

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

*333 Cedar Street*

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Dear Red:

I read your notes with great interest and found them to be a very effective integration of many different lines of thought. There were some points which I would like clarified or enlarged, some major, some minor.

On page II-14-E I was confused by your introduction of the terms "rage and protest" at that point. You do not introduce these terms on the previous pages that I have and it is not clear from your discussion that there is Negro rage and protest (unless you simply assume the reader will know this). This is a minor point, but it does relate to your whole formulation about servility here. As I have understood the issue, the Negro accepts the values of the dominant group but is at the same time, ambivalent. He accepts the values and resents them as well as resenting the dominant group. This is essentially the same as the child who internalizes parental values because he is totally dependent upon his parents but resents the dependency at the same time. This seems to happen in every case and is a result of the child's experience that his parents never satisfy him totally. It is one of the forces that motivates the child to develop independence. Indeed, during adolescence when striving for independence becomes so important, the ambivalence about parental values is often manifest. The adolescent's resentment and rebellion against parental values may be the main focus of his attempt to become independent. Extreme resentment in the child which continues on and causes conflicts in the adult occurs in pathological situations where the parents only minimally satisfied the child's needs. Analogously, the Negro is resentful because he can never be totally gratified by white paternalism.

When the resentment is conscious, servility may then be an act of conscious deliberate aggression, as you say, but servility may also be (and more commonly, I suspect) an unconscious manifestation of ambivalence, concomitant acceptance and rage. The unconscious statement to the oppressor would be, "I do what you want so much that it may make you uncomfortable\*". The main point is, therefore, that servility as aggression may not "shade over" into true Samboism, it may be true Samboism to start with (an unconsciously assumed character trait). The tendency to assume this aggressive servility is what I discovered in many of my Negro patients.

Another manifestation of this complex of acceptance of values and aggression may be the slow witted aspect of Sambo. Here the Negro accepts the idea that he is not bright and aggressively acts this way to be obstructionistic and "unreliable". This may also be deliberate or unconscious.

This relates to another thought I have had about how this ambivalence toward the values of the oppressor group has affected the "non-violence movement". One reason that Negro non-violence may not have been as consistent and effective here as Gandhi's non-violence in India, is just because of this ambivalence. The Indian is probably better able to be submissive without conflict. The Negro shares the "American mystique" that violence is masculine and that non-violence is almost weakness and is ambivalent about following it through to the end. Eventually then, he resorts to threats of violence or the riots we saw last summer.

One more thing, again minor, on the oppressor-oppressed relationship. Bettelheim's work, which you cite, has been strongly disputed by other observers. His experience is considered to have been very brief compared to others who observed less "identification with the aggressor" in the long run and also he was interned before the height of Jewish oppression in the 40's. This, of course, only limits but does not necessarily invalidate the observations he made.

I liked the formulations about Negro sexuality on the whole but thought you were too cursory in saying that female dominated households produce a relationship of frustrated dependency and hostility with the mother. Dependency is not necessarily more frustrated when the mother is dominant but is so intensely fixated on her (the total gratifier) that all or most of the unconscious hostility is also fixated on her. In addition, of course, the dominant mother is experienced as all powerful, impossible to satisfy and all women later are seen as a threat to one's masculinity. All of which you do indicate. I do think also that the matriarchal nature of the Negro family is a matter probably of degree and not of kind in American society i. e. there is a certain trend toward matriarchal family structures in many groups.

The Negro as a sexual symbol for the whites is a fascinating phenomenon. Don't you think that white men project a certain amount of their own desire to violate their women into this image of the Negro rapist? Isn't it something like the movie censor who attacks prurience because of the fear of his own prurient impulses? Also, doesn't the Negroes' acceptance of this image and their propensity to act on it (in actual rapes etc.) have to do somewhat with proving their masculinity?

Lastly, a quibble. The term "depersonalized" which you used a couple of times is a technical one and in the psychological context in which you are writing, is confusing. Would the term "dehumanized" be too strong for your purposes?

I hope some of this will be useful. I'll look forward to speaking to you on January 5th and getting together that week.

Cordially,



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Assistant Professor

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\*Whether or not the oppressor is actually made uncomfortable by the act is not crucial; it is only necessary that the conscious or unconscious intent is aggressive. In a society such as ours, where both negro and white devalue submissive behavior, it is likely that the intent will always be aggressive. Of course, you can say much better than I, whether or not slaveowners were actually made uncomfortable by the servility or whether white discomfort developed later in the South and North.