But the individual male can at least enjoy the symbol of equality. The white female, who, also involved in a search for equality (which also stems from discrimination and the double standard) is readily available.

"There's other kinds of freedom beside some ole white trash women," Crenshaw said. "He might want to see him some shows and eat in some of them big restaurants."

The vet grinned. "Why, of course, but remember, Crenshaw, he's only going to be there a few months. Most of the time he'll be working and so much of his freedom will have to be symbolic. And what will be his or any man's most easily accessible symbol of freedom? Why, a woman, of course."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Richard Wright, Black Boy, (New York: Harper and Row, 1945).

<sup>59</sup>Richard Wright, The Long Dream, (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1958).

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>61</sup>Ralph Ellison, The Invisible Man, (New York: New American Library, 1952), p. 136.



But seeking for symbolic gratification of a value may be one of the best indicators of the acceptance of and support for such a value. One demonstrates one's acceptance of a value by striking at the essence of that value.

And, as blacks support the value of equality, they reject the practice of inequality. This is graphically illustrated in some of the later novels where the desire for a white female stems from a search for symbolic revenge.<sup>62</sup>

It should be mentioned here that the opposite relationship, a white man and a Negro female, does not have the same symbolic freedom or implications for equality for the Negro. Such relationships are not new. The Negro slave was at the mercy of her white master or overseer. And, at least one novel indicated, on Southern plantations, such interactions are even today not totally nonexistent.<sup>63</sup> In the novels, the Negro female typically hates white men. They symbolize her subjugation rather than her

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<sup>62</sup>This motive is more conscious and is readily seen in William Melvin Kelley, dem, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1967). Here the female is also after her own revenge. The white male made allies out of the Negro male and the white female, but they are allies only for symbolic purposes.

<sup>63</sup>In Ernest J. Gaines, Of Love and Dust, (New York: Dial Press, 1967), the following passage illustrates the "normality" of the overseer using the Negro workers about as he desired.

It had started in the field, where he had all the right to call her over into a patch of corn or cotton or cane or the ditch--the one he was closest to--and make her lay down and pull up her dress. Then after he had satisfied his lust, he would get back on the horse like nothing had happened. And she would pull down her dress and go back to the work she was doing before he had called her to him. The other women wouldn't say anything to her, and she wouldn't say anything either--like nothing in the world had happened. p. 62.

freedom, her inequality rather than her equality. White men are to be used for instrumental purposes, to help one get ahead, but only rarely can they become loved ones. Ida's description of white men makes this hatred clear:

Before, I used to watch them wriggle and listen to them grunt, and God, they were so solumn about it, sweating yellow pigs, and so vain, like that sad little piece of meat was making miracles happen, and I guess it was, for them--and I wasn't touched at all. I just wished I could make them come down lower. Oh yes, I found out all about white people, that's what they were like, alone, where only a black girl could see them, and the black girl might as well have been blinded as far as they were concerned. Because they knew they were white, baby, and they ruled the world.<sup>64</sup>

They ruled the world, but in a sense they were important. Under such circumstances, such characters as Ida show little acceptance or little rejection of the existing community values. They are more passive, more apolitical. They accept the community and its values and try to make the most of it. They seem to be much less sensitive to outputs of the regime--with a bitterness that could be politicized and turned to negative feelings for the community. But their very passitivity would make this a difficult task. But at the same time the development of positive attitudes would also be a difficult task as can be seen in Brown Girl, Brown Stone.<sup>65</sup>

The importance of the discrepancy in values can also be noted from the results of interracial sexual relationships. For those relationships always resulted in pain--pain because of the

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<sup>64</sup>James Baldwin, Another Country, (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1962), p. 355.

<sup>65</sup>See Paule Marshall, Brown Girl, Brown Stone, (New York: Avon, 1970) for a superb demonstration of this.

reality of inequality as the practiced value.<sup>66</sup> The two people involved might love one another deeply, but the experiences of the Negro were too foreign for the whites to comprehend. There was always a barrier between the two. And the society would never allow the couple to forget the barrier existed. These barriers had concrete effects. One of the most succinct passages indicating the problems involved is in Night Song:

Between Della and Keel there had been periods of deep passion and of love, but there had also been times when Della withdrew into herself, pondering why she felt no guilt about Keel. How was it she could look at him objectively, as a man, and not as a Negro enhanced by three hundred years of mythology? Their separations had been rather frequent but so had the reconciliations.

The problems had not been Della's alone. Her presence accelerated prejudice, Keel told her. It was bad enough without activating more, so how could he live a life with her?<sup>67</sup>

Similar problems occurred in other novels.

Margrit could never understand why Max disliked any show of affection in public. Even holding hands was forbidden. Stares were hostile and Max wanted them minimized as much as possible.<sup>68</sup> Even the inability to introduce one's loved one to parents only

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<sup>66</sup>The one possible exception of this was William Gardner Smith's Last of the Conquerors, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Company, 1948), where the female involved was German. Even here, there is a clear understanding that return to the United States would be impossible because then the racial differences would become important.

<sup>67</sup>John A. Williams, Night Song, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1961), pp. 66-67.

<sup>68</sup>John A. Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967).

served to drive another wedge between the couple and to emphasize the difference of race.<sup>69</sup>

In four of the novels in which serious character treatment is given to those involved in an interracial, sexual relationship, there is an attempt on behalf of the male to go beyond the merely symbolic aspects of freedom and equality of that sexual relationship. Interestingly, in every instance in which this was the case, the attempts to go beyond the symbolic aspects of equality were closely related to an attempt to find a separate identity rooted in pride in being black. That at least suggests that in those instances, the novels suggest that equality does not necessitate the loss of group identity and, in fact, may even require that a sense of group identity exist. In other novels, however, that position was rejected.

In short, while the novels indicate an overwhelming support of the value of equality, and while they reject the perceived American practice of inequality, there is a suggestion of differences over what equality really means and on what basis it can be achieved. Equality will obviously have some part in any advanced ideological positions, but the precise meaning of equality and the implications of equality are neither clear cut from the novels nor is there clear agreement in the novels.

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<sup>69</sup>William Melvin Kelley, A Drop of Patience, (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1965). The relevant passage here is a particularly poignant example of the problem. Ludlow's white girl friend had to tell Ludlow that she had not wanted him to walk her to work because she was going to meet a friend of her parents. Ludlow was so upset that she told him she had told the friend everything anyway, p. 178. Later, she had to tell him that she had lied. Her parents did not know about them. p. 190.

Achievement. The value of equality is closely allied with the value of achievement. Of particular importance for blacks is the fact that in politics, this translates into public policy made primarily for individuals, not for groups. Closely allied with this is the belief in competition, in a two-party system, and a pluralist model of politics. This translates into a belief in capitalism and its encouragement and protection by the political system.

The value of achievement and particularly its corollary of capitalism was totally accepted by the characters of novels written in the forties and fifties. The general theme was that if one works hard enough, he will get somewhere and advance in the world. And if one could just get enough money to get started in a small business, there would be no stopping. Hubert, a middle-aged black male had fully internalized these values. He resented poor Negroes although he shared their dream of hitting a number. But for him it was to be a grubstake, not something to be thrown away for immediate amusement and luxuries. His dream was to own a store.

Farther on, Hubert saw a barroom where the Negroes seemed to be standing three deep. The jukebox, as usual, was turned up full volume, and they were laughing and shouting over its noise. Such scenes always disgusted Hubert. All these years of freedom had not taught them the most important thing about being free: to hold on to your money and make it work for you. Wasn't that the way the big white man stayed on top? Did you ever catch him spending a dime unless he expected to make two more?<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Mayfield, The Hit, op. cit., p. 16.

But, in the novels of the sixties, the value of achievement and even more the corollaries of competition and capitalism began to be questioned and, at times, rejected. The viewpoint expressed was not just that the black was excluded from achievement by and large, but that achievement was at the basis of exploitation and that the regime had really internalized exploitation, particularly in its total support of the capitalist system and its direct aid to those who most benefited from capitalism. But the relationship of achievement and exploitation was never thoroughly examined. At times, the characters would reject achievement while at other times they would reject only those values which seemed to follow achievement in the United States. Nowhere, for example, does one find a statement as revolutionary as one hears from the Black Panthers.<sup>71</sup>

This might be most readily explained by looking at the strengths of the Negro family and its importance as a socializing force.<sup>72</sup> Williams explores this subject most thoroughly in Sissie<sup>73</sup> where he notes the terrible psychic costs of being raised

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<sup>71</sup>See, for more information on the statements of the Black Panthers: Reginald Major, A Panther is a Black Cat, (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1971) or Philip S. Foner (ed.), The Black Panthers Speak, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1970).

<sup>72</sup>Note here that we specifically reject the idea of the Negro family as pathological as Daniel Patrick Moynihan stated in his controversial report "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," reprinted in Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey (eds.), The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy, (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967).

<sup>73</sup>John A. Williams, Sissie, (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1969).

in a family dominated by a strong female who is forced to be both the man and the woman, father and mother of the family, precisely because the man is unable to achieve in a racist society. But, he also notes that, perhaps because his mother was such a strong figure, such a living model of achievement against such unbearable odds, he and his sister were able to endure the privations of ghetto life--hunger, rats, cold, tattered clothing, physical and mental brutality. They were able to become relatively successful. Certainly not all were able to "beat the odds," but without undue emphasis on achievement, none would be able to. And so, the need to achieve becomes an accepted value--even if it seems to have little relevance to one's own life--even when it is virtually impossible to do so. And when the male does not succeed, does not achieve, he leaves the family, unable to face the meaning of his failure--even though he is fully aware of the odds that were against him.

In the same way, the later novels invariably show that much of the learning that takes place in the streets is geared toward achievement--in any way possible.<sup>74</sup> But in these examples, the ambiguities of achievement are made clear. For if the successful pimp has achieved, it is at the cost of a neighbor's sister. And this realization in the novels leads mainly to questions about achievement as a value and to questions about capitalism as a system.

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<sup>74</sup>This socializing role of the street is confirmed in Elliot Liebow, Tally's Corner, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967).

Perhaps even more devastatingly, the very fact of achieving is often seen in the later novels as the result of a sell-out. To achieve as a black but in a white world is seen as impossible unless one does it on someone else's terms. For example, in one novel, the hero, Max, was leaving Paris for home. His friends ask him what he is going to do.

"I don't know. I've got an offer from Pace." As soon as he said it, he wished he hadn't. The eyes swung toward him again and fell away. Max could almost hear their thoughts: Here they were, by the dozens, wondering where their next meal was coming from, not all of them, but a great many of them, and there he was, Max, just like them, spade, boot, nigger, with a job waiting at Pace--everybody knew Pace--and another book almost ready and advances were going out of sight these days. Whose ass was he kissing, this Max Reddick? Had to be kissing somebody's ass. Otherwise a spade just don't make it in the states. Hard to believe old Max is a Tom.<sup>75</sup>

Whereas achievement then was unqualifiedly accepted in the earlier novels, in the later novels, achievement was viewed like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, accepting the value of achievement seemed to be one of the only ways one could really get anywhere. On the other hand, achievement was seen as occurring as a result of either an exploitation of others or of a sell-out to white society. In this sense, achievement on a personal level was undesirable and led to a questioning of the whole economic system. Overall the novels indicate a great deal about achievement as a value.

Violence. Another value which has been subject to great ambiguities in American history is a belief in the triumph of

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<sup>75</sup>Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, op. cit., p. 233.



right over wrong through the use of appropriate legal channels. Although there is much evidence that points to the fact that the reality has been extensive violence in the United States,<sup>76</sup> the value of non-violence has been a prevalent part of the American myth and of the value structure.<sup>77</sup>

In many ways, incidents in the novels reflect this ambiguity which violence has in the American culture. With perhaps one exception,<sup>78</sup> the pursuit of goals via appropriate and non-violent channels seemed to prevail. And yet, violence was an integral part of most of the novels. Frequently, these were expressions of an acceptance of defensive violence. For example, in South Town,<sup>79</sup> Mr. Williams had been arrested (primarily because in the eyes of some Southern Whites he was "uppity"). And the whites were planning to terrorize the Williams' household. But the blacks of the area were also prepared to organize and to fight back. One by one friends and neighbors of the Williams

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<sup>76</sup>A whole library is now developing on this point. One of the best places to start is Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, Violence in America Historical and Comparative Perspectives, (New York: A Signet Book, 1969). Also see Richard Rubenstein, Rebels in Eden, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970) for a short, but reasonably basic bibliography.

<sup>77</sup>See, e.g. Monica D. Blumenthal, Robert L. Kahn, Frank M. Andrews, Kendra B. Head, Justifying Violence: Attitudes of American Men, (Ann Arbor, Institute for Social Research, 1972), esp. chap. 2.

<sup>78</sup>Kelley, dem, op. cit.

<sup>79</sup>Lorenz Graham, South Town, (New York: Signet Key Book, 1958), chap. 12.

slipped into their house with their guns to protect the Williams family against the night riders. They would fight back.

Almost as frequent as defensive violence was violence from rage--the rage of one who had to constantly suffer in very personal terms from a discriminatory system. It was in such a rage that Ralph killed a white soldier during World War II.<sup>80</sup> It was in such a rage that Salina:

Suddenly ached for violence. . . . It came on her like a thirst. In a wild beating at the pit of her body. To grab the cane and rush into some store on Fulton Street and avenge that wrong by bringing it smashing across the white face behind the counter.<sup>81</sup>

It was in such a rage that Lutie killed<sup>82</sup> and such a rage that brought about a full scale race riot between black and white soldiers stationed in Australia.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, this kind of violence is often barely below the surface throughout many of the novels.

And aggressive violence was condoned in several of the books, particularly those written in the sixties, condoned because of a belief that the only way to fight fire is with fire.

Max had looked at the white defendants, at their relatives in both the jury box and audience, and had come to know, really know that to be oppressed was not enough to win ultimately; that to be in the right was not enough, you had to win the way they won--with blood. Words, petitions, laws, ideas, were not going to be enough. The common denominator was blood, white blood as much as black blood.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Williams, Sissie, op. cit., pp. 34-35.

<sup>81</sup>Marshall, op. cit., p. 216.

<sup>82</sup>Petry, op. cit., chap. 18.

<sup>83</sup>Killens, op. cit., pt. 4, chaps. 4, 5, 6.

<sup>84</sup>Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, op. cit., p. 208.

This bitterness, this undercurrent of violence, overlaid with beliefs in non-violence and law-abidingness is ironically in accord with the acceptance of the mainstream of values in American culture and in the American community. In this respect black values are similar to those of whites. There is irony in the fact that agreement on a social value which binds a community contains the potential for the destruction of that community.

The acceptance of the many manifestations of the value, violence, particularly when related to the light of the underlying rage expressed in so many novels, suggests support for methods which could be used for achieving goals upon which the larger community might not agree. Any ideology would have to deal with this in some detail.

Other values. Other values were occasionally alluded to in the novels. For example, there seemed to be a suspicion of power. Since power has so long been used against blacks this suspicion was probably grounded in experience rather than any general socializing process in which community members learn community values.

In the same way, freedom of speech and religion and other Bill of Rights freedoms seemed to be accepted insofar as they really exist for the black. They were seen as ideal goals, but little attention was paid to them--except to disparage the fact that the reality really did not exist for the Negro. But, from the data of the novels, it was impossible to analyze the nature and importance of these values.

## Summary

The political and social context in which blacks, as evidenced by the novels, perceived themselves can be characterized as ambiguous. On the one hand there is a strong attraction to the political community. On the other there is an equally strong rejection of it. The novels suggest that the changes necessary to solidify the positive feelings are at hand. But the demand of whites for gradualism and prudence suggest that those changes will not be forthcoming and that perhaps America is not really worth it anyway.

At the heart of this ambiguity is the perception of whites and of discrimination. At the very least the novels suggest that the tension surrounding color needs to be resolved by some coherent ideology which can explain the effect of discrimination on blacks and that can suggest an appropriate way to deal with it. Although none of the novels resolved this problem, the later ones expressed the tension inherent in not solving it and suggested some tentative approaches to at least examine the problem.

The same ambiguity ran through the novel's considerations of some of the dominant values of American society. The novels indicated that blacks share the consensus concerning the desirability of equality or achievement. Yet, they also suggest that there is some need to better define and restate these values so that they become behavioral norms as well as ideological norms.

To examine ideology, we began first to look at the context in which that ideology exists. That context as expressed in this

chapter suggests that one may not be able to speak of a black ideology as developed in the novels. Rather, there are elements with potential that will need to be resolved in any coherent ideological statement. As we look at that context more closely in the next chapter in examining attitudes towards politics, that quest for ideology will be more clearly outlined.

### CHAPTER III

#### POLITICS, POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND GROUPS

Attitudes towards politics and those things directly political are a central part of any existing ideology or of the attempt to develop any ideology. Politics itself has to do with the identification of goals as well as the appropriate means to achieve those goals. But, when one defines politics in that manner, there is an implicit present or future orientation. What is prior to the development of an ideology and of politics fitting into that ideology is an explication of the past and thus of the present as a fulfillment of that past. It is the latter with which we are concerned in this chapter; the past and its resultant present as it relates to politics, political structures, and political groups.

As in the previous chapter, we are limited to those things which occur or are talked about in the novels. Indeed, what occurs and what emphasis are put on those events and what does not occur are important bits of information in themselves. We will begin then with some general comments on politics as it appears and as it does not appear in the novels and focus on the personal aspects of politics, political figures. We will then

examine major institutions concentrating particularly on the police and the military, the most pervasive institutions in the novels. The final section will look at groups that are particularly relevant to politics from the black point of view as expressed in the novels.

### An Overview of Politics in the Novels

Irving Howe at one point defined a political novel as "any novel I wished to treat as if it were a political novel."<sup>1</sup> With such a definition almost all of the novels used in this study might be termed political novels; they are, after all, being used as sources of data relevant to a study of politics. Using a more restrictive definition, also by Howe, "a novel in which political ideas play a dominant role or in which the political milieu is the dominant setting,"<sup>2</sup> about twenty percent of the novels could still be considered political novels. This is a relatively large percentage, probably much larger than it would be considering all novels written over the same time period. And, almost all of the political novels in our study were written after 1960.

This suggests two things. First, politics has been a relatively important subject to black authors. And second, that that importance has increased over the time period covered by this study roughly in the same manner as politics has become

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<sup>1</sup>Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel, (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1957), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

an increasingly open and important subject for blacks in this country.<sup>3</sup>

In talking about the American political novel, Howe notes that politics has not been used as a theme for novels in the United States as frequently as in Europe.<sup>4</sup> But in discussing ideology, the use of politics as a theme for black novelists in America becomes more clear.

The growth of ideology, I would suggest, is closely related to the accumulation of social pressures. It is when men no longer feel that they have adequate choices in their styles of life, when they conclude that there are no longer possibilities for honorable maneuver and compromise, when they decide that the time has come for "ultimate" social loyalties and political decisions--it is then that ideology begins to flourish. . . . It is the passion of men with their backs against the wall.<sup>5</sup>

However, none of the works considered here are as complete ideological statements as the works of Stendhal or Dostoevsky or Malraux or Silone.<sup>6</sup> As political statements, the black novels were in the defining process, articulating as it were the extent to which their backs were against the wall and beginning, but just beginning, to feel for the ways to deal with that political reality.

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<sup>3</sup>Assuming that one's degree of political involvement is some measure of openness and importance.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>6</sup>Probably the closest to such works would be Richard Wright, particularly The Outsider, (New York: Harper and Row, 1953).



## Politics as a Process

For most Americans, politics is not a major interest.<sup>7</sup> And so it is for most of the characters in the novels. Even when they are engaged in overtly political activities, few comments are made about politics as a general process. Three major attitudes, however, seem to prevail throughout the novels. The first attitude (one which never seemed to work for the character) was one of isolation, a desire not to have to be a part of any group effort including politics.

"You don't care if the whole world burn down, do you? Do you, Marcus?"

"Long as I ain't caught in the flame, Jim," he said.<sup>8</sup>

" . . . All I want is to be able to make a good life in peace. I don't want to bow before anyone, I don't want anyone to bow to me. I want to be left alone, I don't want to be pigeonholed. . . . "<sup>9</sup>

The second theme concerned a passion for politics tempered by a deep-seated cynicism.

It has not been over with Wallace, it had just begun, that pulsating, murderous desire to be near or in politics, for that was where power was. Politics was some American game; it had its pauses, but never an end. It was the Ultimate Game, while you lived. It had sent people back to where they came from; it killed others and drove still others to the psychiatric wards or alcoholic clinics. It was where one learned the sorry truth about his countrymen.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>See, e.g. Lester W. Milbrath, Political Participation, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965), p. 21.

<sup>8</sup>Ernest J. Gaines, Of Love & Dust, (New York: Dial Press, Inc., 1967), p. 225.

<sup>9</sup>Robert Boles, The People One Knows, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1964), p. 102.

<sup>10</sup>John A. Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 166.

This view of politics comes in the novels from a focus on the normal political channels and institutions in the United States.

The third major theme comes from a focus on politics as actions of the masses directed toward political change and expresses a pride in such actions but a pride tempered by the fact that politics in that sense is necessary at all. After what might be considered a small scale demonstration over segregated Post Exchanges at a military base, Solly, a black soldier, exploded at his white Lieutenant:

"And if you're sitting here trying to take credit for opening up that Post Exchange, forget it! Everybody knows that Permanent K.P. Private Jerry Abraham Lincoln Scott is the responsible party and nobody else. . . ." <sup>11</sup>

The overall thread in all three of these views is that politics as it is viewed as the institutionalized process of government is basically a white man's game and as such is either of little relevance to the black or is part of the reason his back is against the wall. There is then a tendency to turn one's back on politics and things political or to join with those in the same situation and concentrate on politics as a process by which groups can force political change through extra-legal processes.

#### Political Figures

The most frequent political figures discussed in the novels were white liberals. Another group that was important in several novels were Communists. Politicians per se were rarely commented on except in the overtly political novels.

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<sup>11</sup>John Oliver Killens, And Then We Heard the Thunder, (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1964), p. 229.

White liberals. Over half of the novels discussed the white liberal. The best word to describe Negro feeling in the novels toward such persons is distrust. They talk big, but in the pinch, at the point where action needed to replace words, they were seen either to be cowards or to be ineffective. The first case was a minor theme of And Then We Heard the Thunder.<sup>12</sup> Samuels regarded himself as a liberal. When one of his men, Solly, was beat up in the presence of a Colonel MP so badly that he had to be hospitalized, Samuels was determined to find the guilty parties and see that they received the proper discipline. Samuels backed down, though, when he discovered that the Colonel in question was anti-Semitic as well as anti-Negro.

The case of ineffectiveness was also well-demonstrated in The Man Who Cried I Am.<sup>13</sup> Max, a very talented journalist and writer desperately needed a job, but try as his white friends did, they could not come up with a single offer during the time it was most needed.

There was, however, much ambivalence toward the white liberal. In Killen's book Samuels fails to live up to his liberalism throughout the book. Yet, at the point in which it counts most, which side of a race riot will he take, he opts to support his troops, the Negroes. Further, in Williams' novel, it was finally a liberal editor which gave him his break and liberal

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, op. cit.

poet who ruined his own career to let the public know that a fellowship had been granted and then taken back from the Negro, Harry Ames.

That ambivalence is strengthened by what is often seen as thoughtless behavior by the white liberal rather than purposely cruel behavior. Perhaps for this reason, in at least two of the novels, the "reconstructed" Southerner is shown to be a better bet than the Northern liberal. The Southerner is shown to have had to consciously face his prejudices and deal with them. The Northerner is shown, at least in the beginning, to be oblivious to the extent of his own prejudice.

That obliviousness to prejudice usually resulted in saying things that seemed unimportant but which were nevertheless very grating. An example of such a small slip, but a meaningful one to Saul, a black soldier, occurred in a conversation with a white nurse telling him about a little girl patient. Saul tells a psychiatrist of the incident:

"She said, There's a little girl in room, whatever the room number was. She's colored, but she's cute."

"Why did you quarrel?"

"I didn't think the 'but' was necessary. I got upset."<sup>14</sup>

The net result of this is that the liberal is suspect. He has disappointed blacks so much that his word is insufficient evidence of his sentiments. Nevertheless, white liberals do occasionally come through in the novels and do occasionally learn

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<sup>14</sup>Boles, op. cit., p. 97.

the extent of their prejudices. Distrust remains, but there is not a complete rejection of the white liberal in the novels.

Communists. In four of the novels examined, Communists were importance characters, but unlike the white liberals they seemed to have few redeeming qualities. In some respects the Communist party has played an important role for blacks in this country,<sup>15</sup> but in the novels it is viewed as just another group of politicians who are particularly adept at using persons for their own purposes while not really caring about people at all. For example, Cross, the black protagonist in The Outsider, had the following thoughts after a conversation with Hilton, a Communist Party leader:

How astute the man was! The average white American could never drag such simple truths past his lips, and here was a man confessing it with fluent passion. Did the average white American suspect that men like Hilton existed, men who could easily rise above the racial hatred of the mob and cynically make use of the defensive attitudes instilled in Negroes as weapons in their own bitter struggle for power.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, Lonnie<sup>17</sup> and the invisible man<sup>18</sup> found that if you in any way interfered with that struggle for power or if you disagreed with the party, communists would turn their backs on you as ruthlessly as anyone. Partly for that reason, Cross found it as

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<sup>15</sup>See Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1967).

<sup>16</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 247.

<sup>17</sup>Julien Mayfield, The Grand Parade, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1961).

<sup>18</sup>Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, (New York: New American Library, 1952).

easy to kill the communist who on the surface proffered friendship as the fascist who proffered only hate.<sup>19</sup> One admittedly runs risks with the white liberal; with the communist one knew where he stood and the novels rejected that as an appropriate place to be.

Politicians. Poll data suggests that blacks are less trustful of politicians than whites and that blacks feel that politicians are not really interested in their problems. For example, Sears found that 45 percent of the blacks in his sample but only 17 percent of the whites felt that they could not trust their political representatives.<sup>20</sup> In a 1964 NORC survey, a majority (56 percent) of blacks felt that "most people in government are not really interested in the problems of the average man."<sup>21</sup>

The novels add to this data a sense of the intensity of these feelings, a hope that these feelings are wrong and will be disproven but a certitude that they are reality and that eventually all politicians will live up to the expectations of untrustworthiness. They express the attitude that blacks will have to take the initiative, and that the blacks who will do so will not

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<sup>19</sup>Richard Wright, The Outsider, (New York: Harper and Row, 1953).

<sup>20</sup>David O. Sears, "Black Attitudes Toward the Political System in the Aftermath of the Watts Insurrections," Midwest Journal of Political Science XIII (Nov., 1969), p. 321.

<sup>21</sup>Hazel Erskine, "The Polls: Negro Philosophies of Life," Public Opinion Quarterly XXXIII (Spring, 1969), p. 151.

be those who have been intimately involved in the white political structure.

One example of the manipulative orientation of political figures and of their concern for expedience rather than the needs of the people occurred in Taffy where the party organization asked Martha to withdraw her candidacy because the opposition had not run a Negro after all. And they certainly did not want to run a Negro unless they absolutely had to.<sup>22</sup>

An even more bitter example occurred in The Grand Parade when the entrenched political organization used its influence to bring about a racial crisis because it needed an issue to maintain its power.<sup>23</sup>

Even black politicians, although mentioned only rarely, were presented as persons much more concerned with talk than with action. Civil Rights leaders in Chicago were willing to decry the events at Trumbull Park but they were unwilling to do anything concrete that might actually help correct the situation.<sup>24</sup>

The novels not only suggested that, by and large, politicians would not be in the forefront pushing for change, but also that even as defenders of the status quo they were more interested in their own power than that of the people they represented. To

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<sup>22</sup>Phillip B. Kaye, Taffy, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1950).

<sup>23</sup>Julien Mayfield, The Grand Parade, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1961).

<sup>24</sup>Frank London Brown, Trumbull Park, (Chicago: Regnery Co., 1959), p. 162 for example.

defend that power they would be willing to manipulate and to use people.

Summary. Although political ideas and subjects have increasingly been a part of novels, the characters in the novels were with a few exceptions not primarily political persons. Nevertheless, three general themes concerning politics seemed to emerge and those themes were all congruent with the images that political figures had in the novels.

The theme of isolation was a rejection of politics. The second theme of cynicism seemed to stem from a belief that the existing political institutions, or at least those who occupied roles in those institutions, failed to serve the needs of people, particularly black people. The third theme suggested that politics as a process which groups can involve themselves in to help themselves hold some possibilities, particularly if it excludes regular politicians.

A profound distrust of political figures and a cynicism concerning them and their motives was closely related to these themes. Whether of politicians interested in personal power, or of Communists interested in power for the party, the view of such figures was that they would use and manipulate others and take virtually any actions to achieve those personal ends. White liberals were suspect because their pretensions were not based on the reality of personal prejudice. They just could not be depended upon when it was time for action and not just words.



They might come through, but a might was not enough to stake your life on if there were other alternatives.

### Major Institutions

Opinions about major political or governmental institutions are an important part of the total evaluation individuals or groups have about the society they live in and are likewise an important part of ideologies they might construct to justify maintaining or changing that society. There are, however, serious methodological problems in determining those opinions and in drawing implications from them.

Certainly one of the difficulties in examining politics in general and governmental structures in particular stems from the very nature of a federal system. This is, of course, in part the same problem of the previous chapter; what exactly does Picayune have to do with Washington, D. C. On the whole, one could note that the general public does not understand the intricacies of the federal system. On the other hand, they do distinguish a city council from the United States Congress and indeed some individuals are oriented primarily to local events, some to national events, and some to international events.<sup>25</sup>

Besides the problems concerning level of government, a series of problems concerning time and cause and effect may be crucial. For example, social scientists began to reexamine their

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<sup>25</sup>See, e.g. M. Kent Jennings and L. Harmon Zeigler, "The Salience of State Politics Among Attentive Publics," in Edward C. Dryer, Walter A. Rosenbaum, Political Opinion & Behavior, 2d ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1970), pp. 257-285.

previous beliefs in the desirability of a strong presidency in the light of the war in Indo-China. But to what extent it was the war or their general dislike and distrust of the incumbent president, Lyndon Johnson, that led them to this reexamination is not really known, at least at the time.<sup>26</sup> But for the analyst, it is important to know whether it is the role or the role occupant who is being questioned and to know whether that questioning is based on a series of events and is thus representative of a trend or whether it is a response to one specific event and thus part of a still fluid situation.

In part, the difficulty we are discussing is a result of the fact that few things are singularly caused. And novels, as a data base, do not lend themselves well to methods allowing a multi-causal analysis of great rigor.<sup>27</sup> If Chicago blacks feel differently about the police than do Minneapolis blacks,<sup>28</sup> novels are not the best place to explore this.

But, the purpose of this paper is not an understanding of black political behavior but of the elements of ideology that exist within the minds of black Americans. And black Americans, like white Americans, do not sort their perceptions into neat

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<sup>26</sup>See Eric Goldman, The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969) for one view on this.

<sup>27</sup>See, e.g. H. M. Blalock, Jr., (ed.), Causal Models in the Social Sciences, (Chicago: Aldine, 1971) for a good collection of the literature on causal modeling.

<sup>28</sup>See Howard Schuman and Barry Grienberg, "The Impact of City on Racial Attitudes," American Journal of Sociology 76 (Sept., 1970), pp. 213-261.

analytic categories made to order for the social scientist. So, what must be done here is to examine what those perceptions are, realizing that in people's minds, what local police do may affect how they feel about the political structure of America as a whole.

With that in mind, this section will begin on the national level with an examination of perceptions in the novels of the Presidency and Congress. Then we will consider the two most dominant institutions in the novels, the police and the military. We will then look at law and the courts and finally make some brief comments on service agencies.

The Presidency and Congress. The President is a dominant figure in the United States because of his constitutional position as both symbolic and political leader of the nation. Today his virtually unlimited access to the mass media makes the President a familiar figure to almost all Americans. He is one of the first political figures a child learns about and begins to feel about and develop attitudes toward.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, children seem to develop very positive attitudes toward the President.

The image of the President to black children is somewhat more subtle. In his study of socialization of black children, Greenberg noted that:

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<sup>29</sup>Perhaps postmen, school teachers, farm agents, and the like have as much contact with the populace, but as David Easton and Jack Dennis show, Children in the Political System, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), these figures are not recognized as representatives of the political system to as great a degree as policemen and presidents.

Although black children hold very high cognitive and affective images of the President in the third grade, they come to see him as a kind of benign grandfather figure by the upper grades. While they like him and see him as friendly, they do not see him as particularly powerful, effective, or helpful. He appears to the children, apparently, as a rather warm figure who stands apart from sordid political affairs and is seen, at best, as a kind of warm irrelevancy to the governmental process.<sup>30</sup>

This characterization of the images of children seems to be very close to that of adults in the novels of the forties, fifties, and early sixties. The President was depicted as caring about black people and as doing what he could for them. If things were not all right, it was because he had no ability to change it (or didn't know about it), not that his heart was in the wrong place.

For example, in discussing the beginning of the war (World War II), its causes and whether one should fight Silla said:

"I ain saying that we don't catch H in this country what with the discrimination and thing and hard we does have to scrub the Jew floor to make a penny, but my Christ, at least you can make headway. Look how Roosevelt come and give relief and jobs."<sup>31</sup>

Another comment about Roosevelt was "Your commander-in-chief is the best damn president we've had since Abraham Lincoln."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Edward S. Greenberg, "The Political Socialization of Black Children," in Edward S. Greenberg (ed.), Political Socialization, (New York: Atherton Press, 1970), p. 183.

<sup>31</sup>Paule Marshall, Brown Girl, Brown Stone, (New York: Avon Books, 1959), p. 60.

<sup>32</sup>Killens, op. cit., p. 17.

The novels of the late sixties are somewhat less favorable toward the President. He is a less revered figure, more human, more a reflection of the American people. And there is more cynicism in the novels of the late sixties directed at Presidents as at other politicians. Max was reflecting on the Presidency and thought:

For example, Stevenson's great losses to Ike brought forth the terrifying realization that unless the people could have a rich President who had the leisure to study their problems and learn the right phrases and how to utter them (the European heritage--a good King Wenceslaus) like Roosevelt or Kennedy, they'd make do with someone pretty much like themselves. A five-star hero, perhaps, . . . A man in their image.<sup>33</sup>

In part, the emphasis on color in these later novels precludes any more favorable comment--for if the President is white and if black and white is what truly divides American people (regardless of whether it should or not), then the President cannot be entirely trusted any more than any other white man. But, there is even more a feeling that Presidents, none of them, really ever cared about black people--and this was enough to damn them in the final analysis.

They had had several chances. . . . Truman's integrated army; that was to be a start. May 17, 1954; that was to be a start. The March last August; that was to be a start. Each new President, his mouth filled with words, promised a new start. There were always starts, the big ones and the little ones, but there were never any finishes. Enzkwu's papers proved they were faking it all the time; all the goddamn time.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, op. cit., pp. 166-167.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 385-386.

Promises given, but never fulfilled can be worse than no promise at all.

And those promises were given. In The Man Who Cried I Am, Max had been appointed to the White House Staff as a speech writer and civil rights consultant. His disillusionment came quickly over the Administration's civil rights posture. ". . . The Administration, like the ones before it, did not know and could not understand what it was black Americans wanted. Washington's determined look, suggesting an honorable concern, was, at the very least, misleading."<sup>35</sup> Later he discovered that "the Administration deliberately and successfully subverted the lawful attempt of a citizen to enroll in an educational institution of his choice."<sup>36</sup> Max's disgust over this (the disgust was compounded by the fact that the men he worked with had at first told him there was nothing to the rumors) lead to his resignation. As he left, he expressed the despair for ever believing in those promises and for knowing that promises were all there was.

The White House. That is where we are getting the best; there's where the Golden Age begins. Where did it go wrong? We are like blind men feeling different parts of the elephant and taking that part for the whole. No, not we; they. I know that elephant; its tusks, trunk, ears, legs. Elephants? It's the asses that are in, the donkeys. And I believed. I wanted to believe. I had to believe, and how.....?"<sup>37</sup>

While the Presidency was at least commented upon in several of the novels, the most interesting thing about Congress and Congressmen is that they were virtually unmentioned, even in the overtly political novels. For example, in And Then We Heard the

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 307.    <sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 311.    <sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 312-3.

Thunder, Solly helped write a letter detailing racist treatment in the Army and sent it to all the Negro newspapers, to the President, to Eleanor Roosevelt, and to Miss Bethune and the Reverend Johnson Digby, Jr. Digby then held a press conference and went to the War Department demanding an investigation. Congress was not brought in at all.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, while the novels indicate a change in attitudes toward the Presidency with the office no longer being one positively supported, there is really no basis to make any judgement about Congress except to say that as an institution, it does not have much salience in the novels.

The police. As the most visible agent of the law enforcement system, police play a particularly important role in our political system. The policeman is a very ubiquitous and a very visible representative of that political system. At the same time, the policeman is also an ambiguous figure in the minds of many Americans--an enemy when he is operating a speed trap, a friend when he is pursuing a criminal.

Because of his position, the policeman is one of the first political authorities with which children come in contact.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Killen, op. cit., pp. 144, 178-9. Possibly Reverend Digby was someone like Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., who was a Congressman. Even if so, it was not in his role as Congressman that the letter was sent.

<sup>39</sup>David Easton and Jack Dennis, Children in the Political System, Origins of Political Legitimacy, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), pt. 3.

And, although structurally police are agents of local government, they are closely related to national authorities and structure. For example, it may be local police that invade a Panther headquarters, but it was J. Edgar Hoover as head of the FBI and a representative of the national government who called the Panthers America's most dangerous criminals and it is/was the FBI which works/worked closely with local police to catch the Panthers at some wrongdoing.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, police may well be viewed as a part of government without distinguishing between levels of government.

Indeed, police were prominent figures in the novels and they were seen as representative of more than individual local governments but of the political system as a whole. And it would be an understatement to say that the novels represent policemen in an unfavorable light.

In general, police were perceived as racist, as brutal and as corrupt. They were perceived much like an army of occupation organized to protect white but not black interests. They were viewed as ignoring criminal acts when the victim was black. More than one novel specifically mentioned, for example, that a murdered black was, to the police, "just another dead nigger."

Perhaps some examples can clarify the sense in which the novels reflect a feeling that the police are agents of a system

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<sup>40</sup>Evidence of this was directly evident in Seattle. See "Seattle Mayor Says He Refused to Raid Panthers," New York Times, February 9, 1970.



that is set against blacks. Killens is most explicit about this in And Then We Heard the Thunder. Solly had been picked up by the local police in the town near his military base. He had done nothing but had no pass--a military but not a civilian violation. On the way to the police station:

He was still thinking about New York City and the fact that They [the police] had never caught up with him in his city and he had assumed They had given up the chase a long time ago. He had gone through high school, finished college, got a job, gone to law school, gone into the Army with great morale and tremendous expectations.<sup>41</sup>

In much the same manner Max noted while visiting a jail to interview an inmate:

He felt a stab of fear, just as he did whenever he saw a policeman and the cop put that extra something into his casual stare. Perhaps it was that the look carried a threat, a menace. Black boy, I could have you whenever I wanted to, it said, that look. It was not as though Max had not been inside jails and precinct houses before. Maybe it wasn't even the fear of jails and cops as such, but the knowledge that under the existing system they were his natural enemies.<sup>42</sup>

In short, there is something about the police system in the United States that makes it the enemy of black people.

And it is doubly the enemy because it even fails to enforce the law in black areas. Marcus had gotten into a fight at a bar. It began as a fist fight but when the other black drew his knife, Marcus drew his, too, plunged it into the other's belly. The police then arrived:

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<sup>41</sup>John Oliver Killens, And Then We Heard the Thunder, (New York: Pocket Books, 1963), p. 131.

<sup>42</sup>John A. Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 54.

"They was probably there all the time," he said, "But they just wanted to see one nigger kill another one. What they care."<sup>43</sup>

A similar example of the police's reticence to protect blacks can be found in Trumbull Park.<sup>44</sup> A few Negro families moved into a public housing project which had been all white. To protect them from possible retaliation by white residents of the project and of the surrounding community, the police stationed a detail in the project. But the police were unable to establish order, because their sympathies were primarily with the white residents. So, instead of stopping the barrage of bricks and firecrackers which were thrown at the Negroes' homes every night (destroying property to say nothing of peace of mind), whenever the barrage started, the policeman in charge would yell "Take cover, men." And so the barrage continued.

Policemen are viewed as personally brutal. They harrass people for no particular reason. They call them names, think of them as animals, use lethal force on any and often on no provocation. In fact, in four of the novels studied, people died at the hands of the police from excessive brutality; in another, a person committed suicide after a false arrest and a severe beating by police.

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<sup>43</sup>Ernest J. Gaines, Of Love and Dust, (New York: Dial Press, 1967), p. 54.

<sup>44</sup>Frank London Brown, Trumbull Park, (Chicago: Regnery Co., 1959). This novel was based on a true incident, the Trumbull Park riots in Chicago in the mid-fifties.

Besides protecting neither Negroes nor Negro property, police are also viewed as corrupt and as willing to accept bribes to wink at gambling, drugs, prostitution. They act as superiors, having little care for what happens to the people in their district. They certainly refuse to protect them in the exercise of their rights.<sup>45</sup> And the novels of all time periods considered reflected these attitudes, although the later novels were even more antagonistic to the police than were earlier novels.<sup>46</sup>

Antagonism towards the police might well then be an essential part of the explication of any ideology by blacks. Indeed, while several of the novelists indicated an understanding that black hostility increased the difficulty of a policeman's job, even for those trying to do a good job, they also pointed out the vulnerability of police,<sup>47</sup> and the potential use of the police as a symbol of all that is wrong with America. Indeed, the Black

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<sup>45</sup>The police do, in fact, have a rather poor history of protecting the rights of minority groups or individuals espousing unpopular causes. For an unfortunately appropriate example, one might examine the history of the All Star Bowling Alley in Orangeburg, South Carolina. See particularly, "Orangeburg Massacre," New Republic (March 9, 1968), pp. 13-14.

<sup>46</sup>Other data strengthens the impression from the novels. See, e.g. Edward S. Greenberg (ed.), Political Socialization, (New York: Atherton Press, 1970), p. 183; Donald H. Bouma, Kids and Cops, A Study in Mutual Hostility, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), p. 49: "How Attitudes Have Changed," Newsweek LXXIII (June 20, 1969), p. 19.

<sup>47</sup>Seven police in Chicago had already been killed between January 1 and September 1, 1970. See John Kifner, "In Chicago's Ghetto Policeman is Target," New York Times, August 9, 1970, pp. 1, 40. More and more one sees articles concerning ambushes of police.

Panthers used this well when they really got their start and their support from the people by facing up to the police.<sup>48</sup> As a rallying point, police, as representatives of the worst in America, provide a focus that the novels suggest most blacks can agree with. Hostile feelings are widely shared and everyday life seems to provide justification for those feelings.

The important role that police might play in an ideology is further suggested by data that suggests that police are unlikely in the near future to change significantly from the view of them suggested by the novels. The psychological attitudes of the police (particularly white police, to a much smaller extent black policemen) are not conducive to creating the personal changes necessary to generate more positive attitudes. As long as the police see themselves as "outsiders in the ghetto, surrounded by an indifferent and hostile population,"<sup>49</sup> it is unlikely that they will generate the respect for the people in their precinct necessary for some positive feelings to be reciprocated. And as long as "they tend to deny the legitimacy of Negro demands for equality, believing that equality has been

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<sup>48</sup>See Bobby Seale, Seize the Time--The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton, (New York: Random House, 1970) or Gene Marine, The Black Panthers, (New York: Signet Books, 1969) or Don A. Schanche, The Panther Paradox--A Liberals Dilemma, (New York: Kinney Service Company, 1971) for similar accounts.

<sup>49</sup>Peter H. Rossi, et al., "Between White and Black, The Faces of American Institutions in the Ghetto," in Supplemental Studies for the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 74.

Also note Boumi's finds, op. cit., that the police feel that blacks are even more hostile to them than they really are.

mainly achieved,"<sup>50</sup> it is unlikely that they will apply more even law enforcement. And thus, it is likely that black hostility to the police will remain.

The military. Attitudes about the military pervade the novels and express a bitterness that goes beyond mere hostility (as in the case of the police) or distrust (as in the case of politicians). These feelings about the military are particularly important in any consideration of ideology. In the novels, service in the military was a concrete experience that made its mark. The characters in the novels do not seem to forget the hypocrisy so evident in fighting halfway around the world for someone else's freedom. Nor do they forget the training they received. And several novels intimate a willingness, if pushed far enough, to use that training. And it is this combination of awareness of injustice plus military skills that makes these attitudes about the military so important.<sup>51</sup>

They are also important because the military as ultimate defender of the nation is concerned with external aggression and internal disorder. The ability of the armed forces to successfully employ its coercive power is directly related to the

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Indeed, novels written after the cut-off date for this thesis explicitly deal with the potentialities of which we are talking. See, e.g. John A. Williams, Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1969) or Dan Brennan, Insurrection! (New York: Belmont Books, 1970).

maintenance of order and discipline with its ranks. And this depends at least in part on what the ranks think about the military.

Attitudes then developed out of military experiences and concerning the military itself are likely to play a vital role in any ideology developed by blacks. For this reason, this section will go beyond the novels in so far as other information can help illuminate the role of the attitudes expressed in the novels might have on the development of ideology.

The armed forces, particularly the segregated forces of World War II, came under severe indictment in the novels, and memories of that period pervade even recent novels. The whole question of a segregated force (and indeed, the earlier question of whether Negroes should even be allowed to serve their country) was discussed as was the tendency for the Negro to be given only service jobs of a menial character. The attitude of the Negro leaders of the period, having the Negro do the best job possible so he can win the recognition he deserves and so things will be better after the war, was generally rejected, probably with the hindsight that such recognition did not follow the war effort. There is, instead, a large reservoir of feeling that many served because they did not know what else to do, or really had no choice. Max expresses this feeling while reflecting on an offer to cover the Korean War for a magazine:

Berg [the editor] had sense enough to know that any Negro really aware of his position in American society in the year 1950, if given a chance to refuse to go to a real fighting

war and still remain economically and socially solvent would refuse. . . . Besides, when the white American called out, "Gook!" it sounded awfully like nigger.<sup>52</sup>

This attitude, expressed often in the later novels, contrasts with results Gary Marx found in his study of Negro attitudes in metropolitan areas outside the South and particularly of Chicago, New York, Atlanta, and Birmingham. Those persons interviewed were asked whether they felt their country was worth fighting for. Considerable unanimity on this question was apparent. Almost 90 percent answered that it was worth fighting for. Marx did note, however, that

Subjects differed markedly in the intensity of their response and many qualified their answers. But it seemed that, for the majority of these respondents, the question of refusing to fight, if called upon, had never entered their minds. . . . Others, however, while agreeing to the question, offered stronger qualifications; they would fight only because they realized that an attack on the United States would be an attack on their homes and their families, or, they would fight but only because they would be forced to.<sup>53</sup>

Actually, Marx provides the key to understanding the correspondence to the attitudes of the novels and his findings--the underlined sentence in the paragraph above. For, in the novels it is frequently the military experience itself that sets forth in unbearably clear terms the racism of the United States and that the question of refusing to fight first enters the character's consciousness and, of course, by then it is too late.

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<sup>52</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 194.

<sup>53</sup>Gary T. Marx, Protest and Prejudice, (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 30, emphasis mine.

Understand me clearly. I am not concerned about this madness called the Democratic War except to get it over with and get out of it. I used to believe in it. But I have had experiences in this democratic Army, and I no longer give a damn. I don't want to get ahead in here, I just want out.<sup>54</sup>

The most overt aspect of a racist military, its segregated structure, was abolished after World War II by Presidential proclamation. The novels criticize more than its earlier segregated forms, however, focusing on the whole character of the "cracker" army. Officers were often Southerners, who were at best paternalistic, certainly prejudiced, and often cruel. The military police were the worst of the lot, men who often went out of their way to harass and physically torment Negro servicemen.<sup>55</sup> And in the army, there was no effective protest against injustice.<sup>56</sup>

Particularly painful was the attempt by the army to export American customs overseas. For example, in Last of the Conquerors,<sup>57</sup> German women who dated American Negro soldiers were harassed, even jailed for short periods. In And Then We Heard the Thunder,<sup>58</sup> bars in Australia were put off limits to the Negro

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<sup>54</sup>Killens, op. cit., pp. 245-246.

<sup>55</sup>And if the number of recent disturbances on army bases involving blacks and the military police is any indication, this is probably still true.

<sup>56</sup>Of particular interest is the army dislike of group action. Until very recently, there was no such thing as group grievances to the army. Only individuals have grievances and those grievances will be dealt with individually, if at all.

<sup>57</sup>William Gardner Smith, Last of the Conquerors, (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Co., 1948).

<sup>58</sup>John Oliver Killens, And Then We Heard the Thunder, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963).



troops. This, so the novel indicated, was contrary to the wishes of the Australian people, but the American authorities felt they knew better than the Australians. The result was a violent and bloody race riot started by white stupidity and continued by the blacks believing they had fought the Japanese for freedom; now, if necessary, they would fight for their own freedom. Better to die for their people than for a cause they knew to be, at least in part, a sham.

The novels considered discuss primarily World War II or the Korean War. Little mention is made of the Vietnam War reflecting the fact that novels published after 1968 are not included in this study. However, if newspaper reports are at all accurate little has really changed in the Army in terms of race relations.<sup>59</sup>

The brothers thought that because they fought and saw their buddies die, it would make a difference. But they came back to SOS--the same old stuff. It's business as usual in America, and business as usual means black people are going to catch hell.<sup>60</sup>

Over 100,000 Negroes have returned to the United States from Vietnam service.<sup>61</sup> Militant groups exist who openly seek the skills the military veteran has in abundance, but which have

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<sup>59</sup>U. S., Congress, Extended Remarks, 91st Congress, 1st Sess., Congressional Record, Sept. 10, 1969, pp. E7333-5, and Aug. 13, 1969, pp. E6929-30; "Armed Forces: Black vs. White," Newsweek (Aug. 25, 1969), pp. 20A-20B; Stanley Williford and William Endicott, "Military Racial Turmoil Boils into Explosive Situation," Mankato Free Press, Sept. 10, 1969, p. 7.

<sup>60</sup>Thomas A. Johnson, "Negro Veteran is Confused and Bitter," New York Times, July 29, 1968, pp. 1, 14.

<sup>61</sup>See James T. Wooten, "Marines Divided by Order Allowing Afro Hair Styles," New York Times, Sept. 15, 1969, p. 52.

little use in civilian society. The return home and to SOS can be a radicalizing experience, and the milieu to enforce that radicalization now exists. All of these things suggest that the bitterness expressed in the novels towards the military will be an important part of a developing black ideology.

Courts and penal systems. There are few comments in the novels concerning courts or penal institutions. However, what comments there are see courts and penal institutions as little better than the police. They are viewed as racist institutions which have little concern over the fate of a black man, woman, or child. The difficulties in obtaining bail are viewed as detrimental to any opportunity to prove innocence. The lack of adequate council is seen as prejudging the outcome. The rules of the court with the presumption of guilt and the assumption that the police always tell the truth (while the black knows that he doesn't), are all seen to make the whole exercise of the court system futile.<sup>62</sup>

And the thought of all the people who had been placed in jail because they were poor and knew no one to help them, of the falsely arrested, the interminable democratic process which frequently placed a man inside with a minimum of effort, but took forever to get him out. This is the place . . . where they locked up black asses and threw away the key.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Actually, these seem to be fairly accurate perceptions as a number of government studies are beginning to make clear. See especially, though, Paul Chevigny, Police Power, (New York: Vintage Books, 1969).

<sup>63</sup>Williams, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

Comments about Southern courts were even more severe for there the courts were viewed as mere pawns of the agrarian aristocracy.

I looked at Marcus across the table. I felt sorry for him, but I didn't want to show it. Because of what he was saying was true, there wasn't a thing I could do about it. Marshall was too big. If it was just Bonbon who wanted to hurt Marcus, you might be able to prevent that. Bonbon was nothing but a poor white man and sometimes you could go to the rich white man for help. But where did you go when it was the rich white man? You couldn't even go to the law, because he was the law. He was police, he was judge, he was jury.<sup>64</sup>

The story is much the same with penal institutions. Southern jails are pictured as brutal and corrupt, but Northern prisons are viewed as places where one learns how to better one's skills at transgressing the law and "beating the system."

Blacks tend to be poor, and the poor tend to particularly suffer from and to be the victims of crime. But when the entire legal system from police to prison is viewed negatively, law itself begins to be questioned for the law is dependent upon the structures which enforce it. Law begins to look like something other than an immutable code of justice. It begins to be a weapon.

The law in this country, just like in most countries, is for the privileged and if you're white in America, you are privileged. We hope for the law to protect us, but it doesn't. I've seen the White House break laws, and I am not going to console myself that if brought before the court for being in a street fight, I can count on a fair dispensation of justice. The other side has guns, Maggie, and power, everything serious killers should have to do their jobs. Without law on my side, I become the law, my guns are the law . . . <sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Gaines, op. cit., pp. 197-198.

<sup>65</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 356.

It is these kinds of attitudes to which the Panthers respond (in an essentially positive manner) by calling for community control of the police.<sup>66</sup> And the demand to release blacks from prisons and jails reflects the suspicion of America's court system and the feelings of hopelessness about the effectiveness of the penal system. In developing a positive plan for political change, these attitudes must certainly be taken into account.

The legal structure is not viewed much more favorably in non-criminal areas. Integration of schools was, for example, mandated by a court; federal marshalls were dispatched to trouble spots in the South, ostensibly to protect those trying to assert their civil rights. In the novels of the fifties some favorable comments were made about these activities. But in the novels of the sixties, feelings had hardened. There is certainly less hostility expressed toward the legal structure in non-criminal areas than in criminal, but there is also a tendency to be rather apathetic toward such "victories" as have been achieved. Expressed are feelings: that these things have been done as a constitutional (moral necessity and why should you feel good about something that is just doing what it is supposed to do; that integration of schools, open accommodations, etc., do not affect my life in any real way; or, all these so-called "victories" are just sops to keep us quiet as we are kept down. In short, there is little

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<sup>66</sup>See the Panther program reprinted in Bobby Seale, Seize the Time, op. cit., pp. 66-69. For some examples of the importance of these alternatives in the black community, see Gene Marine, The Black Panthers, (New York: Signet Books, 1969).

about the legal system that generates really positive attitudes, and much about it that generates severely negative feelings. And all of this leads to a questioning of law itself and at least to suggestions of appropriate ways to bring about change.

Service agencies. Service agencies such as welfare organizations are another link between the citizen and the government. Although there are occasional references to welfare and welfare workers in the urban novels, very little is said directly. From the context, one senses that the welfare system is seen as demeaning. More apparent is a desire to avoid welfare, even if it is necessary for survival.<sup>67</sup>

The situation for the education structure seems to be somewhat different. There seems to be some positive feelings for the educational structure, at least among adults in the novels. Education is viewed as essential to breaking the cycle of poverty. But, the schools are also criticized for failing to either interest or educate the children and for encouraging racism and low goals. "They didn't even teach English very well where Lillian had gone to school, just so some nut wouldn't get the idea he wanted to be a writer."<sup>68</sup>

Teachers themselves received somewhat ambiguous treatment. By and large they were viewed as pretty ineffective--because of

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<sup>67</sup>See Paule Marshall, Brown Girl Brown Stone, (New York: Avon Books, 1959), where this is true throughout.

<sup>68</sup>Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, op. cit., p. 102.

racial prejudice, sheer incompetence, or because of middle-class biases and subservience to whites. Indeed, one of the more humorous moments in the novels was one where a teacher fled in panic after only two weeks at a plantation school. She was afraid that a chance remark by one of the children would be reported to the whites and would reflect on her.<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps the most significant fact about service agencies is that they play such insignificant parts in the novels. While both welfare agencies and schools are mentioned, there are few glimpses into where attitudes towards these linkages with the political system might fit into any ideological scheme.

Summary. Existing governmental institutions fare very poorly in the novels. In general, they are subject to suspicion, hostility, and distrust. They are sources of feelings of bitterness and betrayal. The military and the police are the object of the most antagonistic feelings, both seen as inherently racist and encounters with both institutions tend to enhance feelings of alienation from the American system. These attitudes must play some part in any ideology that blacks might develop.

While less hostile feelings were expressed toward the Presidency and toward service agencies, hostile feelings were greater in the later novels. Further, there were few positive feelings that might ameliorate the general hostility towards

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<sup>69</sup>Gaines, op. cit., p. 27.

institutions. All in all, the existing pattern of institutions seemed to offer little to characters in the novels.

### Groups

In examining attitudes toward politics, we also need to look at groups like church and race-related groups. Within the black community, these two major kinds of groups seem to have political importance. Groups based on church membership are perhaps the most visible and widespread. Groups with goals directly related to race are a second type of considerable importance within the black community. This section will examine views above those two types of groups as represented in the novels.

The church. The most striking thing about church-based groups is that, although historically the church has played an important political role within black communities, fully one-third of all the novels in this study make absolutely no reference or even allusion to the church. In novels written after 1960, this percentage was even greater, one-half. Furthermore, in those novels which did mention the church, the church was viewed either as absurd, as hypocritical, or as an opiate to be avoided.

In only three books did the church play even a minor role in the action of the novel. In one, The Grand Parade,<sup>70</sup> one of the leaders in the civil rights efforts in the city was the

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<sup>70</sup>Julien Mayfield, The Grand Parade, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1961).

popular pastor of the largest church in the Negro community. Both he and the church remained, however, as minor figures. Politicians dominated the scene. In another, Go Tell It On The Mountain,<sup>71</sup> the church (a store-front sect in this instance) is the center of attention as the Grimes' family story unfolds. In Taffy,<sup>72</sup> the church serves primarily as the steppingstone for women who wish to become active in the community. The voluntary organizational pursuits center in the church and recruits for drives are drawn from other members.

Only rarely are the small sects which have attracted so much attention by sociologists even mentioned. Overall, a reading of the novels suggests (but only suggests since references are so few) that for the urbanized Negro, the church does not provide either the personal support nor the communal center which it provided in the rural South. In addition to having little importance for individual blacks, the novels also suggest that the church has also become less appropriate as a means of furthering the political activity as black politics have evolved.<sup>73</sup>

In contrast to the novels, one is struck by the frequency of references to the importance of the church to the black community in autobiographies. Even such references as there were

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<sup>71</sup>James Baldwin, Go Tell It On The Mountain, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1961).

<sup>72</sup>Philip B. Kaye, Taffy, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1950).

<sup>73</sup>e.g. from manipulation to participation, see Harry Holloway, The Politics of the Southern Negro, (New York: Random House, 1969).



occurred generally in accounts of childhood experiences rather than adult years. Yet in looking at the civil rights movement in the South in the early 1960's, the church again seems to be a dominant institution. One of the major protest organizations, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), is church-based with religious leadership. Many leaders in other civil rights activities often come from active lay-leadership in the churches. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee often worked through churches, using churches as meeting places and recruiting grounds. Anti-civil-rights whites recognized the crucial significance of churches and directed violence (primarily bombings and night-rides) at those churches.

The question that arises from this seeming incongruity of the novels with other data has several implications for this study. First, there is the possibility that as a reflector,<sup>74</sup> novels have certain weaknesses and are thus not always reliable data sources. Alternatively, the novels may be representative of the major attitudes that will form the ideology of the future. To the extent that such an ideology would develop, the church will have a smaller political role in the future than in the past. The latter appears to be the more valid conclusion.

Interest groups. The novels deal with traditional "race organizations in much the same way as the church. By and large

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<sup>74</sup>See chap. 1, pp. 25-37.

when such organizations are mentioned, the view expressed about them is that they are ineffective or that they have little concern with the masses of black people.

For example, in one novel, the protagonist, Max, was out of a job and stopped at the office of the NAACP. They suggested he register at the Urban League. Harry's reply to Max's registration sums up the most frequent view of the Urban League in the novels.

"Oh, shit--listen, uh, goddamn it, Max, how long's it going to take for me to educate you to the way things are? Wake up. You're not their kind of Negro. That's an enclave, man, a niche. If they've got a spot, they're going to ship it to some cousin or brother or some guy like them. You sure got a nerve, dragging your raggedy ass into the Urban League. This is 1947, Max, time for you to be alert! Tell you what; if them niggers come up with a job for you, I'll buy you a whole case of whiskey myself, but hell, don't you worry about that; my money's safe."<sup>75</sup>

In the urban novels, the NAACP does not fare much better. In novels set in the South, however, there is a somewhat different view presented. This is best illustrated in a conversation between two white officers in And Then We Heard the Thunder:

"Do you know what the NAACP is, Captain?"

"No, Sir."

"Well, you should. Every officer with colored troops should know about the NAACP. It's worse than the labor unions."<sup>76</sup>

They were accepted even if criticized because they were seen as a challenge to the status quo even when they only served

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<sup>75</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>76</sup>Killens, op. cit., p. 187.

special interests in the black community. For example, note the following comment by Max, the protagonist, in one novel:

America had bred this time, Max mused, this time and people like Durrell [Martin Luther King, Jr.] a Minister Q [Malcolm X]. America bred them as surely as it bred sweet-corn and grapefruit. Durrell's people came from the church-going middle class; Minister Q's from the muddiest backwashes of Negro life. The white man was going to have some choice to make between them, but he would, Max knew, choose to deal with the remembered image, and that would be Durrell.<sup>77</sup>

It was Minister Q to whom Max eventually turned and trusted.

Perhaps the most important insight relative to ideology that emerges from the view the novels present of groups like the NAACP or the Muslims centers around the nature of the leadership of the groups. There are certain skills which go along with working in the traditional channels of expressing demands in any society. The most relevant skills for successfully using the regime norms in the United States are associated with middle-class status. They require one to be able to abstract concrete issues (at which level one has a wider range of areas in which he can compromise), to communicate in the language of the power holders, to deal with a legal and moral structure which insists on muting conflict. The skills of the ghetto black demand an ability to deal with the concrete issues of the here and now, to do so on his terrain, which need not include using the language of the power holders, and to do so in a way that does not avoid conflict when conflict is, after all, what is happening. Delayed gratification is for those who can survive while waiting.

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<sup>77</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 253.

The lower class black does not possess the skills of the NAACP leader but the novels suggest he does admire them. But, on the other hand, there is also a sense in which those skills seem to be symbolic of white America and as somewhat separated from the black man or woman on the street. The net result is a sense of ambiguity towards black interest groups in the novels. Even those groups which are seen as doing little for black people as a whole are seen as discomfoting to white America. And that is something even if it is not enough. But, the synthesis necessary for developing a mass organization is left undeveloped in the novels, pointed toward, but undeveloped.

#### Summary

Three major general orientations to politics are found in the novels and all these orientations are in some sense consistent with the attitudes expressed toward specific political objects.

The first general orientation is a rejection of politics as relevant to one's life and is thus an isolationist mode of beliefs. The second is a cynicism about politics and is then an alienated mode. The third is an activist mode but one which stresses activism outside the normal channels which are seen as inadequate in dealing with the problems blacks face as a group. The third orientation has very obvious implications for the development of an ideology. Any ideology developed, however, must somehow present itself in a manner that can attract those holding one of the first two orientations.

Specifically, attitudes toward political objects can be characterized as distrustful, hostile and bitter. Political figures are distrusted, including white liberals and that distrust is greatest in the later novels. That distrust is not completely hostile though as are the attitudes toward the police and the military. It is those institutions which are attacked most directly and which must surely play a role in any ideology especially because contact with those institutions seems to be such a radicalizing or mobilizing experience. Indeed, the police as just one part of the legal system are reacted to in the novels in a manner that calls into question the legitimacy of law itself. Discriminatory court and penal systems only enhance the negative feelings about law.

Existing black groups that have played prominent political roles in the past, the church and "race" organizations like the NAACP are viewed as inadequate in meeting the challenge of a hostile political environment. However, while the novels suggest some of the ambiguities in those organizations that make them ineffective they do not create an image of potentially successful groups. The job of synthesizing is left to ideology. And so, we turn to a consideration of ideology in general as presented in the novels.

## CHAPTER IV

### IDEOLOGY

Ideologies provide the link between fundamental beliefs and action. By providing this link, ideologies serve both a social and an individual function. The social function is a kind of glue binding a community together. The individual function is similar in that it is again a kind of glue, one which serves to organize and bind role personalities of the individual.<sup>1</sup> There is an ongoing debate in political science whether most people have an ideology at all. We accept the view that they do (even if it is not so well-organized or articulated as intellectuals might like) and proceed from that assumption.<sup>2</sup>

Individual ideologies are, however, rarely clearly articulated, either by individuals or by groups. Nevertheless, certain strains in what might be considered ideological thought are usually present and can present the beginning point to analyze

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<sup>1</sup>David E. Apter, Some Conceptual Approaches to the Study of Modernization, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), pp. 235-237.

<sup>2</sup>For that debate see, e.g. Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics in David E. Apter (ed.), Ideology and Discontent, (New York: Free Press, 1964) and Steven R. Brown, "Consistency and the Persistence of Ideology," Public Opinion Quarterly 34 (Spring, 1970), pp. 60-68.

ideologies. In terms of blacks in the United States, there have long been and still are three dominant strains which can be said to characterize three different directions of ideological thought.<sup>3</sup>

In this section we shall begin by examining the broad outlines of these three strains. When we will individually look at each strain from the point of view of their ideological basis and what respective novels have to say regarding each particular strain. Finally, we shall look at those three novelists (through their novels) that seem to be most relevant to the development of an ideology by blacks.

#### Three Strains of Thought: An Overview

Dubois characterizes these strains by the dominant views on which they are based: (1) "revolt and revenge"--Nat Turner in the past, some extreme nationalist groups today; (2) "attempt to adjust all thought and action to the will of the greater groups"--Booker T. Washington in the past, some middle-class organizations today; (3) "a determined effort at self-realization and self-development"--Frederick Douglass in the past, movement groups today.<sup>4</sup>

We shall characterize these strains in terms of their relationship to the existing political community in the United States. Thus, there are secessionists who feel that blacks and

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<sup>3</sup>W. E. Burghardt Dubois, The Souls of Black Folk, (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Premier Book, 1961), pp. 45-46.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

whites cannot (ever) share the common division of labor necessary within a political community. The major goal towards which one should work is physical secession--perhaps by migration to Africa or by obtaining some geographical segment of the United States itself. Secessionists carry segregation to its logical conclusions.

The Assimilationists have as a primary goal the abolition of race as a defining characteristic, the disappearance of black or white as a significant reference group. Integration is here carried to its logical extreme of including culture and identity as well as jobs, schools, and housing.

Finally, Pluralists desire political integration while maintaining cultural distinctiveness. Black would remain a viable reference group, but it would not be a barrier to normal activities. Pluralist ideologies often also imply that among blacks, those who wish separation ought to be able to have some amount of it perhaps in ethnic enclaves in cities; those who wish for assimilation ought to be able to do so. However, for most blacks becoming acculturated to the dominant society, there would remain a distinctiveness reflected at least in some cultural distinctiveness. There would be a cultural sense of personal identity. And perhaps distinctive patterns, such as common voting patterns, political coalitions, or community control of some major institutions would be developed.

It should be noted here that while we have characterized these three strains of thought in terms of the relationship of



each to the political community, the same strains would result were we to look at these ideologies as responses to a minority position in a society dominated by whites. Pettigrew sees these responses as moving toward, against, or away from the oppressor.<sup>5</sup> Implicit in this kind of categorization is a typology based on attitudes towards whites and toward other blacks.<sup>6</sup>

It should also be noted that the three strains of thought introduced here represent pure types which, as such, do some violence to the subtle variations which could be found in actual persons operating in the phenomenal world. Furthermore, in one way, the three strains could be viewed as three points on a continuum (albeit a multi-dimensional continuum), each shading eventually into the other. Nevertheless, whether one prefers to approach ideology from the structural point of view centered on attitudes toward the political community or whether one prefers to approach ideology from the personality point of view centered on individual attitudes toward whites and blacks, these three strains of thought can be seen as indicating a useful differentiation within the black community.

The differentiation among the separatist, assimilationist, and pluralist strains of thought represents distinctions based upon

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas F. Pettigrew, A Profile of the Negro American, (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1964), chap. 2.

<sup>6</sup>Jeffrey M. Paige, "Changing Patterns of Anti-White Attitudes Among Blacks," in Charles S. Bullock III, Harrell R. Rodgers, Jr., Black Political Attitudes Implications for Political Support, (Chicago: Markham, 1972), p. 101.

goals and leaves open, for the moment, the question of means. Obviously, means are an important aspect of any ideological system and, indeed, there is much time spent on debate within black movements about whether all means are complementary to all ends. Unfortunately, however, means are not so easily categorized as ends. They might be characterized as institutionalized or non-institutionalized, legal or illegal, violent or non-violent. They might be characterized by style, by organizational mode, by leadership-followship patterns. They might be based on a belief in the dialectic revolution, or in the principle of evolutionary reform.

Rather than impress an order on the potential categorization of means, at this point, just mentioning those dimensions shall suffice. After the ideological statements of the novels have been examined, the question of means shall be reopened and discussed with more precision. For the rest of this chapter, we shall concentrate on the very general aspects of ends as they are represented in the novels.

#### Assimilationists

At first glance, assimilationist thought seems simplistic, yet in many ways, a coherent assimilationist viewpoint may well be the hardest to fashion. Perhaps a hint of this can be found in a passage by Cynthia Ozick:

It is a commonplace but curious law of the Outsider that the more he strives to fashion himself emotionally after the

Insider, the more he proves himself Outside--and without benefiting his real condition.<sup>7</sup>

How does one develop an ideology based on the abolition of race as a defining characteristic that really makes sense in a society which has deemed race as, perhaps, the major defining characteristic?

The novels suggest several general ways to, at least, begin answering that question. Many of the novels of the forties and early fifties tried to define an assimilationist viewpoint by focusing upon the real lack of divisions among men and, thus, focusing on humanity and humanness. Insofar as the novels of the late fifties and sixties express an assimilationist viewpoint, the perspective is somewhat different. The central thesis seems to be that white America has lost its value perspective and that blacks are the repository of those values. Assimilation then is essential for America to regain its original perspective.

If the Negro doesn't save this country, then nobody can. And if I find another word than Negro it might be closer to what I mean. I don't mean the Negro as a person; I mean the Negro as an experience.<sup>8</sup>

Richard Wright expressed much the same thing when he noted that the "Negro is America's metaphor."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Cited by Hoyt W. Fuller, "Contemporary Negro Fiction," in C. W. E. Bigsby (ed.), The Black American Writer, Volume I: Fiction, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 243.

<sup>8</sup>An interview conducted by Eve Auchincloss and Nancy Lynch, "Disturber of the Peace: James Baldwin," Bigsby, op. cit., p. 208.

<sup>9</sup>Cited in C. W. E. Bigsby, "The Black American Writer," Bigsby, op. cit., p. 26.

From both the emphasis of the forties and that of the fifties came a variety of elements from which an ideology might be developed. Certainly, one of the major directions of these assimilationist positions is an existential one as Bigsby correctly states in talking about novels like Invisible Man<sup>10</sup> or A Different Drummer.<sup>11</sup>

Identity depends not on the nature of one's polemical stance but on the essence of one's personal commitment to reality as expressed through concrete action.<sup>12</sup>

Race itself is not important except as it is a part of that reality which must be recognized and accounted for in any action. But as a part of reality, race has no other specialness. Indeed, race is essentially a blinder which prevents man from confronting man on a personal level. And, like any barrier dehumanizing human contacts, must be removed--thus, the emphasis on the things which unify humans rather than divide them.

"No," he said gently, "you can't do that because then you admit what some white people would have you admit and what some Negroes do admit--that you are only Negro, some flat, one-dimensional, bas-relief figure which is supposed to explain everything about you. You commit an injustice against yourself by admitting that, because, first, you rule out your humanity, and second, your complexity as a human being. Oh hell, I'm not saying that being black in this goddam white world isn't crucial. No one but us knows how corrosive it is, how it maims us all, how it rings our lives. But at some point you have to break through to the larger ring which encompasses us all--our humanity. To understand

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<sup>10</sup>Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, (New York: New American Library, 1952).

<sup>11</sup>William Melvin Kelley, A Different Drummer, (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1962).

<sup>12</sup>Bigsby, op. cit., p. 27.

that much about us can be simply explained by the fact that we're men, caught with all men within the common ring."<sup>13</sup>

But, of course, the hitch in this thought is that race is a part of reality and a very important part at that.

I leaned against a stone wall along the park, thinking of Jack and Hambro and the day's events and shook with rage. It was all a swindle, an obscene swindle. What did they know of us, except that we numbered so many, worked on certain jobs, offered so many votes, and provided so many marchers for some protest parade of theirs. . . . Images of past humiliations flickered through my head and I saw that they were more than separate experiences. They were me; they defined me. I was my experiences and my experiences were me, and no blind men, no matter how powerful they become, even if they conquered the world, could take that, or change one single itch, taunt, laugh, cry, scar, ache, rage or pain of it. . . . Here I thought they accepted me because they felt that color made no difference because they didn't see either color or men. . . .<sup>14</sup>

Inevitably, then, to work for an assimilationist goal necessitates the recognition of the present reality of race.

However, to use race too much in working toward assimilation would destroy the possibility of ever reaching the goal, or would at the least delay the reaching of the goal. And thus, expressions of assimilationist ideology are usually accompanied by an individualist philosophy; that one must, and one can, reach one's goals on one's own. There is, for example, the picture of Lotie Johnson trying to make it on her own by abiding by middle-class values of thrift and hard work and individual effort.<sup>15</sup> Or

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<sup>13</sup>Paule Marshall, Brown Girl, Brown Stone, (New York: Avon Books, 1959), pp. 208-209.

<sup>14</sup>Ellison, op. cit., pp. 438-439.

<sup>15</sup>Ann Petry, The Street, (New York: Pyramid Books, 1946).

there are the frequent images of a distrust of organizations, even when there is a realization that organizations are necessary.

And so how does one politicize an assimilationist ideology? What are the weapons one uses to achieve one's goals?

The answers for those novels that are primarily assimilationist are basically threefold. One strain is essentially individual action that for all practical purposes ignores politics. It is not anti-political, just simply apolitical. There is a basic faith in the virtues of the country--a faith that right will triumph if you are patient but dedicated--and so in God is for White Folks,<sup>16</sup> the hero eventually triumphs, indeed, by becoming white.

A second strain is a slight variant of the first--emphasizing, however, the basic efficacy of the normal political processes as in The Grand Parade.<sup>17</sup> This variation reflects a faith in the tactics of cooperation and coalitions with sympathetic whites or, if not precisely using the political process, coalescing with sympathetic whites whenever appropriate as in South Town.<sup>18</sup>

The third strain essentially focuses on the need to make people aware of the position of the black in this country, to educate him to the basic humanness of the black. Out of this

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<sup>16</sup>Will Thomas, God is for White Folks, (New York: Creative Age, 1947).

<sup>17</sup>Julien Mayfield, The Grand Parade, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1961).

<sup>18</sup>Lorenz Graham, South Town, (New York: Signet, 1965).

education and knowledge would naturally come movement toward an assimilated society which reaffirms traditional American values. Education can take many forms and so this strain certainly accepts politics and coalition, but does not emphasize them--out of distrust of politics and out of a sense that the action is on a personal basis and that politics does not really reach that.

It is worth noting that the individualistic strain in such integrationist thought and the cultural and social orientation of such thought are closely related to the needs of middle-class blacks (just as they are to middle-class whites). When Harold Cruse notes that integration is "just not worth the bother" to the masses,<sup>19</sup> he is pinpointing the nature of the benefits which integration would bring, at least in the short-run, to the greater number of blacks whose needs are particularly economic.

Integrationist thought in the novels was closely related to the capitalistic ethos and thus not particularly concerned with the problems of the poor except as those problems related to discrimination on the basis of race. That thought was, therefore, based on a set of values that, even when accepted by poor blacks, seemed to have little relevance to their lives, either to explain their condition or to change that condition. And, so, in the novels, realistically recognizing the nature of integrationist ideologies, the poor were often separatists.

Typically, assimilationists in the novels accepted and were positive toward whites and rejected or were negative towards

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<sup>19</sup>Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, (New York: William Morrow, 1967), p. 312.

blacks. When they accepted blacks, it was blacks who, for all but color, were white--i.e., those blacks who had rejected all traits, behavior patterns, and preferences felt to be associated with being Negro.

In summary, then, assimilationist thought is complex as expressed in the novels, but is based upon an acceptance of America as a political and cultural entity built upon shared values in which race is unimportant. In accordance with those values, the plight of the black person is primarily a result of his/her not having strived enough. With hard work and individual effort, anyone can be accepted for what they have made themselves, not just for their color. Where the conditions prevent individuals' striving (e.g., barriers for jobs), then group efforts are appropriate for changing those conditions, but that effort must be in accord with societal norms governing any attempts to bring about change. Change takes place because of the actions of the few, the elites. The masses are left to struggle on their own.

#### Separatists

Separatist thought is not widely held in the black community according to available poll data<sup>20</sup> nor is it widely experienced in the novels. By its very nature it is an alienated philosophy, for it seeks not just change in political authorities

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<sup>20</sup>See, e.g. Gary T. Marx, Protest and Prejudice: A Study of Belief in the Black Community, (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 28.



or policies, nor even just a change in regime, but a change in the political community--a change ultimately in the nation itself.

And yet, although the novels tend to show an almost total rejection of separatist thought, it was shown to have a powerful emotional appeal, especially to poor blacks.

"... Come in with us, mahn. We build a glorious movement of black people. BLACK PEOPLE! What they do, give you money? Who wahnt the damn stuff? Their money bleed black blood, mahn. It's unclean! Taking their money is shit, mahn. Money without dignity--that's bahd shit!"

"... Look at you two and look at me--is this sanity? Standing here in three shades of blackness! Three black men fighting in the street because of the white enslaver? Is that sanity? Is that consciousness, scientific understanding? Is that the modern black mahn of the twentieth century? Hell, mahn! Is it self-respect-black against black? What they give you to betray--their women? You fall for that?"

"Let's go," I said . . . , but Clifton looked at Ras with a tight, fascinated expression, pulling away from me.<sup>21</sup>

Since separatists were only minor characters in the novels, there were never very explicit statements of the possibilities for a separatist ideology. Certainly coalitions with any whites were rejected. Normally coalitions, either with Africans or with other persons of color, were suggested or implied. For example, in And Then We Heard the Thunder, "General" Grant is very pro-Japanese during World War II:

"You goddamn ignorant bawstards! The Japanese are fighting for your freedom and your dignity. The white man is the most deceitful, the most two-faced human being in all the world. But if he pissed in your damn face and told you it was raining outdoors, you damn fools would purchase umbrellas."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ellison, op. cit., pp. 322-323.

<sup>22</sup>John A. Killens, And Then We Heard the Thunder, (New York: Pocket Books, 1964), p. 496.

Or, in the case of Africa:

"... Wake up! You hear me? I say, black mawn, black womawn! Wake up and recognize Africa as your true home. Do you hear me? Wake up!"<sup>23</sup>

The separatists were most often West Indians in the novels, suggesting that American born blacks, although occasionally drawn by separatist rhetoric, were not really willing to drop their "Americanness" or could not really imagine a situation in which they would be apart from America. They seemed not to want less of the country, but more of it. So, in the novels, separatist ideology was never really articulated beyond a desire to return to Africa or to somehow be liberated by other peoples of color.

However, several things were clear in the novels regarding separatist thought. Certainly it is an ideology for the masses. It is neither led by nor accepted by the elites or middle or upper classes. It is basically anti-white and pro-black, although in some of its more religious manifestations it is so retreatist and other-worldly that the color dimension has little importance. And, except for those religious manifestations, it is an aggressively defensive posture, accepting the potentiality or even necessity of violence.

But, separatist thought never really went anywhere. The novels suggest that its major power may be as a mobilizing ideology arousing black pride and an awareness of the virtue of black

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<sup>23</sup>Julien Mayfield, The Hit, (New York: Belmont Books, 1970), p. 14.

power. What is to be done with that power, however, is unspecified, perhaps, because so much depends not only on the posture white America takes, but also the posture the rest of the world takes. Indeed, at least one author suggests that sheer self-defense for survival is the most immediate goal. Longer term visions will have to wait.

. . . But King Alfred (a plan of white nations to eliminate the black world) would have made Negroes realize, finally and angrily, that all the new moves--the laws and committees--to gain democracy for them were fraudulent, just as Minister Q and the others had been saying for years. . . . The one alternative left for Negroes would be not only to seek that democracy withheld from them as violently as possible, but to fight for their very survival.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, separatist thought with its emphasis on the unalterable evil of America, politically and culturally, emphasizes black superiority. It suggests the necessity of violence even to survive, a distrust of any conciliatory moves by white society, and the potentiality of a coalition with other peoples of color throughout the world. But, for the present, it is primarily an ideology to educate the black masses, to mobilize them into political awareness by focusing on their oppression and deprivation. As for immediate political goals, those must await the reactions of the white majority.

#### Pluralists

The essence of pluralist ideology is a belief that assimilation represents the white man's game to keep the majority of

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<sup>24</sup>John A. Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967), p. 388.

blacks in their place by coopting a few blacks to symbolically show equality and justice as being available for all deserving persons. Thus, pluralism rests on a base of black pride. It starts with the idea that being black is both good and important. Only by accepting that can blacks themselves obtain the power which alone will bring about (because they will take it) equality and justice.

Pluralists do not reject assimilation, at least for some, but see that assimilation is a force without power and that power is unrealistic unless it is based on black solidarity.

And now he knew that he hoped he never would forget again All his escape hatches from being Negro were more illusion than reality and did not give him dignity. All of his individual solutions and his personal assets, looks, personality, education, success, acceptance, security, the whole damn shooting match, was one great grand illusion, without dignity. Fannie Mae had called it manhood. Like something you keep reaching for that never was and never would be--without manhood. If he signed a separate treaty with Cap'n Charlie, would it guarantee him safe-conduct through the great white civilized jungle where the war was raging always raging? Would his son also get safe-passage? Anywhere anytime any place? He had searched in all the wrong places. . . .

. . . He was a Negro and only with Worm and Jimmy and Baby-Face Banks could he achieve anything of lasting value. And Scotty and General Grant and Lanky. And Fannie Mae and Mamma. And Junior. This was the ship to human dignity. All else was the open sea.<sup>25</sup>

It is this emphasis on power--that one must take one's rights, that they are never given--that makes pluralist ideology so militant and frequently (but by no means, always) so violent.

"I called now for black manhood. Dignity. Pride. Don't turn the other cheek any more. Defend yourselves, strike back, and when you do, strike to hurt, strike to maim, strike

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<sup>25</sup>Killens, op. cit., p. 496.

to--" kill, Max thought wearily. I am going to loose those beasts, black and white, and when they are through, and it may take them a long time to get through, perhaps even as long as this farce which has forced us to this has been running, we will know just where we stand. It will be a start.<sup>26</sup>

It is also this emphasis on power that makes the question of coalition so difficult for the pluralist. Theoretically, coalition with whites ought to be a very viable part of pluralist ideology. However, such coalitions are rife with problems as the novels point out. The white liberals tend to be oriented to improving the culture of blacks, rather than helping them gain political power for themselves. And, of course, to the pluralist, this is just warmed over paternalism which fails to meet the real needs of the blacks.

For example, in And Then We Heard the Thunder, Solly tries to improve the lot of his black troops, but that really isn't enough to make him an ally. Only when he joins with his troops in a rebellion does he become an ally--only when he is willing to sacrifice for their (immediate) power, can a coalition with him make sense to the pluralist.<sup>27</sup>

But, pluralist ideology does demand group efforts rather than the individualistic efforts of assimilationist ideology. The center of the group and the power within the group must be black. Whites like Solly can be allies, but only when they accept the preeminence of blacks with the group. This seems to be because a viable pluralism is seen to rest on power and for blacks

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<sup>26</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 388.

<sup>27</sup>Killens, op. cit., p. 496.

to be a viable group within a pluralist society, it must have sufficient power to be a part of any brokering game.

None of the novels under consideration dealt thoroughly with pluralist ideology, except for its cultural context. There is an emphasis on black pride, a historical tradition, a distinctive dialect, a musical and oral literary tradition, food preferences, and a tradition of endurance even under slavery and oppression. But what a pluralist society would be like, apart from these distinctive black cultural patterns, is treated only in superficial terms in the novels.

Pluralist ideology, then, accepts the existing American community and its professed value orientations. It seeks a means by which all blacks can be a part somehow of that community while still remaining black--with all the positive features that blackness implies. It recognizes the necessity of group action to achieve the goal of a pluralist society based upon professed values of the tradition of the American community. Aggressive tactics are not precluded to reach such a goal.

All three strains of black thought are thus illustrated in the novels considered in this study. Most frequent in the early period were assimilationists, in the latter period pluralists. No strain of thought totally dominated any of the time periods under study. Separatist thought was the least represented, although the separatists in the novels were often the most vivid characters.

While we have thus far illustrated the three strains of thought, we did not fully deal with the adequacy of the novels in

outlining a full-fledged ideological pattern. Such an analysis might be pursued by examining the ideological thought of some of the authors whose novels have been studied as distinct from the characters in the novels.

### Three Novelists

A novel is not always the best means of expressing an ideological statement. Yet, a novel often presents a point of view and thus may be an ideal way to develop the major outlines of an ideological statement. By counterposing one character against another, the problems in any given position can be highlighted and perhaps a synthesis can be reached, either explicitly or implicitly.

The authors selected were chosen because they had written more than one novel during the time period considered. This gives us a chance to look at any change that might occur in an author's point of view over time. Secondly, the authors selected were chosen because they were the most explicitly ideological of any of the examined authors in the study. The selection proved to be especially useful in that the three novelists had very different points of view.

Here we do not wish to be detailed, but to present an overview of the position(s) of each of the three authors considered. We shall evaluate those positions by reference to three general criteria. First, does the point of view expressed address the problems of black people in the United States. This is a descriptive requirement. Secondly, does the point of view expressed

show some relationship between the existing needs and problems of blacks and a desired reality. This is an evaluative requirement. Thirdly, does the point of view suggest some way out, some way in which the desired reality could be achieved, some way in which the existing reality could be changed. This is a prescriptive criteria.

We shall examine the following authors and their works: Richard Wright, The Outsider<sup>28</sup> and The Long Dream,<sup>29</sup> William Melvin Kelley, A Different Drummer,<sup>30</sup> A Drop of Patience,<sup>31</sup> and dem,<sup>32</sup> and John A. Williams, Night Song,<sup>33</sup> Sissie,<sup>34</sup> and The Man Who Cried I Am.<sup>35</sup> From this analysis we may hopefully discover more precisely what must yet be done to develop an ideological position(s) that might be useful as a guide to action for blacks (and for whites).

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<sup>28</sup>Richard Wright, The Outsider, (New York: Harper & Row, 1953).

<sup>29</sup>Richard Wright, The Long Dream, (New York: Ace Publishing Co., 1958).

<sup>30</sup>Kelley, A Different Drummer, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup>William Melvin Kelley, A Drop of Patience, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965).

<sup>32</sup>William Melvin Kelley, dem, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967).

<sup>33</sup>John A. Williams, Night Song, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1961).

<sup>34</sup>John A. Williams, Sissie, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963).

<sup>35</sup>Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, op. cit.



## Richard Wright

Of the three writers here considered, Wright is the earliest and probably the most famous. His best known work, Native Son,<sup>36</sup> was published in 1940 and thus appeared too early to be considered in this study. However, The Outsider,<sup>37</sup> first published in 1953, and The Long Dream,<sup>38</sup> first published in 1958, are in many ways similar to his better known work. Indeed one of the criticisms of Wright is that by removing himself to Paris, he was not able to improve upon his earlier promise.<sup>39</sup>

Also, of the three writers here considered, Wright is closest to the assimilationist strain of thought, demonstrating that strain's strengths and weaknesses. His novels are most explicit in describing both the extremely painful position of the black in the United States and the often cruel and depraved actions of the white in the United States. But, Wright's focus on blackness is upon that blackness as an experience, an experience which provides the black person with a point of view and a sensitivity that propels him to a position both inside and outside of American culture. What blacks share is an experience of "outsideness" rather than blackness. Thus, the white hunchback, Houston, (in The Outsider) is also an outsider. Although he does

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<sup>36</sup>Richard Wright, Native Son, (New York: Harper & Row, 1940).

<sup>37</sup>Wright, The Outsider, op. cit.

<sup>38</sup>Wright, The Long Dream, op. cit.

<sup>39</sup>Constance Webb, Richard Wright, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1968).

not share blackness he shares "outsideness," the crucial experience of blackness. When Wright talks about man's apartness from man, that is precisely what he means, not black's apartness from whites, but men from each other. Black becomes relevant then because of this experience of apartness and has little relevance in and of itself. This is, of course, the essence of the assimilationist position. The problems of black people become (simply) the problems of all mankind, albeit magnified somewhat.

This might be illustrated by the closing passages of The Outsider, where, dying, Cross Damon responds to Houston's attempt to understand the meaning of Damon's life:

"I wanted to be free . . . to feel what I was worth . . . what living meant to me . . . I loved life too . . . much. . . ."

"And what did you find?"

"Nothing . . . " ( . . . ) The search can't be done alone." ( . . . ) "Never alone . . . Alone a man is nothing . . . Man is a promise that he must never break. . . ."

( . . . )

"I wish I had some way to give the meaning of my life to others . . . To make a bridge from man to man. . . . Starting from scratch every time is . . . is no good. Tell them not to come down this road . . . Men hate themselves and it makes them hate others . . . We must find some way of being good to ourselves . . . Man is all we've got . . . I wish I could ask men to meet themselves . . . We're different from what we seem . . . Maybe worse, maybe better . . . But certainly different . . . We're strangers to ourselves."<sup>40</sup>

By making the problems of black people into the problems eternally faced by the human race, one takes away the possibility of solving those problems as blacks. And, perhaps because those

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<sup>40</sup>Wright, The Outsider, op. cit., p. 439.

problems are eternal, Wright's characters don't solve them, but typically they run away.

Wright constantly emphasizes the negative aspects of the everyday life of blacks. He sees the negative aspects of those who adapt to the cruelty of that everyday life and sees that adaptation as essentially debilitating. But to those who don't adapt, there is really only flight. For if there is nothing positive in blackness that can allow you to form a positive sense of black identity or the basis of an ideology that might indicate what can be done to change one's condition, there is really little left but flight.

Indeed, Wright's major characters live in a world of individuals seeking peace, peace that is universal, but that is in oneself. But he never deals with what is oneself, or at least his characters never really come to a satisfactory grasping with that question.

From the plane's window he saw night swoop down and swallow up his world and no world of the whites who sat about him. He shared their daily world, but his past made his world different from theirs. He had fled a world that he had known and that had emotionally crucified him, but what was he here in this world whose impact loosed storms in his blood? Could he ever make the white faces around him understand how they had changed his world with images of beckoning desire and dread? Naw, naw . . . No one could believe the kind of life he had lived and was living. Was it not better to lie as he had lied to the sleeping white man at his left elbow, and declare that his world did not exist? Above all, he was ashamed of his world, for the world about him had branded his world as bad, inferior. Moreover, he felt no moral strength or compulsion to defend his world. That in him which had always made him self-conscious was now the bud of a new possible life that was pressing ardently but timidly against the shell of the old to shatter it and be free.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Wright, The Long Dream, op. cit., p. 350.

The net result is that Wright offers a challenge to us all and a vision of a world to us all. But he does not offer any hints to the ghetto or rural black or how those changes which might make his/her life more bearable can be brought about, or even how to cope with life as it is. If men (or women) were wiser, the world would be a better place. But Wright fails to deal with the world as it is. As we shall explain in Chapter VI, it is this failure that may well be endemic to assimilationist thought.

#### William Melvin Kelley

While the novels of Wright maintained a relatively consistent assimilationist position, those of William Melvin Kelley become more and more separatist in perspective. In the end, Kelley takes a position that rejects white America. But since blacks and whites are inevitably bound together, Kelley, like Wright, is not able to go beyond the description of a situation; he is unable to suggest how to extricate oneself from that position.

The development of Kelley's perspective throughout the three novels here examined illustrates the incompleteness of his vision. The first novel, A Different Drummer,<sup>42</sup> is full of hope. Following the example of one man, rural blacks leave their fields and emigrate from the Southern State in which the story is set. It is a fable of a peaceful, non-violent revolt in which the

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<sup>42</sup>Kelley, A Different Drummer, op. cit.

people take freedom for themselves. Traditional black leaders and organizations are rejected. The people take direct action on their own, not necessarily understanding why they are doing what they are doing, but feeling and thus knowing that it is something that must be done.

Although generally whites in the book appear as cruel and uncomprehending, that is not totally the case. Harry, for example, teaches his son not to say nigger because Harry feels that things must change and that one must be prepared for change.<sup>43</sup> The net result is that the novel is hopeful. It points the potentialities inherent in a real sense of community among blacks and it posits the inability of whites to deal with this sense of community for their own ends.

Kelley's next novel, A Drop of Patience,<sup>44</sup> is less hopeful. In it, Kelley begins to question not just the oppression of blacks by whites but also the white structure characterized by white middle-class values. Ludlow Washington, a blind Negro jazz musician, gets the break that would allow him back into the big time and allow him to achieve the recognition he deserves and the success that should have been his. But he is no longer sure that he wants all that. He is no longer sure that the compromises that would be necessary are really just a small price to pay. Perhaps he would be more appreciated, more true to himself and

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>44</sup>Kelley, A Drop of Patience, op. cit.

his art, playing for poor blacks in a store-front church in some rural community.

In dem,<sup>45</sup> Kelley is no longer questioning the validity of white middle-class values in the United States. Indeed, he has rejected white society as absurd. Like his first novel, dem is a fable. But unlike his first novel, dem rejects whites and white American society. As such, it is a strongly separatist statement. But it also, by its central theme concerning the birth of twins, one white, one black, illustrates the intertwining of black and white in American society. The net result is that, while Kelley's novels are very cathartic, they fail to provide any clear sense of what is to be done. Unlike Wright, Kelley develops a strong statement of the positiveness of blackness. But like Wright, he does not develop his thoughts. Any ideological statement must be able to prescribe a future dependent on more than waiting for white society to self-destruct. But so far, Kelley has been unable to do this, and that may be an inherent dilemma in separatist thought, for to do so necessitates the untwining of what even Kelley shows to be very intertwined in American society--black and white.

John A. Williams

Of the three novelists considered in this section, Williams most thoroughly deals with the relationships between blacks and whites in American society. His novels explore both

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<sup>45</sup>Kelley, dem, op. cit.

the meaningfulness and the meaninglessness of race. And he so doing, he most carefully explores the pluralist position.

Yet, like Kelley, Williams' position changes slightly from novel to novel. Each novel posits the necessity for drastic changes to occur in American society so that there can be some kind of racial accommodation. But it is not until his third novel that Williams clearly takes the position that blacks must be prepared for offensive, violent action to force these changes. This last suggestion carried out in his fourth novel, Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light,<sup>46</sup> was published too late to be included in this study.

Williams clearly develops the dilemmas inherent in both assimilationist and separatist thought. He rejects assimilationism for while he sees the problems of blacks as being partly the result of economics, he sees them as being particularly the result of racism. And assimilationists fail to confront the reality and depths of racism.

Furthermore, he sees the tremendous strengths of black people and with that the importance of maintaining blackness as in some ways relevant. But he also sees some of the weaknesses of black people, and more importantly, the interdependence of black and white. His novels reach for a way of accommodating black and white without losing the vitality of blackness. This is essentially the pluralist position.

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<sup>46</sup>John A. Williams, Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1969).

But Williams rejects any personal accommodation. He clearly points toward the necessity of group action should changes occur in society that are enduring. And it is in the nature of the way such group accommodation could be achieved that blacks can force change. But they must understand the nature of their problems and the basis of those problems in racism. They must be able to face themselves, understanding their weaknesses and celebrating their strengths. They must be able to refuse to depend upon whites for help, yet be able to use honestly offered help from whites. But he ends with a realization that change is really a dream short of all-out warfare. He has sized up power realities. He has suggested that, the system may be rotten but it is under the control of politicians. Those with power will not give up power unless forced to do so.

Max, reflecting, while waiting for his phone call to be put through so he can read the King Alfred papers (a plan agreed to by the American government that essentially spells genocide for blacks) to Minister X who might be able to do something about them:

Each new President, his mouth filled with words, promised a new start. There were always starts, the big ones and the little ones, but there were never any finishes. Enzkwu's papers proved they were faking it all the time: All the god-damn time! Time had moved on, but beneath the surface change remained in doubt. And it was time they came to know, once and for all, that Negroes now knew everything.<sup>47</sup>

Max went on to what seemed to him the inevitable picture.

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<sup>47</sup>Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, op. cit., p. 386.



There were lessons:  
 The unprotecting, unembattled die,  
 The enemy today is the believer in Anglo-Saxon updated  
 racial mythology.

The dark is inevitable because Justice is an uncool  
 lesbian.

Many, many will die, Bernard Zutkin. Black bodies will  
 jam the streets. But those bodies, while they still have  
 life, would be heading downtown this time. . . .

After that, Mister Charlie and the engineers and King  
 Alfred, you will have learned your lesson. There will be,  
 you see, white bodies, too.<sup>48</sup>

Throughout Williams' work there is a constant tension  
 between hope and despair. But, his belief in the necessity of  
 pluralism remains constant as does his description of the way  
 things are and why they are that way. Where he falls down in  
 presenting his ideology though is just in that alternation between  
 hope and despair. The solution to the problem is not inherent in  
 his analysis. There is a kind of blind faith in conflict rather  
 like parents who suggest that their two squabbling kids resolve  
 their differences by an all-out fight. Perhaps when they have  
 beaten each other enough, they can get together on new terms with  
 new respect for each other. No wonder Williams sometimes despairs.

Yet an ideology heavily based entirely on despair seems  
 inadequate since it is to guide people to a new and positive  
 sense of purpose and action. Williams' analysis goes further  
 than the other novelists; but yet it, too, falls short.

#### Summary

In this chapter, three strains of ideological thought  
 were examined, first by concentrating on the novels, and secondly

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 387-388.

by examining as a whole the novels of three writers. This examination concentrated on general outlines of thought rather than on specific details. In general, assimilationist ideas were most prevalent in the early novels, pluralist in the later ones. None were fully developed, although internal problems seemed most frequent with assimilationist and separatist thought.

When examining the individual authors, the major problems in each strain become more clear. While assimilationist thought accepts the many factors that bind black and white together in the United States and is indeed based on this interdependence, it fails to account for racism although it sometimes brilliantly describes it. Separatist thought accepts the racism and is indeed based on the reality of racism, but fails to deal with the reality of a system that is, for better or worse, interdependent. Pluralist thought deals with both racism and interdependency but fails to indicate a clear way out, a way whose basis is inherent in the existing system. No clear ideological statement then emerges from the novels.

Before we can examine this fact and its consequences, we must examine one more element discussed in the novels. Each of the strains of thought discussed above are related to a concept of black identity. In the next chapter, we shall examine that identity in more detail.

## CHAPTER V

### ATTITUDES TOWARD SELF: BASES FOR IDENTITY

Ideology and identity are in many ways very closely related topics. In discussing youth, Erik Erikson expanded on this complementarity.

An ideological system is a coherent body of shared images, ideas, and ideals which, whether based on a formulated dogma, an implicit weltanschauung, a highly structured world image, a political creed, or, indeed, a scientific creed . . . , or a "way of life," provides for the participants a coherent, if systematically simplified, overall orientation in space and time, in means and ends.

Youth needs to base its rejections and acceptances "normally" on ideological alternatives vitally related to the existing range of alternatives for identity formation, and in periods of radical change, the essentially adolescent prosperity comes to dominate the collective mind.<sup>1</sup>

Erikson then goes on to note:

I think one learns most about the importance of ideology for identity formation by comparing such highly verbal and strongly institutionalized ideologies with those often unformulated and transitory symptoms of conversion and aversion which exist as the most meaningful part of a young person's or a young group's life, without the understanding or, indeed, curiosity of the adults around them. At any rate, many of the extreme tastes, opinions, and slogans which occupy the arguments of youths anywhere, and many of the sudden impulses to join in destructive behavior, are a joint expression of

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<sup>1</sup>Erik H. Erikson, Identity, Youth & Crisis, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1968), pp. 189-190.

historical identity fragments waiting to be tied together by some ideology.<sup>2</sup>

In the previous chapter, we examined the outlines of possible ideologies for black Americans. In this chapter, we shall examine elements of identity, elements that must be integrated into ideological thought.

In thinking about identity, several items are of importance. A primary question is centered around the idea of what do blacks share, if anything, besides a common color of skin, and even this is a somewhat misleading criterion given the wide range of colors subsumed under black. Then, of those things shared, is there a feeling of sharedness? If not, are there indications of what could serve to develop that feeling? If so, what does that feeling suggest in terms of politics?

The answers to these questions lead to a consideration of black identity which in turn is a crucial part of our considerations of ideology. Robert Penn Warren noted the key importance of identity.

I seize the word identity. It is a key word. You hear it over and over again. On this world will focus, around this word will coagulate, a dozen issues. Shifting, shading into each other. Alienated from the world to which he is born and from the country of which he is a citizen, yet surrounded by the successful values of that new world and country, how can the Negro define himself?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 195. Although Erikson is here talking about youth, what he says is equally applicable to blacks or any other group.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Penn Warren, Who Speaks for the Negro? (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 17.

The novels are, in some ways, preoccupied with the question of identity. The titles of many of the novels is indicative of the pervasiveness of questions of identity--The Invisible Man,<sup>4</sup> The Outsider,<sup>5</sup> The Man Who Cried I Am.<sup>6</sup>

Three major elements relevant to identity are explored particularly in the novels: color, historical experiences, and patterns of everyday life including speech patterns, food and music. In this chapter we shall examine those potential bases for identity and then look at the extent of black solidarity as another type of potential basis for identity.

#### Elements of Identity: Color

One's skin and one's sex are unlike most other characteristics in that they are unchangeable. Any attempt to come to grips with oneself must start with that fact.

But that very fact was ignored in the novels of the forties and early fifties. Color consciousness existed, but acceptance of black as being good and as being something on which one could base other qualities was lacking. Being black was a handicap to be overcome in the same way you might overcome being poor. One could hide one's origins behind super-respectability and not notice that one's skin was a little on the darkish side--

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<sup>4</sup>Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, (New York: Signet Books, 1952).

<sup>5</sup>Richard Wright, The Outsider, (New York: Harper & Row, 1953).

<sup>6</sup>John A. Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967).

rather like not noticing some hillbilly idiom in otherwise "respectable" speech.

Indeed, white blood was proof of being more than just a "nigger." Light skin carried status and dark skin was an obstacle. Other talents were needed to overcome its stigma.

Most women in town had considered him a good catch, even though he was dark.<sup>7</sup>

Further, the epithet, "field nigger" was thrown at those of dark color--and was often answered by "bastard." Both terms referred to slavery days when the field Negro was the lowest person in status while house Negroes were usually light since they were frequently the offspring of the plantation master and a female slave.<sup>8</sup> Such an exchange involved all the bitterness of a past which was regarded with shame and guilt and tended to drive Negroes even further apart.<sup>9</sup>

Even in the sixties, minor characters occasionally expressed the view that "the lighter, the better," but by and large, color was rarely mentioned in evaluative terms.

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<sup>7</sup>Chester Himes, The Third Generation, (New York: New American Library, 1954), p. 18. Emphasis added.

<sup>8</sup>Light skin also meant the possibility of "passing" as occurred in Will Thomas, God is for White Folks, (New York: Creative Age, 1947). However, for an opposing view, see Albert Murray, The Omni-Americans, (New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1970), chap. 2, esp. pp. 86-96.

<sup>9</sup>In Philip B. Kaye, Taffy, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1950), one senses the intensity of this shame when a social worker asks Martha about her grandparents. Martha bitterly replies that Negroes don't know their grandparents, at least not if they are white.

Occasionally, when it was mentioned, it was to express a reality which one regretted.

I knew there wasn't any hope uptown. A lot of these men, they got their little deals going and all that, but they don't really have anything, Mr. Charlie's not going to let them get but so far. Those that really do have something would never have any use for me; I'm too dark for them, they see girls like me on Seventh Avenue every day. I knew what they would do to me.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly enough, the mixed feelings of shame and guilt which the earlier novels indicated inhered in color, became mixed with success in the sixties. Success had long depended on color or at least on a sense of color identity with whites.<sup>11</sup> In the sixties, the novels indicated a distrust of those who had made it:

Goddam it. why hadn't they come? Now he knew. He had been lucky. He had made it, they thought, and that made him less Negro; that made him no longer one of them. . . . "Okay, baby, you tell it your way. I know them white folks don't publish your books because they like you."<sup>12</sup>

The successful black was a Negro who had sold out to white society, who had become its pawn. And the successful black felt the guilt keenly:

Can you think about being back home with all the broads you grew up with and not feel goddamned guilty about having made it? It makes me feel bad; it makes me feel as though they hate the hell out of me. You can feel it: a word here, a look there, like you were--not a criminal--oh, I don't

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<sup>10</sup>James Baldwin, Another Country, (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1962), p. 351.

<sup>11</sup>Murray, op. cit., disagrees.

<sup>12</sup>John A. Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967), p. 171.

know. Like a white folks' nigger. To a Negro, you know, that's worse than being a criminal.<sup>13</sup>

Guilt and shame were not the results of white blood as in the earlier periods, but the possibility of white help in return for race treason. But it is still color which divides black from black.

Color has very ambiguous meanings in the later novels. Even when it serves as a sense of pride, it contains the seeds of doubt. The question is, "Have I made it in spite of being black, or because I'm black?" Never is being black seen as irrelevant. Alternatively, the question is, "Have I failed because I'm black or because I'm me?"<sup>14</sup> The real difficulty in answering these questions, however, revolves around the fact that they are asked by a black person who lives in a country peopled by a majority of whites. And whiteness constantly intrudes on consciousness. There is a sense in which, until color has a meaning shared by the whole political community, these questions can never be answered. And it is in the necessity of this definition that the later novels disagree.

dem,<sup>15</sup> for example, illustrates the view that whites are irrelevant, not worth considering, not worth persuading, not really worth a second thought, except that the lives of blacks

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<sup>13</sup>John A. Williams, Sissie, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1963), p. 259.

<sup>14</sup>See, e.g. Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesay, The Mark of Oppression, (New York: World Publishing, 1951).

<sup>15</sup>William Melvin Kelley, dem, (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1967).



and of whites are so totally intertwined. In a strangely haunting fable Kelley shows white society to have gone amok, amok with perversely twisted priorities and fears and with a loss of all sense of responsibility. And yet, in what is a strongly separatist statement, the central concept in the book, superfecundation,<sup>16</sup> resulted in the birth of twins, one white, one black, thereby illustrating a retreat from the separatist position. Those births illustrated that the fate of blacks and whites are bound together. If whites must solve the white problem themselves, blackness too must have a positive meaning. But the meaning of color in specific is still unclear.

And Then We Heard the Thunder, on the other hand, expresses a much more pluralist view of color with the recognition that to be black is to share something with others who are black and that sharing can be a source of pride and solidarity. Yet that fact does not preclude intercourse with the entire political community on a basis in which color is a source of one's strength. For example, there is the following confrontation between Sully and his Australian girl friend:

"And besides, why should my color be overlooked?" He put his index finger on his face. "This is me. Black me. Proud me. Proud black American me, whose ancestors came from great Africa. Not arrogant, but just beginning to be proud of the specialness of black me. No bleaching powder, no hair slick-em-up. No trying-to-be-like-you." . . . He walked over to her phonograph records and found the album he was looking for. "When you listen to him sing, do you forget he is a black

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<sup>16</sup>The fertilization of two ova by spermatozoa from two separate copulations.

man? Part of his strength and conviction is his blackness. Robeson, black man, Afro-American."<sup>17</sup>

Interestingly enough, none of the novels of the sixties had a primarily assimilationist viewpoint where color becomes irrelevant entirely. Certainly, there were characters who expressed this point of view, but none of the 1960's novels as a whole did. Unlike the earlier novels, in the 1960's color was just too important, too crucial, too much a positive as well as negative part of oneself, to reject it by considering it meaningless.

Within the period studied, then, the meaning of color and its usefulness as a possible basis for identity has changed. The meaning of color has changed from a reference to the color of one's skin ("the lighter, the better.") to a reference for the totality of oneself, to a symbol of one's source of pride and of inner meaning. The precise role of color in defining oneself remains unclear, but the positive aspect of color and the symbolic aspect of color ring loud and clear throughout the later novels.

#### Elements of Identity: Historical Experiences

Memories of historical experiences are an important aspect of group identity. At least in part such memories serve to define the "we" and the "they." The affective component of such memories serve not only to further distinguish the "we" and the "they," but also to indicate whether the "we" is moving toward or away from a sense of identity with "they."

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<sup>17</sup>John Oliver Killens, And Then We Heard the Thunder, (New York: Pocket Books, 1964), pp. 418-419.

Within the novels, references to historical experiences of blacks and of their relationships to whites are relatively infrequent, becoming, however, more frequent in the later novels. Most frequent are references to the days of slavery in the United States. In the later novels, references to Africa are also fairly common.

Erik Erikson has noted that:

a nation's identity is desired from the ways in which history has, as it were, counterpointed certain opposite potentialities; the ways in which it lifts this counterpoint to a unique style of civilization, or lets it disintegrate into mere contradiction.<sup>18</sup>

Although not a nation, the same kinds of contradictions are apparent when examining the historical memories noted in the novels. It is extremely noteworthy that these contradictions are more apparent in the later novels than the earlier ones, a clear suggestion that the later novels are moving toward a clarified sense of black identity.

These contradictions take several forms. For example, on the one hand, historical references are often integrated into the thoughts of characters in the novels, a kind of acceptance of the past. Yet it is often done so in a manner that forces comparison with the present and a realization that not much has changed and that the suffering of the past did not particularly ameliorate the suffering of the present.

Ralph's stride quickened with anger. Was this what the Fates had in store for him. For all the Joplins who had not

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<sup>18</sup>Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950), p. 244.

died in the slave raids nor during the Middle Passage which had taken fifteen millions? Was this scorching and sundering of the earth to be their welcome when they joined those other survivors, not necessarily the fittest? Shit. Shit!<sup>19</sup>

The whole memory of slavery is tinged with contradictions. On the one hand, black people were slaves, were mistreated, had little control over their fate. They were constantly humiliated and were no more than chattel. Yet they endured, and they also developed a kind of quiet strength. Others rebelled. Do memories focus on subservience or rebellion, on the cruelty of whites or the strength of the blacks? Should slavery be viewed with shame or with pride? And how can these experiences be integrated into a sense of historical identity unless significant others (American whites) recognize the reality of these experiences? The later novels struggle with these problems, but fail to solve them. Williams most frequently posed this problem. For example, Max, in The Man Who Cried I Am, began a position paper for the President with Lincoln's statement that the Union would not have won the war without black troops. His liberal white chief, Bonnard, reading the paper said, "Did Lincoln really say that?" "You could look it up," Max said.<sup>20</sup> But, the statement was never used.

Africa, too, presented a variety of contradictions. In the early novels, a reference to Africa often was tinged with ideas of naked savages with no real civilization. In the later novels, however, references to Africa were made with knowledge of

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<sup>19</sup>Williams, Sissie, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>20</sup>Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, op. cit., p. 299.

the history of the great Empires of Africa, of the University of Timbuctu, of the bureaucracy of the Bantu, of great cultural achievements, of the roots of a musical tradition and of a dance tradition. Characters in the books often wish to go to Africa and some do. In the same vein, the movement of African colonies towards independence was celebrated by blacks in America.

Africa was, in short, a historical reality and a solid geographical piece of sod to which one could trace one's roots. But, the novels also indicated an ambiguity in Africa as a historical reality. For the nature of slavery meant that one could never know what his/her roots were other than African. And Africa was as heterogeneous as Europe and perhaps even more so. Consequently, the novels indicate a rather mixed reaction to Africa in the flesh spurred on by the fact that the Africans didn't welcome black Americans with open arms.<sup>21</sup> The beginnings of a sense of past, necessary to finding one's identity in the present are there, but they are confused. Furthermore, how does one really know what to believe about Africa and how does one really integrate that into what one feels about oneself. Note Max's thoughts as he reflects on Africa.

Africa. The continent had been like something you knew you had to buy or see or go to, but always forgot. The Black is Best groups were always talking about it. Then there were the J. A. Rogers books and Max had read them many times, with tremendous doubt and with humor. The Africans had kings and princes and great armies and wealth and culture, Rogers said. Maybe so. The books in the Schomburg Collection up on 135th

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 276 passim. For confirmation see William Borders, "Africans are Cool to Blacks of U.S.," New York Times, 5 September 1971, pp. 1, 23.

Street near Lenox also said as much. The Collection was some place. Every Negro feeling the toe of the world halfway up his ass could duck in there and read about how great Africa was and how great black people in general were, but few had done it. The white man's hate-self-serum had created a hard stale rind of disbelief.<sup>22</sup>

Historical experiences and memories are important in developing a sense of group identity. But for that development those memories must be integrated into some kind of whole. Contradiction will undoubtedly exist, but those contradictions must themselves be integrated rather than random. The experiences of slavery, for example, is full of contradictions. Those contradictions might be integrated into a view of the slavery experience instead of random recollections of experiences during slavery but that is a difficult task. The later novels seem to suggest the importance of that task, but were not able to resolve the contradictions successfully.

#### Elements of Identity: Patterns of Everyday Life

##### Speech Patterns

The way in which language is used, the patterns of speech, special idioms, rhythms, can be shared by a group and thus be a part of group identity. The later novels particularly indicate the usage of distinctive speech patterns.

He passed a Negro derelict lolling on the steps. The man's eyes leaped with hope as Ralph approached. "S-s-say, man," the derelict said, "lay sometin' on me, please." Ralph sidled past, murmuring, "Baby, I'm clean as chittlins." The derelict laughed and shuffled aside. "G'one, jum, you the goddam best." His appreciative chuckles followed Ralph all the way down the steps. Ralph wondered what the derelict's

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<sup>22</sup>Williams, The Man Who Cried I Am, op. cit., p. 97.

reaction would have been had he not uttered an element of the idiom with the proper inflection. Passwords. Not just what you said, but how you said it. That's where the white boys fell down; they didn't know how.<sup>23</sup>

Identity can be positive or negative, something which is a basis of one's self-pride, or a resource of one's rejection of one's roots. The invisible man illustrates how language does contribute to that identity be it positive or negative.

Close to the curb ahead I saw a man pushing a cart piled high with rolls of blue pages and heard him singing in a clear ringing voice. It was a blues, and I walked along behind him remembering the times that I had heard such singing at home. It seemed that here some memories slipped around my life at the campus and went far back to things I had long ago shut out of my mind. There was no escaping such reminders.<sup>24</sup>

The invisible man and the cart pusher talked--but the cart pusher was using idiomatic expressions that the invisible man was not able to relate to. Like the singing, the speech stirred memories, but remained strange.

What does it mean, I thought. I'd heard it all my life but suddenly the strangeness of it came through to me . . . God damn, I thought, they're a hell of a people! And I didn't know whether it was pride or disgust that suddenly flashed over me.<sup>25</sup>

This ambiguity concerning language by the invisible man disappears in the later novels where speech patterns that are special to black Americans are assumed as a normal part of life. Language under those circumstances becomes a contributor to a

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<sup>23</sup>Williams, Sissie, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>24</sup>Ellison, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

positive sense of identity and of solidarity. It serves again to separate the "we" from the "they."<sup>26</sup>

Another indication of the importance of language use is the use of the word "nigger" by blacks. In many of the novels, Negro characters will use the term "nigger," a term which, when used by whites, has only bad connotations. In the novels of the forties and fifties, if one Negro called another "nigger," the word did have these bad connotations. "Niggers" were Negroes who were deviant in some way.

You can have ninety-nine colored folks and there'll always be one nigger! Fats uses guns, knives, and he's been mixed up with dope, Chief.<sup>27</sup>

They were the ones who held the race back, ones who stole, lied, cheated, or were just plain lazy.

The term would also be used in anger or in a taunting manner. When such was the case, the one against whom the term was used usually responded in anger or in a hurt manner. Parents tried to protect their children against the term and often avoided discussing it in the same manner they would avoid discussing sex. Note, for example, the following discussion between a mother and her young son:

"Mama, what's a nigger?"  
"You go look it up in the dictionary."

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<sup>26</sup>One might also note here the inclusion of a special dictionary in Bobby Seale, Seize The Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton, (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 404-412 to help the uninitiated understand on at least one level.

<sup>27</sup>Richard Wright, The Long Dream, (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1958), p. 243.



"How do you spell it?"

"Why, Cain, I thought you were smart."<sup>28</sup>

In the novels of the sixties, one begins to note that "nigger" is used much, much less frequently, but when it is used it has become more of a term of affection and belongingness among blacks. Friends sometimes call one another "nigger" with the same connotation as the word heard more frequently today when whites are present, "brother." Sometimes it just refers to blacks as a group with something in common.

Sometimes I think the Jesuits is right. I seen more good niggers ruined by integration.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, although the term is used much less frequently, when used, it seems to symbolize the positiveness of blackness, rather than the more negative connotations of an earlier day.<sup>30</sup> In a sense it has become a special word reserved for use by and among "brothers."

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<sup>28</sup>Owen Dodson, Boy at the Window, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Young, Inc., 1951), p. 11.

<sup>29</sup>Kelley, op. cit., p. 176.

<sup>30</sup>H. Rapp Brown, Die Nigger Die! (New York: Dial Press, 1969), p. iii, makes a somewhat finer distinction; by 1968, novels had not yet fully worked out the differences within the black community. But, Brown's comments do conform to more recent usage and are here included for clarification.

This word, "nigger," which is taboo in negro and white America, becomes meaningful in the Black community. Among Blacks it is not uncommon to hear the words, "my nigger," (addressed to a brother as an expression of kinship and brotherhood and respect for having resisted) or "He's a bad nigger!," meaning he'll stand up for himself. He won't let you down. He'll go down with you. When Blacks call negroes "niggers," however, it takes on the negativeness of white and negro usage."

It should be noted that "nigger" has, if anything, become even more opprobrious to blacks when used by whites. In fact, other terms used by Negroes like "spook" or "blood" are also terms which the whites must leave alone. They may have a meaning of camaraderie among blacks, but even a white who is accepted may not share in this kind of solidarity. Solly was having an affair with Celia, an Australian.

"You have the nicest warmest eyes in all Australia."

"And how about my mouth? Is it not full and shapely? My lips are not thin and stingy like most Australians, are they? Pam says a spook must've spent a hard word on my mother."

His hand went out automatically and sharply up against her mouth almost before the words came out, and he reached for his cap in her hands but she backed away from him.

"Why? Why?"

"You won't get another chance to insult this particular colored man," he said almost calmly, "you may rest assured."

. . . . .

"But-bu-but we heard the soldiers call each other spooks many many times when they roomed at Steve's house. My-my brother's--the colored soldiers--we-we thought it was a term of affection."<sup>31</sup>

Language and speech patterns are an important part then in one's sense of group identity. They can serve to strengthen ties among the group by being something special that is shared, and they can serve to distinguish the out-groups by excluding them from understanding or using that which is shared. The later novels show much more of this special use of language than the

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<sup>31</sup>Killens, op. cit., pp. 420-421.

earlier ones suggesting again that identity of black qua black is becoming more frequent and more important.

### Music

Jazz and the blues are an integral part of many of the novels, early and late. And it is in music that one particularly feels a sense of sharedness among blacks, of recognition of common experiences, of feelings, of loves and hates, of joys and sorrows. It is to the old, well worn 78's of Bessie Smith that Buzzy of Trumbull Park turns, to play and in so doing relieve his own fears of attack by white neighbors who are intent upon forcing him to move and also to feel that someone else shares(d) those fears and can beautifully express them.<sup>32</sup>

And in the novels it is those who reject being black and who are trying to be middle-class whites who reject the music developed by blacks:

Essie snapped on the radio and found a colored station. A tenor sax man was carrying the melody on a jump tune. She danced around the living room, enjoying the music even more because she knew her sister disapproved of these stations. She said their music was too loud and only backward Negroes listened to them.<sup>33</sup>

But, of course, it was not only "backward Negroes" who listened, unless by backward is meant not wanting to be white; and that was the meaning in this novel.

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<sup>32</sup>Frank London Brown, Trumbull Park, (Chicago: Regnery Co., 1959).

<sup>33</sup>Julien Mayfield, The Hit, (New York: Belmont Books, 1970), p. 121.

As a more symbolic form than literature, music can perhaps be more expressive of consciousness than can novels. Certainly, we cannot, here, discuss the meanings of jazz and the blues.<sup>34</sup> But we must note that they do indeed play an important role in any sub-culture which might be shared by American blacks. At some point or another, there is a positive reference to such music in most of the novels studied. The musician who makes this music is also an important character in many of the books, although a major character in only three of them.<sup>35</sup> And, indeed, the jazz motif is the style of one of the best of the novels from a literary point of view.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, as Keil has suggested, "the entertainers are masters of sound, movement, timing, the spoken word. One can therefore find in their performances the essentials and defining features--the very core in fact--of Negro culture as a whole."<sup>37</sup> We only need suggest that content here. The important point is that music, jazz and blues, is an essential part of what is or what could become a black basis of identity.

It is important to note here, however, that sharedness is only a part of identity. One can share music with a group and

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<sup>34</sup>But if, interested, see e.g. Charles Keil, Urban Blues, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

<sup>35</sup>William Melvin Kelley, A Drop of Patience, (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1965). Williams, Sissie, op. cit. and John A. Williams, Night Song, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1961).

<sup>36</sup>Ellison, op. cit.

<sup>37</sup>Keil, op. cit., p. 16.

feel that it gives one something in common with that group without really understanding what that sharedness means and thus unable to base one's actions on that sense of sharedness. The invisible man is reflecting on his sense of invisibility.

Then somehow I came out of it, ascending hastily from this underworld of sound to hear Louis Armstrong innocently asking

What did I do  
To be so black and Blue?

At first I was afraid, this familiar music had demanded action, the kind of which I was incapable and yet had I lingered here beneath the surface I might have attempted to act. Nevertheless, I know now that few really listen to this music.<sup>38</sup>

Although music, jazz and the blues, are a common part of the novels and are a potential element for a shared identity. There must be some further consciousness to make that identity distinctive enough for it to be usable as a basis of group action.

#### Food

The foods one eats, or prefers, or particularly associates with one's heritages are an important part of group identity, because eating occurs so regularly. Mealtime may be the only time a family, for example, gets together. At the least, food is something one cannot avoid for too long. And, food plays a very symbolic role in many of the novels.

In many ways feelings about food reflect the same ambiguities as feelings about other aspects of identity. The desire to be an accepted part of society pushes one toward rejecting

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<sup>38</sup>Ellison, op. cit., p. 15.

foods associated with blacks and with home. The desire to be oneself pushes toward acceptance and indeed celebration of those foods with which one identifies.

When the invisible man first got to New York, eager to make it and to prove himself, he rejected food associated with his Southern Negro past. For example, he went into a drugstore for breakfast:

The counterman came over.

"I've got something good for you," he said placing a glass of water before me. "How about the special?"

"What's the special?"

"Pork chops, grits, one egg. Hot biscuits and coffee!"

He leaned over the counter with a look that seemed to say, there, that ought to excite you, boy. Could everyone see that I was Southern?

"I'll have orange juice, toast, and coffee," I said coldly. . . .

(I was) proud to have resisted the pork chops and grits. It was an act of discipline, a sign of the change that was coming over me. . . .<sup>39</sup>

But, after learning a little more about being black in a white world, the invisible man no longer had to reject his heritage. Indeed, he could celebrate it. He bought a yam from a street vendor:

I took a bite. . . . I walked along, munching the yam, just as suddenly overcome by an intense feeling of freedom-- simply because I was eating while walking along the street. It was exhilarating. . . . What a group of people we were, I thought. Why, you could cause us the greatest humiliation simply by confronting us with something we liked. Not all of us, but so many. Simply by walking up and shaking a set of chitterlings or a well-boiled hog maw at them during the clear light of day. . . .

~~T~~o hell with being ashamed of what you liked. No more of that for me. I am what I am.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 157.    <sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 229-231.

It is, however, an additional step from accepting what one is to celebrating what one is. Thus, although the novels do illustrate a sharedness in favorite foods or "down-home cooking," food does not appear in the novels as a major element of a positive black identity.

Thus, food, too, can be a source of meaning, a way of identifying oneself and relating to oneself--if one can overcome the stigma (to some) of accepting one's blackness. But it is not yet seen as a component of a total concept of identity.

### Summary

The novels, then, indicate that there are nascent elements around which a positive sense of group identity could be formed. Blackness itself has in part become, and certainly has the potential of becoming, a symbol of belongingness based on a past and a present, on a historical and a cultural uniqueness.

Yet, the symbol has not really jelled. It has distinct elements, but it is not yet an articulated whole. It lacks the unity which only an ideology can express. But, to consider that ideology's potential form(s), one must first consider the extent of solidarity already existing among blacks; the basis of that solidarity; and the relationship between that solidarity and the elements of identity.

### Solidarity

Although not itself an element of identity, group solidarity could be an important impetus toward the consolidation of that identity.

The question remains, then, do the items above (and other feelings not considered) lead to any solidarity? What kinds of indications do the novels give that blacks feel that they are a kind of community in which the individual is a part of the group, a group which has an important meaning because it symbolizes elements of oneself?

During all time periods covered in the novels, two views of physical solidarity prevailed. Often, some character would express the view that Negroes do not and would not stick together:

If you ask me, they've got too many spooks on that team. It'll never work out. I used to pull for Brooklyn before they got all those Negroes on the team. Then I switched to the Yanks. You know Negroes never can work together.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, the same novel would present scenes of extraordinary solidarity, especially when one Negro would be in trouble with the white world and its representatives, usually the police. Even a stranger in trouble was reason enough for blacks to rally. For example, in The Third Generation, Charles lost control of his auto, smashing into a group of people waiting for a streetcar;

The door of the car was flung abruptly open. A butcher jerked him to the street, brandishing a bloody cleaver. He looked up into the hard white face, saw the brutal mouth, merciless gray eyes, and felt his consciousness leaving. He tried to hang on to himself, vaguely aware of a violent scuffle taking place as if he had no part in it. When the picture came again he was closed in by a group of colored men.<sup>42</sup>

Such examples are a frequent image in the novels.

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<sup>41</sup>Mayfield, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>42</sup>Chester Himes, The Third Generation, (New York: Signet Books, 1956), p. 179.



Indeed, in one novel, solidarity is complete. In A Different Drummer<sup>43</sup> the entire population of a Southern state, following the example of a lone man, voluntarily drop everything to leave the state for greener pastures in the North. The story is admittedly a fable, but the author clearly felt that Negroes could and would act together to better their lives as well as for self-protection, and that they would do this because of something shared in blackness.

Where such solidarity was expressed, however, there was the general expression of it being due to the "courage of the masses" rather than through organizational help. Indeed, what is obviously the NAACP is seen as impotent, totally unable to help the handful of blacks who integrate a housing project against opposition of somewhat unbelievable proportions in Trumbull Park.<sup>44</sup>

There are many elements of this lack of faith in middle-class organizations to really bring together black people. The most important element seems to be that those organizations are frequently characterized as either white-oriented or white-controlled, or as just not really caring about blackness per se. A concern with nondiscrimination is important, but the novels

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<sup>43</sup>William Melvin Kelley, A Different Drummer, (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1962). The basis for such solidarity is not viewed by all novelists as possible in the South at the present as Junius Edwards, If We Must Die, (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1963) makes clear when he shows some Negroes' resentment at the attempt of one Negro to rock the boat by attempting to vote.

<sup>44</sup>Brown, op. cit.

tend to indicate that it somehow does not fulfill a psychological need of seeing something unique and beautiful in black.

The novels, then suggest that solidarity based on color is a realistic goal, but that there is a need for that solidarity to transcend individual circumstances and that those groups which are supposed to provide the vehicle for that transcendence have so far failed to do so. Certainly, the inherent suggestion is again the need for a well-articulated ideology to bring about such solidarity.

Identity and ideology present a chicken and egg proposition. Each could be more easily articulated if a clear sense of the other existed. Just as there are bases for the development of an ideology, there are bases for the development of identity. But the novelists were unable to put these together, to break into the chicken-egg cycle. This failure is the central question of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FAILURE OF IDEOLOGICAL THOUGHT

In the preceding chapters, we have noted that, although the novels present several bases for a potential ideology and identity, they fail to present a successful, fully integrated and coherent ideology or sense of identity for black Americans. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore that failure.

We presuppose that the lack of an ideology is indeed in some sense a failure. We do not make this judgement in normative terms, for one person's loss may well be another's gain. Nor do we wish to comment on the usefulness of one versus several ideological positions.<sup>1</sup> Instead, we shall concentrate on an examination of three areas which might help explain why the novels reflect a lack of identity and unifying ideology that might give identity a purpose.

First, as indicated in the introductory chapter of this paper, there are inherent limitations in the novel. Some of the more pertinent of these limitations will be reviewed.

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<sup>1</sup>See, for such a discussion, Luther P. Gerlack, "Movements of Revolutionary Change," American Behavioral Scientist 14 (July/August, 1971), pp. 812-836.

Secondly, there may well be aspects of what we have chosen to call the American condition that make the development of ideology an extremely chancy proposition. At many points, we have touched on the response of the novel to this and we must here more systematically examine the roadblocks that exist in our culture to the development of an ideology.

Finally, there is what we have chosen to call the black condition in American society, full of paradoxes and contradictions that may well not be, at least readily, solveable. Again, while these have been touched upon throughout this paper, we must here systematically examine the problems involved.

This threefold examination should then allow us to come to some conclusions concerning the failure to develop an ideology and the potentiality of such an ideology being developed in the near future.

### Limitations of Novels and Novelists

In one sense, the novel is an excellent way to explore the meanings of a changing society and in so doing present an ideological vision of a better world. As Horace Cayton noted:

Sometimes a new critical perspective of society and its culture is stimulated by powerful ideological developments which throw new light on the everyday world of events. A new perspective can lead to insight and change. These revelations come to philosophers, scientists, political leaders, and above all, to the artist. And of all the artists, it has been the writer who, from the beginning of time, has fashioned various brave new worlds.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Horace Cayton, "Ideological Forces in the Work of Negro Writers," in Herbert Hill, Anger and Beyond, (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 37.

But possibility is not probability, for the creative writer faces several difficulties as writer in delineating new perspectives. The Negro writer in the United States faces additional difficulties as writer, difficulties which can stand in the way of developing that perspective that "can lead to insight and change," that ideological perspective we have been examining.

There is a perennial debate about whether art and politics are compatible. And indeed, the dangers of mixing art and politics are many: the stereotyped characters walking through the pages like cardboard dolls programmed by the latest model computer; the plot which unrolls with all the subtlety of a blitzkrieg; the dialogue, which while soaring to new polemical heights, lacks all relevance to the action of the novel. One of the novelists examined in this study noted that the black writer particularly faces these problems:

So conscious is he of the pervading evil of race prejudice that he feels duty-bound to assault it at every turn, injecting opinion into alleged narration and inserting his philosophy into the mouths of his characters.

Writing of Negroes, the novelist has difficulty with his characterizations. His people usually become walking, talking, propaganda, rather than rounded individuals. . . . One might even say that the chronicles of offenses constitute truth; however, they do not constitute art. And art is the concern of any novelist.<sup>3</sup>

But to say that politics can interfere with art does not say that politics inevitably interferes with art as Dostoevsky, Silone or Conrad have so ably demonstrated. Indeed, politics may

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<sup>3</sup>William Gardner Smith, "The Negro Writer: Pitfalls and Compensations," in C. W. E. Bigsby (ed.), The Black American Writer, Volume I, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 72-73.

elevate art to its highest levels by forcing the authors to deal with a polarity, a tension, an opposition that wrings the best in resolution from a writer.<sup>4</sup>

Great literature deals with human problems, with the eternal in man and not the transcient in history. This goes beyond questions of characterization or of plot to the essence of the perspective of the novel. Albert Murray, for example, noted that:

. . . it is all but impossible for a serious writer of fiction to engage his craft in a political cause. . . . the truly serious novelist has what almost amounts to an ambivalence toward the human predicament. Alarming as this may seem, however, it is really very fundamental to his open-minded search for the essential truth of human experience.<sup>5</sup>

And so, some critics insist that novels with black characters must only incidentally be about black people, that they must fundamentally be about the human situation. Such a perspective would, of course, make a novel a very inadequate platform to explore ideological perspectives relevant to black Americans.

But, as Gross noted:

In the insistence upon the Negro's similarity to all other men--which had been the rallying cry of the battles against the literary stereotype--there lay the ironic danger of so bleaching out his personal and cultural identity that he would be stripped of his unique and tragic history, which is to say his particular humanness.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See the opening essay, "The Idea of the Political Novel," in Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel, (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1957), pp. 15-24.

<sup>5</sup>Albert Murray, "Something Different, Something More," in Hill, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>6</sup>Seymour L. Gross, "Introduction: Stereotype to Archtype: The Negro in American Literary Criticism," in Seymour L. Gross

Although there may be common elements of human experience, the impact of those elements on people's lives and the way people chose to deal with them do differ. Jews may have been oppressed in Nazi Germany, women in Egypt, blacks in the United States, the peasant in Italy, but great literature does not make the same of all those situations. In truth, the limitations of great art are not so much limitations put upon novelists but limitations of novelists, not all of whom are capable of being great.

Society can make it easier or harder for novelists to fulfill these potentials, however. One problem for the black novelist in America concerns the critics.

The Negro artist works against an undertow of sharp criticism and misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from the whites. "O, be respectable, write about nice people, show how good we are," say the Negroes. Be stereotyped, don't go too far, don't shatter our illusions about you, don't amuse us too seriously. We will pay you," say the Whites.<sup>7</sup>

The militant black critic says you have sold out, you do not use your art for the cause; the white critic says you're being too hard, or too "black," or worse yet, ignore you.

And always, there is the question of sales--is there a market for what the novelist feels must be said. As Saunders Redding noted, until recently, the Negro audience was so small

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and John Edward Hardy (eds.), Images of the Negro in American Literature, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 12-13.

<sup>7</sup>Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Social Mountain," reprinted in John A. Williams and Charles F. Harris (eds.), Amistad 1, (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 303.

that, black writers had to write for white audiences.<sup>8</sup> Even today, black poets and dramatists are more likely to write for black audiences than are black novelists. The necessity of writing primarily for white audiences does not preclude the novelist from developing an ideological perspective but it certainly does not help, for two reasons. First, whites may not buy works which are too honest. Ellison noted that:

the white reader draws his whitener around him when he sits down to read. He doesn't want to identify himself with Negro characters in terms of our immediate social and racial situation. . . . The white reader doesn't want to get too close, not even in an imaginary re-creation of society. Negro writers have felt this and it has lead to much of our failure.<sup>9</sup>

The second problem is that the political needs of the white audience differ in part from that of the black audience. Developing an ideological perspective for blacks is not necessarily appropriate if you are addressing a primarily white audience.

The successful novelist faces additional pressures which ultimately have an impact on his ability, through the novel, to develop a perspective useful for this development of a black ideology. For once achieving commercial or critical success, the pressures take many forms and each have their own peculiar kinds of debilitations. When it means more and more time on the lecture circuit, the television and radio talk shows, the club teas, the

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<sup>8</sup>Saunders Redding, "The Negro Writer and American Literature," in Hill, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Hoyt W. Fuller, "Contemporary Negro Fiction," in Bigsby, op. cit., p. 232.



novelist enters an unreal world, far from those things he writes about. Perhaps even worse he is forced into being a spokesman for which he is really unsuited.<sup>10</sup> And then he is criticized, if he is black, for not being involved enough in the "movement," again, a role for which his talents may be unsuited. All too many of the promising American black novelists attempt to escape these pressures by emigrating--and like Richard Wright find that in so doing they lose touch with the tensions and torments that made them successful novelists in the first place.

Richard Wright once wrote that:

Perspective for Negro writers will come when they have looked and brooded so hard and long upon the harsh lot of their race and compared it with the hopes and struggles of minority peoples everywhere that the cold facts have begun to tell them something.<sup>11</sup>

Perspective had not yet come by 1968 and yet, the novels examined in this study seemed to be on the verge of reaching that state. It is not the limitations of the novel or the social problems of the novelist that prevented the breakthrough. As we have noted above, these problems of developing perspective are real, but the great novelist is able to overcome them. It is elsewhere then that we must look for an explanation for the lack of ideological perspective.

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<sup>10</sup>Connor Cruise O'Brien, Writers and Politics, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 20.

<sup>11</sup>Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Literature," John A. Williams and Charles F. Harris (eds.), Amistad 2, (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), p. 11.

Limitations because of the  
Nature of American Society

The United States as a social system presents barriers to the novelist's ability to develop an ideology, but does not preclude him/her from doing so. The fact that so many novelists (and political leaders) have been of West Indian rather than American ancestry attests to these difficulties that a culture puts in the way of its artists. Although it was the Swedish Myrdal who wrote An American Dilemma,<sup>12</sup> an American might have been able to do so, perhaps even with more insight. What we wish to do in this section is examine what difficulties the American cultural, social, and political systems place in the way of the black novelist.

Much has been written, directly and indirectly, about the American culture. We shall here only briefly suggest those elements that have an impact upon the black artist trying to develop a meaningful ideological perspective for and with black people.

Probably the most crucial barrier for those trying to articulate a new ideological perspective in American society, be they blacks, new leftists, or women, is the difficulty in identifying the perspective which the new ideology is to be a counter to. For, after all, what is the existing American perspective? There are those who see it as pragmatic, which in essence is a rejection of any perspective.<sup>13</sup> But there are also those who see

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<sup>12</sup>Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma--The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy, (New York: Harper and Row, 1944).

<sup>13</sup>See, e.g. Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1955), esp. chap. 17.

it as a liberalism that, while not necessarily clearly articulated, is capable of being defined.<sup>14</sup> Others yet see it as conservative<sup>15</sup> and others yet claim that it is even radical.<sup>16</sup> And in the midst of all this, others yet proclaim the end of ideology, noting that, after all is said and done, modern society needs no guiding perspective.<sup>17</sup>

And, if that were not enough confusion, Lyndon Johnson gave a major civil rights address in New Orleans and shortly thereafter Hubert Humphrey hugged Lester Maddox. Not only is there a confusion of national purpose, but almost daily one can view reaffirmations of whatever one views as that purpose, and alongside those reaffirmations one can also see denials. And both denials and affirmations often go beyond disagreements on means to disagreements on purposes, no matter how disguised.

Is it then any wonder that the proponent of major political changes has some difficulty in developing a perspective that can successfully challenge what is and galvanize people to a new perspective of what could be?

Along with this lack of a clearly articulated and agreed upon ideology, America has, as Irving Howe noted, lacked

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<sup>14</sup>See, e.g. Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955).

<sup>15</sup>See, e.g. Russell Kirk, The American Cause, (Chicago: Regnery Co., 1966).

<sup>16</sup>See, e.g. Christopher Lasch, The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965).

<sup>17</sup>See, e.g. Daniel Bell, The End of Ideology, rev. ed., (New York: Free Press, 1960).

ideologies. It is not that there have been none, for there have been many, but that by and large none have developed those "advanced systems of political belief that led to the kind of irrevocable struggles we associate with the life of ideology in Europe."<sup>18</sup>

And consequently, there is no literary tradition in America that can influence modern writers who seriously wish to deal with real conflicts. A black novelist, William Gardner Smith, spelled this out more clearly:

Emotional depth, perception of real problems and real conflicts, is extremely rare in American literature--as it is in American society generally. Instead of issues of significance, our fiction (our serious fiction) is overladen with such trite themes as that of Tennessee Williams' The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone. America's is a superficial civilization: it is soda and pop land, the civilization of television sets and silk stockings and murder mysteries and contempt for art and poetry. It is difficult, out of such environment, to bring forth works with the emotional force of, say, Crime and Punishment.<sup>19</sup>

Movement leaders have often followed in the American tradition of not reflecting seriously and thoroughly on the principles that guide them. Stokely Carmichael, for example, noted:

Don't worry about ideology. I always say that my work is my ideology. You will find that after you get going your ideology will develop out of your struggle.<sup>20</sup>

And as Donald McCormack noted:

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<sup>18</sup>Howe, op. cit., p. 160.

<sup>19</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Donald J. McCormack, "Stokely Carmichael and Pan Africanism: Back to Black Power," Journal of Politics 5 (May, 1973), p. 389.

Action abounded, yet somehow the praxis remained resolutely barren--the realm of ideas lay fallow. Experience, it appeared, might also be little more than a constraint, a prison to obscure one's vision.<sup>21</sup>

The black novelist then faced the problem of having a meagre literary tradition in a society confused about and basically rejecting ideological thought but undergoing a black revolt whose leaders, by and large, failed to contemplate on any but general terms what their actions really meant. The novelist wishing to be serious about an ideological perspective did so very much in an intellectual vacuum.

And, whenever ideas were discussed that held some potential for development, the existing political establishment had little difficulty in coopting those ideas and developing them for the use of the status quo. Thus, black power as a slogan with a potential for ideological development was easily coopted by President Nixon so that it was no longer challenging as a possible perspective for change. It was really just an expression of the American dream; we all want to own our very own candy shop.

This cooptation takes a tremendous toll. Ideological perspectives are not developed overnight. They need to be nurtured, discussed, debated. If at their very beginnings new insights are coopted and perverted, that nurturing period is nipped in the bud and meaningful development of the idea is cut off. The ability of the society to coopt symbols then serves to

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 389-390.

those seeking change.<sup>22</sup> At the same time this cooptation not only withholds real change but also makes it more difficult to develop the insights, ideas, and perspectives that might lead to or at least show the way to tangible success.

The typical manner in which change has taken place in American society also serves, in one sense, as a barrier to the novelist trying to develop an ideological perspective. Devine summarizes the views of most social scientists on change:

. . . There has been substantial change in the American social system. But change has not taken place randomly through the system. Change has tended to focus first on social structure, then on social values, then on political values. Because of the strength of the American political culture, most changes have been deflected to the physical and social environment. While social change has been substantial, fundamental political change has been limited. . . . The change which does take place politically takes place at the authority level. Neither the regime values nor the essential regime political structure have changed to any significant degree.<sup>23</sup>

Hans Morgenthau takes this a little further by noting that in the United States, a crisis of national purpose is due to the inability or unwillingness to reconcile old ideas with new facts.<sup>24</sup> There is, in other words, a tendency for vast change to remain unintegrated into our thought systems.

Certainly this is related to the prior points on the lack of ideological thought in this country and the ability to coopt

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<sup>22</sup>See, e.g. Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964).

<sup>23</sup>Donald J. Devine, The Political Culture of the United States, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1972), pp. 293-294.

<sup>24</sup>Hans Morgenthau, The Purpose of American Politics, (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 6.

ideas. It also, however, contributes two new barriers to the would-be novelist seeking perspective. First, if one agrees with the basic values of a society but dissents from the practice of those ideals as we have seen is often the case with the black novelist, how can one develop a perspective that cuts deeper than me-tooism. The burden of such a perspective is that it must be on means, on strategies and tactics, not on goals. And insofar as it is on goals, insofar as they differ from those of the society, they are specific, short term, or local in their statement. A perspective that can mobilize people for the long pull, that can unite people in different positions, that can form an enduring cohesion, must attract people with something more than that short term goal. But if it is to mobilize them against the existing system it must thoroughly differentiate itself from that system, and as the new left, e.g., also found, a desire to reinstate traditional American values and goals does not serve as sufficient differentiation, for those values and goals are in many ways still real, certainly supported as existing, today.<sup>25</sup>

A second problem concerning the nature of change in this society arises out of the substitution of cultural for political change. Robert Bone noted that:

American culture is still in the process of becoming. It is not a finished form, a house that one day will be rented out to Negroes. On the contrary, in the process of racial integration the culture will be radically transformed. This

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<sup>25</sup>See, e.g. Joanna Schneider Zongrando and Robert L. Zongrando, "Black Protest: A Rejection of the American Dream," Journal of Black Studies 1 (Dec., 1970), pp. 141-160.

transformation will amount to a correction of perspective. By degrees, the white man's truncated version of American reality will be enlarged. The American eye will be retrained to see sights hitherto ignored or, if seen, misconstrued for verial ends. Connections formerly obscure will now be plain; the essential oneness of American civilization will emerge. Ultimately, Americans will develop a new image of themselves as a nation.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps, but the new perspective Bone cites is essentially a political perspective. And by focusing only on the cultural perspective, the novelist, or any other social thinker, will fail to develop those insights--that can or will fundamentally change the existing political perspective. And, that is what has traditionally occurred in the United States. The novelist then must strike out in a vacuum. Without doubt, the development of new perspectives is never easy, but the traditional view of change in the United States makes it doubly difficult here.

Finally, there are two related structural aspects of American society, one perhaps peculiar to blacks, the other not, that make it more difficult within this system for novelists to develop new ideological perspectives. The first concerns the structural aspects of political/social movements in the United States. For a variety of adaptive reasons, such movements tend to be segmentary, polycephalous, and reticulate.<sup>27</sup> Gerlack notes that: "In spite of these centrifugal characteristics, these varying groups manifest sufficient cohesion and ideological unity to be perceived as a large scale movement."<sup>28</sup> And that is true.

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<sup>26</sup>Robert Bone, "Ralph Ellison and the Uses of Imagination," in Hill, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>27</sup>Gerlack, op. cit., pp. 812-834. <sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 834.



There is a sharing of "basic ideological themes."<sup>29</sup> But a sharing of ideological themes does not constitute a cohesive and integrated ideological statement. As we have noted, the novelists have developed ideological themes or, as we preferred to state, have developed possible bases for an ideology. What they, like the movements, have failed to do is develop a comprehensive ideology. And the very nature of the existing movement, while perhaps adaptative for short term successes of the movement, is not conducive to ideological development. Individual personalities, jealousies, internecine strife, and all the other centrifugal tendencies serve to detract from the serious thought needed to cut through to the heart of the real problems of the movement. A novelist can overcome this, but it is not easy when the people around you, the media, and the events of the day are all on opposite courses.

Another roadblock concerns the geographical distribution of blacks in the United States, a factor which contributes to the characteristics of the civil rights movement. This geographical distribution has several dimensions. For example, although a relatively small minority in terms of the country as a whole, blacks are a majority within some areas--a fact that in our federal system has considerable importance. Secondly, while once primarily rural and Southern, blacks are now rural and urban Southern and urban Northern. And within that urban North, while concentrated in the central cities of major metropolitan areas,

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 834.

those areas are widely separated in space from one another. The purpose of an ideology is to bridge this gap between urban and rural and to deal with the presence on one level and the absence on the other of a definable territory. But these facts in combination do limit the kinds of ideologies that are realistically available. As Rubenstein notes, the absence of a definable territory limits the applicability of independence ideologies.<sup>30</sup>

And last, but by no means least, racism constitutes a roadblock to the development of ideology. The existence of and direction of white racism is almost totally out of the control of blacks. And yet, an ideology whose basic thrust is assimilationism (and to a lesser extent pluralism) must deal with control of white racism if it is to be meaningful for the here and now. But racism's effect is much deeper than that. It is a life-taking force that affects all too much of one's everyday life. It is a constantly assaulting force, one all too easy to blame all one's woes on, or one all too easy to expend one's energies in rage on. It can deaden the senses as one's defenses are built up. It can assault one's joy at the most unsuspecting moment. An irrational force, all too easily it begets more irrationality. The ideologist cannot ignore all this, but he must also take care not to be sucked in by it either. It is indeed a burden placed on any black person in this country.

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<sup>30</sup>Richard E. Rubenstein, Rebels in Eden, More Political Violence in the United States, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970), pp. 37-41.

Each roadblock is only a small barrier in itself. It is cumulatively that they present such a challenge to the would-be ideologist. The reality of racism, for example, suggests an independence strategy. But the reality of geographic distribution suggests otherwise. And whatever is done must be done in an atmosphere that distrusts ideologies and tends to soak them up and symbolically absorb them into the body politic. Debate and constructive ideological thinking is thereby inhibited by these obstacles.

And, if that were not enough, there are a series of additional roadblocks related to the everyday reality of black life. It is those roadblocks we will examine in the next section.

#### Dilemmas of the Black Condition

Although the nature of novels and the nature of American society place difficulties in the way of the novelist attempting to present an ideological viewpoint, those difficulties are more easily overcome than some of the real dilemmas that exist in the lives of blacks in the United States. In the previous chapters, the outlines of these dilemmas as perceived by the novelists have been presented. In this section we shall summarize those dilemmas and present them in a somewhat more generalized form than they were previously presented.

Essentially these dilemmas are conflicts in thought arising out of the black experience--dilemmas that make it difficult to form an ideology. Dolbeare and Dolbeare note that ideologies answer three questions:

. . . (1) how the present social, economic, and political order operates, (2) why this is so, and whether it is good or bad, and (3) what should be done about it if anything . . .<sup>31</sup>

In the abstract the answers to these questions may seem simple, but the novels make clear the point that life is not in the abstract and that the black experience presents several, seemingly contradictory, answers to those questions. It is these contradictions, or conflicts, that make it so difficult to develop an ideological position. For one kind of reality, one description of the system would suggest a strategy of dealing with the system. But were a different description more accurate, the first strategy might well exacerbate the problem rather than lead to solutions. But, what if both descriptions are a part of the truth? One must develop a new paradigm as a new synthesis of thought in which both positions can be reevaluated to illustrate a larger truth and thus new ways to deal with that truth, or one must remain floundering, dealing with one's dilemmas as best as one can.

This latter is essentially what the novelists have done. They have presented real dilemmas in the black condition, real conflicts which cannot, seemingly, be resolved in current modes of thought. Not then, being able to fully describe in a unified coherent manner the system, they cannot really evaluate it or relate why it is so, and they certainly cannot develop a coherent way to indicate what must be done.

There are four major dilemmas discussed in the novels that are relevant to describing the system. These descriptive

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<sup>31</sup>Kenneth M. Dolbeare and Patricia Dolbeare, American Ideologies, (Chicago: Markham, 1971), p. 3.

dilemmas will be presented. Then we will examine more briefly the comments of the novelists on the second and third of the Dolbeares' questions.

#### Dilemmas of Description

Inequality. The first descriptive dilemma regards the nature of inequality in American society. Although all of the novelists agreed that the society was in some sense inequalitarian, there was a lack of clear agreement as to the dimensions of inequality, to the nature of inequality, and to the relationship of inequality to other values.

Perhaps the key to the dilemma is the nature of inequality in the system. Is the inequality that exists an aberration in a basically equalitarian system, or is the inequality that exists actually a foundation of the system? The first, basically reformist position, focuses upon the pervasiveness of equalitarian ideals within the United States. That reality does not always correspond to ideal as a fact of life is a result of the relative immaturity of the system. But the trends, although not always smooth, are always clear; an increase in equality, a lessening of the inequalities that exist. Thus, the previously cited reference in Brown Girl Brown Stone<sup>32</sup> to Roosevelt's opening of employment in defense industries illustrates the basic equalitarianism of the society, whatever inequalities exist can be corrected.

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<sup>32</sup>Paule Marshall, Brown Girl Brown Stone, (New York: Avon, 1970).

The second, essentially radical position, focuses upon the pervasiveness of inequality tempered by, but in no sense altered by, symbols of equality. It sees the society and the economic system as based on inequality and the consequent exploitation that inequality allows. An equalitarian rhetoric is maintained as a safety valve, to focus blame on individuals for their plight, not on the system, and to allow the maintenance of a hope of better things. What the first position sees as signs of progress towards equality, the second position sees as necessary, either for fulfilling temporary needs of the system (somebody had to keep the factories running) or for maintaining the myth of an equalitarian ethos.

Many have written tomes on equality and inequality and the novelists certainly did not reflect on the subject in the philosophic or empirical analytic detail that any of those specialists have. The focus here is on a description of the system that could lend itself to the formation of an ideological viewpoint. Further concerns centered around the dimensions of inequality. Briefly, should inequality be considered in relation to opportunity alone or to opportunity and other aspects of life? Secondly, what is the relationship of equality and inequality to different life styles and cultures? Third, is inequality a characteristic of relevance to groups or to individuals?

In the novels, the authors who saw equality as relevant primarily to questions of opportunity were usually closely associated with the view that the inequality that existed in the system

was essentially an aberration. Likewise, a part of this syndrome was the view that equality should mean the same to those with differing life styles and culture and should be available in the same manner to all.

While we have characterized this as a syndrome, that is only partly true for, although those positions frequently went together, they did not do so in all cases, nor must they inevitably do so. Particularly difficult in the novels was the question regarding life styles and culture. Especially poignant is the question, what should being black mean in an equalitarian system and what does it mean in the existing system? Is blackness a cultural trait, not merely a racial one? Is it a defense against unequalitarianism or is it a positive way of surviving an unequalitarian system? Those who saw the system as basically equalitarian defined in terms of opportunity tended to see equality as relevant in the system to individuals not to groups and tended to see blackness as an inappropriate way to classify culturally. They thus tended to minimize the importance of differing life styles and cultures.

Those who saw unequalitarianism as endemic to the system tended to view equality as extending beyond opportunity, as being relevant to groups as much as individuals and as being possible for and compatible with differing life styles and cultures. With such a view, inequality was bound to be endemic to the existing society; just as in the first, inequality was bound to exist side by side with equalitarian aspects. And the novelists saw enough

truth in each syndrome to both reject the niceties of syndrome thought and to fail to conclude which was the better description of the system.

In a like manner, the novelists were unable to describe the relationship of the value of equality to other system values, particularly achievement. The relationships they saw seemed, like other aspects of the black condition to be contradictory. On the one hand, achievement seemed to go hand in hand with equality, at least equality of opportunity. Achievement by individual blacks showed that equality did exist, however limited it might be. The values seemed to be reinforcing within the society.

But on the other hand, achievement seemed to be a more important value than equality and one that aided the maintenance of an essentially inequalitarian system by focusing on individual achievement, focused thoughts on one's own progress and away from the faults of the system. It was self-justificatory--people are where they are because they worked for it (or failed to work for it) not because the system made it easy (or hard) for them. In this view, achievement was another tool for manipulation and thus was a more critical value for the system although still primarily a symbolic one. Inequality was thus a characteristic of the system reinforcing a cynical achievement orientation.

These contradictory views of inequality, in terms of its dimensions, its nature, and its relationship to other values, were to the novelist, a real view of the black position in American society, a position which, at least from existing paradigms



of thought, really was contradictory. There were other contradictions. The views on inequality leads logically to the next dilemma: is the inequality due to or supported by racism or classism?

Racism versus classism. Is the inequality that exists for blacks due primarily to racism in the American system or due to classism in that system? The novelists most clearly posed this problem in discussions of the police.

While, as noted in Chapter Three, the police were, on the whole, viewed as an oppressive institution whose members acted out the brutality of the society. But they also were seen as failing to provide essential governmental services to ghettos by failing to expect nor to enforce the same standards of law and order as in white communities. The novelists disagreed as to the reasons for this. On the one hand, police behavior was presented as a symbol of the segregationist and racist nature of society. A hypothetical statement seems the position of the dominant society. "As long as you black folks stay put in your place you can go about your animal tendencies, but keep them confined. Because, start messing with white people and we will just have to treat you for what you are. If a dog goes wild, you shoot it. Same for blacks." Racism was the essence of the society, and racist a singularly good word to describe it.

But, on the other hand, police behavior was seen as a symbol of inability of the society to solve its domestic problems

that were a natural result of inequality in a presumably equalitarian society. It was not an irrational policy based on race but on the low economic status of blacks. Indeed, other poor people in the past had such problems (e.g. immigrant groups like the Irish and Italians). This view did not see the society as a whole as characterized by racism. Instead, the society is characterized by the existence of social classes based on economic status and it is that status that is important to one's treatment by the system. Both of these descriptions share a belief in a wealthy relationship within the society that results in an oppressive power relationship. The view that the society is characterized by classism notes that government, particularly one of its institutions, the police, fails to carry out its duty to blacks and justifies that failure by reference to the low status of blacks. The view that the society is characterized by racism notes that the government succeeds in carrying out its duty by oppressing blacks because they are black.

Both of these descriptions may contain some kernel of truth. The novelists seemed, by their using both descriptions but not completely accepting either description to indicate that the black condition is indeed characterized by aspects of each which need to be synthesized into some larger understanding. This they were unable to do.

Nature of racism. If the society can be described in any sense as racist, is that racism a description of a reaction by

whites to black behavior or of white elite design? Again, the novelists, within single works, took both positions.

On the one hand, racism is seen as a behavioral characteristic of whites (and also of blacks) that is a more or less rational reaction to the low status and all the characteristics low status entails of most blacks. It is a superiority/inferiority relationship similar to that of the city slicker to the country bumpkin caricatures. Color is generalizable and thus becomes a generalized symbol for low status and thus serves to perpetuate white reactions. Visible status changes, however, eventually overcome that symbol, at least when the individual is in normal surroundings, particularly outside of the South. The existence of racism is then, not really the fault of blacks who never asked to come here as slaves or stay as serfs. But blacks are dependent on their own efforts to rise out of poverty and economic inferiority. Certainly the system operates to make success difficult. A kind of vicious cycle operates. Because he is deemed inferior the black cannot get a job. Therefore he is poor and economically inferior. He is thus without power and politically and socially inferior. This keeps his children from getting the education to get a job and so on and on. It is a frustrating position, but this view implies that with sufficient individual effort, it is not an impossible position if only enough blacks would try.

Contrasted with this view is the view that racism is quite separable from the behavior of blacks for it is an attitudinal characteristic of whites constantly reinforced by and manipulated

by a white elite using it as a key to the maintenance of their power. Racism is a strategy of exploitation by the elite. It is supported by other whites in part because of the benefits (real and psychological) that whites obtain from this exploitation. It is also in part because the power structure, the white elites, have so many means at their disposal to perpetuate the myths on which racism is based. The major problem here is not, as in the first view breaking into a vicious circle, but in breaking through the camouflage of the power elite and changing the power structure in other than symbolic terms.

All of the novels exhibited from time to time both of the above positions although the earlier novels emphasized the first position. The later novels the second. But again, the novelists were unable to synthesize the two views, both of which they thought in some way described the black condition.

Change. The novelists also failed to come to a firm conclusion regarding change in the American political system. On the one hand, they say the system is in a rather ongoing state of evolution, with change, reforms in the system, having occurred in the past, occurring in the present, is still possible in the future. The system is viewed in a "it could be worse" and "it once was worse" manner. Oppression of any form is seen as bad, but at least the worst things like lynchings have become a thing of the past. As bad as things might be, they have been, and could be,

worse. And normal politics, as cynical as they might be about politics, is still seen as a major instrument for achieving that change.

The other view sees change as illusory. If things have improved, it is because times have changed and thus the ways to exploit blacks have changed. One should not thank the oppressor for becoming more skilled at oppression nor see so-called reforms as meaningful in terms of change if the exploitative relationship remains the same. In this view, normal politics, like other instruments under the control of the elite operates to exclude blacks (and others) and to exploit blacks (and others) and does so as a manipulative instrument of the elite to give legitimacy to the policies that elite intends to pursue anyway.

The first view then sees change in terms of reforms and describes the system as flexible and normal politics as the appropriate instrument for obtaining reforms. The second sees reform as irrelevant to the basic issues (no matter how much they may make daily life more tolerable). The system is essentially static, changes that occur are merely cosmetic, and politics is an instrument used by the elite to legitimize their behavior.

Summary. There were four major aspects of American society and the black position within it that the novelists described. But, in all four cases those descriptions were not single, incisive, coherent descriptions but alternative sides of a coin, each of which

seemed to contain some part of the truth but which could not, within existing thought, be easily synthesized.

There was a tendency for positions to be related to one another within the novels. Thus, when inequality was seen as a characteristic of the system rather than an aberration within a basically equalitarian society, that inequality was often seen as based on race rather than class. Racism was continued by elite manipulation for their purposes rather than by black behavior patterns. And change was seen as illusory within the system rather than an integral part of the system. This outlook was particularly true of the later novels. And, likewise, the alternative positions tended to go together. But this was not invariably so. And, indeed, the common recognition that each position served to describe at least some aspects of the system mitigated against any such consistent descriptions. Again, there is a necessity for synthesizing the viewpoints, not for accepting one set and rejecting the other.

That no single description of the system seemed entirely appropriate makes it extremely difficult to proceed to develop an ideology. Each of the above descriptions argues for a different kind of strategy to deal with it. And, a strategy formulated to deal with one description may only exacerbate the importance of the facets dealt with in the alternative description. It becomes clear that there is a need to synthesize, but also that the very "reality" which needs synthesizing makes such synthesis difficult. In so far as the system is, in any way, racist, exploitative, and

manipulative, the common man or woman facing that system day after day has difficulty seeing in perspective the meaning of all the hundreds of minor assaults upon person. It is no wonder that the leaders of political movements are so often intellectuals. And, in American society, even black intellectuals have no refuge. If ghettos were really ghettos, that is, not invaded by white society in the form of business people, the media, education and welfare services, blacks might be better able to reflect upon their position and develop syntheses of the contradictions of their lives. But, those contradictions exist precisely because whites so constantly intrude and yet ignore blacks and the ghettos. And thus, the very position of blacks in American society makes very difficult the development of an ideology.

#### Strategies and Implications

It is very difficult to posit one's goals and develop strategies to meet one's goals until one has, to one's own satisfaction, described the existing system and evaluated it. The novelists did not present such strategies in any coherent, developed sense. They did, however, suggest certain key problems in the development of a strategy and illuminated some of the problems and dilemmas that blacks seriously seeking change would face.

The problem most frequently appearing in the novels concerned whether one tries to achieve change alone or at least alone with significant others like family and friends and thus concentrate on changes in one's own life that would indirectly help

change the lives of other blacks or does one try to achieve change with others and thus concentrate on systemic change.

The least demanding position is to go it alone. And because it is the least demanding, it is what most people will do regardless of rational exhortations regarding the shortsightedness of such a consensus or pleas for assistance short of actual coercion. Ultimately in the post-1960 novels and in most but not all of the pre-1960 novels, the authors rejected such a course because it never really seemed to work out. For a while, a person might materially benefit from such a course, but there always came a point at which the system was too strong for an individualistic assault.

But the alternative of working in groups presented a series of problems. Should those groups consist of blacks only or of blacks and whites whose interests coincided? To work only with blacks has the advantage of focusing directly and exclusively if this is desired on racism. But, it also means that a minority, those blacks willing and able to join the struggle, of a minority, all blacks, would be attempting to force change. And that minority is geographically diverse. It is somewhat ethnically diverse (we noted earlier the difference between those with recent West Indian ties versus those who came to the United States directly from Africa). It is urban and rural, middle and working class and poverty stricken. Short of a keen sense of black identity, such diverse persons would find some difficulty in coalescing sufficiently to work together for social change.



To work with other oppressed groups would likewise pose problems. To do so most successfully, each group should have a totalistic view, that is to be opposed to all forms of oppression within the society, not just that of race, or class. On the one hand, the position of blacks in American society ought to make it possible for them to have such a view. As Juliet Mitchell has noted:

The fully developed political consciousness of an exploited class or oppressed group cannot come from within itself, but only from a knowledge of the interrelationships (and domination structures) of all the classes in a society. Blacks do not have this 'overview' any more than the working class, but because their oppression is visibly cultural as well as economic. There is an impetus to see the diverse aspects of oppression within the whole system.<sup>33</sup>

But, the pervasiveness of racial oppression has also blinded (some) blacks to sufferings other than their own and has also forced oppressed people to fight each other for very limited resources (jobs, education, governmental assistance, etc.). The novelists, for example, show no more awareness of the problems of women than does any other sector of society. There was little in the novels to suggest a totalistic approach to oppression, black problems being only one part of that oppression.

Working with others in coalitions then presents several dangers. No group really shares precisely the problems of blacks. In any coalitions, blacks would be outnumbered, and by the logic of racism, blacks would be right where they were in the first

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<sup>33</sup>Juliet Mitchell, Women's Estate, (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 23.

place. At the very least, any such coalitions would be fractionalized and have considerable difficulty agreeing on goals, timetables, and specific courses of action. The real danger of such coalitions is a spending of time on internal squabbling rather than on working for systemic change.

Another area focused upon was whether one orients one's efforts upon people within the system or upon the system itself. In general, the novelists rejected making one's efforts primarily toward people. It was racism that was vicious, cruel, and castrating; racists were victims of racism as were blacks. At any rate, to destroy the most virulent racists would still leave the exploitative institutions intact. Besides, to focus on racists smacked of the traditional American focus on agitators, communists, or other such trouble making conspirators. Blacks had suffered too much from that to fall back into such tactics.

But, what does it mean to focus on the system. Some toyed with a quasi-Marxian analysis with the capitalist system as the root of the troubles. Racism becomes the domestic equivalent of colonialism and is cultivated to facilitate the amassing of profits. One's strategy is then to attack the economic system, but somehow this was never developed as it never seemed to really head anywhere.

Particularly in the earlier novels, some toyed with an attack upon the "innocence" of the system. Americans never really understood how the system and its institutions worked. It kept working because no one ever tried to change it. The system would

"self-correct" once people realized the pervasiveness of racism, poverty, and exploitation. But this too never went very far.

And not really knowing where to attack, the novelist often fell back into a defensive posture. Unable to come to any clear conclusion about offense, blacks can at least minimize the deleterious effects of racism by protecting themselves. One then doesn't need a strategy, just tactics to deal with whatever is happening at the moment. A racist is running for office; get blacks to vote. Whites are buying guns; get blacks to buy guns. A company discriminates in hiring; sit-in. And so on. But defense is a never-ending proposition. It is also in the long run psychologically speaking, a defense mechanism to avoid facing the realities of one's situation. To focus on achieving what seem to be minor successes allows one to avoid one's reality and avoid considering what sacrifices must be made to face that reality.

The novelists understood that and suggested that while engaged in defensive politics, the black community focus on building both a clear sense of self-identity, and on building institutions that could later serve as the basis of an offense.

The problem the blacks face in trying to build institutions is their very minority position and lack of power that necessitates building those institutions in the first place. The power of the dominant political institutions to coopt black leaders and policies is immense; and as the novelists indicated, used frequently and effectively. And, should cooptation fail to blunt incipient black organizing efforts, then the power of

coercion remains. It could be "mild" coercion like rewriting the laws to wipe the voting slates clear and force reregistration or it could be "strong" coercion like harrassing the group with criminal charges against leaders and followers and the infiltration of the group with the goal of obtaining information and influence. A minority using normal politics is particularly dependent upon the views of the majority--and that majority controls the rules of the games the minority must play as it tries to influence that majority.

And so, besides suggesting that existing black institutions were inadequate and that new ones needed to be built, the novelists suggested little concrete strategy that could be used.

There is, in the discussion of strategies, as in the discussion of description, much food for thought. But there is no ideology--and as the novelists make clear, the very real nature of the problems black people face and the very contradictory nature of those problems, makes difficult the development of an ideology. Somehow, some way, there is a need to escape the blinders the existing system places on people. There is a need to step back, and to synthesize the dilemmas in a way that can suggest a clear-cut direction of action. But that has yet to be done.

### Prospects for the Future

Chapters Two through Five of this paper covered the specific statements that the novelists made on subjects that might

be relevant to the formation of an ideology. They failed to develop that ideological statement and this chapter has discussed some of the reasons for that failure. The problems any novelist has of doing so, and especially of a novelist in American society, are great. But even greater problems are suggested by the novelists themselves. The latter part of this chapter then generalized the more specific statements of the novelists that had been examined in earlier chapters. The conclusion was that a major problem in the formation of an ideology is the existence of real dilemmas in the everyday lives of blacks. Until blacks can describe the system in a coherent and concise manner, they cannot adequately posit long-term goals and strategies to reach those goals. But the very nature of the lives that blacks must live in this system make it very difficult to develop a descriptive scheme.

That the later novels were better able to develop sustained arguments on some of the issues than were the earlier novels bodes well for the possibilities of ideological development. That the sixties made it not only possible, but even somewhat fashionable, to question previous assumptions about the operation of the system probably made it easier for the novelist also to question. All present indications are that the climate of the seventies may be even more encouraging for such questioning. And with the questioning, there will be the further seeking of answers. This too bodes well for the future.

But the logic of this chapter suggests that novelists must be able to think the unthinkable. They must not merely reflect

current "reality" but shape it in some sense. Young, probably urban, novelists must be allowed to nurture their talents. And for the rest of us, we must be willing to take them as seriously as they take themselves. Perhaps then, or in some hypothetical sequel to this paper, it would not be necessary to include a chapter on "The Failure of Ideological Thought."

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Ideology is a more or less coherent statement of an individual's or group's position within a given political system and states its desired position and a prescription to reach that desired position. The purpose of this study was to examine the ideology of blacks in the United States, using as the major source of data novels written by and about blacks. Although there were many elements of ideology present in the novels and although a certain development of those elements took place during the time period studied, those elements were not sufficiently developed to present any clear ideological statements. The novels themselves suggested some of the barriers in overcoming that failure of ideological thought.

In this chapter, we shall summarize those findings noting their significance, suggest certain cautions about those findings, and briefly suggest an agenda for further research.

#### Summary

The most basic and enduring aspect of a political system is the political community. Therefore, a discussion of the context in which a group perceives itself must deal with that community.

And it was here in discussing the American political community that the first of several dilemmas of ideological thought was noted. The novelists all described that community as one in which blacks were excluded from full membership, yet an integral part of that membership. No clear statement of the desirability of that political community was forthcoming. America was loved and hated. It tugged at a character's emotions, sometimes with a desire to save it from itself, sometimes a desire to reject it unmercifully.

The same tensions ran through the description of dominant American values. And this ambiguity about the existence of, definition of, and acceptance of those values reflected the disagreements among the novelists on the position of black people within that community. Were they like other low status groups, oppressed by an economic system, or were they a unique, black group oppressed by a white racist society? And if the latter, what hope could there be for becoming an accepted part of the political community?

This cynicism and this ambiguity carried through to considerations of regime and authority level aspects of the polity. Three general orientations to politics were developed in the novels that were basically rejecting, or at least distrustful toward, major political objects and processes. One orientation essentially rejected politics and by implication the need for a political ideology that blacks could use in any search for political change. The second was an alienated mode that emphasized a



cynical attitude; not expecting much from the existing system, but not willing to challenge it overtly either. The third was an activist mode that focused on activism outside the normal channels to bring about changes in the operation of the regime and the membership of the political authorities. All three of these orientations described the regime in much the same terms, but they differed in the explanation for the patterns that were described. In other words, it is significant that there was not a mode that accepted relatively uncritically the normal political process in the American system.

In looking at ideology in the novels as a whole rather than with elements of that thought, three general orientations on strains in ideological thought were discussed. The weaknesses in each of these strains particularly centered around the role of racism in the society. Assimilationist thought accepted the interdependence of black and white in America and sought to make that interdependence a unity. By rejecting the basic nature of racism in the society, that strain could not successfully suggest a strategy for reaching the unity that would be of relevance to most blacks. Although it placed the burden of change on the individual black and his or her ability to achieve, it did not suggest how to do so under the conditions of oppression.

Separatist thought was based on the pervasiveness of the racism rejected by the assimilationists. But in the process of developing a strategy to deal with racism, separatist thought ignored the interdependence of black and white and thus ignored

any consideration of white response to separatist demands. In rejecting America, the separatists tended to ignore it.

The pluralist strain of thought focused on both racism and interdependency. But while capable of insightful comments about the nature of the system, pluralists could not go that additional step to focus on how to deal with racism and interdependency at the same time. A full and coherent integration of themes, a synthesis of contending issues, seemed beyond the abilities of the novelists, at least during this period.

For any of these strains to be fully developed, a more complete understanding of the existence of or possibility of a sense of black identity is necessary, for one of the missing elements in each of the strains of thought was the complementarity of ideology and identity. Assimilationist thought rejected the presence of a separate black identity and failed to account for any elements of such that existed. The other two strains assumed it, but failed to show its dimensions. By focusing on identity, this study suggested that solidarity based on color was a realistic goal, but one not yet articulated in all its dimensions. And just as an ideology could speed that process of identity articulation, an adequate articulation of identity could speed the process of ideological development. But, so far, that integration of ideological thought with statements of identity had not occurred.

And thus, the pieces of a potential ideology existed, but those pieces had not yet been adequately synthesized. The reasons

for that failure lay primarily in the very position that blacks have in American society. The dilemmas the novelists described were real dilemmas. None of the novelists studied had been able to step outside of their everyday life sufficiently to think the unthinkable, to see that synthesis that would allow us to understand reality in a new light, to see coherence where there was randomness, to see purpose where there was drift.

### Some Cautionary Notes

We have concluded that there is no clearly stated ideology in the novels studied. But, that by no means precludes the existence of a clear ideological statement relevant to blacks in the United States. We have also discussed the major elements that might be a part of any ideological statement. These elements were found in the novels studied and therefore other elements of ideology might be found in other data sources.

Indeed, we have noted throughout certain limitations of novels as data sources and as vehicles for developing ideological statements. As the reader evaluates the conclusions of this paper, it is well to restate some of the most significant weaknesses of the novel (and its contrary strengths) for a study of ideology.

A novel is subject to and confined by artistic requirements. Matters completely extraneous to the plot and character development are not easily inserted merely to supplement a theme of relevance to ideology. Not that is if the author has serious concerns about traditional artistic criteria. The great novelist

is able to clearly and integrally relate any ideological statement to the context of the novel and thus to the bread and butter aspects of everyday life. This strengthens the appeal of the ideology to people, particularly as it strengthens the sense that the story is or could be "real." But, unfortunately, not all novelists are great. Not all novels are logical and coherent. And, not all novels have even a clear point of view, to say nothing about a statement relevant to ideology.

As we noted earlier, the time period studied was one in which ideological themes were most likely to emerge. And, as also noted, the novel has advantages as an agent for the emergence of ideologies. But to say that, does not say it happened. Just because novels may be reflectors does not mean that the ones studied were. Just because novels may be predictors does not mean that the novels examined in this study had any predictive qualities. The reader must decide whether the references throughout the paper to other data sources were adequate checks on the reflectiveness of the novels.

Ideologies have both affective and cognitive dimensions. The nature of the novel best lends itself to statements of the affective dimensions of ideology. Thus, an additional cautionary note for the reader is to expect that the affective aspects of any ideological statements in the novels would probably be more developed than the cognitive aspects. One might expect such cognitive elements to be fleshed out in other kinds of writings. However, affective and cognitive elements are analytically more

separable than practically separable. Thus, the novels might at least include the outlines of the cognitive aspects of ideology.

In part because of its affective capabilities, but also in part because of the novel's concentration on one or a few problems and because of its inevitable drive to a conclusion that has been presaged throughout the book, the novel can often result in a "erueka" experience. Suddenly one feels a clarifying of much that was previously murky. The danger in this result is that what suddenly seems clear from the action of the novel is not only not clear apart from the novel, but even false. This may be, of course, true of any work, fiction or nonfiction, that seems well reasoned. We present this caution here, however, because the novel, with its attention to the details of everyday life, may be more beguiling than a more abstract essay might be.

Finally, to the extent that novels reflect the social milieu, they exhibit the strengths and weaknesses of the society. If the society avoids confrontation with serious problems, the novel is likewise apt to avoid such confrontations. If the society must mask serious issues in symbolic wraps, the novel is likewise apt to mask such issues. If society is ambiguous, the novel is apt to be ambiguous. Again, a great novelist can transcend the limitations of the society, and that is when they can be extremely useful in understanding some aspect of the society. But, meanwhile, lesser novelists are confined by those limitations. They can reflect and confirm those limitations, a useful characteristic because that does shed light on the society, but

they rarely provide those insights of discovery that every social scientist should be seeking.

And, thus, one must interpret the findings of this paper with caution. Better or different ideological statements relevant to blacks might be found elsewhere. As in all science, findings should be taken as tentative, particularly until replicated by others using different methods and different sources of data.

#### For Further Research

Questions of ideology are important ones. Purposive change can be sought pragmatically, which is to say without the articulation of its ideological antecedents. Or it can be sought to implement goals posited by an ideology using means posited by that same ideology. The position of blacks in American society seems to be unsatisfactory to blacks and to whites. What change is desired and how that change might best occur is a question whose answers can be sought and evaluated in ideological statements.

In this paper we have examined one narrow aspect of that problem. Much more could be done. Most obvious is the need to examine non-fiction materials and compare them to the findings derived from novels. Perhaps of more interest would be to examine systematically the development of ideological thought of other groups which were also seeking entry into the political system at about the same time blacks were, i.e. Indians, Chicanos, women, and students. A comparison of these groups could shed a great deal of light on many of the questions raised in the study of

black ideology. For example, to what extent are the dilemmas that we discussed also true of the American polity in general? Other questions of interest could also be explored by the suggested comparisons. To what extent does oppression on the basis of race versus sex versus language lead to similar or dissimilar descriptions of the American political system? Have other groups shared the movement we have found in black literature from a primarily assimilationist position to a more pluralist position?

This paper has focused on the substantive elements of ideological thought and not been at all concerned with the extent to which different groups within the black community hold any of the strains of ideological thought or any elements of that thought. Obviously, if one of the significant reasons for understanding ideologies is to obtain some idea of the potential parameters of political change, some idea of who and how many hold any belief set is necessary. There are, of course, many surveys of black attitudes. There are few, if any, that have focused directly on the question of ideology.

Typically, in political science, ideology has been left to the normative theorists or to the area specialists. When behavioralists have examined ideology it was often to ascertain whether people's beliefs fit into a framework that seemed logical and consistent to the investigator, whether or not it might seem logical to someone with a different view of the world. Or alternatively, the investigator would, through one methodological process or another, group opinions and attitudes into some pattern

and deal with that as an ideological framework. Neither approach seems to adequately express the subtleties nor the ways in which people might have internalized an ideological system. In brief, a major area of research and theoretical development is to integrate ideology more thoroughly into all political science.

If the concept of ideology is, then, to be integrated into political science, more research must be done. And such research should also be relevant to blacks wishing to develop a clear, coherent, and useful ideology. The promise is there. It awaits fulfillment.



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