

## Race, ethnicity, and the Weberian legacy.

by John Stone

**Max Weber was one of the most prominent sociologists who conducted extensive research on group behavior. However, Weber has been criticized by many scholars for his failure to focus on racial, ethnic and national conflicts. Although these scholars have their own basis for their criticism, a closer analysis of Weber's findings reveals implicit reference to racial and ethnic conflicts. For instance, Weber observed the general tendency of social groups to establish monopolies and oligopolies. His observation led to the development of a new perspective on ethnic group formation.**

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The whole conception of ethnic groups is so complex and so vague that it might be good to abandon it altogether.

Max Weber (1922/1968) *Economy and Society*

[The present century has witnessed] explosions of nationalism, [of] racism and, in places, of religious bigotry, which, interestingly enough, not one among the most perceptive social thinkers of the nineteenth century had ever predicted.

Isaiah Berlin (1992) *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*

Few writers in the sociological tradition can be compared to Max Weber as a prophet of the most fundamental social and political trends of the 20th century. His remarkable ability to focus on the central issues of the modern era, not to mention his increasing recognition as a precursor of some of the major themes that constitute the "postmodern" debate, are acknowledged by admirers and critics alike.(1) Weber's analysis of the cultural foundations and contradictions of capitalism, his skeptical vision of the future of socialism, his concern about the pervasive intrusion of bureaucracy in everyday life, and his seminal discussion of the complex interplay among economic, social, and political power are contributions that are generally recognized and are documented extensively (Gerth & Mills, 1948; Parkin, 1982; Runciman, 1978; Wrong, 1970). It might even be argued that much of the most valuable controversy in social theory during the past four decades has been, to rephrase Zeitlin, a "debate with the ghost of Weber."(2)

Nevertheless, Weber may be criticized, along with almost every other social thinker from the time of the French Revolution until the outbreak of World War I, for failing to give sufficient weight to racial, ethnic, and national conflicts.(3) He cannot, however, be accused of having ignored these issues, and much of his sociological analysis, even when it was not focused specifically on racial and ethnic groups, can be adapted to the study of race and ethnic relations without significant modification. In this essay, I outline Weber's own attempts to incorporate

race and ethnicity into his sociological writings. Then I consider some of the principal ways in which aspects of the Weberian legacy have been adopted by a broad range of sociologists and other scholars concerned with race and ethnic relations.(4) Finally, I argue that a Weberian perspective still offers some of the most important insights into the enduring problems of racial and ethnic conflict.

Following in the footsteps of other prominent European social thinkers such as Tocqueville and Beaumont, Harriet Martineau, and James Bryce,(5) Weber found that contact with the United States greatly heightened his interest and sensitivity toward race and ethnic relations. In 1904, during a crucial visit to the Congress of Arts and Sciences of the Universal Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri, Weber not only derived inspiration for the completion of his most celebrated work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he was also brought face to face with what he began to realize was America's most serious problem. At this time, the specter haunting Europe appeared to be that of the class struggle, the dress rehearsal for the Bolshevik Revolution was only a year away, and the latent national rivalries, about to break out in global warfare during the next decade, were still masked by the waning years of Pax Britannica.

The situation in America was starkly different. Northern cities teamed with the ethnic diversity generated by the trans-Atlantic migrations combined with the movement of African Americans from the southern states. It was impossible for any perceptive observer to overlook the central significance of racial and ethnic diversity for American society. Weber was fascinated by the situation he observed in New York and Chicago:

The Greek shining the Yankee's shoes for five cents, the German acting as his waiter, the Irishman managing his politics, and the Italian digging his dirty ditches . . . the whole gigantic city . . . is like a man whose skin has been peeled off and whose entrails one sees at work. (Gerth & Mills, 1948, p. 15)

Like Tocqueville, who visited America some 70 years earlier, Weber was particularly struck by the contrasting status of African Americans and Native Americans (cf.

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Manasse, 1947, p. 198).(6) Why was it that the former were treated with so much more hostility and contempt than the latter? He noted that this could not be attributed to physical differences, because both groups were clearly and visibly distinct from the majority White population. Nor could it be argued seriously that there was a natural repulsion between Blacks and Whites, as many southern Whites claimed, because of the large number of mixed-race offspring from interracial unions and sexual relationships. And yet it could be seen that the smallest trace of observable African ancestry would relegate an individual to a subordinate social status whereas significant amounts of "Indian blood" did not. Weber's explanation for this strange differential rested with the institution of slavery, which was, of course, unique to the Black experience in America. Paradoxically, the strength that Blacks had demonstrated by surviving the physical and psychological trauma of slavery (unlike the Indians, who generally could not adapt to these terrible conditions) led to their association with despised manual labor. This, according to Weber's interpretation, reflected the almost feudal contempt for such work found in southern White society.

Weber's views on American race relations were influenced by the contacts he made during his brief stay. He spent several days in the company of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma and also visited Tuskegee, Alabama. Whether he actually met Booker T. Washington is unclear, but what is certain is that he spoke to W.E.B. Du Bois, Washington's great rival, and that from this encounter came an article titled "Die Negerfrage in den Vereinigten Staaten," which Du Bois published in the 1906 volume of the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Politik*, a journal that Weber jointly edited. It was Du Bois who made the claim, which in retrospect was not particularly exaggerated, that "the problem of the twentieth century would be that of the colour line," a prediction that Weber, no mean prophet himself, readily adopted, stating that the unresolved racial conflicts would hover over American society "like a big black cloud" (see Gerth & Mills, 1948, pp. 15-16).(7)

If Weber's American travels were to focus his attention on some of the most sharply defined issues of racial conflict and stratification, this was not his first attempt to grasp the significance of ethnic group differences. During the 1890s, he published a number of articles (including his inaugural lecture at Freiburg titled "The National State and Economic Policy"(8)) on agrarian life in eastern Germany, which involved comparisons between ethnic Germans and ethnic Poles, both as farmers and as farm laborers. In these early studies, Weber displayed a thoroughgoing German nationalism in which he castigated the Junkers, the landed aristocracy, for using cheap Polish labor that undercut and systematically displaced German farm workers from the

great estates of the eastern parts of the country. At this time, Weber had not totally rejected the currently influential notions of inherent racial differences, as his references to "Slavic adaptability" implied (see Manasse, 1947, p. 194), but he was much too careful a scholar to pursue this line of reasoning without substantial evidence to support it. Time and again, he found concrete historical and social causes to explain observable differences in the economic behavior and social status of the Polish and German populations, which made the idea of inherent group characteristics redundant. His growing rejection of racial theorizing was not based on a conviction that no such differences could exist, and even in his later writings he always regarded the question, at least in principle, as an open one. What was crucial for Weber was the weight of evidence that the work habits of Germans and Poles were a product of historical circumstances and environmental conditions rather than permanent biological or cultural attributes. As a result, references to such factors increasingly faded from Weber's subsequent writings on these issues.

There are two other major themes of Weber's work that illustrate this consistent rejection of racial "explanations" of historical change and national character. In contemporary historical debates surrounding the factors purporting to explain the decline of the Roman Empire, Weber attacked the notion that "barbarian" blood among the leadership groups could in any way account for the collapse of this great civilization. Such a hypothesis simply did not fit the facts: At the height of its power and prestige, the Roman Empire acquired many of its most brilliant leaders from the ethnic periphery of its vast territories, and there was no evidence that it was external rather than Roman cultural influences that accompanied the social and political disintegration of the regime. Explanations had to be found in other, less simplistic causes. In writing about another of the great historical civilizations, that of the Chinese, Weber addressed the same basic issue from a different angle. He considered the question of outsiders' stereotypes of the Chinese "character" and showed how these were often mutually contradictory or that certain types of behavior could be interpreted as typical of most groups under similar circumstances. Once again, Weber's commitment to value-neutral methods to explore and test hypotheses, considered to be eminently plausible by many contemporary scholars, led him to reject racial explanations of social and political events.

Weber's mature position on ethnicity and ethnic stratification thus represented a significant and vital shift from the emphasis of his turn-of-the-century writings on agrarian life in Eastern Prussia. This is illustrated further by his analysis of the Indian caste system and the situation of post-diaspora Jews in Western societies. Manasse provides a characteristically balanced assessment,

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pointing to the crucial change in the type of question that Weber considered to be important in these later studies. The confusion between race and culture was resolved and "instead of asking which innate qualities distinguish one Indian caste from another, he raised the question why the solution of the racial problem in India differed so greatly from the solution in analogous situations, such as that in England after the Norman conquest" (Manasse, 1947, p. 207). A similar change of focus could be detected in his attempt to understand the factors inhibiting the assimilation of the Jews in the diaspora by their host societies. Turning attention away from any allegedly hereditary characteristics of the Jews as a minority group, he asked, "What historical and sociological experiences shaped those attitudes that caused the segregation of the Jews from their neighbours?" (p. 207).(9)

In both cases, Weber's interest in the historical development of the caste system or in the remarkable persistence of the Jews as a distinct minority - or "pariah group," to use his more controversial terminology - caused him to focus on the interaction between economics, religion, and ethnicity. Economic monopolization provided much of the rationale for the creation of these particular social structures, religion acted as a potent source of legitimation, and racial and ethnic characteristics acted as convenient types of group markers. He saw caste as originating in racial conflicts with the dominant, light-skinned conquerors forcing the darker-skinned, indigenous populations out of all those occupations that carried social prestige. Understanding the religious doctrine of karma and the taboos on intermarriage and commensality provided, as in his argument about the unique contribution of ascetic Protestantism to the birth of modern capitalism, vital clues to the resilience of the caste system in India. A similar appreciation of the special characteristics of traditional Judaism, such as the emphasis on strict dietary laws, also played an important part in explaining why the Jews had preserved their distinct communities in a largely gentile world.(10)

Weber's influence on the field of race and ethnic relations is by no means confined to his somewhat limited treatment of the subject itself. For two and a half decades after his death in 1920, Germany was submerged in the "polar night of icy darkness" that he anticipated so clearly in his final lectures. However, Weber's sociological legacy was passed on to the English-speaking world mainly through the translations and writings of Talcott Parsons. With the defeat of Nazism, much of the initial concern of race relations research, particularly among the refugee scholars from Central Europe, revealed a preoccupation with the psychodynamics of prejudice, as exemplified by the monumental study of the *The Authoritarian Personality* written by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, and

Sanford (1950).(11) This represented an attempt to understand the fundamental roots of fascism that lay behind the horrors of the Holocaust. The limitations of this approach gradually became apparent, and emphasis shifted toward investigations of patterns and structures of racial discrimination. With this reorientation of research, Weber's central themes of power, domination, authority, and legitimation became increasingly relevant for the analysis of racial and ethnic conflicts.

There are few contemporary perspectives on race and ethnic relations that cannot be linked, in one way or another, to some theme of Weber's seminal writings. When the emphasis is on the microdynamics of racial interaction found among the symbolic interactionists, phenomenologists, and ethnomethodologists, Weber's methodological focus on action, and the importance he attached to the interpretative understanding of such action (*verstehen*), is clearly relevant. W. I. Thomas's famous dictum, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences," echoes much of Weber's preoccupation with entering into the minds of social actors. "One does not have to be Hitler to understand Hitler" might be an interesting adaptation of his famous statement concerning Caesar.

This concern with ideas leads logically to the study of racism and other ethnocentric belief systems that have played an important part in the perpetuation, and possibly the genesis, of systems of racial stratification. Weber's ongoing debate with Marxist scholars, and his attempts to refine materialism to take seriously the importance of ideal interests, provided a solution to many of the self-inflicted problems of subsequent Marxist sociology. If these scholars had seen Weber's work as an attempt to extend and develop Marx's legacy in a more sophisticated and realistic direction rather than as a frontal assault on their cherished dogmas, they would have avoided an enormous amount of spurious controversy.(12) Finally, Weber's focus on power and domination is of critical relevance to a wide spectrum of approaches that emphasize a variety of different factors, from resource mobilization and competition to the role of world systems and the conflict between centers and peripheries. It is interesting to note that despite the importance placed on rationalization as a key concept and unifying theme in so much of Weber's work (cf. Brubaker, 1984, p. 2), his understanding of the term was rather different from the way in which it has been incorporated into modern rational choice theory. In fact, he anticipated some of the limitations of this particular perspective on race relations (cf. Stone, 1992, pp. 91-92).

Whereas the scope of Weber's vision is impressive, it is possible to isolate certain key contributions that, in my judgment, are especially valuable to the field. These I

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consider under the following broad headings: (1) the insight of his basic definitions, (2) the processes of group closure and boundary maintenance, (3) the role of racist ideas and the importance of legitimacy, and (4) the centrality of power and domination.

### 1. DEFINITIONS

Weber's evident frustration with the elusive quality of ethnicity is well captured by his statement in *Economy and Society* quoted at the beginning of this essay.

Nevertheless, he did not abandon the concept and proceeded with great care to try to isolate its essential character. As a result, he produced a formulation that has been adopted, in most of its basic elements, by many subsequent scholars of the subject. Weber defined ethnic groups as "human groups (other than kinship groups) which cherish a belief in their common origins of such a kind that it provides a basis for the creation of a community" (Runciman, 1978, p. 364; see also Jackson, 1982/1983). In this definition, he isolates the fundamental characteristics of the phenomenon that center on a set of beliefs and not on any objective features of group membership such as shared language, religion, and especially biological traits associated with the everyday understanding of race. It is this sense of common ancestry that is vital, but the identification with shared origins is largely, if not wholly, fictitious. The elusive quality of ethnicity stems from the minimal core on which ethnic groups are based and accounts for the kaleidoscope of other elements that are found among the myriad examples of individual ethnic groups. Weber is adamant that the difference between ethnic groups and kinship groups lies precisely on the question of "presumed identity" (Roth & Wittich, 1968, p. 389). Ethnic membership per se does not necessarily result in ethnic group formation but only provides the resources that may, under the right circumstances, be mobilized into a group by appropriate political action.

The individual and social construction of ethnicity is a theme that has recurred in many subsequent analyses of the phenomenon. Attention is focused less on the content of ethnicity than on the processes and mechanisms that convert the potential ethnic attributes into fully fledged ethnic communities and organizations. Such a perspective applies across the spectrum of groups whether they are defined as racial or as ethnic, and it reinforces the critical truth that whether we are unmasking "the figment of pigment" (Horowitz, 1971, p. 244) or the "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), it is vital to concentrate attention on the sociological process of group formation that is the central task of the social scientist. What causes the increased salience of ethnicity at a particular historical period? What determines which ethnic

markers are selected as the basis of group membership? How are group boundaries demarcated and perpetuated? How are boundaries broken down and, in some cases, eradicated by assimilation into new and different social groupings? These are some of the basic questions that Weber's deceptively simple definition of ethnicity provokes.

The third definition refers to nationalism, which Weber considered to be a political extension of the ethnic community because its members and leadership searched for a unique political structure by establishing an independent state (Smith, 1992b, pp. 62-63). Whereas, as Anthony Smith has noted, he did not provide a historical account of the rise of nationalism, he did nevertheless seek to discuss the important relationship between ethnicity and nationalism, which has been a key feature of much subsequent scholarship.

### 2. GROUP CLOSURE AND BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE

Apart from providing these basic definitions of race, ethnicity, and nationalism, Weber's discussion of what he termed "social closure" is another particularly helpful contribution to our understanding of the origin and dynamics of ethnic and racial groups. Weber noted the general tendency of social groups to attempt to form monopolies or, at least, to try to restrict the full force of open competition in a manner that was analogous to the behavior found in economic markets. By extending the tradition - long established in the literature of economics - of analyzing the reasons underlying the formation of monopolies and oligopolies to encompass the rationale behind a much wider range of social groups, Weber opened up an interesting new perspective on ethnic group formation. Whereas this approach could also be applied to classes and professional groups as much as to racial or ethnic groups, it did provide a convincing explanation for the persistence of these groups once they had been established, if not for their initial creation.

That question was largely a matter of historical or social circumstances: factors such as conquest or migration putting visibly or culturally identifiable groups together and unleashing the tendencies for the more powerful to entrench their privileges by monopolizing economic, social, and political advantages. This became particularly acute when competition for scarce resources increased so that

one group of competitors takes some externally identifiable characteristic of another group of (actual or potential) competitors - race, language, religion, local or social origins, descent, residence, etc. - as a pretext for attempting their exclusion. It does not matter which characteristic is chosen in the individual case: whatever suggests itself most easily is seized upon. . . . [The

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purpose of] this monopolization . . . is always the closure of social and economic opportunities to outsiders. (Weber, 1922/1968, pp. 341-342)

Such an agnostic attitude to the importance of particular group markers has not commended itself to all subsequent scholars working on the question of social closure, with writers such as Murphy (1988) proposing a hierarchy of closure mechanisms rather than the almost random process of group demarcation suggested by Weber.

The theme of social closure has become an important element in the neo-Weberian literature; whereas it has been developed with particular focus on social stratification, it is of equal if not greater relevance to ethnic and racial stratification. Frank Parkin's (1979) trenchant critique of Marxism, along with the more recent studies by Murphy and Brubaker, has demonstrated how "the mechanisms of closure provide a key to understanding the formation of status groups and social classes engaged in the struggle over the distribution of rewards and opportunities" (Manza, 1992, p. 276). Although much of this debate has been concerned with aspects of class analysis, many of the examples have in fact been drawn from situations of deep racial and ethnic conflict. This has exposed the limitations of a sociology of stratification that has often ignored or downplayed these critical ethnic and racial divisions and is true of gender divisions as well. (13) As a result, modern stratification theory has steadily regained a wider vision that typifies the approach found in Weber's writings on these issues rather than being preoccupied by the more restricted view of the processes associated with economic classes found in industrial societies.

Concepts of closure, and the related question of group boundaries, can be seen as a central preoccupation of many scholars studying ethnicity in modern society. Michael Hechter's work, for example, has ranged across a spectrum of issues, from concern with the phenomenon of internal colonialism as an explanation for regionalist movements in the Celtic Fringe of Great Britain (Hechter, 1975; Stone & Hechter, 1979) to rational choice analyses of ethnic conflict (Hechter, 1986, 1987). Both approaches have some connection to questions of social closure, but his theoretical discussion of the principles of group solidarity clearly lies explicitly within the debates over types and forms of social closure. In social anthropology, the seminal writings of Fredrik Barth on boundaries, and the subsequent focus of scholars such as Wallman and Okamura, represent variations on a similar theme (Barth, 1969; Okamura, 1981; Wallman, 1986). Brubaker's (1992) study on Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany reveals yet another illustration of the manner in which Weber's emphasis on the centrality of social closure

continues to appear in important new studies of societal diversity. As Brubaker (1992) notes,

In global perspective, citizenship is a powerful instrument of social closure, shielding prosperous states from the migrant poor. Citizenship is also an instrument of closure within states. Every state establishes a conceptual, legal and ideological boundary between citizens and foreigners. (p. x)

Although it is not generally attributed to the Weberian legacy to the sociology of race and ethnic relations, as it is characteristically associated more with Simmel's essay on "the stranger" and Park's writings on "the marginal man," the body of literature devoted to "merchant minorities" can also be linked to Weber's interest in what he called pariah groups (Leresche, 1989; Stone, 1985). It is true that, as a recent critic such as Gary Abraham has stressed, Weber's concern with such minority groups was only peripheral to his major research interests; however, his analysis should not be dismissed, as Abraham (1992) implies, as simply a repetition of "contemporary stereotypes" (p. 293). His interpretation of the position of such groups in society contains much insight that is derived from seeing the phenomenon in a broad comparative context. Thus the ideal type may be based on the situation of European Jewry, but the characteristic features of a merchant minority can be found in groups residing in many different societies during various historical epochs. Among such groups, tendencies toward monopolization, albeit forced on the group by outside discriminatory pressures, can be developed with the assistance of ethnic markers or religious sanctions that are then used to limit access to group membership. Such status differentiation develops into caste-like structures, according to Weber, only when rooted in ethnic divisions. Thus

The "caste" is actually the normal "societal" form in which ethnic communities which believe in blood relationship and forbid intermarriage and social intercourse with outsiders live alongside one another. This is true of the "pariah" peoples which have emerged from time to time in all parts of the world - communities which have acquired special occupational traditions of an artisan or other kind, which cultivate a belief in their common ethnic origin, and which now live in a "diaspora," rigorously avoiding all personal intercourse other than that which is unavoidable, in a legally precarious position, but tolerated on the grounds of their economic indispensability and often even privileged, and interspersed among political communities. . . . The Jews are the most striking historical example. (Runciman, 1978, p. 50)

Later scholars have argued about the balance of characteristics that constitute the core features of such

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groups and particularly about the factors in the wider societies, and among the groups themselves, that account for the origin and persistence of the phenomenon. Others have criticized Weber for the apparently pejorative connotations of the term pariah group, but substitution of the politically more correct terms such as middleman or merchant minorities should not disguise the fact that these particularly vulnerable ethnic groups display many of the sociological characteristics found in Weber's original analysis of the subject.

### 3. RACISM AND LEGITIMACY

Two of the most distinctive features of Weber's sociological perspective were his concern for understanding the meaning that individual actors attributed to their behavior and the related importance that they invariably attached to the search for legitimacy in relation to such action. In *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber isolated a special set of ideas that he argued were particularly crucial in explaining why modern rational capitalism took off in one particular social setting during a specific historical period. Several sociologists and historians of race and ethnic relations have also speculated on the parallel role of ideologies and belief systems - in this case, those associated with racism - in contributing toward an explanation of the dynamics and persistence of particular forms of racial and ethnic stratification. John Rex, for example, who is one contemporary sociologist to explicitly identify with a Weberian perspective, has incorporated the presence and special character of "deterministic belief systems" in his attempt to define a "race relations situation" (Rex, 1970, 1980). Whereas other scholars, particularly those inclined toward a Marxist or materialist orientation, have tended to dismiss racial ideas as epiphenomena that are largely insignificant reflections of a particular mode of production, much of this is based on confusion concerning the social impact of false ideas.

It is certainly true that ideas of biological race have been discredited on scientific grounds - notions of pure races are wholly fictitious - but it is not the case that such beliefs are sociologically irrelevant. For Weber, it did not matter whether Calvinist notions of predestination had any validity; what counted was that people believed this to be the case and that this had real, if unanticipated, consequences for human action. Whereas there is certainly no absolute link between prejudiced beliefs and discriminatory action, to dismiss such ideas as irrelevant is unjustified. Thus Rex focuses on the debates over slavery and points to the importance that Weber attached to "the question of the role of religious and other ideological factors in shaping socio-economic systems" (Rex, 1980, p. 125). Although Weber's stress on the affinity between Calvinism and rational capitalism might imply an

incompatibility between slavery and capitalism, the situation was in reality much more complex than this. Rex uses Weber's basic approach to develop a broad sociological portrait of colonialism and post-colonial societies that revealed that "slavery is one means of achieving ends which may also be achieved through a variety of alternative forms of unfree labor" (p. 130). Where, then, does racism enter the picture? On this question, Rex makes the interesting claim, following both Tocqueville and Weber, that racist ideas are particularly salient in circumstances where legal sanctions no longer support racial inequality. Under these conditions, the social order has to "depend upon the inculcation in the minds of both exploiters and exploited of a belief in the superiority of the exploiter and the inferiority of the exploited" (p. 131). In this way, as Rex continues to argue, "the doctrine of equality of economic opportunity and that of racial superiority and inferiority are complements of one another. Racism serves to bridge the gap between theory and practice" (p. 131).

Such a position not only suggests that racial ideas are far from irrelevant, it highlights the circumstances where they may be critically important. It also raises the second major preoccupation of Weber's sociology of domination: the question of legitimacy. For, as Weber noted,

[There is] the generally observable need of any power, or even of any advantage of life, to justify itself. . . . He who is more favored feels the never ceasing need to look upon his position as in some way "legitimate," upon his advantage as "deserved," and other's disadvantage as being brought about by the latter's "fault." (Weber, 1922/1968, p. 953; also quoted in Wrong, 1979, p. 104)

Slavery, apartheid, and other forms of racial oppression are generally associated with elaborate ideological justifications, but it may well be the case that racist ideas are particularly important when such rigid status systems are being questioned and are under attack by egalitarian social philosophies. Those following in the Weberian tradition would have little doubt that such ideas should be taken seriously and analyzed as part of the causal chain that brings about systems of racial hierarchy, helps them to endure, and also leads to their eventual demise.

### 4. POWER AND DOMINATION

Many, although by no means all, interpreters of Weber's political sociology have noted the element of naked power that lies ominously below the surface of his discussion of legitimacy and authority. As Parkin (1982) comments, "inside the velvet glove is always an iron fist . . . . The terminology of violence, coercion and force is as natural to Weber's sociology as the terminology of moral integration

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is to Durkheim's" (p. 71). Weber himself is quite explicit about the matter and in *Economy and Society* declares

Domination in the most general sense is one of the most important elements of social action. Of course, not every form of social action reveals a structure of dominance. But in most of the varieties of social action domination plays a considerable role, even where it is not obvious at first sight. . . . Without exception every sphere of social action is profoundly influenced by structures of dominance" (Weber, 1922/1968, p. 941).

This is particularly relevant for the study of race and ethnic relations, and it is no accident that an important survey of the state of global race relations written by Philip Mason during the late 1960s, and based on research monographs from all five continents, should have been given the simple title of *Patterns of Dominance* (Mason, 1970). Philip Mason was neither a sociologist nor someone particularly influenced by Weber's writings, but the choice was characteristically Weberian in its stress on structures of power. Weber's preoccupation with power has a special resonance for the study of race and ethnic relations. By breaking down the components of power and by stressing the analytically distinct concept of "status group," Weber opened up a means of understanding the special sociological character of ethnic group formation that had for so long troubled those trying to impose a largely materialist perspective on ethnic loyalty, racial identity, and national affiliation. The example of the poor Whites in the southern states of America is frequently cited by Weber as a dynamic illustration of the interplay between low economic class and high ethnic status, which has important repercussions for race relations. While explaining the lack of class conflict between the planters and the non-slave-owning Whites, he noted that "the 'poor white trash' were much more hostile to the Negroes than the planters, who, because of their situation, were often swayed by patriarchal feelings" (Runciman, 1978, p. 58). In this way, he draws a distinction between what Pierre van den Berghe (1965, 1978) was to characterize as the "competitive" and "paternalistic" ideal types of race relations.

The famous discussion of "class, status and party" in *Economy and Society* also points to the special spheres in which market conditions prevail and those areas in which they do not, anticipating some of the limitations of rational choice-based theories of race relations. Thus he notes that "when the fate of a group of men is not determined by their chances of using goods or labor in the market (as in the case of slaves), that group is not in the technical sense a 'class' but a 'status group'" (Runciman, 1978, p. 45).(14) This does not mean that status groups are unrelated to the economic structure of society, but it does imply that their

special dynamics are not wholly driven by the mode of production, by the distribution of wealth in society, or by a set of preferences originating, in any meaningful way, at the individual level. Race and ethnic relations have been defined by one social theorist, Herbert Blumer, as a "sense of group position" (as quoted in Lal, 1990), which is very close to the preoccupation with social worth, prestige, and styles of life that are the hallmarks of status groups in general and ethnic groups in particular, as found in the Weberian conceptualization. Whereas it would be wrong to deny the direct economic costs and benefits associated with ethnic and racial group membership (and exclusion), a purely materialist reductionism totally fails to capture the complex reality of some of the most fundamental bases of individual identity and social life.

Despite the theoretical primacy of power in Weberian sociology and its practical relevance for studies of race and ethnic relations, these two aspects of social relationships are not always closely associated. Of the major sociological perspectives on race and ethnic relations, the writings found within the plural society tradition are perhaps the most implicitly Weberian in their emphasis. These start from Furnivall's (1948, pp. 304-311) classic formulation of a "plural society," one consisting of separate ethnic and racial groups living in distinct social spheres and cultural universes, where group interaction is confined to the impersonal relationships of the marketplace and where the whole society is held together by the political power of the dominant (colonial) rulers. Such a model has many of the ingredients of Weber's approach, including a recognition of the social reality of discrete ethnic and racial boundaries, and the fundamental significance of power in underpinning group relationships. Its subsequent development by M. G. Smith and Leo Kuper reveals even more parallels. Thus Smith's focus on what he calls the differential incorporation of minority groups is not unlike the mechanisms of closure that I discussed earlier. What is noteworthy is that much of this literature refers to the societies of the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa reflecting the degree to which these concepts have broad cross-cultural relevance (Kuper & Smith, 1969).

Not all contemporary power analyses of race relations emerged out of this tradition; some, such as Rex's, clearly do, whereas those of Lieberman and Blalock have come to emphasize similar variables by somewhat different routes. Thus Lieberman has pointed to the importance of the initial contact situation between different ethnic groups and which of them possesses the dominant power at that crucial time. Blalock has stressed the many components that make up the balance of power between contending ethnic and racial groups, thus providing insight into the enormous complexity of the struggles that underlie so

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many contemporary ethnic conflicts. All three approaches, however, share the core Weberian premise that power must remain at the center of any serious attempt to understand the nature and dynamics of ethnic and race relations (Blalock, 1989; Lieberman, 1961; Stone, 1992).

### CONCLUSION

Three quarters of a century has passed since Weber's final writings on race, ethnicity, and nationalism. No one could have predicted the precise manner in which these forces would influence and shape the course of history during a period of unprecedented ethnic violence and racial conflict. Weber's special contribution rests less on his analysis of contemporary debates, interesting though these often proved to be, and more on his general sociological perspective, which provided important clues to the pervasive significance of racial and ethnic divisions within society itself. I have selected four basic themes to illustrate the impact and relevance of his work, including the sophistication of his conceptualization, the ubiquity of group closure mechanisms, the interplay between racism and legitimacy, and the critical role of power. It is not surprising that, given the range and influence of his insights, few contemporary scholars of race and ethnic relations have bothered to claim the title of Weberian. This is because his influence has been so pervasive that such an epithet is unnecessary. In this sense, despite the intellectual uncertainty in the field and the lack of any dominant paradigm (cf. Rex & Mason, 1986; Stone, 1992), it might be true to say that we are all Weberians now.

### NOTES

1. Most classical sociologists touched on the questions of race, ethnicity, and nationalism but tended to mention them as aspects of other problems (Stone, 1977). Alexis de Tocqueville's writings provide us with quite an extensive analysis (Stone & Mennell, 1980) and a possible exception to Isaiah Berlin's claim that the subject was largely ignored by 19th-century social thinkers. A full recognition of the central significance of racism and nationalism by sociologists dates from the early decades of the present century and can be found in the writings of Park and the Chicago School, together with the seminal work of W.E.B. Du Bois (cf. Lal, 1986, 1990).

2. This is an allusion to Zeitlin's (1968) earlier claim concerning Marx in *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory*.

3. In this article, I subsume the questions of nationalism under the general term ethnicity. Weber's own definitions of nationalism viewed it as a form of politicized ethnicity aimed at establishing a separate and independent state.

For an equally insistent distinction between the terms nation and state, see the influential writings of Walker Connor (1972, 1993), in which this issue has been stressed in the context of global studies of ethnonationalism.

4. Weber, like Marx, never saw himself as a professional sociologist. His interests and training were too broad for such a narrow categorization, and he lacked Durkheim's zeal for establishing an exclusive sociological discipline (cf. Lukes, 1973; Parkin, 1982).

5. Bryce's contributions are explored and compared to Weber's in Stone (1972) and Tocqueville's in Stone & Mennell (1980). I thank Jacqui Callaghan for bringing Martineau's much undervalued work to my attention. One can extend this argument to Marx, whose writings for the *New York Daily Tribune* produced at least some serious attention to the issues of race relations and slavery by the founder of dialectical materialism. Thus the impact of America, albeit indirectly, did have some impact in moderating the ethnocentric preoccupations of the Marxist tradition. For a more recent review of the Marxist legacy on nationalism, see E. Nimni's (1991) *Marxism and Nationalism: Theoretical Origins of a Political Crisis*.

6. It is interesting to compare Tocqueville's robust rejection of Gobineau's racial thesis with Weber's much more tentative approach. In both cases, however, the use of historical evidence to refute such theories provides a comprehensive demolition of their plausibility. Whereas Tocqueville noted how the Romans would have dismissed the Britons as savages, belonging to a different race and destined to vegetate in ignorance, Weber showed how "barbarian blood" was an integral part of the glory that was Rome.

7. Weber's respect for Du Bois is clear and, at a meeting of the German Sociological Society in Frankfurt in 1910, he declared, "I wish to state that the most important sociological scholar anywhere in the Southern States in America, with whom no white scholar can compare, is a Negro - Burckhardt Du Bois" (Weber, 1910/1973, p. 312; 1910/1971).

8. Compare Abraham's (1992) comment, "The way in which Weber brought his concern (for the social and cultural unification of Germany) to bear on the Polish problem reveals a central and perhaps irresolvable conflict between the liberal and nationalist aspects of his social outlook" (p. 73).

9. For a sharply divergent and highly critical interpretation of Weber on this issue, compare Abraham (1992, pp. 9, 287).



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10. See Smith's (1992a, pp. 436-456) discussion of the survival of ethnic groups.

11. Contrast this search for the "fascist" personality with the subsequent arguments concerning the "banality of evil." For an excellent recent study in this tradition, see Fred Katz (1993).

12. See Hechter's (1976, p. 1168) related comments.

13. Compare the parallel arguments in Mirza (1992) and the comments of Komarovskiy (1991).

14. The most comprehensive development of rational choice theory in sociology is found in Coleman (1990).

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- Author's Note: This essay was written during my tenure of a Jean Monnet Fellowship at the Culture Research Centre of the European University Institute. Additional support was provided by the Graduate School of George Mason University.