The Ideology of European Dominance  
Author(s): Dona RICHARDS  
Source: Présence Africaine, Nouvelle série, No. 111 (3e TRIMESTRE 1979), pp. 3-18  
Published by: Présence Africaine Editions  
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/24350048  
Accessed: 07-04-2020 02:06 UTC
Dona RICHARDS

The Ideology of European Dominance

1. INTRODUCTION

This article is intended as an admonishment against the uncritical use of social scientific theory as it has been presented to us in our academic training. I will look critically at Western European social thought in terms of the values and judgements which are implied therein, especially as it relates to Africans and their heritage. I will argue, as others have done, that because of the intimate connection between the Western-European worldview and Western-European social theory, it is either irrelevant or, as in most instances, dangerous to people of African descent. It is obvious that science is not pristine and that scientists do not exist in a vacuum. I assume that we, as black social theorists, have no use for the myth of objectivity — a myth which has served the interest of Western-European political objectives. Contrary to the propaganda of academia, white social theory does not represent a universally valid and « objective » body of thought, nor a neutral tool to be used for the purpose of understanding human experience. I would argue, instead, that it represents a particular view of the world as seen from the perspective of supposed Western-European superiority, and that an image of the inferiority of African civilization is inherent in the terms, definitions and theoretical models on which white social theory is based.

I will develop my argument by presenting certain key aspects of the intellectual and emotional roots of Western-European social thought generally, then, since it is the discipline in which I was trained academically, I will move on to the genesis of anthropological theory in particular. Anthropology will emerge not
as a « science of man » but as a particular manifestation of Western-European culture. The fact that these particular, culturally-based forms have been presented and imposed as universals is a fact of serious political consequence.

My special concern in offering this argument is the question of the rôle and the future of the black anthropologist.

II. IDEOLOGY AND WORLD-VIEW

It is possible to isolate certain seminal ideas which have served as organizing principles in Western scientific thought. These emerge as a series of inter-related themes, sometimes hidden, at other periods more visible. Though I attempt to single them out to a certain extent, they are not usually distinguishable as separate and distinct ideas but, together, help to determine the contours of the Western-European world-view.

These themes, as I hope to demonstrate, are intimately related to the Western-European attitude towards, and the perception of, other peoples, and imply a particular relationship to them. These factors are part of what I will refer to as « ethos ». This term is used to indicate the emotional tone of a culture, the uniqueness of its people. It refers to their collective ego; that which enables them to behave as they do and, indeed, explains that behavior. The white Western ethos appears to thrive on the perception of those who are culturally and radically different from them as inferiors. They seek to relate to others as superior to inferior, as the powerful to the controlled, as the « civilized » to the « primitive » and so forth. Their world-view reflects these definitions and this relationship. As I outline these key aspects of the Western-European intellectual tradition, I will attempt to demonstrate how they help to order experience in such a way as to satisfy the Western ethos.

We can begin with the « Great Chain of Being » idea (as it has been referred to). Some trace its origins all the way back to Plato, and I tend to agree as most Western intellectual constructs are variations on themes stated in Platonic theory. Although the idea has been expressed in many different ways and in fragments from classical Greece to the present, it can be characterized as consistently monolithic without sacrificing accuracy. It is a conception of the Universe which holds that all beings relate as though part of a hierarchy, their value increasing as they reach the top. Differences of kind imply differences of value. For Aristotle, the hierarchy was based on the
« powers of the soul » and each Being or organism possessed its own power in addition to those « beneath » it. For the Scholastics, the most natural organisms were in the bottom ranks of the hierarchy, God and the angels held the top positions respectively, while man had a key position being both « nature » and « spirit ». Two essential ingredients presupposed in this idea were that there was an ultimate reason or rational explanation for everything that existed in the world and that everything, every phenomenon, had a place in which it existed in sequential relationship to all others (1). The lineal relationships which we will see developing here form a very crucial aspect of Western thought and help to put things in a perspective necessary for the satisfaction of the Western self-image.

What I am concerned with are the ideological and cultural implications of these philosophical conceptions. First of all, « Man » becomes number one in this chain since, practically speaking, God and the angels are not really in the picture. The « power » of man’s soul is his rational ability and this gives him control and superiority over the « lesser » beings. We do not have to speculate as to what occurs when the factors of race and culture or the data of « types » and « kinds » of men are added to this picture. The results are predictable. The ranks do not skip from « higher » animals to Man: instead, finer gradations are discernable with white men at the top and black men almost always coming barely above the higher animals. (According to some theorists, they did not make it that high.) « The Great Chain of Being » concept has had a tremendous influence on the theoretical models of Western-European scientific thought. What is implied about the African heritage in this conception? How can it be used other than to distort and denigrate African civilization? But, then, its purpose is to express the Western-European ethos, not the African ethos. It presents the white man with a view of the world in which he is ranked highest in a hierarchy of beings and other people are as animals to him.

*  
* *

Two other seminal ideas are even more closely related; that of unilinear, universal evolution and the « Idea of Progress ».

In what Europeans have called their « Renaissance », the « Chain of Being » was able to express itself in a new form. God and the angels appeared to be gone for good and this put « Man » (white, European man) solidly in the driver’s seat. The idea of progress came to the fore. From Biblical eschatology came the idea of a meaningful historical process, but the Western-European ethos could not express itself comfortably within a religious conceptualization. It needed the « freedom » of a secularized view of history. One which said that there were no holds barred and openly stated the ascendancy of man. In a rapidly expanding industrial society, for a culture whose imperial drive was meeting with success after success, this concept fitted perfectly. It said that men (understand « white men ») were advancing in the right, the only direction. What allowed them to do this, above all, was their ability to rationalize the Universe, to apply the principles of « science ». Since this progressive movement was a good in itself, as Roger Bacon had helped them to see, science was indeed above moral scrutiny. This was a new morality. It encompassed a mood of arrogance, superiority, power and most certainly expansion. The idea of progress is essentially expansionistic; incorporating all that has past, it gathers it up and carries it towards an infinite and undefined future. « Progress » will never be reached, it will continue indefinitely. And what continues indefinitely as well is growth of empire and the mechanization of society. This idea was embraced at the same time that the Protestant Reformation was making way for the triumph of capitalism in the West. In terms of the Western-European ethos, it was the perfect ideological mode for the acquisitive instinct, expansionism, the « white man’s burden » and the exploitative imperial quest: the conquering mentality (2).

For the philosophers of the so-called « enlightenment », « progress » was the blessed unfolding and unleashing of man’s capacities for reason and goodness and the Encyclopedists of the 18th century struggled to formulate « inevitable » laws of a « universal history » into which all human experience could be fitted, thereby making it intelligible. It was out of this that the peculiarly Western-European concept of culture was born: universalistic, elitist and Chauvinistic. Given their political relationship to the rest of the world, these Europeans were precisely the wrong people to formulate the so-called universal laws of human

(2) For a very rare and perceptive discussion of this concept see Henryk Skolimowski: « The Scientific World-View an the Illusions of Progress » in Social Research, vol. 41, n° 1, Spring 1974, pp. 52-82.
nature or to construct a universal science of man. The concept of a «common humanity» became a tool by which to impose Western-European ideology on the world rather than an indication of the recognition of, and therefore the validity of, other cultural experiences.

And so the stage was set for the dominant evolutionary theories of the 19th century. Spencer and Comte stated the obvious. If we accept the fact that progressive historical movement is that which propels us through time, then it becomes logical that society must have progressed through stages which relate to each other in a lineal sequence of the less to the more progressive. Society can be understood as having progressed through certain evolutionary stages, representing increasing stages of enlightenment, rationality, propriety, mechanization and so forth. The point of reference was always European society which represented the most evolutionarily advanced stage at any given point. The next predictable addition to this picture is that again — at any given point — the other cultures and societies of the world are fitted within the evolutionary scale to relate lineally to the most evolved society. In this way, evolution becomes universal and unilinear. Everybody is moving through the same stages in the same sequence. We are all therefore judged by the same ideology since this is, after all, an ideological and not merely a theoretical construct. The result is a more up-dated version of the «Great Chain of Being».

Taken together, these two ideas present a view of the world in which Western-European man becomes the «most progressive» and therefore the «superior» man. He relates then to others who represent varying degrees of inferiority. Quite properly, he «teaches», «controls», «orders» and «exploits» them. Since he knows best, he confers his blessings through slavery, colonialism, expansionistic imperialism, neo-colonialism and so forth. And so, Africa becomes a victim, not only of exploitative behavior, but we as Africans are made to believe that this is just since our heritage is «backward», «primitive» and «underdeveloped». We become victims of an imposed worldview as well.

These three themes which I have discussed are not really three totally distinct models or concepts, but threads of one ideological construct. They have in common the fact that they all help to create a spectrum or scale which judges or rates races and cultures; the Western-European always being that which is most valued according to the logic of these schemes; that which is most different from white Western-Europe being the lowest in value (and that is always Africa and her people).

We, as Africanists, are obligated to make it clear to young
black social theorists that all of the ideas mentioned above are but theoretical models, not « proven » truths but tacitly accepted presuppositions which form the white Western-European frame of reference. These are their givens, not argued for but assumed. There is no reason for us to assume a view of the world which places us hopelessly in a position of inferiority and justifies our powerlessness and their exploitative behavior. And yet, as we have inherited these thought forms from the European, we have tended to accept them also as givens, not realizing their inherent implications.

III. THE USES OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Now I would like to turn to anthropology specifically and see how it relates to the foregoing discussion. I will consider anthropology only in its history, as an academic discipline, but it must be understood that the endeavor reaches back to the beginnings of Western consciousness. It is, indeed, born out of that consciousness, and is always present when white people study « the strange », « the exotic », that which is different from and therefore considered to be less than they.

As a recognized theoretical endeavor, anthropology grows out of the Spencerian-Comtian milieu. This was itself a manifestation of the Western-European ethos which reached its heightened and matured expression in the 19th century, but it must be understood as part of a continuum traceable from Classical Greece to contemporary American society. This ethos and consciousness seeks expression in the theory of white racial and Western-European cultural superiority and finds its satisfaction in the political control and economic exploitation of the world’s people who are not of this race or culture. The discipline and activity of anthropology has, therefore, a particular relationship to the projected image and behavior towards, and treatment of, civilizations, cultures and people who are not white and not Western-European.

It was this ethos which created « the savage », then explained his (« our ») existence by giving the « Chain of Being » an historical dimension so that, in terms of world-view, we were placed spatially and temporally in relationship to them in a scheme which explained their superiority. The task of anthropological theory was to explain cultures as part of a series of sequence of evolutionary events, in genetic relationship, in an hierarchical structure. The fact that social phenomena are all
thought to be explainable in terms of these principles of order is a legacy from Plato via Scholasticism and neo-Platonism (3). It does not matter that human experience may not, in fact, fit neatly into their schemes: what is important is that it be twisted and distorted so that it appears to fit, in order to be pleasing to the European mind and to satisfying the European ethos. Cultures and civilizations become «savage», «barbarian», «primitive» and «backward» — all negative terms in this scale of values. And since the positive end of the scale represents the most rational, the former also become «stupid» and «ignorant».

It is into this scene which Lewis Henry Morgan and Edward Wilmot Tylor entered in the late 1800’s. The way had been paved for them through the combined efforts of a tradition of undeclared physical anthropology and social evolutionism. The outlines of subsequent anthropological theory had already been drawn. Writing in 1803, Saint-Simon, architect of a nascent sociology and socio-technical order, said that «the Negro, because of his basic physical structure, is not susceptible of rising to the intellectual level of Europeans» (4). In his efforts to unify Europe, he argued that «the surest means of maintaining peace in the confederation will be to keep it constantly occupied beyond its own borders, and engaged without pause in great internal enterprise. To colonize the world with the European race, superior to every other human race; to make the world accessible and habitable like Europe, such is the sort of enterprise by which the European Parliament should continually keep Europe active and healthy» (5).

* * *

For all European social theorists of the 18th and 19th centuries, «civilization» was the reserve of Whites and the «problem of race» simply meant to them the theoretical problem of how different races came to be and how they were evolutionarily related to one another. The monogenists, with their heavily Biblical loyalties, said that white Adam and Eve were the

---


parents of all people but that other races represented degeneration from the original stock. The polygenists argued that God created other « species » of man besides Adam. This view, hinted at as early as the 17th century, continually gained ground and flourished in the mid-19th century. The proponents of polygenism said that differences could not be accounted for by environment and that, indeed, the differences were so great that races constituted separate species. Polygenism was the prevailing opinion of physical anthropologists in the mid-19th century and in the late 19th century racial craniology was the order of the day. The structure of the cranium was said to determine racial achievement and there was much measuring of brain size to predict mental capacity. In 1856, the French anthropologist, Gratiolet, stated that black inferiority was due to the fact that the cranial sutures of Africans closed earlier than those of the Whites (6). These were the ideas that dominated the American School of Physical Anthropology in the 19th century.

Herbert Spencer mapped out the stages through which society evolved. Again, it had to be the white man who, happily, was the agent of its evolution and all men did not reach the top of the evolutionary scale, since mental capacities were determined by race and the savage peoples lacked abstract ideas. It was alright that certain groups (the Tasmanians, for instance) had become extinct since this was a law of evolution (7).

It is easy to piece together the threads and trend of white racialist thought that was to become sociology and anthropology. Civilization was progressing. It was moving not only through time but it was advancing rationally. It was getting « better ». It was the culture of the Whites of Western Europe that always advanced it. Why? Because they were physically constructed so that they could think better. Brain differences accounted for cultural differences. Culture had to be analysed in conjunction with anatomical and physiological differences. All of this would help the European to determine the universal laws of progress in human civilization. It is not incidental that such reasoning resulted in a scientific hierarchy of « superior » and « inferior » races. It is the Western ethos which turns human diversity into raciology.

What we often fail to understand is that the « racial » and the « cultural » are not really two isolated aspects of human experience in the white man’s mind, they are not two separate methods of explaining and comparing human difference. On the contrary, race is both physical and cultural and when raciology

(7) Ibid., p. 119.
ceased to be heavily physical in nature, if it ever really did, it
did not cease to be. The socio-cultural component of the ideo-
logy went hand in hand with its physical aspect.

By the time Edward Tylor, the « founder » of anthropology,
began to write it was easy to speak of « lower » and « higher »
races in scientific discourse. His dichotomy was between
« savage man » and « cultured man ». Differences in cultures
were due, not to different tastes, values or commitments, but to
different evolutionary stages. There were no « cultures », there-
fore, but only stages of culture (in the singular). This implica-
tion and this image of non-European cultures did not die with
the 19th century, but persists now and, unhappily, even among
ourselves. We are forever comparing peoples at « stages » of
development: it does not matter that these « stages » are manu-
factured and exist only in our mind.

For Tylor, the « lower races » were « the same from Dahomey
to Hawaii » (8). They were at the same evolutionary stage
of culture. The value of studying them was to show European
man what his prehistoric ancestors must have been like. Such
analogy and comparison are unfounded but, again, support the
Western ethos. We are, in fact, recounting the construction of a
culturalist and racialist mythology: each aspect supporting and
reinforcing the other, so as to build a systematic scheme expres-
sing the tenets of white, Western-European ideology. This is the
objective which gave birth to Western anthropology — to lay
the strongest scientific basis possible to the mythological system —
to provide the theories (« and facts ») which demonstrated
white, Western-European physical and cultural superiority. In
this tradition « Science » itself becomes « Myth ».

Symptomatic of the disciplines of Western social science is
the penchant for erecting schemes which other cultures can be
« fitted » into. This, of course, helps to satisfy the urge to
power and the need to control. The unilineal evolutionary scale
did, intellectually and academically, in scientific terms, what
Europe was doing politically in the 19th century — expanding
borders of control and seeking new methods of exerting even
greater power over conquered peoples.

* *

As a Victorian evolutionist, Tylor’s mission was ostensibly to
discover the successive stages of the human intellect. Primitive

culture represented man at a crude intellectual level, with an underdeveloped brain. Civilized man could think better and use his brain more efficiently. The superior intellect of the progressive races had raised their nations to heights of culture. It is partly a misunderstanding, partly an over-simplification to say that Darwin influenced the social sciences or, as the apologia usually goes, « they took his theories and misapplied them in ways that he did not intend ».

The relationship was reciprocal, circular and very close between the biologist, the physicist and the social theorist of that time. They all influenced and used each other for, after all, they were of one mind: their goal was the same. Darwin used not only the « Great Chain of Being » concept to support his theories, but also the racial theories which were being offered by the anthropology of his day. It was believed that men like Tylor, McLennan and Lubbock had demonstrated that man had progressed from a lowly condition to the highest civilized state. Darwin said that the gaps in forms, representative of various evolutionary stages in the physical development of man, were explained by extinction. In the future, he said, one could expect Africans to become extinct and then the evolutionary gap between civilized man and animals would be much wider, instead of as it was, then, between the « Negro » and the gorilla (9).

If it could be shown that human history had progressed in terms of a single evolutionary development from savagery and barbarism to civilization and if white people could accept the idea of being descended from barbarians or savages, argued Darwin, then they should be able to accept the idea of being descended from the baboon. It was anthropology which had developed racialist thought most successfully and could therefore help Darwin's theories gain acceptance.

If a physical scientist is to be singled out as being most influential in terms of anthropological racialist theory, it is the work of Lamarck which must be chosen. The doctrine of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, coming one half century before Darwin's theory of evolution was perfected, was just what was needed to seal the « marriage » of race and culture.

* *

Lewis Henry Morgan, the most prominent American anthropologist of the 19th century, said that as men created new insti-

(9) Stocking: op. cit., p. 113.
tutions, made inventions and discoveries, the cerebral portion of their brains enlarged. This improvement was, of course, passed on. His work, *Ancient Society*, explicated his evolutionary theory of human society in an elaborate scheme. The amazing thing about Western social theorists is that, as long as their theories suit the purposes of Western-European ideology, there are few holds barred and imaginations are free to run rampant. Morgan's scheme was a very imaginative creation indeed. In it, stages of culture were neatly lined up in order of evolutionary advancement, not only technologically but economically, morally, religiously, socially and politically. Even the terms by which people addressed their relatives, even languages were either savage, barbarian or civilized. It was all there, it all worked out very well and was self-fulfilling. Monogamous marriage systems were more civilized than others and that made sense because he was writing for an audience whose society he used as the model of what was meant to be civilized: monogamous, Christian, smart and white. (It is significant that Engels found this scheme very useful in explaining *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.)

Though many of Morgan's conclusions are now out of vogue, his evolutionary theory of society, along with that of Comte and Spencer, forms the basis of the assumptions and presuppositions with which socio-cultural and racial phenomena are approached. Conservatives, Liberals and Leftists alike, white, West Europeans generally assume an evolutionary hierarchy in which certain forms are superior and have evolved from inferior forms with the help of the most rational men. It should be obvious that such a view of social history does not allow for a pluralistic conception, nor admit of the validity of cultural diversity. It explains away diversity — uses it to create, sustain and reinforce the white self-image.

Victorian evolutionism encouraged by Morgan, Tylor and, above all, Spencer, made itself felt in Western social theory avowedly until the 1920's and, tacitly, it remains so. The reason is clear if we look at the content of this theory. Only white-skinned, large-brained races had reached the top of the evolutionary scale and, because they had created and participated in this higher culture, their brains developed further. Cultural evolution was conditioned by brain evolution which was acquired and passed on through cultural evolution. The moral? Race is both cultural and biological-physical. (They get you any way you turn.) Darwin's descent of man succeeded in placing Africans, like other living « savages » as he called them, in a chain: a racial hierarchy of universal evolution that went from ape to European. All of this was to give a new rationale to the theory of
white superiority. During the period 1890-1910, evolutionary social theory was being incorporated into the establishment of the social sciences as part of official academia, with all that that honor implies in Western society.

What we have seen is that, politically, with the end of chattel slavery, new methods were needed by which to assure control. Relinquishing the slave clearly did not imply surrendering the white self-image or the image of the black man on which it depended. That self-image and its dialectical opposite had to depend on a new mode of control. This is where Western social science came into play. In the earlier stages, the burden fell most heavily on anthropology. Later, sociology and psychology would keep the home fires burning in the United States and be used to deal with those of us who had been taken from the homeland. Intellectual, ideological control was the order of the day. Prove racial inferiority to the inferior, not with a whip but with a text book, and you had it made.

Our intellectuals became apologists, at first grateful to get a toe in the back door, eager to denounce racial and cultural affiliation and, later, unconscious of the implications of the theories they mouthed. The « Chain of Being, » the « Idea of Progress » and « Unilinear Evolution » continue.

IV. CONCLUSION

I have offered these arguments out of a specific concern for the black anthropologist. I am especially concerned with anthropology in relation to Africana and to the needs of Pan-African self-determination. What are we to conclude about the state of anthropology from this history of ideas? What about the black anthropologist? Should there be one and, if so, what should his or her role be?

Many will point to the Boasian critique of evolutionary theory and the subsequent creation of an American School of Cultural Relativism, and say that all has changed. They will agree with the Whites who tell us that anthropology is the most humane of the social sciences, free of Eurocentrism and Western ideology. That, in my opinion, is a serious error.

First of all, it should be realized that Boas was a white European writing for a white European audience. His arguments had to be put in terms of the anthropometry of his day. His critique had to be limited indeed. He, in fact, engaged in much measuring of head-sizes himself.
Secondly, the 19th century manifestation of white supremacist ideology in the social sciences was the correspondence of physical and socio-cultural evolution. As we have seen, the concept of race combined the physical and the cultural. And so the Boasian critique of this position sought to extricate culture from biology, to deny that culture was determined by race, with « race » now referring to the physical diversity of human groups only. From our perspective, this was like treating a symptom rather than the disease and it simply introduced other severe problems. It resulted in a much more subtle tool suited to the objectives of the white liberals of the 1940's and 50's, as opposed to the conservative racialist idéologues of the 19th century.

At this point, Blacks were being told singly, as individuals, « you can make it », « you can participate in civilization in spite of the fact that you are black ». The effect was « the first-Negro-to » mentality that separated us from one another. The success of this kind of white liberalism was far-reaching and, coming on the heels of evolutionism, helped to account for our long period of self-denial. It was that separation of the physical from the cultural which made us want to say, « I have no connection with Africa » and « there are no group characteristics ». This left us, in fact, without a culture — and the only one to which we could aspire was theirs.

As for the contemporary state of white anthropology, there is the political anthropologist who justifies European dominance and exploitation by classifying African nations as « underdeveloped areas » and « societies in transition ». These seemingly innocuous terms can be used to serve European political ends if Whites are to be the judge of what is « modern » and what « development » and « progress » mean. If we use their definitions, we are also using their ideology. The same old, tired conceptual models lie at the base of such views and interpretations of our culture and societies. We have not lost the « Chain of Being » or the evolutionary scale, because the ethos is the same. The need to reaffirm white supremacy is still there. And then there are the 20th century missionaries. The Whites go to live among the natives, to help them, to praise their ways and, most of all, « to learn about themselves ». This is all yet another expression of the same ethos. It is a more subtle, deceptive and therefore dangerous statement of white superiority. Dangerous because we accept these people without question, they interpret the meaning of the social forms we have created,
and then we become politically confused: «white people are not all bad». And we begin to act as though they were not our political adversaries, as though they were not using us. We become pacified. If white anthropologists want to learn about themselves, why do they not study their own culture? It certainly requires study, having menaced the rest of the world for over 2,000 years. The reason that white anthropologists do not study white culture is that anthropology is the expression of the white ethos par excellence. It takes the position that «we study, control, know you» (that is what they mean by «knowledge is power»); «we are superiors, you are inferiors». The work of the anthropologist is an embodiment of the existential circumstances of political superiority: Europeans could study others, they could not be studied. It is based on the assumption and fact of white power over Blacks, clearly and simply.

* * *

The contemporary white anthropologist has allowed himself to become irrelevant by typically focusing attention on small, powerless cultures which he theoretically and superficially abstracts from the political context surrounding them and, thereby, from the implications of white European exploitation. The culture concept, depoliticized and Europeanized, is then used to make «objects» of African peoples while placing white people above ethnological scrutiny. It was this misuse and limitation of the culture concept which made the cultural and intellectual imperialism of Western social science possible, while at the same time helping to sell the image of the «uncommitted scholar». An intimate relationship exists between the conventional stance of white Western anthropology and the political fact of Western imperialism and, as European domination is successfully challenged, as white men lose their political subjects, the white anthropologist loses his «objects» of study.

It is Pan-Africanism and other self-deterministic ideologies which tend to expose Eurocentrism in anthropological conception. Either anthropology will be redefined or it will become obsolete. I am not arguing for the continuance of anthropology as an academic discipline. Perhaps, in terms of what anthropology should be, we ourselves have been doing it for hundreds of years and, perhaps, all leaders of African liberation are our great anthropologists, in the sense that they have consciously understood the political and revolutionary implications of cultural behavior.

But if we are to put any energy at all into training black
anthropologists, we have a huge task before us — that of radically overhauling the discipline we pass on. If black anthropologists are to be legitimate contributors to the redemption of Africa then it would seem that we must create a « new » anthropology, one which severs the ties between social theory and white supremacist ideology; one that no longer serves the interests of Western-European imperialism in any of its forms. We must emphasize the political significance of the culture concept by focusing on the relationship between ideology and group commitment, value and the mobilization of human energies. As the white anthropologist becomes more and more irrelevant, we must not become so. The black anthropologist must be a politically committed one, one who uses his or her sense of culture to change what needs to be changed in the interest of African self-determination.

But this undertaking must quickly move far beyond the rhetorical stage. We must beware of the pitfalls of getting caught up in words. The racialist theories, which become exposed in even a cursory look at the historical development of anthropology, are couched in terms which are, for the most part, no longer fashionable. This makes them more obvious and the tendency is for us to consider contemporary anthropology as a new discipline because the rhetoric has changed. But we must look deeper. On the level of world-view nothing has changed. How could it? The so-called, enlightened white anthropologist who, in the introductory section of his book, acknowledges the racialist beginnings of anthropology, ends his book with statements which express the same world-view as his earlier colleagues. The concepts of « primitive » and « civilized »; of « simple » and « complex »; of « undeveloped » and « developed »; « tribal » and « world » or « universal » are all value-laden when he uses them and serve the purpose of invidious comparison — one in which his heritage comes out on top. Africa is still used to point to the superiority of that which is white and Western-European.

If we look more deeply, we will see that that is because the concepts of the « Chain of Being » are translated into the European ideas of progress and that unilinear, universal evolution still lies at the base of the world-view that informs white anthropology. So, in our academic training, we have inherited a heavy burden. Unfortunately, our legacy is a history of social theory which cannot be extricated from the history of white, Western thought and behavior, about and towards the African heritage. Yet, it is now couched in terms which sound « neutral »; it is hidden in theories which have the ring of a universal science. We must
beware of the cover up of humanistic rhetoric because it is only that.

* *

I would end by reiterating the caution made by our colleague, Professor George Bond (10). It is not enough to repudiate the negative images of the African heritage which Whites have produced, assimilated and exported: rather, those of us who have been trained academically in the social sciences must look more critically at the theoretical assumptions and presuppositions on which these disciplines are founded. It would appear to be the mission of all African social scientists, at home and in the diaspora, to devote their energies to the radical reconstruction of the disciplines in which they have been trained. Without such an approach, we run the risk of incorporating the theoretical, mythological and ideological models of white social science into our own methodologies, thereby unknowingly internalizing the value of Western European society, including the negative image of Africa which white racialism and culturalism has created.

We must support the brothers and sisters who have called for a commitment to the critique of these disciplines on an ideological, philosophical level; then to their reconstruction, using more universally valid criteria (11). Not claiming objectivity (a dubious concept) but seeking to express a Pan-Africanist ideology and thereby contributing to a statement which more accurately mirrors the reality of a culturally pluralistic Universe. In this way, we will have something valuable to pass on to those young Africanists whom we teach, instead of unconsciously perpetuating a politically and intellectually debilitating dependency on the social theoretical models of those who would seek to destroy us.

Dona RICHARDS,

Assistant Professor of Anthropology,
Hunter College, New York
