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Race/class : Jamaica's discourse of heritable identity

Argues that Jamaican notions of 'race' and 'class' can be rendered as a discourse of heritable biological and environmental identity. There has been a movement in the meaning of colour categories from an emphasis on biology, to a greater emphasis on environment. This transition has been encouraged by the emergence of class as a 20th-c. idiom.

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RACE/CLASS: JAMAICA'S DISCOURSE OF HERITABLE IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION

Jamaican society in the slavery period brought two cultures into confrontation: a variety of West African groups and a smaller range of Anglo-Europeans and Sephardic Jews. The differences between these groups were rendered by the dominant Europeans in terms of "race" as evidenced in color and other attributes imagined and construed to ideological ends. More recently, possibly in the twentieth century only, an idiom of "class," or "color/class," has been adopted widely by Jamaicans to describe various social fissures and conflicts. Just as "race" has been used to render ethnicity, including its divisions and conflicts, so "class" has been used to describe in the present, and retrospectively, the dynamics of privilege and disprivilege generated by a changing economy and different modes of productive enterprise. Both the idioms of "race" and "class" are culturally interpreted in Jamaica. They are both given particular content by Jamaica's own historicity (cf. Trouillot 1992; also see Robotham 1991). Both pertain to an experience of hierarchy, and to the contestation of hierarchy, in the course of Jamaican history (cf. R.T. Smith 1982). The relation between these idioms, however, has remained an intractable analytical problem, notwithstanding the fact that almost every social scientist writing on contemporary Jamaica has contributed something to the issue.¹ I make this remark in order to dispel any hasty expectation that the current discussion can resolve the matter. However, as an early student of the cultural aspects of social class in contemporary Jamaica, I feel it is time to make some remarks more explicit than those in my previous work, on the manner in which I understand the relation

New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids vol. 68 no. 3 & 4 (1994): 213-233

between “class” and “race” especially as it is represented in Jamaican discourse.

Social class and color groupings jointly present the major issues of status that constitute a Jamaican sense of hierarchy. These groupings intersect and overlap. Derek Gordon (1991:181-206), in his work on education, shows this clearly for contemporary Jamaica when he plots the differences in educational outcome for lighter and darker members of Jamaica’s middle and lower classes. Though lower-class black children are improving their position in relation to class members of lighter color, lighter colored children of the middle class have used educational reforms to further secure their advantage over black children in the middle class. Gordon remarks that in these circumstances, consideration of class alone masks other important dynamics, though the dynamic of color is not a unidirectional one.

Turning now to issues of discourse, to the manner in which Jamaicans themselves represent and talk about this milieu, we can only expect a fairly complex picture which sustains some continuity throughout the society, but also varies significantly when viewed from different types of social position. How Jamaicans in different positions figure the issues of “race” and “class,” and whether and in what degree they are distinguished, could hardly illicit a simple model of one univocal discourse. Yet among a number of writers on Jamaica, there has been a common view, if not a model, of how Jamaicans experience and give meaning to these dimensions of social life.

M.G. Smith (1984:140), like Harmannus Hoetink (1973:55), has understood “race” in the sense of the spurious biological distinction made between different ethnicities. This distinction and preference, once codified in law, is seen to play the role of charter for *de facto* discriminations in the present. These *de facto* acts, Smith suggests, are sustained at the level of conscious choice. Jack Alexander (1977), on the other hand, understands “race” in terms of an underlying structure of color categories that govern, in an unconscious way, peoples’ perceptions, construals, and responses to others. Alexander demonstrates his view with an analysis of a middle-class woman’s reflections on the subtleties of phenotypical difference that occur within her own kin domain. Race becomes the idiom through which this everyday sociality is ordered. These positions, which assume different notions of culture, share the common characteristic that race-glossed-as-color is seen to define the major contours of Jamaican culture. The more recent writings of R.T. Smith (1982, 1987) and Lisa Douglass (1992) can also be seen as part of this genre. Both Smith and Douglass, in rather different ways, juxtapose “hierarchy” to “inequality” in order to represent Jamaica’s form of systemic, envalued, differential power. R.T. Smith poses the problem of the way in which a “socio-racial stratification” encompasses or is

encompassed by class and "the values of individuation." He concludes that the socio-racial does encompass the values of individuation so that the latter "liberal ideology" in fact "embod[ies] racial concepts in its very structure" (R.T. Smith 1982:98, 119). To these particular racial concepts Smith (1982:116) gives the status of those that "define the nature and components of the world." Here he grafts a Dumontian view of the New World construction of natural difference onto the type of opposition Tocqueville proposed between hierarchy and American egalitarianism (Dumont 1970:239-58). Jamaica's racialized ethnic order becomes a hierarchy of natural difference rendered in "modern" biologized terms. This order in fact absolutely rejects the notion of "equality of condition" that Tocqueville proposed as characteristic of New World forms of society.

In a similar mode, Lisa Douglass (1992:9-10) juxtaposes a naturalized hierarchy of race to beliefs in "meritocracy" and "egalitarianism." Hierarchy is introduced as "color hierarchy" manifest in a group of elite white families. Their practices are taken as evidence for "ideas" that give a "sacred" quality to the practice of hierarchy (Douglass 1992:24). The grounding of this hierarchy in the "21 families," a well-known white sector of the elite, makes them the locus for analytical integration of issues of class and gender with color. In so doing, Douglass implies in a manner similar to Smith, that the "socio-racial order" encompasses class and gender. It is the structural order, the "system's integration," to use R.T. Smith's words (1992:xii), that underlies the entire society. The naturalized hierarchy of color difference encompasses the social order.

What binds all these positions together, notwithstanding their theoretical divergences, is an emphasis on the enduring pre-eminence of "race" as the meaning that specifies Jamaican experience. Racialized notions of ethnicity as rendered in the color categories become the central content of Jamaican culture. With this emphasis, the view seems to capture a major component of Caribbean history. It repudiates the frequent attempts to reduce the rendering of Caribbean history simply to a uniform political economy and to a universal class experience. The Caribbean becomes a unique culture area, albeit at some analytical cost.

COLOR, CLASS, AND THE QUESTION OF INHERITANCE

These forms of analysis situate race as the *sine qua non* of Jamaican experience. As a consequence, it is the reproduction of racialized meaning that is constantly emphasized in analysis.² The diffuse articulations subsumed under class or even gender, become incidental to the reproduction of a nat-

uralized hierarchy identified always with the issue of race. Analyses which begin with a critical thrust, to emphasize Jamaica's specificity, and its non-assimilability to simply another Western class experience, gradually become increasingly conservative, in two particular ways. First, race is represented, by default, as a Proustian phenomenon that remains the same more than it changes. The object of these analyses might be taken to be always to return to the reproduction of color categories as a way of proving that Jamaica has a culture in the sense of an enduring set of meanings. Second, those writings that render the color categories as a form of Jamaican hierarchy suggest that they have a uniform salience right throughout Jamaican society (R.T. Smith 1982, 1987; Douglass 1992). When M.G. Smith (1965) first criticized the value-integration point of view and proposed a plurality of cultures for Jamaica, notwithstanding their differential power, one assumes that part of his rationale was to question this assumption of a uniform salience. As a result, his enduring racial charter applied to only one cultural section, the whites. This critical response from M.G. Smith simplified forms of hegemony that have been characteristic of Jamaican society (Austin 1983, 1984). Yet, when race is seen as meaningful and encompassing structure, this hegemony is also misrepresented. Everyone has a sense of hierarchy and everyone is under the sway of color categories, accepting the hierarchy to a similar degree, or so the analyses seem to suggest. Yet, if this were so one should wonder how the educational reforms of which Gordon writes could even have effected the change that they have in the life chances of the black lower class. A notion of encompassing hierarchy may give cultural identity to Jamaica, but also locks it away from the real political and cultural innovation that has occurred in the course of this century. The struggle and conflict of the society are seen mainly in the context of reproduction, and sentiment and even sacrality are emphasized over the experience of conflict, and the political struggle to resolve that conflict.

It is through this political and cultural innovation that racialism, as a set of practices, has been attenuated in Jamaica. Color categories as an idiom of difference have endured nevertheless. Yet, the use of these categories comes in various forms and with various degrees of salience. As the more obvious race discriminations have diminished in occupational spheres, concern about the minutiae of color increasingly has been domesticated among the privileged, and possibly now remains most marked in the kin domains of the upper middle class. At the same time, the term "class" itself is used as a means of making social distinctions. It is sometimes conjoined with a color category and sometimes used independently. It is common for people in the lower middle class, mobile through education from the lower class, to observe that class is now more important than color. Lower class men, on

the other hand, often talk about "the black working class" and interchange notions of race and class. Talk about class has probably increased, but contrary to R.T. Smith and Douglass, this is not simply talk about individual achievement, a discourse which, in my experience, is confined to a section of the middle class. Class as experienced and talked in Jamaica carries its own forms of heritable identity that at various points and in various ways give content to the color categories. This is so because although overt acts of race discrimination are now less common in Jamaica, economic and cultural constraints on the poor and black sustain ideas of heritable identity that bring together issues of color and class. There is therefore a real attenuation of racialism, but with this does not necessarily go a relinquishing of color categories, or a switch to an idiom of individual achievement. Notions of heritable identity remain and they are often marked by a reference to color sometimes explicitly conjoined with class. They can also be stated, and often are, in social class terms alone.

These comments introduce my third concern with the "culture of race" position. In this position, class is either denuded of meaning or else becomes historically non-specific notwithstanding the obvious fact that "class" is a category among the people. Sometimes it is denied social salience (M.G. Smith 1984), or else is construed as a certain form of contemporary "false consciousness" that, making reference to "education," thereby assumes a meritocratic order in a society that is clearly based on a hierarchy of naturalized difference (Douglass 1992). Sometimes it is proposed that Jamaicans can clearly distinguish race and class so that it is unproblematical to discuss race and color categories independently of social class (Alexander 1977). Another position is simply to observe that changes in class relations bear on the way in which race is understood, though race nevertheless always remains assimilable to its previous forms (R.T. Smith 1982). Rather seldom is the possibility entertained that due to Jamaica's historical specificity, Jamaicans have also construed the experience of "class" in particular ways; ways that make the representations of difference presumed to be embodied in diverse productive roles something specifically Jamaican, related to but not identical with color classifications. Such a meaningful content of class I found in the language of "inside" and "outside" which proposed ideas of manners and education, associated with certain productive roles, to be inherited characteristics. These antinomies pertained to three areas of life: work life, domestic life, and procreation. Each of these domains, paradigmatically, was organized in an educated "inside," or an "outside" way that connoted lack of education. The manner in which these domains were organized defined a certain sort of being, and notwithstanding a discourse of individual achievement, sustained by middle-class people I knew, these

kinds of being were chiefly conceived as deriving from a heritable identity. In fact, the striking thing about Jamaican ideas of education was the degree to which they incorporated notions of heritable identity quite removed from issues of individual achievement (Austin 1974, 1979, 1983, 1984; cf. Douglass 1992:16, 261). In short, this experience of being enclashed was also rendered as an experience of being placed within or beyond particular domains of *inherited sociality that ultimately defined different kinds of being*. This circumstance was summarized for me by a middle-class woman who observed one day, "It took me five generations to be 'educated.' Yu caan' tek a chil' from below Torrington Bridge, put 'im in a school and mek 'im 'educated.' Caan be done."³

A more extreme expression of a similar view was to observe that the post-War reforms in education have simply produced "learned criminals" (Austin 1984:170). More interesting still, I recorded these observations, and others like them, at a twenty-year interval, one set in 1972 and another set in 1992. They proposed an environmentally induced inheritance that made human beings inexorably different even when it might be assumed that ultimately they came from the very same "race" and manifest the same color shade. For the term "black working class," in particular, these observations have a special force. They suggest that in Jamaica there are active ideas about heritable identity that can give significance to class and ethnicity without being simply biological (cf. Robotham 1991; Douglas 1992:269). "Inheritance" is here the operative word that subsumes both notions of racial difference grounded in biological being, and also notions of cultural difference produced by environing historical experience. This experience can be associated with "negroes," "blacks," or "Jamaica whites." It can also be associated with social class and divorced from particular ethnicities. Black families can sustain an inside status and be part of the educated class. Lighter skinned families of the lower class can equally manifest an outside status and be identified as uneducated.

It seems to me that R.T. Smith has made a major contribution to Jamaican ethnography through his account of the manner in which Jamaican culture has at its core a sense of persisting hierarchical order. This is a sense of hierarchy that acknowledges ranked, inherited forms of difference. These rankings are still articulated often through the idiom of color shade and can reflect biologized notions of race. Yet, Jamaican culture in this sense is more than simply a discourse of race. It also involves issues of class which give meaning to the experience of hierarchy. The articulation of social class can bring other ideas of inheritance either distinguished from color difference or else associated with that difference. These alternative modes of representation vary with position in society.

Moreover, to say that a sense of hierarchy is close to the core of Jamaican culture does not entail, so far as I can see, that all Jamaicans simply accept a set of ranked color categories as their major means of interpreting the world or even as a significant means. This hierarchy is given different meanings. It is endorsed and left implicit in perception, or else made explicit and contested in a variety of ways. All these positions, nevertheless, can refer to issues of heritable identity and to Jamaica's historicity. It is this phenomenon of inherited identity with references back to plantation society and to the problematic of hierarchy that for me most typifies Jamaican culture. In this, race does not encompass class, or class give meaning to color categories only. Rather, they are both historically emergent dimensions of a discourse of heritable identity that is characteristic of Jamaica.

Particularly in the course of this century, class, with its own forms of cultural content, has become a salient category of experience, joining with and sometimes superseding the experience of racialized relations. This process has itself reflected not only economic change in Jamaica, but also a continuing political struggle to expunge color as a ground for distinction. Whilst neither color nor social class have been overcome as bases of hierarchy, this process of political and cultural struggle has confirmed and expanded a discourse in which biologized hierarchy is strongly contested. Distinctions of social class, however, that evoke other views of inheritance, and can be aligned with ethnicity, have often replaced these racist notions. These distinctions are also contested, and defended, and help to shape a complex discourse of heritable identity. In this discourse, as the experience of the lower classes has become, increasingly, a transnational experience, their views have also become more vocal and more confrontational. This is often expressed in cultural genres through "dub" music and poetry, and through the urban folklore of gangs. It reflects itself in the middle class through some classic novels of race and class and through a plethora of ironic comedies flowing from the pens of various authors.⁴

JAMAICA'S DISCOURSE OF HERITABLE IDENTITY

In place of the "culture of race" account, I would like to propose a more complex scheme that renders this phenomenon as a form of discourse in which there are a number of positions. I shall call this discourse "Jamaica's discourse of heritable identity." At its heart are positions which bring matters of color and class together in a variety of different engagements. To specify this discourse, however, requires a small digression on "heritable identity."

Notions of heritable identity in Jamaica have rested either on beliefs in biological inheritance, or on beliefs in heritable difference constituted and reproduced through the sustaining of distinct environments (Austin-Broos 1992). The distinguishing feature in these two different notions is that whilst the biological view, which is far less common in Jamaica today, proposes that difference is intrinsic to races, the environmental view in fact proposes that difference is constituted over time. This difference can be seen as situational, and therefore as changeable in principle. Many Jamaicans from a variety of classes in fact entertain this view of the world. From a conservative position, however, this difference can also be construed as something which becomes intrinsic to the person as an enduring phenomenon. Whilst the former biologized view is a relatively straightforward version of racialism, the latter conservative view of environment combines ideas about color and class with a certain adaptive notion of inheritance. People evolve as different beings due to the circumstances of their environment. The comments on education cited above offer this view of social class. Commonly, however, this environmental view conjoins ideas of class with notions of color or ethnicity. A brown middle-class woman once observed,

The negroes sometimes do not like themselves. They put it forward that they are glad to be negroes, but basically, I don't think they are. The negroes and so were brought in as slaves and, of course, they had no voice. The masters tell them what to do and they just do it. And in time, when they even got a certain amount of freedom, that's the only way they knew, and so [they] brought it forward unto their children, to a point, not in the form of slaves, but it work out the very same thing today.

This statement by a brown Jamaican woman treats “negroes” as a separate kind of being certainly different from herself. This is due to their envioning inheritance, and notwithstanding the obvious fact that she is part “negro” herself. The use of the phrase, “unto their children” also evokes a biblical tone in which the inheritance of a “negro identity” becomes, like sin, an enduring condition. And from this position, blackness like sin is seen as a set of inherited dispositions as much environmental as it is intrinsic. These views are in fact significantly different from typically biologized statements of difference common during the colonial period. George W. Bridges (1828, II:479), the Anglican cleric, portrayed “the African” as exhibiting “generic deceit, ingratitude and cruelty.” Some seventy years later at the turn of the century, even Frank Cundall (1900:404), a born and bred Jamaican, observed that an “Englishman” in Jamaica, with special care, could only do “a fair amount of almost manual labour” due to the nature of his physique. The statements of hierarchy current in Jamaica are seldom of this simple biologized type, but rather refer to intractable difference forged through environmental inheritance.

I specifically wish to identify Jamaica's discourse of heritable identity with these ideas of environmental inheritance. They conform with the observation made by Alexander (1977) that Jamaicans by and large do not see races as inherently hierarchical, but only as constituting hierarchy through history. It is important to note here, and pace Alexander and also Douglass, that an important component of this history involves the articulation of class relations on which Jamaicans comment themselves (cf. R.T. Smith 1982). One position in this discourse endorses hierarchy in the present and suggests that the civilizing power of colonialism has not entirely reached the black lower classes. They are intractably different due to inherited environment. Another position in the discourse contests this construal of inheritance. The imagery of the "black oppressed" or, more commonly, the "black working class," proposes that disadvantage, not disability, is the inheritance of the poor and black. Typically, lower class black Jamaicans, when they articulate this position, as do many in the middle class, seek to propose that equality of condition that Tocqueville described as a New World notion (cf. Jayawardena 1967-68). Sometimes they see their fellow Jamaicans defeated by imposed inheritance, and sometimes they underline the struggle that keeps this sense of equality alive. Both these positions, nevertheless, address historical environment.

Around these two positions in the discourse revolve some others which are equally important. One of these is the type of position that focuses on individual practice and proposes that Jamaica can become an order of individual achievement beyond the contextualizing power of history. Here is part of a conversation with a black middle-class man:

I: I started out saying the white person was regarded as being in the upper strata. It's not as blatantly so now, because many of the colored people are up there now. Today, it's not really so much the color, or the race; it is the class now.

A: And when you say 'class,' do you mean 'money?'

I: Yes, money and position. You know, the status that you reach in life when you have an education. A black, a jet black doctor is a big man.

A: And what gives status in Jamaica now?

I: Well, profession, successful business more or less. That's about it. It doesn't matter what business really if a man can move around looking tidy, and have a motorcar and his children going to big schools, and all that sort of thing.

This is a typical middle-class statement that rejects the issue of inheritance in order to foreground individual achievement. This type of position, which promotes individualism in the face of hierarchy, is, nevertheless, frequently

mixed with ideas about heritable identity as a fact of environment. The latter ideas are deployed to explain either why the middle class continue to achieve, or why the lower class seem to so seldomly. They suggest, through reference to education, that achievement is fostered through time; and that those not engaged in enduring cultivation will inherit an untutored disposition. The individualized position is therefore unstable and tends to fold back before too long into issues of heritable identity.

A further position in the discourse is more often "said" through practice than talk. It involves notions of radically equal community transcending the field of hierarchical order. Typically, these forms of community are proposed as colorless and also as classless. They are very often conceived in religious terms and in terms of radical forms of self-transformation. Unlike the meritocratic position, they see the resolution of hierarchy in forms of community rather than individual practice. Nevertheless, they also acknowledge that these communities are based in individuals' practice. Many Revival and Pentecostal groups, for instance, propose such a radical community that would, in fact, be colorless. Their notions of transcending hierarchy involve both Christian and existential elements. The individual, in a revelatory moment, bursts through the hierarchy to a different plain of being. An alternative to a colorless transcendence is transcendence to a world entirely black. In Rastafarianism, with its separatist element, a radical model of this community is proposed.

Both of these latter positions seek to move beyond the discourse of heritable identity to worlds of differently nuanced equality while the notions of heritable identity, in turn, endorse or contest a hierarchical order. The views of inheritance that re-affirm hierarchy focus on the plantation period and often propose a continuing heritage derived from the colonial milieu. People are as they are today due to the colonial past. The notions of heritable identity that contest this view emphasize a different inheritance. They focus on a "history of freedom" that followed abolition. The creation of family, class, and nation is intimately associated with this history and seen as the creation, over time, of newly secured identities especially for people identified as "black" (cf. Robotham 1991). Both these positions operate from ideas of envioning condition; one which reproduces hierarchy and the other which comprises the practice of freedom to realize an equality of condition. Middle class people who underline individual achievement identify neither with the hierarchical view, nor with the rhetoric of black class and nation. The Jamaicans who posit in their practice radically equal communities are also, often, lower-class people unable to engage with the rhetoric of class, or with the political rhetoric of nation. Unlike a section of the middle class, they are sceptical regarding individual achievement in the absence of

spiritual support. These Jamaicans are sometimes men, but very often lower-class women.

The discursive formation here described could be rendered as a "culture of race." It does not involve phenomena different from those to which other accounts have pointed. This account places these phenomena, however, in a more dynamic perspective. It acknowledges that notions of hierarchical difference can change their meaning, be contested and attenuate, all within a larger cultural milieu that nevertheless remains distinctively Jamaican. Class, as the historically constituted environments that work upon the initial forms of ethnic inheritance that were once construed in bio-racial terms, becomes integral to this larger milieu rather than some shadowy grid beyond it. Different forms of class experience intersect with color shades to produce paradigmatic environments that constitute heritable identities. These notions of environmental inheritance can be naturalized to a degree or remain situational and therefore amenable to change.

In the remainder of this discussion, I will seek to put forward the Jamaican view by discussing some examples of the discourse here described. In a separate, complementary paper entitled "Hierarchy and Jamaican Religion," I explore some of Jamaica's visions of radical transcending community.⁵ Here, I begin with a discursive position that endorses Jamaican hierarchy and then consider two positions that contest it in different degrees and ways.

"THE SLAVERY THING IS STILL IN THEM"

Fearful of rural impoverishment and of Jamaica's massive urbanization, many members of Jamaica's middle class regard with distaste and frustrated regret an aggressive lower-class ghetto style that appears to turn its back on education and even on "civilization." The ghetto dweller is typified as someone outside a respectable society; someone whose position and disposition is a heritable product stretching back to slavery. Here is the view of a middle class woman scanning the hierarchy she knows as Jamaica.

Once the black people, they were more docile. They didn't have all that fire within them. I think what happen now, that even though the people are just as ignorant and just as poor, they now got a spark and because they are ignorant, they don't know in what way to bring themselves forward. So the only way they know is to be hostile. I feel it is because they don't really know better.

Because what you find happening is there are certain areas in Kingston that is definitely of a very bad element. That is, they do nothing but the wrong thing. As children, they will be pick pockets. They will not attend school. They will always be scruffy and dirty. No mind [that] they don't have another shirt, but they will always be dirty and on the

road. The parents will never know where they are. The parents in turn when they do catch up with such a child give him a flogging that, I mean no human being should get, and so tomorrow they back on the road as a sort of retaliation. I mean, [the parents] quarrel with them but they can't do anything more. Because basically, I think, lots of people that are black are sorry they are black. No matter how they tell you that black is beautiful and they are happy to be black and natural and so. I think lots of them deep down are sorry they are black and maybe that is why they respond like this. From slavery they were beaten, you see, and they didn't learn another way.

The middle-class people are more civilized, even though they keep the color shade thing. That prejudice, now, is responding to the white. You know, the Jamaica white. Those people now, are very clannish. They are together all the time. They are always doing things together and everybody else is an outsider. Because you may come along and you may hold, maybe, a government office and they may need you ... Then they'll befriend you. But you will still be an outsider. You will never be able to come into the fold. The matter is not particularly social, but it definitely have to do with marriage. I mean, you're not aware that there is an undercurrent. But let you walk through the gate with their brother or their son, they would reject you immediately.

The shade thing applies to them and to the older middle class. Because, in an earlier day, that color really meant behavior. If you walk in there as somebody not of their color, you would also be not of good behavior. And then, they would really reject you. Now, people say it was a terrible thing; terrible to worry about the shade of skin, and the shape of lips, and type of hair. But, really, to people it meant the behavior. It meant civilization you see. And when you see the blacks today, you will understand what it mean. You see, people wouldn't marry that vulgarity.

This woman is Afro-Chinese, and in her own perception lives at a tangent from the color-shade schemes of the middle class; a tangent even more clearly defined by her marriage to an Indian businessman. Absent in her comment are the types of careful phenotypical distinction that can still be elicited at least from some in the middle class. Her concern with issues of hierarchy, however, is revealed in her connection of behavior with color and with the manner in which a "black" behavior is reproduced across generations.

The experience which shapes this discursive position is based in the juxtaposition of two milieux: a middle class space of educational achievement leading to social mobility and the assumption of particular forms of "behavior"; and a lower-class space of limited opportunity that has promoted rural to urban migration and the gradual growth of sprawling slums in Kingston. Opportunity for the few and constraint for the many has produced in this middle-class position an acceptance of hierarchy only finely overlaid by a sense of individual achievement. The embodiment of this middle-class experience comes in the creation of ordered space that allows the privatization of an "inside" life and the maintenance of status unequals "outside" (see Austin 1984). These conceptions among the middle class create an extraordinary sense of "matter out of place" applicable both to artifacts and people. The same Afro-Chinese woman gave me an example from everyday life.

There is a Rastafarian broom man that passes along here. The gardener had cleaned up for me on a particular day and the following day he was gone and there walked along a man who was selling his brooms. You know, the old brooms made from banana leaf. He stood right in the curb there and started. They have a way of using a knife or an ice pick to shred it out. And in doing that, it shreds off the fibres on the ground. Well, I was out there and I said to him "I'd rather you didn't do it there because I have just swept up. I don't like filth lying on the grass." And he turned to me and said "This is not your sidewalk you know. I'll stay here as long as I want to." And I got mad and the gardener heard, and he came out to the gate, and he said to him, "She right, she just pay me to look after her place which include de sidewalk. She has every right to tell you not to mess it up." And the Rastafarian turned and he insult the gardener which was his own particular type of person, and he cursed him off good and proper. It's ignorance you see. They have always been lacking in education but you are supposed to treat them like gods and perhaps give them everything you have.

The Rastafarian with his wild hair shredding his brooms on the tended lawn is the image that this woman deploys to describe a transgression of hierarchy located in the space of neighborhood life. It is because the Rastafarian and the gardener are the same, black and poor, that the woman can reject the Rastafarian's claims to a mendicant but nevertheless transcendent status. When the Rastafarian curses his own, he demonstrates his uncivilized nature conferred and reproduced over time by a disordered and violent environment. In the woman's view the Rastafarian thereby loses all claim to difference from the domestic servant.

"SPEAKING OF A CULTURAL STANDARD, IT HAS TO DO WITH INHERITANCE"

A woman from the respectable working class has a different view of Jamaica's hierarchy. For her it is a mechanism of disadvantage that can sustain, through the exercise of power, a constraining and demoralizing environment. Her discussion of maintaining a "cultural standard," and the inculcation of "bitterness" in youth, reveals an equally striking sense of class, ethnicity, and the struggle with hierarchy. The woman is a vendor or "higgler" who resides and works in the East Kingston area. For a period during her younger years she had worked as a domestic in New York and Boston. She is very well read and a Pentecostal deacon. She has one daughter who has been socially mobile into the lower reaches of the middle class. Her three sons remain in her neighborhood and two of them are involved in gangs, a milieu of violence that worries her. She emphasizes the problems she encounters in sustaining a "cultural standard" in her sons that will protect them from violence and ultimate destruction.

Speaking of cultural standard, it has to do not primarily with a person's breeding, but it has to do with inheritance ... You are moving toward the betterment of life and the entirety of your human environment. You think of what's better rather than being complacent.

A youth become complacent now, because he can see that glimmer of light towards any other successful way in which to maintain himself as a person. And it's something that seems to be growing more intense. You see, the opportunities aren't really here because we were actually subjected to certain rules and regulations because of our English or British masters, and, you know, which job you could get and your social life restricted. If there was a night club, you would be looking very conspicuous as a black man walking in there with the white. A black woman now, was far away. To be close you were a maid or a whore. Like the Whore of Babylon perhaps. But in those days, somehow it didn't seem to bother us. The people. I mean the black people now, because they had in themselves, in their own communities so much intensity of enjoyment and fulfillment within themselves ... You were more a creature of life among the people and there wasn't, like, the comparison. Today there is definitely like a lot more comparison between the people of different class.

But if you stop to compare, Jamaica is only one country, and you find that there is subversion, rebellion, chaos internationally. I wouldn't want to isolate Jamaica as being why it's happened here, because black people everywhere are not that much privileged and this causes bitterness ...

The financially wealthy, they have moved out and sought dwelling in places where they are no longer mixing with the lower class or the "trying." They've been movin' themselves inside an' we left outside in the yard. You see, they define a group that is in a certain economical or income bracket, and they actually manufacture a society of their own, as opposed to we who cannot be in that position because source of income wouldn't permit. And the black individual compare himself, and this creates a bitterness. Then, in government places and business there is still a great deal of shade prejudice. Judith [her daughter], she say the prejudice still there in the bank. It's there, and I don't know what's going to move it and that is [another] one of the reasons why in the black youth you readily find him boisterous and very barbarous because he knows how you feels and he defies it. And it makes him bitter in his inside part. And this is one of the reasons why even against his own black he gets that way because there is that bitterness in the youth and he will slash it up with anybody. And the nearest thing to him is one of his own. And then he lose that enjoyment of life that help black people step forward in the past. Maybe the gals do better because they more inclined to keep the standard. All o' we feel that bitterness, but the youth more ready to slash it up.

So, change now would take a great deal of time because today, even if he get a "living wage," the youth still feels you owes him more, coming from that bitterness. It comes like an inheritance because he don't have the cultural standard.

The vendor summons the colonial past to explain various conditions of the present, but denies that black people were defeated by the past. She also denies that the Jamaican situation is simply a result of Jamaican conditions. She points, rather, to an international scene in which the articulation of race and class has become more pronounced as an ordering phenomenon even as mobility has increased. The inheritance she addresses is a bitterness in terms of which she explains the violence of the ghetto. In her view, "youth" not sustaining a "cultural standard" and becoming "barbarous" is an issue

of heritable identity, not the product of "breeding" or even an undisciplined environment, but rather of discrimination no longer counterbalanced by a sustaining black community. When that black community is sustained, it is feasible still to inherit a standard, notwithstanding the bitterness. This woman contests Jamaica's hierarchy and refers to its international setting. She endorses a lower-class ethnicity, even as she sees color and class impeding further advancement. She acknowledges the way in which adverse effects of an imposed environment can be internalized in the person. The "bitterness" that she describes would be called by others lack of "civilization."

"FOR THE BLACK RACE AND WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO THEM"

Another contestational position from within the discourse is the position especially of men who have been migrant workers and also engaged with Jamaican unionism. These men are perforce a minority in Jamaica whose sprawling lower class is only partly proletarianized. Yet, they and their fathers, as they relate, were important in the development of Jamaica's current structure of political life. In Kingston, they joined the early union movement and supported the founding of the political parties. Their experience of collectivity has been pre-eminently through unions and sometimes the local branch of a political party. They do not represent the Jamaican perspective, or even the lower-class perspective, but rather a certain historical perspective of more privileged male workers in the society. Working in a ghetto area that was also a "port workers" neighborhood, some of my major informants were recruited from this group. It was among this group that I found an emphasis on the historicity of a "black working class"; a migratory group of workers from Africa who were first enslaved by their "British masters," and then made itinerant in the Caribbean region. The most striking expression of this heritable identity I collected from a man who also has a penchant for interpreting economy. He had begun his own life as a carpenter and turned to laboring work, and even cane cutting, as life as an artisan became impossible with increasing American mass production (see Austin 1984:185-96). His view of Jamaica's situation is sober.

Things will reach a turning point where [people] need to change their furniture within a year or two. It will have to be done so as to keep the economy turning over because the influx of people that demand work and need work to keep them alive and keep their livelihood going, it's ten times the amount of people from we used to have. So it will have to be a revolving basis. Throw out this this week, take in something next week and throw it out the other week so as to keep the next man employed. If that is not done,

well, this nation will have to be scattered across the globe so that they start back making some sort of foundation that should have been made, for instance, one hundred years ago. When we brought as slaves to Jamaica they never thought about making a nation. Well, maybe now they mus' scatter the nation! [But] it's hard to do that thing today when we all become Jamaican.

He paused and expressed distress at his own idea of a nation freed, but without foundation. Reflecting on the issue of nation, however, he addressed the struggle of the history of freedom.

For the black race, and for the colored people, and what has happened in the past, of what should have happened in the past, of what should have been given in the past – that, they have not got, and they are reacting against it. They are demanding that it be given to them, but they are demanding part of it, and what they are demanding, it is in a horrified manner. They are demanding it with a vengeance you see. And somehow or other we will have to be given these demands. And what I do notice is that a lot of the university students, they recognize now the black man's cry. Some people there really begin to support the workers. [But] the mulatto and even the fair people now, they are one side against the black class. And even when the black politician reach the top, he will go more to that side. So the black race now is demanding you see. They are horrified for the injustice.

This worker identifies his black ethnicity with a particular class experience, and as he contemplates the issue of nation moves from an economic rendering of life to one which becomes both aware of class and aware of a class embodied in a black ethnicity. Color and class are assimilated in the experience of a “black working class.” Yet in the course of social mobility, class can prevail over and redefine the sentiment of ethnicity. The black politician who reaches “the top” tends to “go more” to the other “side.” This man describes the same “fire within” urbanized lower-class Jamaicans as that to which the Afro-Chinese woman refers. This is not, however, a product of inferior environment producing a condition of “ignorance,” but rather an expression of enduring anger not only for the present but the slavery past. This man acknowledges Jamaican hierarchy but with the intention of contesting it. The lyricism of his reflections on nation building reveal a marked sense of historicity; a sense of inherited environment that has framed the struggle for a society based on equality of condition. The influences that shape his rhetoric flow both from Jamaica's union movement and from more recent moments of politically embodied black nationalism. That this position is articulated with passion reflects the enduring assertions of hierarchy that remain a part of Jamaican culture. That this man can articulate this view so freely also reflects the role of various political collectivities in constituting a lower-class experience during the course of the twentieth century.

The world of Jamaica's domestic politics is now overwhelmingly a black and brown world, whilst even within the private enterprise corporate structure a number of black Jamaicans hold key positions. Most importantly, the institutional complex of banking establishments that regulates government and private sector interaction is now largely in the hands of black and brown Jamaicans, and ethnic minorities other than whites (Stone 1980:65, 1985:3, 45; cf. Douglass 1992). Though Douglass's account documents well the coherence and vitality of the white section of Jamaica's elite, the fact remains that their power now is heavily curtailed by the intimate interactions that perforce obtain between public and private sector organizations (Stone 1980:214-8; 1985:42). These developments in themselves have not dispelled hierarchy from Jamaica. They have, however, attenuated it and allowed in the midst of political practice a form of theater which seeks to confirm the humanity of those who remain black and poor (cf. Jayawardena 1967-68). This theater is created when leaders, of whatever color and class, press themselves in the midst of their rallies to engage bodily with their followers. Singular bodies clad in tailored shirts parade down streets and are totally surrounded by a crowd of people in soiled, worn, and sometimes ragged clothes. In these theaters, leaders are often pictured embracing the bodies of the poor and black. And it is just this ready representation of the smell, feel, and touch of socially unmediated physical contact that is apprehended as a move beyond hierarchy. The capacity of a politician to "hug up" the poor is crucial in his public career; and the marked gendering in this activity places women politicians at a disadvantage. The use of cultural space in Jamaica to create distance between people who embody ranked difference – the mistress and her employee, the worker and his overseer – is here rejected in order to create an egalitarian image sustained well beyond the moment. This image is a powerful tool for politicians in structuring the sentiment of their supporters. It is also, however, an image which contests the forms of space in social life that are used to express hierarchical order. These forms of politics in the twentieth century have restructured Jamaican experience in ways that allow Jamaica's discourse on heritable identity to expand, become more consciously complex, and give variations of meaning and salience to the color categories still a part of daily life. All Jamaicans can make color distinctions of the type that Alexander (1977) describes for a middle-class woman. Whether or not all Jamaicans attach a similar, naturalized hierarchial meaning to the use of these color categories is a more debatable issue.

CONCLUSION

In this account, I have proposed that Jamaican notions of “race” and “class” can be rendered as a discourse of heritable identity. This discourse involves both ideas of biological inheritance and ideas of environmental inheritance though, increasingly, issues of environmental inheritance have displaced biologized conceptions. This form of environmental inheritance, however, can itself be naturalized through the view that environmental effect in fact becomes internalized. The ability of notions of environmental inheritance to bring together issues of ethnicity and class is marked by the joint occurrence of idioms of color and of class, often sustained in intimate relation. I have also proposed that a notion of hierarchy, of ranked difference specified through time, stands at the center of this discourse. This notion of hierarchy can be confirmed or contested. It is confirmed by reference to the plantation past and the civilizing power of colonialism. It is contested by acknowledging the reproduction of hierarchy not through internalized inferiority, but rather through the inheritance of disadvantage. The history of freedom since abolition has been the struggle against this disadvantage and for positive notions of ethnicity. Other positions in this discourse repudiate both hierarchy and heritable identity through the advocacy of individual achievement, or through the pursuit of spiritual transcendence as realized in religious community. And there may be further ways in which this sense of hierarchy is either confirmed or contested. These are simply the ones I have observed. It is also important to note, as I have hinted, that these different positions in the discourse may be gendered to a greater or lesser degree. The discourses of a “black working class” is, in my experience, male-oriented whilst forms of religious transcendentalism are strongly influenced by feminine imageries, though they are not exclusively feminine. The manner and degree of this gendering is an issue that requires further research.

I have observed that a color idiom is sustained in Jamaica not least because the vast majority of Jamaicans remain black and poor. Whilst many middle-class people are also black, very few of lighter skin color have been downwardly mobile. Once again, Gordon’s valuable comments on education in a society needing trained personnel, gives some insight into this situation. A color idiom is also sustained by the fact that in a transnational world, where a majority of my major informants had all had overseas experience, power resides in the hands of whites. Notwithstanding that Jamaicans often construct transcendent communities beyond Jamaica, it is also true that this transnational world has reinforced the experience of color. This situation, along with economic constraints that make poverty the experience of the black majority, helps to reproduce Jamaica’s color idiom even as it is joined by an idiom of class.

Inherited forms of sociality that sustain color categories as taken-for-granted forms of distinction also contribute to Jamaican discourse. To suggest, however, that these race and color meanings entirely encompass Jamaican life and have remained largely impervious to change over a period of three hundred years, is a proposal that I find implausible, and also unnecessary in order to specify Jamaican life. This position cannot explain the changes that have occurred in Jamaica, and tends to simplify, albeit inadvertently, the complex of Jamaican meanings that informs the discourse of everyday life. Not least among this complexity is the fact that color terms are given variable meaning, and their use as a representation of hierarchy is constantly contested through other uses that value "black" and "brown" constructively. These variations are related, in turn, to Jamaican experiences of class and ethnicity, and to the meanings they give to these experiences. Notwithstanding these reservations, Raymond Smith's introduction of a notion of naturalized hierarchy is a major innovation in the interpretation of Jamaican culture. It not only seeks to specify the society along with others of the Caribbean region. In its references to the work of Louis Dumont and Alexis de Tocqueville, it also poses issues about forms of society rather than merely about cognitive categories.

One way of summing up this analysis, is to say that there has been a movement in the meaning of color categories from an emphasis on biology, to a greater emphasis on environment, and that this movement has been encouraged by the emergence of class as an idiom in the course of the twentieth century. The emergence of class as a twentieth-century idiom has also been an embodied emergence in which at least for some in the lower class their experience is known through ethnicity; through the experience of being black. Yet even those who articulate the notion of a "black working class" also can recognize the independence of class as a phenomenon sustaining hierarchy. Blacks who are mobile to "ranking" positions can assume new sentiments and orientations due to changes in their class position. The environmental inheritance they bequeath to their children may secure them as part of the middle class. The lighter skinned child born "below Torrington Bridge" also can be judged by the middle-class teacher as one who inherits "ignorance." Idioms of color and class in Jamaica reflect but also partially hide these variations and shifts in discourse that produce a range of different positions. What brings these various positions together, however, is a sense of inherited identities pertaining to hierarchy in society. Jamaicans struggle with this complex of notions, and thereby quite unintentionally produce a distinctive and compelling culture marked by its sense of history.

NOTES

1. See for instance, M.G. Smith 1965, 1984; Henriques 1976; Alexander 1977; Austin 1979; R.T. Smith 1982, 1987; 1984; Douglas 1992.
2. See especially Hoetink 1973; R.T. Smith 1982, 1987; M.G. Smith 1984; Douglass 1992.
3. Torrington Bridge is simply one of a number of geographical reference points in Kingston used to demarcate over the years that point south of the more prosperous "New Kingston" where the city's "ghetto" area is supposed to begin.
4. The authors I have in mind in particular are Orlando Patterson, Arthur Winkler, and Trevor Rhone.
5. This paper was "aired" at the American Anthropological Association Meetings in Washington DC in November 1993. It is part of a planned trilogy, the third of which is tentatively entitled "Talking Colour: Stratification and Ethnicity in Jamaican Ideas of Colour." The latter paper focuses on the different ways in which a middle-class and a lower-class person might speak about color, reflecting different forms of social experience.

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