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STATUS, PARTY AND THE AMERICAN NEGRO

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A major obstacle to the formulation of a unified and coherent theory of social stratification is that few attempts have been made to test hypotheses derived from alternative theories in a way that will lead to the acceptance of those that closely approximate social reality and to the rejection of others. One strategy for conducting such tests is to select a sub-group of a given population and see which theory best explains this group's social position. Four major theoretical orientations can be utilized to explain the social position of the Negro in America. Testing hypotheses derived from these with recent survey data provides a clear basis for establishing a preferential ordering. At the same time, we may test specific hypotheses about the political behavior of American Negroes which are related to these same theories.

a. The economic determinist model. This orientation sees social structure as a consequent of an economic substructure. Thus, in the Marxian view, race should be relevant only insofar as it identifies a group within a social class. That is, certain racial groups, by virtue of their market positions, assign a social position to their members.¹ That Negritude exerts an influence on social position independent of market position has been demonstrated by Siegel, who, controlling for market position, has shown that at all levels of competence, Negroes are economically disadvantaged relative to whites.² In the Marxian view, furthermore, race would be an irrelevant issue in partisan choice, economic interest being dominant here. Earlier studies have

shown, however, that with regard to Negro partisanship in America, race, rather than occupation and income, is of primary import.³

b. Class and status. The demonstrated independence of race from purely economic considerations suggests that, at a minimum, two dimensions of social structure must be identified: class, in terms of objective evaluations of market position, and status, in terms of social estimations of honor, which may vary independently from objective class considerations.⁴ There is, in fact, empirical reason to subscribe to such a formulation. Laumann and Guttman, for example, have demonstrated that associational patterns in America are influenced more by similarities in prestige - the equivalent of social honor - than by similarities in market position.⁵ The hypothesis to be judged here is that since the social position of the Negro is determined by his race as well as by economic considerations, the Negro will, at all economic levels, perceive himself to be of lower status than will whites. That is, there will be status costs as well as economic costs of Negritude, and these will permeate the social structure.

c. The "Black Bourgeoisie" Model. This orientation, derived from the work of Frazier, argues that white-collar workers within the Negro community claim middle-class status for themselves, and dissociate themselves from the working-class Negro.⁶ The hypothesis of class differentiation within the Negro community is in direct opposition to the class and status hypotheses, which suggests that Negroes, regardless of their occupation, will consider themselves to be of lower social status. Our initial preference was

for the latter model, for research on the power structure within Negro communities has suggested high community participation on the part of persons in middle-class occupations, contrary to Frazier's formulation.⁷

d. The assimilation approach. While the three models cited above posit static class relations both within the Negro community and in Negro-white relations, this point of view argues for change over time. Regardless of whether the social status of the Negro is determined by purely economic criteria, by racial judgement, or by differentiation within the Negro community at the outset, the assimilationist view holds that through time, the social structure of the Negro community and patterns of Negro participation in social and political processes will come more and more to resemble those of the dominant white community.⁸ Dahl points out that political assimilation may be a stepping stone to structural assimilation, i.e., that politics may serve as a mobility channel whereby members of low-status groups can enter the middle strata of society.⁹ The degree to which this relationship exists, however, is an empirical question, and it may be that for the Negro the relationship between political assimilation and mobility within the social structure will not be as strong.

Our data were drawn from the 1964 election study of the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan. The sample consisted of 1558 respondents, 1439 of whom were re-interviewed after the election.

An essential metric in this undertaking was an index of social

status based upon objective characteristics that would be minimally responsive to fluctuations in any single criterion. The index used was based upon occupation of head of household, family income, and education, each rated on a scale from 1 to 3 according to the scheme presented in Table 1. While this index is not sensitive to differences

Variable	SES Value		
	3	2	1
1. Occupation of family head	Professional Semi-Professional Self-employed businessman Artisan-manager Public official	Clerical and Sales Buyer, agent, etc. Skilled worker Protective service Farm operator Retired	Unskilled Labor Service Worker Farm labor Unemployed Housewife
2. Education	Some college or more	Some high school or more	Grammar school or less
3. Family Income	\$10,000 or more	\$4,000-\$9,999	\$3,999 or less

in content of education or to differences due to self-employment vs. employment in a bureaucracy, it seems to be the best objective index in view of the data available. For each respondent, the sum of scores on the three variables was computed. The index ranged from 3 to 9, and was trichotomized, with a score of 3 and 4 being indicative of low status, scores of 5 to 7 indicating middle status, and scores of 8 and 9 indicating high status.¹⁰ The distributions of this index for Negro and white respondents are presented in Table 2. These data provide a further basis for one rejection of the strict economic determinist interpretation of the

social status of the American Negro. While the Negroes in our sample

SES	Negro	White
High	11	20
Middle	47	64
Low	42	16
Total	100%	100%
N =	159	1399

were found disproportionately to be of low social status, over half of our Negroes fell in the middle and high categories.

The choice between the class and status and the Black Bourgeoisie models must rest upon subjective stratification considerations as well. Our respondents were asked what social class they thought they belonged to. The results, controlling for objective social status, are presented in Table 3. Clearly, these are status costs to being Negro, even when objective socio-economic character-

Class Perception	NEGRO			WHITE		
	High SES	Middle SES	Low SES	High SES	Middle SES	Low SES
Middle	59	12	4	77	38	20
Working	35	82	96	17	58	78
Other	0	0	0	2	0	0
D.K./N.A.	6	6	0	4	4	2
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N =	17	75	67	283	889	227

istics are held constant. At each SES level, Negroes are more

likely to see themselves as belonging to the working class than are whites. The difference is greatest in the middle SES level.

Even these data, however, show that there are Negroes who perceive themselves to be middle-class. The class and status model would lead us to expect that among persons who see themselves as middle-class, Negroes will be less likely to have a strong sense of class identification than whites. That is, they will be less secure in their claimed social position. Our data suggest that this is not the case. While the difference is not significant, among individuals perceiving themselves to be middle-class, Negroes are somewhat more likely than whites to have strongly felt class bonds. These data are presented in Table 4. The status

TABLE 4 Strength of Class Identification Among Respondents Identifying with Middle-Class, by Race.

Strength of Identification	<u>NEGRO</u>	<u>WHITE</u>
High	64	55
Low	32	44
D.K.N.A.	4	1
Total	100%	100%
N =	22	594

costs of being Negro, then, are not universally felt in the Negro community.

To argue, however, that the existence of strong middle-class identifications within the Negro community is indicative of a "Black Bourgeoisie" element in the population, one would have to further argue that this group differentiates itself from the

wider Negro community socially, politically, and economically. Candidate choice in the 1964 presidential election indicates no differentiation within the Negro community, save that between people who voted for the Democratic candidates and those who did not vote. This differentiation appeared at each SES level, being strongest in the lower strata and decreasing in inverse relationship with SES level. These data appear in Table 5. They contrast

Vote	NEGRO			WHITE		
	SES: High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Johnson	88	73	49	43	55	45
Goldwater	0	0	0	44	25	20
Refused to say	6	0	1	0	1	1
Did not vote	6	27	50	12	19	33
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N =	16	66	66	262	819	210

sharply with comparable data for the white community, where there was a marked increase in support for Goldwater as a direct function of SES.

Perhaps a more telling indicator of political differentiations among American Negroes is the extent to which they see racial integration as a major problem facing the government. The "Black Bourgeoisie" orientation would lead us to hypothesize that the segment of the Negro population which saw itself as middle-class and tried to dissociate itself from the larger Negro community would deny that integration was a problem. That is, it would not

identify itself with the problems of the Negro community.

Table 6 presents data on the extent to which the Negroes in our sample saw racial integration as the major problem facing government. While those with strong class identifications are less

	Middle Class	Working Class
Strong Identification	38%	37%
Weak Identification	50%	55%

likely than those with weak class identifications to view racial integration as the major problem facing government, this relationship holds among both middle-class and working-class Negroes. It thus cannot be attributed to the existence of a "Black Bourgeoisie" that seeks to differentiate itself from the Negro community at large. Rather, it might be argued that a strong identification with any social class is indicative of a felt sense of involvement in the social structure. A concomitant of such involvement seems to be a lower level of concern with the problem of racial integration.

We must now face the problem of the social and political assimilation of the American Negro. Certainly, there is evidence that even in the South, Negro political participation has increased.¹¹ According to the research of Dahl and Myers, we would expect that such political activity would lead to social mobility. Two empir-

ical points need to be brought out here. First, there is evidence that voter turnout is still on the increase among Negroes. Orum reports voting figures for Negroes of 32 per cent in 1952, and between 53 and 57 per cent in 1960.¹² In our 1964 sample, 63 per cent of the Negro respondents reported having voted. It is difficult to separate out the factors of legislative changes regarding registration and poll taxes, civil rights activity, and tendencies toward social assimilation, but the empirical fact is that reported Negro turnout is definitely on the increase.

On the other hand, it is difficult to link this trend in voter turnout to changes in the Negroes place in the social structure. Certainly, the rate of increase of median income has in recent years been higher for Negroes than for whites -- largely due to the lower initial level for Negroes.¹³ Our own data reveal that while the American Negro has achieved some level of upward mobility intergenerationally, he still lags behind the white. The data in Table 7 reveal that among people of working class parentage, the upward mobility rate for whites is more than twice that for Negroes. We anticipate, however, that the future trends will

	<u>NEGRO</u>	<u>WHITE</u>
Middle Class	10	22
Working Class	90	78
Total	100%	100%
N =	143	870

indicate an increasingly stronger relationship between Negro political activity and the integration of the Negro into the American social and economic structure. Ironically, the Negro stands to make his greatest gains by failing to assimilate totally into the political structure, and by maintaining a racial vote, rather than by adopting economic position as the relevant determinant of partisanship. Thus, the general notion of assimilation requires differentiation and specification. Negro Americans have been assimilating politically insofar as their turnout patterns are coming to resemble those of whites. However, assimilation to the dominant society has not taken place with regard to the determinants of partisanship, and it seems to be the case that social structural assimilation will, in the short run, be achieved most quickly through the maintenance of just such a racially distinct basis of political leverage. We would anticipate that as Negroes become structurally integrated into American society, the 'Negro vote' will atrophy.

In conclusion, our data suggest the rejection of both economic determinist and "Black Bourgeoisie" explanations of the Negro's place in American social structure, and his political behavior. It is clearly necessary to distinguish between the Negro's class, in purely economic terms, and his status, for holding economic factors constant, the Negro is the recipient of less social honor than is his white counterpart. The situation is not static, however, and the social position of the American Negro may be viewed developmentally. Through increasing political participation,

however, we expect rates of Negro social mobility to increase, and once social structural integration is accomplished, we expect that the Negro vote will become less coherent within the context of the American electorate.

FOOTNOTES

1. Herbert Apthekar, for example, has discussed the economic subjection of the Negro as the basis of his low social status. See A Documentary History of the Negro People in America (New York: Citadel Press, 1951).
2. Paul M. Siegel, "On the Cost of Being a Negro," Sociological Inquiry, vol. 35, no. 1 (Winter, 1965), p. 41-57.
3. See for example Morris Janowitz and David R. Segal, "Social Cleavage and Party Affiliation," American Journal of Sociology (forthcoming).
4. See H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948) p. 180-195.
5. Edward O. Laumann and Louis Guttman, "The Relative Associational Contiguity of Occupations in an Urban Setting," American Sociological Review, vol. 31, no. 2 (April, 1966), p. 169-178.
6. E. Franklin Frazier, Black Bourgeoisie (Glencoe: Free Press, 1957), p. 43 ff., 195 ff.
7. Floyd Hunter, Community Power Structure (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1963), p. 113-147. James Q. Wilson also reports an increase in middle-class civic leadership in the Negro community. See his Negro Politics (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960).
8. For an early statement of political assimilation leading to social mobility see Jerome K. Myers, "Assimilation in the Political Community," Sociology and Social Research, vol. 35, no. 3 (1951), p. 175-182. Anthony Orum discusses the Negro case in particular in "A Reappraisal of the Social and Political Participation of Negroes," American Journal of Sociology, vol. 72, no. 1 (July, 1966), p. 32-46.
9. Robert A. Dahl, Who Governs (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 41.
10. Where information for any of the three variables was not ascertained, the SES ranking was based on the average of the remaining responses.
11. See especially Paul Lewinson, Race, Class and Party (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1965), esp. p. ix-xx; "Postscript, 1964", and Robert E. Lane, "The Politics of Consensus in an Age of Affluence," American Political Science Review, vol. LIX, no. 4 (December, 1965), p. 891.
12. Orum, op. cit., p. 41.
13. Lane, op. cit., p. 891.