

to get this, see please returned
- Ben (This is my copy) but I'm sending to you because Peter felt
May 10, 1983

Dear Professor Cedric Robinson:

It was great meeting and discussing with you, finding out that there is an affinity of many ideas between us, both on Marx and on the Black world. That it took so long to "find" each other tells something about our alienating world. Let's not lose each other again, but keep up the dialogue.

In returning from my exhausting but exciting three-month tour this Marx centenary year, I had to escape to Canada (once the "Freedom Road" but now just quiet rivers and forests to think in), but I'll send this letter back to Detroit to mail so a bulletin on CLRJ can be enclosed. What prompted it was that I did get to view the video-tape you made of our interview. Do congratulate the artists who recorded it. But I was sorry to see that we evidently talked overtime and thus your last question to me on why the split in the Johnson-Forest Tendency and my answer were cut off. In any case, I felt you deserved a more detailed answer -- which I'll tell you after I ask (and I hope your answer is "yes"): Will you, as editor of Race and Class, review there Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution? It actually relates to my answer to your question most objectively as well as "intimately."

Let me begin at that point, i.e. the end, since today is 1983 rather than 1953. I'll work backward to the beginning which, philosophically, is the correct turning point between CLRJ and myself going our divergent ways. (Indeed, I would have to turn even further back three years more to 1950, when I was working with West Virginia miners in their General Strike, while CLRJ was in New York criticizing.) When it comes to 1983, it was my self-criticism after I write anything and then reread it that produced the paragraph you heard as I finished my talk on my new book at Santa Barbara. That is to say, that paragraph is the one I wrote after the presses were already locked. It is true that what it concludes is present throughout the work, but since I review what I have said on Women's Liberation on that penultimate page (p. 194), I thought I should do the same for Marx on the Black dimension.

Will you please, then, add the following to page 194, directly after the top paragraph, beginning with "In the early 1970s ... ahead of the advanced lands," and before the next paragraph, which begins with "The two paragraphs that Engels omitted..."

The added paragraph reads:

15934

Marx's reference in the Ethnological Notebooks to the Australian aborigines as "the intelligent black" brought to a conclusion the dialectic he had unchained when he first broke from bourgeois society in the 1840s and objected to the use of the word, "Negro," as if it were synonymous with the word, "slave." By the 1850s, in the Grundrisse, he extended that sensitivity to the whole pre-capitalist world. By the 1860s, the Black dimension became, at one and the same time, not only pivotal to the abolition of slavery and victory of the North in the Civil War, but also to the restructuring of Capital, itself. In a word, the often-quoted sentence: "Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the Black skin it is branded," far from being rhetoric, was the actual reality and the perspective for overcoming that reality. Marx reached, at every historic passing point, for a concluding point, not as an end but as a new jumping off point, a new beginning, a new vision.

Now then, when it comes to the beginning of the break with CLRJ and my reference to 1950 and the Miners' General Strike, that was the year when my activity in that strike and the way I interpreted that strike proved to be the beginning of what I was soon to call "a movement from practice that is itself a form of theory", which demands of theoreticians that they begin there, just there, if they, in turn, are to meet the new challenge and rise to the point of philosophy. CLRJ, on the other hand, evidently began to feel that he wanted to go "beyond" Marx -- and in any case not have me discovering new epochs in cognition and action. (And perhaps there was a little male chauvinism included there also.) In any case, I was not conscious of the fact that our differences began there, as I was, at the same time, translating Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks and sending them to him with commentaries that showed a difference between him and Lenin on Hegel. So the bulletin, For the Record, which I am enclosing, begins with the open philosophic division in 1953 -- 30 years ago to the day -- when I broke through on Absolute Idea, not as an abstraction or mystical god but, in fact, as a movement from practice as well as from theory so that the unity of the two make up the Absolute.*

You will note first that For the Record was prompted by the fact that Professor John O'Neill at York University, who is a good Hegel scholar but not a politico who understands "factional fights," had sent me a work (mimeographed "Notes on the Dialectic" by CLRJ, which he had sent to O'Neill asking for his commentary and help in finding a publisher), informing me that he had written to CLRJ that he was turning it over to me, who knew both Hegel and Marx better than anyone. Naturally, I laughed my head off. (I would have given a million to have seen CLRJ's face as he read that letter!) I wrote to O'Neill telling him who I was outside of Hegel Society conferences, and that what he had sent me was what I had typed for CLRJ way back in 1948 -- and then proceeded with my critique of it.

Secondly, the Bulletin shows what I felt directly after the split when Facing Reality appeared as CLRJ's and Grace Less's "answer" to Marxism and Freedom. (In that work, incidentally, you will find, in the last chapter of the original edition, on Automatism, what that 1950 strike was all about, both in thought and in fact.) In the Bulletin you will find my letter to Bess, who was then in France arranging for a French translation of M&F and unaware of CLRJ's (actually Grace's) latest (1958) work.

Thirdly, of course, is the critique of Radical America, who were trying to make CLRJ into the "greatest Third World theorist"

*Did you happen to read George Armstrong Kelly's Retreat from Eleusis where he devotes some space accusing me, not Hegel, of an unchained dialectic? I had lunch with him, a Christian Hegel scholar, and he asked explaining Hegel meant it when he insisted he was a good Lutheran, and it showed in his not working out the second negation, which is exactly what Frantz Fanon caught in his critique. The Christian seemed satisfied that Hegel "wann't a liar."

15936

and rewriting history not just of the Johnson-Forest Tendency but of Russian history and Trotskyism which was the actual inspiration for CLRJ's truly, and only, original work, Black Jacobins.

Is there any possibility of you returning to Michigan for a visit or whatever, and thus visiting with me? You're always welcome. I heard in Los Angeles that you have finished a work on Black intellectuals that will soon be published. When? Where can I get it? Sorry, I didn't know that fact when I was in Santa Barbara because my years have piled up a lot of experiences on that subject.

Yours,

Raya Dunayevskaya videotape interview with Cedric Robinson
U.C., Santa Barbara April, 1983

CR: My name is Cedric Robinson. I'm a member of the Political Science Faculty here at U.C.S.B. and Director of the Center for Black Studies. Today we will be speaking with Raya Dunayevskaya. Born in Russia, Ms. Dunayevskaya has been active in the American Marxian movement since before the Second World War. In 1937-38, she served as the Russian Secretary to Leon Trotsky during his exile in Mexico. At the outbreak of World War II, Ms. Dunayevskaya broke with Trotsky because of his advocacy of the defense of the Soviet Union under Stalin as a "degenerate but workers state." Her own position was the interpretation of Russia as state-capitalist. In 1941, she joined with another major dissenter in the American Trotskyist movement, James R. Johnson, better known by his original name, C.L.R. James. Together they formed the State-Capitalist Tendency within the Marxist-Trotskyist movement. Before the Tendency severed its association with that movement, it took the name Johnson-Forest, as Dunayevskaya's Party name was Freddie Forest. Later James and Dunayevskaya split in 1955. James went on with others like Grace Lee Boggs to form the 'Facing Reality' group. Ms. Dunayevskaya is credited with founding Marxist-Humanism in the U.S. She and James independently developed the theory of state-capitalism. She is the author of a number of major works on Marx and Marxism, the most recent being Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution.

Welcome, Ms. Dunayevskaya. RD: Glad to be here.

* * * *

CR: Let's begin with the "Negro Question", as it was known in the American Communist movement, that is, the relationship between Marxism and Blacks. Where would you begin that?

RD: I would like to begin by showing that, far from being German, which Marx was so far as birth was concerned, he had very, very deep American roots, and the deepest were precisely on the Black Question. First, in the sense of the Abolitionist movement. That is, he showed the Abolitionists were so great because they stood on the shoulders of the Black man in the anti-slavery movement. Secondly, in the Civil War. He felt that so long as Lincoln was only interested in union, he will never win this war. It has to be a civil war. And even his closest collaborator, Engels, got worried that the South would win because they had the better generals. This is the letter Marx wrote to Engels, on not worrying about who will win:

15938

2,

A single Negro Regiment would have a remarkable effect on Southern nerves. A war of this kind must be conducted in a revolutionary way, whereas the Yankees have been trying so far to conduct it constitutionally.

Now, this magnificent statement, which is Aug. 7, 1862, we have re-produced with the Black regiment that finally got there, and are arresting the Southern confederates, in order to show that on this centenary of Marx, we have such deep roots back. The development of the whole Black Question was due to the fact that the American Communists never did understand the Negro Question. It was one of the big developments between myself and C.L.R. James, because we began seeing that that was so, and you could trace it through for a long ^{period,} ~~time.~~

For example: I have deposited all of my documents in the Wayne State University Library of Labor History, from 1941, the time C.L.R. James and myself developed the theory of state-capitalism, until today, with all the works I've published. I thought I would call attention to the fact of what we did in the '40s. Just before C.L.R. James wrote the "Resolution of the Minority on the Negro Question," which was January 1945, I had written the following:

"Marxism and the Negro Problem," June 18, 1944

"Negro Intellectuals in Dilemma," a critique of Myrdal's study (CR: That's Gunnar Myrdal's An American Dilemma), and I called it

"Negro Intellectuals in Dilemma," to capitulate to him. Then there was the Resolution by Johnson. Then there was

"Negro's in the Revolution," May 1945

"Marxism and the Negro Problem," April 23, 1946

"Abstract of Com. Coolidge" -- that's Ernest McKinney who was the head of the Workers Party, the Trotskyist Party, that is, the Negro specialist, and he himself was a Negro. I disagreed very, very heavily with him because he said the Negroes couldn't get anywhere by themselves, and they had to bow and be second to the labor problem.

"Industrialization and Urbanization of the Negro's

So you see in a single period, 1944-46, we have no less than 7 documents, both in arguments on the question and in further development. What happened after that -- meaning the '60s when Black became such an exciting color and they finally admitted it -- was that I found that the greatest Third World theorist was Frantz Fanon. It was that work that we reproduced:

15939

3.

RESABT

I think that you can't get anywhere on what I call "American Civilization on Trial: Black Masses as Vanguard," unless you do see the truth of American history, and the fact is it's not just a role the Negro, or Blacks, played, but at every single stage of development. The first trade union was gotten, the National Labor Union, directly after the Civil War. So Marx's statement about 'labor in the white skin not being free so long as labor in the Black skin is branded,' isn't rhetoric; it was a pure statement of fact.

The question of restructuring Capital had to do with the impact of the Civil War in the U.S. as to Marx's relationship to break with the concept of theory, as if it were only a debate between theoreticians, instead of what were the workers doing, what was the race doing, what were the women doing.

*

CR: Let me take you back for a moment. In the 1920s and the 1930s with respect to the Left movement in the country in general, as it related to or took positions in respect to the so-called Negro Question, as we've indicated, in the American Communist movement. At one time in the 1920s, that is, presumably from the late 1920s into the post-World War II world, the American Communist movement assumed more or less strongly, depending on which period you're looking at, the position that Black people constituted a nation within a nation, and that Blacks had the right to self-determination, that is, the right to chose to separate from the U.S. as a people. How did the positions that you were taking, and that Johnson-James was taking, in the context of the Trotskyist movement, relate to the Communist Party's position?

RD: First of all, that wasn't the '20s. The particular debate you're referring to is the '30s. In the '20s, when Lenin was still alive, at the II CI Congress, he demanded that the Negro speak for himself, and give the report to the Congress; he demanded that, even though Marcus Garvey wasn't exactly a Marxist, he organized the greatest movement and we better pay attention to that. (CR: The position was enunciated in 1928 at the VI Comintern.

RD ✓

RD: Yes, but the point is that it didn't become a position ^{unlike} when they tried to say that, yes, the Negro is a nation within a nation but supposedly they'd be given ⁵ counties or something. (CR: States) RD: States. Well, that's what I think of our Southern states. We opposed that in the sense, first of all, that they have to make their decision. Secondly, why

4

only 5 counties? They're everywhere. And the whole debate began to degenerate into questions as to whether they have a different language, whether they have geographic boundaries.

Our position was: no, it isn't a question of language. They think differently and if they use the English language, it's because their original language was taken away from them, they don't remember. The main point was on the trade union question. We absolutely rejected the idea that the Negro couldn't get anywhere on his own, he had to be subordinate to labor. We insisted not only could they get everywhere on their own, but that they did get whatever they had won when they were on their own. Only at certain turning points in history, like the CIO, when they finally began to take in Blacks, that you could see that revolutionary role.

For example; I was in the Negro Champion before I met C.L.R. James, and when there was no union taking in Blacks. In the Negro Champion, the Negro Labor Congress of the Communists, we felt we would never get anywhere with the A.F.L., and we better organize Black unions on their own. So that from that moment on, the question of saying, let's not depend on labor as much as we believe labor is central, we better see that they had done such and such work.

In the '40s in particular, for example, one of the big fights in the Trotskyist movement, at which point C.L.R. James and myself took the same position, was a question of the Black participating in the Texas primary. Coolidge was given the stupid idea it's a capitalist party; why should we do that, we should be opposed. I said, anyone who wants to die for the stinky position of being able to vote, obviously they want to make their presence known and what they can do. And we were for it. So the actual positions of fighting and the actual positions of vanguard, the actual position of developing and saying that only at certain turning points was white labor good, like the C.I.O., was in the '40s.

*

CR: One of the major Black militants outside both the Communists and Trotskyist movements in the 1930s, when the debates began as you say, was W.E.B. DuBois. He had published, in '35 or '36, his Black Reconstruction. Did your position fundamentally differ from his, or was there much agreement?

15941

5

RD: There were more points of agreement than disagreement. First of all, we thought it was the greatest and only correct book on what really happened in the Civil War, the Reconstruction period. The only opposition we took is that it was obvious that DuBois' attitude and position on the fact of the "talented tenth" was not helping; it was disregarding the Black proletariat, and that was wrong. But otherwise it is the most magnificent history. People better study it; they will not really know what really happened until then. The disagreement with DuBois was on the question of the "talented tenth." It was not on the question of his analysis of the Reconstruction period.

*

CR: Did the treatment of intellectuals like DuBois by the American Communist movement have any impact on those Blacks, intellectuals as well as workers, who came into the Trotskyist movement? Just who were they and what was their path into Trotskyism?

RD: Actually there weren't many Black when C.L.R. James came around. (They were damn glad to have a Black; they could show him off.) No, when the Communist movement broke up into Trotskyism (I just had a discussion on it, incidentally, with Harold Cruse, in Michigan when I gave a speech on "Karl Marx and the Black World" at the U. of Mich. at Ann Arbor). When they were developing the idea of the "talented tenth" and what are we reaching to now, it was to show that ever since the break-up, the Blacks -- Dungee, Lovett Ford Whiteman (CR: These are Blacks who were in the American Communist movement)

RD: Right. For example, poor Lovett Ford Whiteman who was my editor at the Negro Champion had gone to Russia and got his head out off just like all the other people did during 37-38. (CR: You mean literal now?) RD: Yes, yes, yes, I'm sorry to say. Maybe not the head, but he was murdered anyway. I don't know whether it was a firing squad, but it was during the 37-38 infamous Moscow Trials.

Ernest Rice McKinney was the only well-known name of Blacks who had been a member of the N.A.A.C.P., who had many years (I think he may still be alive, because I heard something about him recently where he called me an 'adventurer' or something), who, however, had a very, very wrong position. He so far moved away from W.E.B. DuBois and the "talented tenth" as to say that you couldn't get anything unless you were with white labor. And he used to tell awful stories about the strike of 1919 in steel, and Black workers were strikebreakers, and stuff of that order.

15942

6

The Trotskyists actually didn't have Blacks, and none were well-known. They had lost everything in the break-up between Trotskyism and Stalinism. And then they began having some Blacks who were proletarians. When the C.I.O. started, that's the first time we really got some Blacks who ~~Black Americans~~ ^{Black Americans}. But even though I'd been expelled by the Communists, I would still go into cities where they didn't know me, and work again on things like the Scotsboro case, on Negro labor defense. But it wasn't that the Trotskyists had Blacks.

The first time that there was a real Resolution was C.L.R. James, 1943-44, and all of my articles on 'Marxism and the Negro Question', and all of my debates. And, frankly, they invariably put up Ernest Rise McKinney to debate me -- because, then, he was Black and I was white, so the color was against me by being white, as if he really knew the question and I didn't.

*

GR: Let me draw you out in terms of another characteristic. You were not merely white, but Russian-born, and also a woman. What impact did these characteristics have for you personally and politically in the Left movement?

RD: So far as Americans, I felt they don't know anything about the Black Question. I felt that you have to be a foreigner to ever recognize how important the Black Question was, because their constant fight on the question, that you have to be subordinate to labor; their constant not understanding the Civil War; and paying attention to the fact that there were a lot of ~~workers~~ ^{workers}, the Irish particularly, who were opposed to Black freedom, or at least didn't want to fight in the Civil War -- were all kinds of subordinate issues.

I happened to have been the first one -- I was still a ^{Y. C. Her} ~~Y. C. Her~~ -- to make the motion, that either you're going to make the comrades really feel comradesly by having the right to accuse the white comrades, even though they're supposed to be Marxists, of white chauvinism and to have a trial right there (in '25, '26, '27 in the Y.C.L.). I felt very, very strongly in the fact that I don't think there's a single American that understands the Black Question; it needed a foreign hand.

Now, so far as the woman's role, is concerned, they do it very subtly. It isn't a male chauvinism that you could expose immediately that way. It's whispers in the corridors, or it's something else, as to what there is involved.

15943

7.

movement to make all of us brave enough to say, well, it isn't only capitalism that has male chauvinism, it's right here in the Left, and you better pay attention to that and reorganize yourself.

*

✓ CR: Some of the ex-Party people, that is, people like Benjamin Gittlow (I'm thinking of his I Confess...RD: What a horrible book). One of the issues he raises in that text is the tragedy of a particular woman, who became involved in what I call "sexual politics" in the most perverse sense of it, had nothing to sustain herself, and ultimately dying after a series of abortions and that sort of thing. The question I'm asking you, is that, as a woman, did it not raise more than just simply problems of petty harassment or whispers in the corridors?

RD: We always felt that whereas it's true, that wherever there happens a revolution...When it was the Easter Uprising, every Jewish girl thought that she'd become a revolutionary right away if she slept with an Irishman. In the '30s and '40s, every Jewish girl thought that she would become a revolutionary if she slept with a Black man. So they would try to use that, that it wasn't really political, it was sexual. But it simply wasn't true. They felt that they, as women, are doing what they would do with anybody, and the white man wasn't half as sensitive to the question of sex and wouldn't ask a Black woman to marry him. But the white woman would.

✓
But we didn't really raise that. When people betrayed, and Gittlow of course is a big betrayer and went over to the F.B.I., they would raise those questions that were not raised before. White American have such a bad names. I was very, very shocked, for example, when once I found the main theoretical journal of when we were all Socialists (I never was, but the Americans were before 1917). He said, well of course I'm for equal economic and political rights, but I wouldn't like my sister to marry a Black man. And I thought: Jesus, in a Communist paper, in a Marxist paper? How can it possibly be? So there were those kinds of things, and I would always say: for heaven's sakes, Marx's daughter married a Black man. Who do you suppose Lafargue was? He was a Creole, and they were very proud of the fact. So how much longer can we move backwards in America, that here it is the 20th century and we're still talking such nonsense?

*

15944

CR: In the post-World War II period, when you began to--I suppose even earlier, you'd already marked yourself off as a major figure in the Left movement...

RD: I don't know that I was a major figure. I was very active and a thorn in their sides. I hated intellectuals and leaders so much, I really had very little to do with them. I would just do the work. But I was active in Chicago. I was an actual founding member way back in 1925 of the Negro Labor Congress. I was working on the Negro Champion. I was working with Lovett Ford-Whiteman, Dungee, and the others. And then by not being afraid that you're bourgeois, I worked with some of the the N.A.A.C.P. and so forth, on the question, and would review books like Fire in the Flint, to try and show they have a literature, they have a feeling, they have very great thoughts...

In the '40s, when I got together with C.E.R. James, we were fighting, number one, against Jim Crow in the U.S. Army. We were very active in that, and some of them have pictures of themselves, Johnson-Forestites, who were working in there. We were part of what we weren't supposed to be part of -- they didn't want whites around the March on Washington. It was a very, very important stage in our development and our activity. And I worked very hard with the Schomburg Collection, I did a lot of my work there. I handed in all of the documents of that time before documents were important on the question. They have quite a big part.

Now the Marxist-Humanist documents are a part of the Collection and they actually have some things that may be missing. One of these days I'll have to go there. I asked Harold Cruse when I was discussing with him, where did you get the Negro Champion, I don't even have a copy. And he said it is available in the Schomburg Collection. I had actually not know. That's what I mean by answering the question, I wasn't important then. I would write something, and I would get mad, and go to something else. I didn't care for my documents. I think after breaking with C.L.R. James, I said, well, if I break with him, I better keep my documents.

* * *

(continued interview after videotape interview has formally ended)

RD: ...the question of Humanism, that they were raising questions about what kind of labor, that were really way above what anybody was asking. So it's a movement from practice that is itself a form of theory and that, therefore, we had to have a new version made of what used to be called "Marxism and

State-Capitalism", which became Marxism and Freedom. The new version was that the American worker should be part of this; all of the reconstruction of Capital in relationship to America; and Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks. *Notes* agreed in theory, but did an awful lot ~~to see~~ *to see it wouldn't get ahead* *out for publication.*

Finally, the break came when I developed the ideas in 1953 on the Absolute, what I actually considered the breakthrough of the Absolute Idea" that it wasn't only a unity of theory and practice, but a question of such a unity, that it was an entirely different development, the relationship to theory and philosophy. He categorically refused to comment or to have anything to do with it, that the real thing was organizational. He was being deported, and 'someday or another' he'll come back to it. Well, 'someday or another' never came back, and we were meanwhile listed. He was in England and I was here and had to bear the brunt of it. I really feel that even though now in Correspondence -- that is also available in the Marxist-Humanist documents -- we were raising the question of Absolute Idea in discussion, he refused categorically to have anything to do with the fact that the breakthrough of seeing a moment from practice that is itself a form of theory, so that theory had to become philosophy. He just conked out -- sorry to use the phrase.

*

CR: One last question, and it also has to do with the collectives that the Johnson-Forest Tendency suggests. At least 2 very powerful theorists came out of that group, other than James himself, and that's yourself and Grace Lee Boggs. I'm wondering why we have not heard from other major women theorists in the Left movement in this country?

RD: I believe that the women theorists had been so disgusted with the particular of what they considered the main thing -- male chauvinism -- that they just separated from Marxism altogether. Even though Grace Lee Boggs is supposed to be a philosopher (she was, in fact, our formal philosopher), the truth is that she doesn't raise the woman Question, as the center; it's only Black.

I raised not the Woman Question as the only question, not the Black Question as the only question. I named 4 forces of revolution that I insist are also Reason; that's labor, Blacks, women and youth. I think if you think that any one of the forces is the only one -- even though I consider the Black masses in motion as the vanguard -- I do not think it is the only one.

The question became whether the women want to separate themselves on the basis of women, instead of being part of the revolutionary movement, and obviously...(tape ends here)

early documented in the archives and all my publications - 2 parts were involved Oct. from all the other sides = Women of Color & Africa - Gaudin

Notes by RD, 1/17/84 regarding transcript of CR interview

Q P. 3 appears the 1st error in dating positions of which he is apparently unaware. I.E. when he asks about the 20s and 30s I correct him that the discussion on Black in the CP was about the 30s, not the 20s. The 20s are important because Lenin was still alive and I refer to the CI Congress. CR obviously doesn't recognize it's not a question just of dates and in order to emphasize it's the 20s not the 30s,

CR says: "The position was enunciated in 1928 at the 6th Comintern." This means he mixes up the 6th with what I was talking about (the 2nd); secondly that he mixes up Lenin's stand in ~~1920~~ 1920 on the National Question with 1928 and Stalin-Bukharin theory of everything from "socialism in one country".

P. 9, top para. in which last sentence is left unfinished, should read: CLRJ agreed in theory but did an awful lot to see that it wouldn't get worked out for publication.

To the final page 9, where in the last para. the note reads: "tape ends here", the sentence should be completed as follows: "And obviously, insofar as I was concerned -- and all that is documented in my Archives, as well as all the publications -- two points were involved: 1) first and foremost to Marxist-Humanists, the uniqueness and originality of the slogan that distinguished us, 'Woman as Reason as well as Force'; 2) the need for an autonomous WLM.

214 ~~CR 29~~
The Th. Kuhn? ... who = ?
Sci 105
Les. 4/5
page key
of E. H. ...
THE TERMS OF ORDER: POLITICAL SCIENCE AND THE MYTH OF LEADERSHIP
by Cedric J. Robinson (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1980).
Pp. vii-218, \$9.95 (paper).
vs Weber ...
1

Over the past decade, a growing number of African and African American scholars have examined the assumptions and biases of Western social science in order to better understand the motives underlying them and to pose alternatives to their attendant theories and conclusions. Most recently, critique of the social sciences has directed attention toward the theoretical and methodological constructions of various disciplines as these attempt to define and/or interpret, within their separate domains, the nature of social reality. The point of this reassessment is not simply to expose fallacies, but also to instruct, as it becomes increasingly evident that the oppression of African peoples is intellectual as well as physical. Cedric Robinson's The Terms of Order is an important contribution to the movement of critical consciousness among Black peoples. This work centers on the concept of "the political" in Western thought and specially addresses the implications of historical options (Marxism and anarchism) to the conceptions of conventional political science. Modestly described by the author as an essay (it is really several essays, each quite self-contained), the book offers a detailed discussion of the myth of political order and the postulate of political leadership as the basis of that order.

In discussing political science and the object of its inquiry--the nature of the political--Robinson turns to Thomas Kuhn whose The Structure of Scientific Revolutions has influenced thinking about the philosophy and sociology of knowledge for some twenty years. Kuhn's treatment of "normal science" as the process by which knowledge is produced and accumulated is used to demonstrate both the tautological character of scientific thought and the discontinuity between paradigms of the political and our concrete

Describing to ...
P. ...

15948

experience of it.

Kuhn argues that scientific knowledge is generated through the operation of "normal science" which produces a dominant paradigm, one having no serious competitors. Paradigms or "exemplars" are deemed by Kuhn to be scientific puzzle-solution models that have gained acceptance largely by means of formal instruction. Robinson says of "normal science," "One knows what to ask of one's data and how to produce that data because one knows 'instinctively' the boundaries and the range of correct and acceptable answers" (p. 11). *Robinson*

The salience of any paradigm, according to Kuhn, derives from its practitioners' commitment to it. Therefore, while there may be multiple paradigms extant, owing to their distinctive epistemologies, they cannot be judged solely by recourse to experience or reason. Paradigms are incommensurate. Paradigm change thus requires transformation of individual perceptions and conceptualizations, something akin to religious conversion.

For Robinson, political science is a dominant paradigm and, as such, cannot be compared with other paradigms of social order. This discipline, he argues, does not explicate the nature of the political, rather, it posits the political as a categorical necessity. This basic presumption of political science has largely gone unchallenged. Political science, then, does not generate testable propositions. Instead of theoretical formulations, what is encountered in the discipline is a profusion of methodological invention. The latter, of course, is geared toward prediction of "political" behavior. From this perspective, it is clear that political science is an atrophied discipline, a victim of stunted growth. At best, it is an ideology that mirrors and interprets a predetermined view of the human condition.

Political science, though, cannot be dismissed so easily for it and its

practitioners remain collaborators in the persistence of the idea of the political as a categorical necessity, an idea that, despite its elusiveness, has become the pre-eminent metaphor of our time. In its most simplistic conceptualization, it is pristine reductionism: "Everything is political."

In his formulation, however, Professor Robinson interprets the political to be "... an ordering principle, distinguishing the lawful or authorized order of things while itself being the origin of the regulation" (p. 7).

He discerns that "We associate, then, the political with power, authority, order, law, the state, force and violence--all of these are phenomena which

restrict the outcome, deflect the extraneous, limit the relevant forces.

We speak of the political both as an instrument for ordering society and that order itself" (ibid.).

In Western thought, the political is taken as a factual proposition about and the archetype of social order. If one accepts the idea of human "nature" as being a universal nature that purports to account for human predispositions, then high on the list of essential attributes is a need (instinct perhaps) for order. Order is a given, an element of the human impulse for survival. In Western civilization, at least since Plato, power has been identified as a principal source of social order. Power necessitated a further instrument to effect order, this being political leadership. Hence, says Robinson, we are presented with a paradigm in which order is achieved and sustained through the agency of political leadership.

Persistence of the political as social reality in Western thought is shown by Professor Robinson to be linked to certain discernments--metaphysical and epistemological--which equate social order and political leadership.

Psychoanalytic theory, structuralism (French), linguistics, and ethnology are used in the book to examine both the subconscious processes whereby the myth

of political order persists and also to suggest how an understanding of other cultures may be achieved without mistaking cross-cultural similarities for descriptions of reality. Whereas Western systems of thought arrogantly claim to be rooted in rationality, Robinson shows how "prescientific" beliefs and mythologies have remained viable and continue to infiltrate these epistemologies. As his argument develops, it becomes apparent that political science is understood by him to be a repository of such myths living in the collective memory (subconscious) of Western civilization. The charter myth of "political" society is that of political leadership, those or that authority through whom (potential) chaos and indecision are eliminated from, or mediated within, the public sphere.

The modern Western myth of political order is traced to Max Weber and his translation of the messianic wish into the mysticism of charismatic leadership. In its Weberian construction, the charismatic relationship between leader and follower is necessarily one of dependency. In order to conceal the asymmetry of this structure, Robinson argues, leadership and followership are imbued with contrary qualities. For Weber, charisma was the essential legitimation for traditional and bureaucratic authority. In this paradigm, followers are conceived as surrendering their authority to the leader, thereby insuring a well-ordered system. The structure and reality of domination are, in this manner, hidden and protected.

Among the many merits of this book is Robinson's reinterpretation of Weber's theory of charismatic leadership. The strategy employed in his reinterpretation is dialectical analysis. Taking hints from Levi-Strauss and Foucault, with their emphases on binary opposites and oppositions, Professor Robinson proceeds to view political authority as the perversion of charisma. For him, Weber's theory "is a rational version of the messiah, a paradigm

mixed with mystifying notions of rational (geometric) social order and apocalyptic salvation" (pp. 158-159).

In providing a critique that moves beyond the parameters of traditional Western thought, Robinson argues that charismatic phenomena are not expressive of the leader-follower dyad, but rather, represent the dissolution of that dependency. The solidarity of charismatic masses is not disjunctive--the "charismatic leader becomes the charismaticized follower, the element most totally subordinate, to the extent that his every action is charged with not merely an obligation but as well a detailed instruction" (p. 152).

The dynamic of the charismatic relationship is, for Professor Robinson, a temporary collective consciousness spawned by social crises.

Western responses to the repressions and disorders (crises) of political society, at least since the nineteenth century, have been of two general types: Marxist and anarchist remedial programs. Granted the variation within each type, both share with conventional perspectives the same epistemological and metaphysical premises, specifically, acceptance of the political as a categorical necessity and the possibility of political freedom. Marxist metaphysics, for example, proclaim the state to be the greatest evil, an evil inextricable from class struggle, which, in turn, is the motive of human history. In this messianic vision, history ceases to exist once classless society (political freedom) reigns. Anarchism, too, is a political force in opposition to the state, offering differing versions of the return to a Golden Age. According to Robinson, the failing of modern Western radicalisms is their inability to pose genuine alternatives to customary conceptualizations of authority as legitimated power. They are merely alternatives of the political, not its negation.

If there is an authentic alternative to these customary conceptualiza-

tions, then it would have to meet certain fundamental criteria: "If a people found a consciousness of authority, survival and order without respect to the political, that is without human agencies which embody power and its cognates, then they can be understood to be authentically without politics" (p. 29). To acquire an understanding of anarchy in this generic sense, Robinson turns to the ethnographic literature treating the Ila-Tonga of Zambia. In applying linguistics and ethnology as counter- or subversive-sciences (approaches which claim to offer alternate ways of knowing to those predicated on logic) it is shown that authority need not be based in power, force, nor the threat of violence. In Ila-Tonga society, the authority of leadership is restricted; the moral basis of association is not submission to political authority, but rather to the authority of kinship. As the idiom of the political dominates the thought and activities of the West, so in Ila-Tonga society does the idiom of kinship assume this function, but as a truly integrative device. According to Robinson, the mythology of kinship as rationalized in the principle of incompleteness, that is, in the notion of the necessity of the Other in realizing Self, reflects the ideological and social insights of this anarchistic society.

Thus dialectical analysis, the juxtaposition of paradigms, does not facilitate a resolution of oppositions, however, it does allow an understanding of differing social realities. Paradigms of the political and those of authentic anarchism are incommensurate; they lack shared assumptions about the nature of social order, of social relatedness.

The political is the hubris of contemporary Western thought. As such, it assumes priority over all other conceptions of social relatedness, so much so that even in the absence of political phenomena, they are conjured up and superimposed on manifestly nonpolitical things and events. Though

W.K. on
Ethnology
for

it is not so very difficult to accept that our experience of social order is learned, that it is a culturally-derived Gestalt, Robinson rejects the assertion that this experience, universally, is realized as political order.

Chad P
This book is his contributions toward disabusing us of acceptance of the "naturalness" of the political. Those who wish to cling to the political as an instrument of liberation will find little solace here.

At another level, one equally important to Black scholars and activists, this book is an exquisite demonstration of how the separation of knowledge into various disciplines has encouraged and perpetuates the fragmentation and distortion of social reality. *vj.*

Mary Agnes Lewis
Department of Afro-American Studies
California State University, Hayward
Hayward, California

15954