

RACE, NATION AND CLASS: NOTES ON MARXISM
AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

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This very short paper is a theoretical exercise, and represents the developing line of Peoples College, an attempt to set the terms for a more fruitful dialogue/debate between Marxists and nationalists. (We oppose anti-theoretical ad hominum reductionist argument as being a fruitless waste of time.) Our view is that when these forces work together in the leadership of a Black mass movement great gains are possible. In the 20th century this has always been the case, although with great problems, and for a revolutionary movement to develop in the next decade or so Marxists and nationalist intellectuals will have to cooperate. This requires a dialogue/debate. We need a theoretical terrain, a field of action. We propose to move in such a direction.

At the heart of most post World War II theoretical debates in the Black liberation movement has been the system of ideas associated with Karl Marx, Marxism. This has been paralleled, challenged, supported, and refuted by an older tradition of ideas and practices known in the aggregate as Black Nationalism. The Marxist-Nationalist dialogue or debate has heated up or deepened in the last 40 years in the Black liberation in part due to several historical developments:

1. The post World War transformation of Blacks from a rural tenancy, especially sharecropping, to an urban work force conditioned by the rigor of factory life, even when initially employed as urban service workers. Marxism is based on industrial capitalism, so this transformation is a virtual pre-condition for Marxism to have fertile ground within the Black community even if its main proponents would initially come from the intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie.

2. The post war Third World movements have been guided by the nationalist-Marxist tension, with unity generally characterizing the anti-colonial period, and a split of the two in the independence period. In Africa, Mozambique, Kenya, and Tanzania are examples where there was anti-colonial unity but after independence nationalist took over in Kenya, Marxists in Mozambique, and in Tanzania. President Nyerere has maintained a unity that is likely to die with him.
3. Overall in the world, socialism is the only clear alternative to the system that oppresses and exploits Blacks in the USA. Further, the only theoretical ideas universally opposed by the ruling class in the USA are associated with Marxism. So, being in a rather desperate situation some Blacks turn to Marxism just as some Blacks turn to nationalism. Nationalism appears to be reborn periodically because white people "appear" to continually oppress all Blacks.

One critical aspect of this dialogue/debate is the qualitative difference between the two. Ultimately, Marxism is rooted in a continuation of the theoretical work of Karl Marx. This is clear, and the object of a theoretical analysis of Marxism itself must begin with the written work of Marx and his associate, Engels. Further, social revolutions led by Marxists, socialist revolutions, are universally regarded as the concrete object of analysis to analyze the practical result of the theory. No such clarity exists for Black nationalism in the USA. There is no body of theory or practice of comparable

statute. However, there is a movement in which ideas get continually reborn in varying shapes, forms, or degrees. Further, while what has just been said is true of Marxism at its best, the literature of Marxism mostly reveals the diversity and deformity of sectarian trends of one sort or another. The need for a continuing debate/dialogue between Marxists and nationalists at once speaks to both their respects, strengths and weaknesses.

The Marxist-Nationalist dialogue/debate has been carried out variously in different ways. Each represents contradictions requiring specific treatment:

1. ideological polemics: This is the form of fierce debate that seeks linguistic clarity of abstract general theory, and represents a confrontation of world views. In most cases this form of debate is a tug-of-war between good and evil, so on this level the two sides battle to confirm the troops and win over others, usually young middle forces. Two key questions are: What is the nature of the world? What is the correct strategy for revolution?
2. political struggle: This is the focus on concrete action-do we do this or that (behavior) who do we do this with and how do we do it (tactics)?
3. scholarship: This is the set of activities whereby knowledge is developed. Given an ideological stance facts can be generated in a cumulative manner whereby one can sum up what is known, and logically point to what is not known.

This paper is focused on this later form of the dialogue, the ASALH is hardly the context for ideological polemics or political struggle. (Please turn

to TABLE 1.)

This table identifies the main aspects of our conception of the Black experience. Marxism is instructive for its focus on material reality. Each aspect has its own existence and must be identified, analyzed and dealt with on its own terms--this is not a reductionist mode. Further, each aspect is related to all others although to identify the principal reason for each (identity and change) the model calls for an analysis of the internal aspects of it; but to grasp all of society, to deal with a wholistic approach, requires that all factors be dealt with in their interrelatedness.

RACE: is the biological level of reality. In general, we can identify the genetic code of an individual to constitute biological identity, further, as an organism health is the extent to which life prospers--since all life dies, health is a measure by age of where each of us stands in a journey back to the earth.

CLASS: is the economic level of reality. It is next because it reflects the material process in the social realm whereby a society produces, distributes and consumes the necessary requirements for human survival. Again, this is universal of the human experience as much as biology.

NATIONALITY: this concept is inclusive of the universal social structure and process in which individuals are moulded into discreet communities each having a particular orientation to each other and the model.

CONSCIOUSNESS: this concept is the sum total of all mental process and psychological reactions. This is the residual category of the experience of what is abstract. It is the realm of epistemology, and is a reflection of the material processes of race, class, and nationality. (Please turn to TABLE 2.)

Race is a material reality. Further, given recent research it is now possible more than ever to sum up the basic issues or contradictions at this level, biology, and to specify in the most general terms the intervention of sociological processes. In this diagram, we are concerned with generation #A. There are at least four relevant sources of material influence. The principal issue in the biological sphere is the factor represented by the genetic code established by biological parents at the level of chromosomes. But the biological existence of this identity is in large part conditioned by the social-ecological processes of mate selection. Further, the health of an individual is subsequently influenced by prenatal care and child-rearing practices. Further, each generation is influenced by the generations who preceded it and influence those who follow it.

The key point here is that given this model, it is possible to sum up scientific scholarship and define new realms of research. While we are all aware of research on the environmental influences, we should be incorporating the new developments of genetic engineering. Today, human beings are fast getting into a position to escape our biological prison. Today, we have the possibility of anchoring the Marxist-Nationalist dialogue/debate in a new scientific framework more than ever before. (Please turn to TABLE 3.)

The class factor is covered at the materialist level of history by the science of political economy. The greatest contribution of Marx was on how this aspect of human history works, and the great possibility of human progress in liquidating human suffering, by liquidating classes. In political economy, there are at least four important contradictions to be studied. In a society dominated by class--in other terms given levels of development of the Production Forces, a historically determined set of classes or production relations develop

in each mode of production. Again, every society develops by changes in this structure, and therefore every society can and should be analyzed in this way.

In this way, the difference between capitalism and socialism is clear--capitalism often with superior Production Forces and socialism with more equitable production relations. Further, this is true even if the historical examples of socialism fall short or deviate from logical or abstract models. Too often rhetoric is used in place of differences, easy to see if one's vision is conditioned by a paradigm based on scholarship, especially scholarship consciously informed by this paradigm. (Please turn to TABLE 4.)

Given the biological factor-race--and the class factor-political economy-people have forms of their social experiences and styles by which they carry out their lives. Nationality--often call ethnicity--is a critical aspect of one's social life, and it is based upon, though not strictly determined by, race (color) and class. (Please turn to TABLE 5.)

This is the level of the abstract. Everyone has a psychological make-up, a consciousness, though not everyone is self-consciousness. Everyone has opinions, ideas, and shares ideas with members of a common group. Some are educated and become scientific, while others are indoctrinated in a dogma and learn a "text." Further we can see the four logical alternatives of consciousness here. (Please turn to TABLE 6.)

This is the overall design of a paradigm by which we can sum up what we know and design how we can find out the rest. In general--once we identify this paradigm, we can begin to carry out positive research activity. Notice our incorporation of a historical dimension. This periodization of the Black experience is rooted in political economy, with clear correlates of change at the level of nationality. For example: (rural blues has an

origin quite different from urban jazz, although as a product of Black people in America they have the same origin.) Marxism helps us grasp the dialectical reality of the Black experience.

The greatest problem here is that while the design is logical and analytical, on the empirical level we have not developed a paradigmatic data base to fill the theoretical spaces (although, we can do it with an ad hoc, eclectic review of lit). Further theoretical work and developing new paradigmatic data bases constitute the task of Black studies scholarship over the next decade.

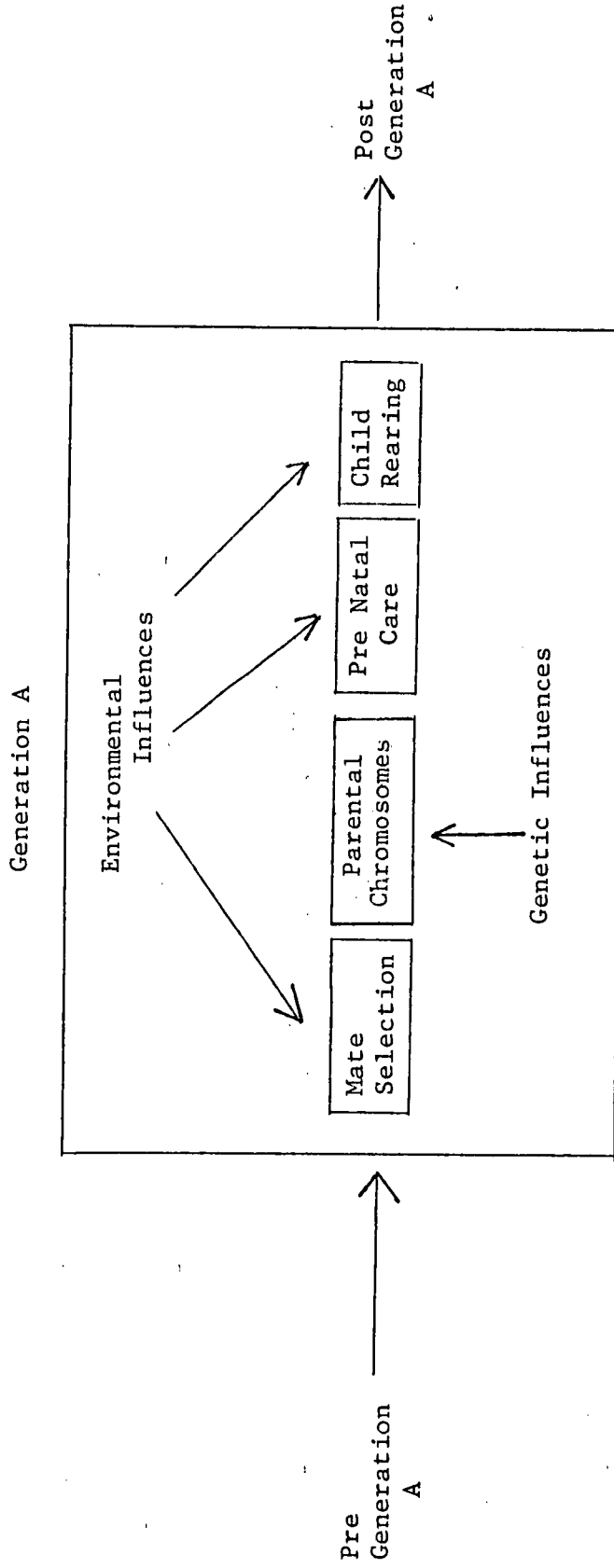
This has been a short intervention, a conception and a proposal.

- I. I have argued that the time has come to emphasize the Marxist/Nationalist debate/dialogue on the level of scholarship. Further, I have used Marxism to design a paradigmatic framework to specify the theoretical terrain of this dialogue.
2. My proposal: We must not turn away from this essential struggle - indeed, there have been too many polemics based on bad nationalists and bad Marxists. The cumulative history of this dialogue has to lead to a better future. The proposal is that a major plenary be held at the next ASALH on this dialogue so that the entire community of Black intellectuals will be better able to carry on the dialogue/debate at the local level.

1. PARADIGMATIC MODEL OF
THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

1. CONSCIOUSNESS → reason and emotion
2. NATIONALITY → culture and socialization
3. CLASS → occupation and power
4. RACE → genes and health

2. THE RACIAL FACTOR: BIOLOGY vs SOCIOLOGY

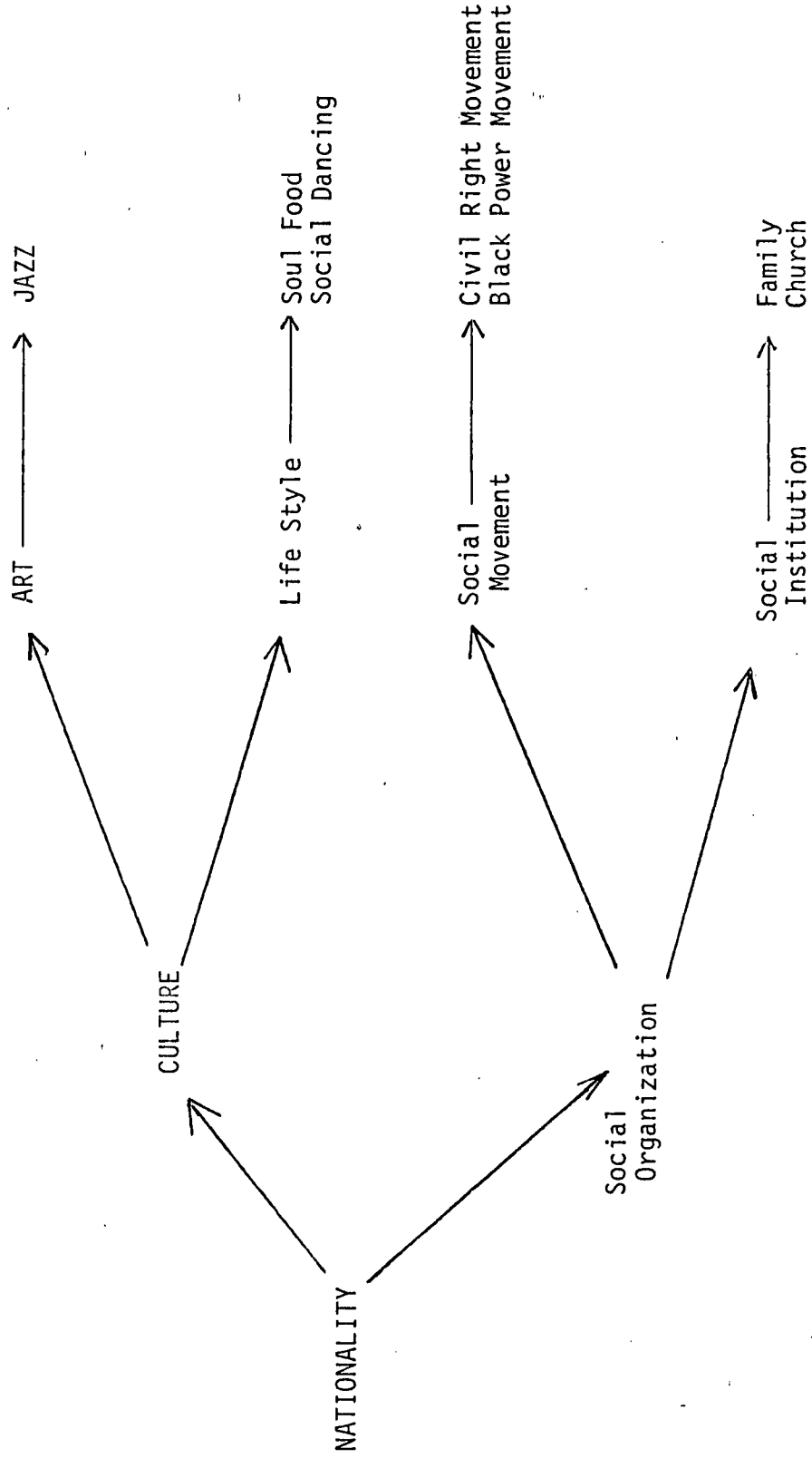


1. Biology: Internal contradictions, genetic influences (Nature)
2. Sociology: External contradictions, environmental influences (Nurture)
 - (a) How do parents meet and choose to mate?
 - (b) Once pregnant, how does the mother sustain the fetus?
 - (c) How is the young child cared for until adulthood?

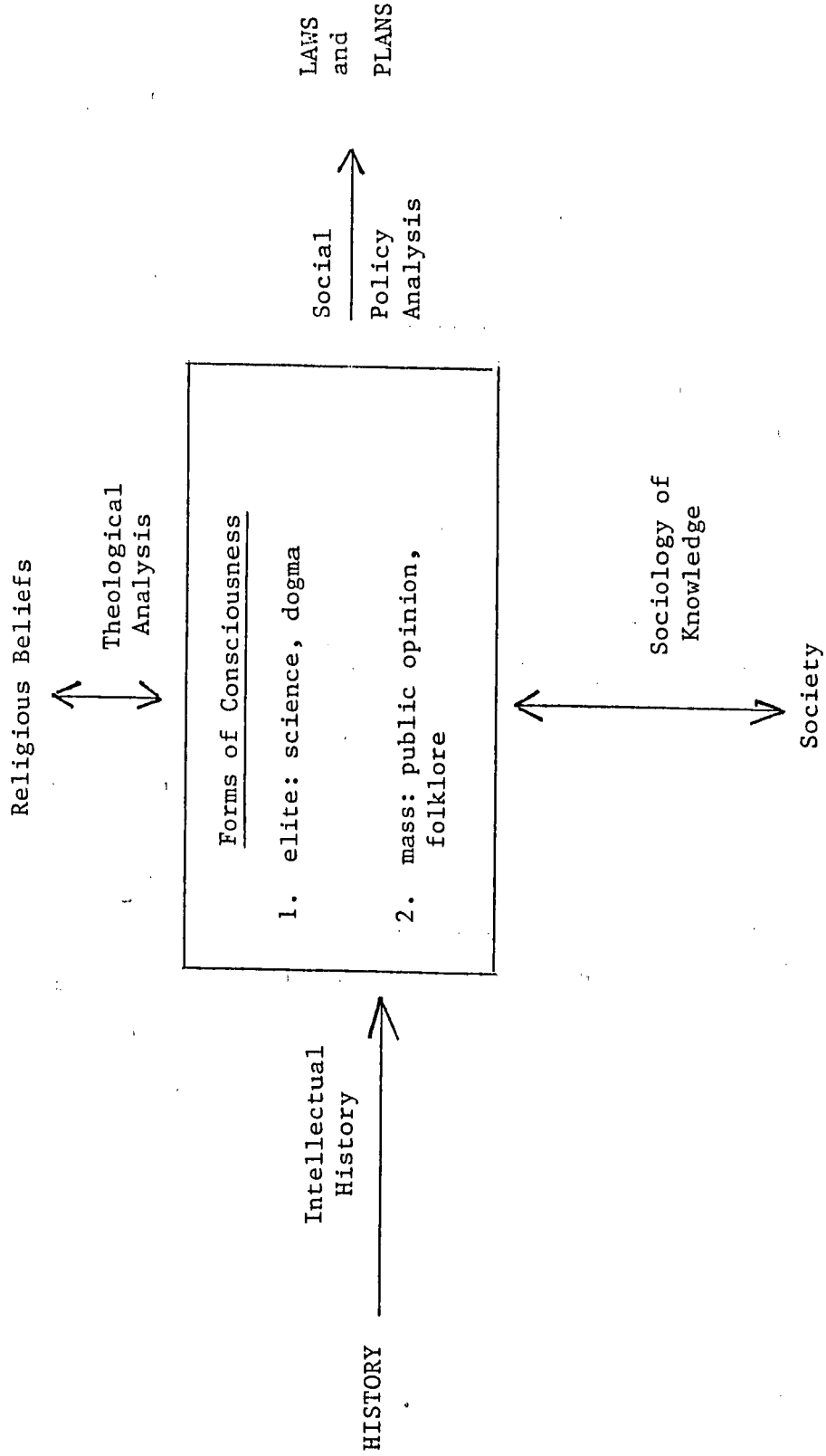
3. THE CLASS FACTOR: POLITICAL ECONOMY

Contradiction	Aspects of Political Economy	Component Parts
A. People vs. Nature	Production Forces	Natural Resources (objects of Labor) Tools and Machines (instruments of Labor) Technical Skill (quality of Labor)
B. People vs. People	Production Relations	Ownership Management Labor
C. Production Forces vs Production Relations	Mode of Production	Revolution Reform Reaction
D. Principal Mode of Production vs Secondary Mode(s) of Production	Socio-Economic: Formation	Articulation of different Modes of Production Revolution

4. THE NATIONALITY FACTOR: CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY



5. THE CONSCIOUSNESS FACTOR: IDEOLOGY



6. TOWARD A PARADIGM FOR THE BLACK NATIONALIST/MARXIST DIALOGUE DEBATE

LOGIC OF CHANGE	SOCIAL COHESION	Traditional Africa	Slavery	Rural Tenancy	Urban Industrial
	SOCIAL DISRUPTION				
		Slave Trade			
	Ideology	A1	C1	E1	G1
	Nationality	A2	C2	E2	G2
	Class	A3	C3	E3	G3
	Race	A4	C4	E4	G4