

the end of the 1970s, however, they have become very cynical about politics and ideology, having learned to use the political "line" to achieve their own material interests. Years of purges and "mass struggles" have made them cautious. Their lives have been disrupted not just by the unlimited amount of social change being engineered from above but by the machinations of local leaders struggling for power among themselves.

One is constantly reminded that despite an unremitting level of Party Commandism at the national level, local political and economic realities continue to be asserted at critical stages in the process. Time after time peasants have been able to turn the tide of political rhetoric and turmoil by simply refusing to be coerced any further. Despite the most radical politics of the national leadership at any given time, those leaders had to remain sensitive to the level of production. Peasants found that one of their most effective strategies was to quit producing in order to demonstrate their disenchantment. There was a quiet resistance to any change that endangered material well-being that has been effective to some extent in curbing the political and economic excesses and blunders of the party leadership.

*Chen Village* is an excellent study in that it provides the reader with a firm foundation of information about the past three decades of rural life in China. From this foundation one can more easily understand the surprising changes currently taking place under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping in his efforts to reprivatize the country's agricultural production in an attempt to restimulate productivity and motivate the peasantry. Because the authors present such a balanced view of the events and people, readers are able to draw their own conclusions about the successes and failures of the revolution. Whether the reader is interested in social continuity or change, in problems of social organization of a large and diverse population, or in the practical problems of conducting a revolution, this book will prove itself useful and thought-provoking.

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Jonathan H. Turner, Royce Singleton, Jr. and David Musick, *Oppression: A Socio-History of Black-White Relations in America*, Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1984. 215 pp. \$11.95 (paper).

*Oppression* is a neat little book: a mere 215 pages in total. For many sociologists, especially those specialists in race relations and historical sociology, *Oppression* will be too neat and too short. After all, the authors set themselves no small task as the subtitle, *A Socio-History of Black-White Relations in America*, indicates. Add to the socio-history a concluding chapter devoted to extending Turner and Singleton's (1976) theory of ethnic oppression and one has good reason to be suspicious of this little book achieving all it sets out to accomplish. Yet, Turner, Singleton and Musick's concise presentation will be appreciated by those who do not assume the value of a book is directly proportional to its length. Specialists will be disappointed by what could be viewed as a superficial historical treatment of the racial oppression of blacks in America. Although in many respects the authors offer the broad historical overview that is much needed in an introductory text on race relations in America.

Chapter One, "The Nature of Oppression," suggests why the authors wrote a book about the history of oppression as opposed to a history of discrimination. They suggest that when one examines the prejudice, discrimination, ethnic antagonism, and racism in the history of black-white relations in America the cumulative effect warrants the term oppression. This history, according to the authors, is one of "institutionalized discrimination against blacks that resulted in, and to a large extent still perpetuates, their relegation to the bottom ranks in the stratification system" (9). According to the authors, oppression exists when:

identifiable segments of the population in a social system systematically and successfully act over a prolonged period of time to prevent another identifiable segment, or segments, of the population from attaining access to the scarce and valued resources of that system. (1-2)

Oppression is conceptualized here as varying in degree according to the extent to which three universal resources are denied—material well-being, power, and prestige.

Turner, Singleton and Musick maintain that oppression manifests itself in America through the development of a caste-like system, whereby belief systems, economic, political, legal, and educational structures produce limited options for black Americans. Chapters Two through Six give an historical account of each of these aspects of oppression from colonial America to the present. Depth is sacrificed for breadth and, consequently, much of the book reads like a compendium of facts and figures. Nevertheless, the book will leave little doubt that the term oppression is not too dramatic a term to use in describing black-white relations in America.

Chapter Two, "The Culture of Black Oppression," demonstrates that, as William O. Douglas once remarked, the worst provincialism America can be guilty of is racial prejudice. This chapter documents the rich legacy of racial prejudice in America. The authors survey anti-black beliefs from the view of blacks as biologically inferior, popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the latent anti-black attitudes which surface today when institutions are forced to be actively egalitarian, e.g., affirmative action, busing, etc. It is significant, too, that central concepts of our American ideological heritage like "equality before the law" and laissez faire economics have often supported gross inequalities in power and wealth. Although one may find Turner, Singleton and Musick's emphasis on beliefs throughout this work overly idealistic, they do demonstrate that with several hundred years of publicly dispensed and consumed racist ideologies behind us it is naive to think they have disappeared.

In the chapters on economic and political oppression one wishes the authors had chosen to diverge from their plan to "let the facts speak for themselves" (167). Although readers are given nice surveys of the history of discrimination against blacks in the economic and political spheres, little is done to pull the facts into a coherent whole, and the theoretical chapter at the end of *Oppression* fails to synthesize the facts to the extent one might expect. Both chapters deal predominantly with the documentation of past abuses, but fail to adequately address current economic and political problems facing blacks. A telling omission is the current debate over the significance of race in America, e.g., Wilson (1978). The caste/class debate is only alluded to in the chapter on educational oppression. It is unfortunate that both chapters read as little more than a recounting of past abuses, when they contain such fertile material.

The chapter on educational oppression raises a pressing and difficult problem for black-white relations, or for that matter ethnic and gender relations, in America. In short, can a non-discriminatory educational system overcome the legacy of past and present discrimination in other institutional spheres? The question is a good one, but the authors only raise it and refuse to deal with it. The question provides the basis for raising crucial questions about liberal democratic beliefs and is directly related to the caste/class debate. But again the disadvantage of the authors' choice to simply report the facts in Chapters Two through Six is again evident.

The description of forms of legal oppression in America points out the extent to which discriminatory practices have been given legal legitimization throughout much of our history. Probably the most significant insight of this chapter and the book is the formulation of what the authors call the new "American Dilemma":

how to "correct" for past oppression without discrimination against affluent and powerful whites. Without enactment of both anti-discriminatory laws and compensatory measures (to undo the legacy of past discrimination), blacks will have great difficulty in reducing their oppression. (166)

This insight would offer an excellent opportunity to discuss the problems with liberal solutions to black oppression, but the authors only make the observation to immediately proceed to their theoretical chapter on oppression.

The final chapter contains a useful table summarizing the structures of oppression, dominant beliefs, and "progressive" beliefs for different periods of American history. From the table the authors distill eight generalizations about the structure and history of black-white relations in America. The eight generalizations are interpreted in terms of nine theoretical propositions, propositions which borrow heavily from Bonacich's (1972) split labor market theory and William's (1970) typology of basic values. Ultimately, the initial nine theoretical propositions are raised to a higher level of abstraction to improve the scope of theory. The authors specify five scope conditions which correspond to the historical conditions in American society: a market economy, a population with distinct subpopulations, an economic system where subpopulations occupy distinct economic positions, a society with liberal democratic values, and a society where people are not politically

disenfranchised. While there are good reasons to question the last scope condition, the others are not problematic.

The theory develops the relationships between the market relations in the economy and the political and ideological structures clearly and will be useful to students. Nevertheless some will be disappointed at the apparent lack of relation of this chapter to the rest of the book. In part, the problem is intrinsic to the formal nature of the theory generated. The abstraction and formalism are not so much the problem as is the feeling that with the rich historical material covered the authors might have done more. The chapter reads too much like an addendum. In short, the final chapter could have been written quite apart from the earlier chapters. Consequently, one wonders if a different concluding chapter might have suited the rich historical material offered in earlier chapters. Ultimately, Turner, Singleton and Musick's book must be appreciated for its attempt to bring an historical perspective to race relations, although their own theoretical chapter is unnecessarily disengaged from that historical account. Nevertheless, *Oppression* is a useful contribution to the body of introductory texts on race relations.

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