

CARTON 4:4

RELUCTANT REFORMERS

MANUSCRIPT, CHAPTER 8, CONCLUSION
"RACE AND REFORM"

can be made to respond to organized social pressure from other groups in society. Throughout the history of the United States militant blacks have tried to accomplish precisely this. The clash between black and white reformers forms an integral part of the ongoing drama of the advance and counter-attack against racism. This drama in itself is an ideological and institutional manifestation of the expansion and forced retreat of capitalist imperialism. Indeed, it could be argued that just as imperialism created the external forces capable of rolling it back, so has it also created an insistent independent internal ideological force which is committed to opposing imperialism's racist ideologies. White reformers, themselves largely unaffected by racism, generally fail to perceive its full ramifications and subtleties. ^{This is why} ~~Hence, it falls inevitably~~ to militant blacks and other non-whites, who can't escape racial oppression, ^(have so often) to take the lead in promoting and consolidating opposition to racism.

In this task black reformers have achieved some measure of success, but their efforts have been hindered by repression and co-optation, on one hand, and faulty organization and ideological ^{confusion} on the other.

While repression and co-optation are ever-present dangers, the foregoing study indicates that independent, mass organizations are indispensable to the formation and propagation of an anti-racist ideology. Only in this manner ^{have} militant blacks and other colonized non-whites ^(been able to) exercise self-determination for themselves and provide needed ideological leadership in the larger society.

Bourgeois property relations and their ideological rationalizations in the popular mind of white America have repeatedly incited racial antagonisms.

This does not mean that no whites understood the importance of struggling against racism, nor that black leaders were always correct in their proposals and programs. It simply expresses a social dynamic that has recurred in the history of American reformism. White leadership is not automatically racist, nor black leadership automatically correct. Such mechanical formulas don't meet the test of practice. However, the ~~recurrence~~ ^{Continuance} of this social dynamic around racism indicates a recurring or contradiction problem in the nature of reformism.

The foregoing analysis of the roots of racist ideology implies that ultimately the attack on racism must become a struggle with the bourgeois social order itself since the two cannot be isolated one from the other. Unfortunately, black leaders themselves have not always understood this, some making a fetish of separatist and escapist fantasies while others vainly sought ~~to~~ assimilation into a bourgeois order that could not but be racist.

The dynamics of U.S. historical development led black reformers to develop as an independent ideological force, but not a separate ideological force. That is, although having their own press, organizations, caucuses, etc., black social reformers were seeking to push general social reformism toward a broader struggle where it would confront racism. But this would mean ~~they~~ ^{these} were no longer reform movements but revolutionary movements attacking a principal phenomenon of the bourgeois order.

This is the final dilemma of reformism. Reform movements have been consistently undermined by racism, but to resolve this problem demands that both the struggle for reforms and the struggle against racism be incorporated into a thorough-going process of revolutionary social transformation. Here reformism balks, for its aims are limited and highly specific. However, without transcending these limitations social change movements will continue merely to react to problems -- rather than

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taking the lead in rooting out causes of problems -- and the problems themselves will simply recur in new forms. Like Sisyphus, reformism can expect neither ~~final~~ ^{unless it} success nor rest without fundamentally altering^s its conception of the task at hand.

~~If that were to happen, we would no longer be dealing with reformism.~~

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Thomas F. Gossett, Race: The History of an Idea in America (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), pp. 3-16; Frank M. Snowden, Jr., Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 216-18.

2

Paul A. Baran, The Political Economy of Growth (New York and London: Modern Reader, 1968), pp. 136-39.

3

Oliver C. Cox, Capitalism as a System (New York: Monthly Review, 1964).

4

Stanley M. Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 52-80; Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

5

Eugene D. Genovese, The World the Slaveholders Made (New York: Vintage, 1971), pp. 21-113, passim; Genovese, In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History (New York: Pantheon, 1971), pp. 23-52, 158-72.

6

Oliver C. Cox, Caste, Class and Race (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1948), Chapter 16. Some contemporary scholars have denied that there was any causal link between capitalist slavery and racism. These writers place greater stress on psychological variables or pre-existing attitudes in accounting for the development of racism; yet their own evidence reveals the crucial role played by the institutionalization of slavery in the English colonies (and English contact with other slave-trading nations) in fostering and shaping the ideology of racism. See Oscar Handlin, Race and Nationality in American Life (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday-Anchor, 1957); Carl Degler, "Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice," in Melvin Drimmer (ed.), Black History: A Reappraisal (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968). A critique of Degler's thesis that black slavery was molded by pre-existing prejudices and discrimination can be found in Louis Ruchames (ed.), Racial Thought in America, Vol. I, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1970), pp. 13-15. A similar argument is found in George M. Frederickson, "Toward a Social Interpretation of the Development of American Racism," in Nathan I. Huggins, Martin Kilson and Daniel M. Fox (eds.), Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience, Vol I, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971). For a detailed examination of this subject see Winthrop D. Jordan, White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1969).

7

James Boggs, Racism and the Class Struggle (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1970), pp. 150-52.

8

Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery (New York: Capricorn Books, 1966). Even those whites in Europe who were severely exploited had no reason to oppose racism since colonialism and slavery offered them an unprecedented opportunity to emigrate and acquire land and labor resources relatively cheaply.

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Some of the complexities of this debate are traced in George M. Frederickson, The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914 (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

10

Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1966), Chapter 3.

11

Here we see a modern bourgeois counterpart of the older mercantilist interest in religious education and conversion. The bourgeois evangelism at the turn of the century can also be considered an anticipation of the full-blown cultural chauvinism that would emerge after World War I.

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Frederickson, The Black Image in the White Mind, Chapter 8; Gossett, Race, pp. 66-68, Chapters VII, VIII, XIII.

13

Frederickson, The Black Image in the White Mind, Chapter 10.

14

Martin Nicolaus, "The Theory of the Labor Aristocracy," Monthly Review, Volume 21, No. 11 (April, 1970).

15

The structural limits of integrationism are discussed in Robert L. Allen, Black Awakening in Capitalist America (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday-Anchor, 1970).

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Eric R. Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

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Gossett, Race, p. 341.

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Allen, Black Awakening in Capitalist America.