EXPLORATIONS IN ETHNIC STUDIES

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Explorations in Ethnic Studies is an interdisciplinary journal devoted to the study o ethnicity, ethnic groups, intergroup relations, and the cultural life of ethnic minorities. The editorial staff welcomes manuscripts that are in concert with the objectives and goals of the National Association of Interdisciplinary Ethnic Studies. Contributors should demonstrate the integration of theory and practice.

Manuscripts must be typewritten, double-spaced, and are not to exceed fifteen pages (including notes). Send four copies with the author's name appearing only on a separate title page. Consult *A Manual of Style* (University of Chicago Press) for proper manuscript form.

Because all submissions are refereed by two or more persons, it takes at least two months for the readers' reports. Manuscripts received without a self-addressed, stamped envelope will not be returned.

For further information, write:
Meredith Reinhart, Assistant Editor
NAIES Publications
Ethnic Studies Department
California State Polytechnic University
Pomona, CA 91768

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ANNOUNCEMENT: The NAIES Executive Council passed a resolution during the fall meeting establishing the Carmen Carter Memorial Human Rights Lecture. You are invited to make contributions to support the Carmen Carter Memorial Human Rights Lecture.

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Comments from the Guest Editor

Gretchen Bataille

I want to take this opportunity to share some thoughts with the readers of *Explorations* about the association and the journal. The new editorial staff is in the process of making several significant changes in format as well as content of the publications. The first new beginning is a new logo, a logo which has as its central symbol the character meaning "the source." We believe that from the strong histories, from the vibrant beginnings of all peoples comes the strength to examine our collective pasts, to live better our presents, and to look forward joyously to our futures. Despite the gloom which is around us in the various forms of continued racism, economic woes, and lack of understanding, we are confident that the NAIES will continue to be a catalyst for change, providing a forum for examination of problems and the posing of solutions. Because the NAIES has an interdisciplinary focus, we will continue to draw on the arts, on history, on the social sciences, on political science, and on all other fields to examine our concerns at the national conference, at regional conferences, and through the publications of the Association. Those who have been active with the Association from its inception had (and still have) a vision. It is a vision we can all work toward bringing into focus.

This issue also marks the beginning of a new effort to truly "exchange" information. Each article is followed by at least one critique which further comments on the subject, provides ideas for future study, or assesses the implications of the research. We hope that the critiques are viewed as an incentive not just to the authors but to others as well to continue the enquiries which have been started. The NAIES is dedicated to the integration of theory and practice, to finding solutions, not just articulating problems. As such, we believe that all areas of academic enquiry are on-going, and that definitive answers are few.

Several of the papers included in this issue were presented at the 1980 NAIES conference in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. The themes of that conference, "Ethnicity and Mental Health" and "The Invisible Ethnic" resulted in both theoretical and practical approaches to the study of ethnicity. In the first two papers the conflicts experienced by ethnic minorities with the "helping" professions are examined. The remaining papers focus on various groups which have experienced "invisibility" historically and still today. Maxine Seller's research on ethnic theater suggests far-reaching possibilities for further

scholarship on these "lost" enclaves. Margaret Laughlin provides the dismal, and carefully hidden, statistics on the education of migrant children. In her review of Wiesel's *Night*, Mildred Culp examines the theological ambivalence of the Jewish people during the holocaust. All of the critiques accompanying the essays suggest future research possibilities, and we invite papers on these or other subjects which illuminate the study of ethnicity from an interdisciplinary perspective.

I thank Richard Vanlten, Associate Dean of the College of Sciences and Humanities at Iowa State University, who has supported the endeavors of the NAIES and has provided both time and travel funds to enable me to continue the work of the Association, and Paul Weller, Vice-president at California State Polytechnic University, who arranged for the necessary funding to produce this issue of *Explorations*. Such institutional support is critical to the on-going work which has been started, and we are grateful that our institutions share our vision of a better future.

ETHICAL PROBLEMS IN EVALUATION RESEARCH*

Elisabeth J. Johnson

For some time, social scientists have been concerned with ethics in research. Much of what they have written has focused on research in general, but many of the points they raise are applicable to evaluation research in particular. Included among these concerns are informed consent, the right to treatment, the right to refuse treatment, implicit coercion, powerlessness of subjects, and, perhaps most important, external access to confidential data.

Evaluation studies approach other ethical domains as well, such as responsibility to funding sources, the threat to jobs of persons working on programs being studied, and the needs of the community as perceived by its residents. Many of the issues are inextricably tied to political concerns; we are concerned here with politics at the agency and specific project levels. This presentation shows that these issues are so complex and so important to the outcome of the research that strategies for dealing with them should be developed in the initial planning stages of the study, along with other methodological procedures.

Position of Relative Power of Researchers and Subjects [1]

Researchers should begin by considering their positions as they relate to research participants. The researcher has a number of advantages. First, the person comes with the sanction of whatever institution is sponsoring the study by virtue of having had the proposal accepted. This sanction is not an inconsiderable power source, for such funding agencies as part of "the establishment" represents high authority, a fact that is not lost on program participants. Second, the investigator has the advantage of superior knowledge in being the only one who knows the grand design. The evaluator is, therefore, in a position to manipulate variables, alter the design, and give the orders. The reseacher continues to gain superior knowledge through education and training not only in the substance of the specific discipline but also in functioning with "establishment" institutions.

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Minority researchers share some of the same power advantages that their majority colleagues enjoy. And investigators who come from minority groups will likely have "the establishment" perspective, because of their training. This is not to say that their value as social scientists should be minimized; quite the contrary, for their membership in minority groups should give minorities an understanding that many middle class whites would find difficult to achieve.

Research subjects are in quite a different power position. Evaluation research is usually focused on action programs designed to ameliorate the consequences of social injustice. Program participants typically come from groups which have been the victims of injustice. These victims include racial minorities, welfare recipients, the elderly, children, prisoners, ex-convicts, and mental patients, all of whom are powerless in relation to the larger society. Participants in action programs are usually beholden in some way to "the establishment" for the services they receive, and there is an implicit threat to these services if participants refuse to cooperate with evaluation efforts. Such persons do not usually challenge the established order and there is no reason to expect that they would do so in response to a research program.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Herbert C. Kelman has pointed out that one of the principal aspects of human dignity is the right of choice. The choice to reveal or keep oneself private is cherished by all persons, regardless of social class. It is interesting to note that privacy as a phenomenon increases with class privilege. For example, executive bathrooms are locked; being awarded a key is a sign of increase in status, but the workers' bathrooms feature multiple stalls with only the most rudimentary concealments. This differential is also true in terms of research, with upperclass people reserving more of the right to withhold information about themselves than the lower classes are able to do.[2] Persons who cannot protect their privacy legitimately will do so deviously; this behavior could destroy a research project.

One of the major ethical issues confronting researchers is confidentiality and privacy. The fact that subjects may feel powerless in the face of research plans in no way implies that they do not feel exploited and exposed. What is worse is the fact that subjects have no choice in whether the program will be evaluated or not. The implications for the study's success are serious, because the participants' lack of influence over the program makes the evaluation vulnerable to indirect manipulation through clients' lying and other

forms of sabotage.

Revealing certain types of information can pose a definite threat to certain populations such as prisoners and welfare recipients. Promises of confidentiality, meant sincerely, are usually given by evaluating groups. However, it is now impossible to give that promise with complete assurance that it can be kept, given computer technology and data banks which make information retrieval very simple for knowledgeable persons. Hoffman and Miller have described, in rather alarming terms, a method of getting private information on a given individual from a data bank using readily available information such as occupation and city of residence.[3]

The federal government maintains data banks which contain information about clients likely to participate in action programs. An example is the CODAP system developed by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). NIDA requires all drug programs which receive federal funds to forward certain information about their clients for inclusion in the CODAP system. These clients are truly at risk, for many of them have been in trouble with the law. The conflict arises when there must be an accounting of the expenditure of tax dollars and evaluation researchers are the ones who do it.

The issue of maintaining data confidentiality has led to some troublesome times for some programs. In the Chicago Woodlawn Project, which worked with the Blackstone Rangers and the Devil's Disciples, notorious youth gangs, an evaluation was terminated over the issue of confidentiality. The program was considered by some to be novel and successful, because it worked through the structure of the gangs to achieve change in the community. During the violence that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., there was significantly less violence in the Woodlawn district than in other Chicago neighborhoods. Yet the program was controversial in many ways: Mayor Daley opposed it because he could not control the funds and a senate sub-committee wanted an accounting because the program worked with criminals. The evaluators were having difficulties in getting the staff and clients to cooperate with the study because of all the outside pressure. Ultimately, the senate sub-committee subpeonaed the raw data which had been collected at a time when the program was troubled. When the evaluators delayed releasing these data, the sub-committee ordered a site visit. During the visit, some documents from the program were taken by a committee staff member, presumably inadvertently, and later returned with a note saying that they had been copied.[4] Incidents of this nature are not infrequent, especially in controversial programs. Usually the researchers get blamed for this violation of confidentiality

even when it is clearly not their fault. Program evaluators must find ways to avoid these pitfalls in order to gain and maintain the confidence of program staff and participants. One way to do this is to plan and carry out research in partnership with consumer representatives.

Political Interests

Action programs tend to be favored by neighborhood groups, human service workers, and social scientists. There are, however, many groups with competing interest and perspectives. Money is often given directly to an agency or program, by-passing state and local authorities. Government officials are, at the very least, skeptical of such an arrangement. Legislators who appropriate money through Health and Human Services, the Justice Department, or the Department of Labor are obliged to have an accounting of such expenditures to their constituents. Ordinary middle class citizens feel resentful about efforts to pull minority citizens into the mainstream, for every newcomer who enters the job market is seen as a potential threat to their interests. These conflicting interests cause incredible tensions within and around community programs.

The demand for cost effectiveness is not really understood at the program level. The funding source wants to demonstrate efficacy as soon as possible so that they can justify further spending. It is nearly impossible to work under such pressure: trying to produce results in too short a period of time, with difficult clients, and, often, inexperienced staff. Staff dissension abounds, clients drop out of the program in frustration, funding is threatened and it is in this context that the evaluators are expected to commence their studies. It is understandable that program staff feel beleaguered and defensive and do not willingly cooperate in a program's assessment. Under these conditions, evaluation cannot possibly measure the program at its potential best, especially because, as C. Weiss points out, such studies have a tendency to find negative results.[5]

Weiss suggests that timing is crucial for meaningful evaluations. Many studies are started before a program has worked through its problems and adequately trained its staff. Premature evaluations often lead to abandonment of a program before it has had a chance to prove itself. Another problem that funding institutions needs to consider is that no one program can remediate all ills in society. The best we can expect is the amelioration of the social problem for a small group of victims. Consequently, large impact studies are probably inappropriate.

Consequences of Negative Evaluations

In the final analysis, a negative result is the consequence most feared from evaluation. When a new program is funded, it sets up a chain of events that have long-reaching effects on a community. A needed service is provided and local residents come to expect the service to be available indefinitely. Jobs are created and they are often filled by neighborhood folk who might never have obtained similar positions elsewhere. The program, if it meets certain criteria, can become a training site for graduate students, thereby increasing the quality and quantity of the services offered. A negative evaluation can destroy such a network. Evaluations that focus more on the process and milestones of the project might be seen as more helpful and useful in decision-making and change. The agency would then have a better chance of defining itself and achieving its goals.

Many social action programs were started as alternatives to traditional services. This suggests that new methods are being used, most of which have not been tested. Some failures are unavoidable as the staff tries out new ideas and methods in their search for the most effective models. A negative evaluation stifles this creativity; in response, the staff resorts to the same old tried methods which never really worked, but offer a measure of safety, nevertheless. *Creativity is risky and evaluation ought to accomodate to that fact.* Self-help originality can blaze a trail where "establishment" programs have failed precisely because the workers will not have the same biases as the professionals and academicians. To evaluate such programs, a new approach and perspective is needed.

The Right to Treatment, The Right to Refuse Treatment, and The Loss of Temporary Benefits

Many evaluation studies use the experimental method or aspects of it, i.e., they use control groups, give and withhold treatment, offer temporary benefits, and then study the effects of these manipulations. An example is the Negative Income Tax Experiment in New Jersey which gave income supplements to persons at the lowest end of the tax brackets. The grants were given for a specified time following which recipients were evaluated to measure the many benefits derived from the program and then compared to a similar group who did not receive the extra money.[6] It can be argued that persons who receive this benefit become accustomed to a new lifestyle and therefore the research causes the subjects to feel worse after completion of the study than they did before. One could also argue that to use a control group of needy persons and exclude them

from the cash benefits is inherently exploitative. There are no neat solutions to these dilemmas, but researchers would be remiss, indeed, to rush into such a project and neglect to consider the total impact of such activities on the population.

In other cases, special treatments may be given to patients in health clinics. The staff has reason to believe that the treatment will be effective and is, therefore, reluctant to exclude some patients in order to establish a control group. If the benefit to the patients from the experimental treatment will be major, the researcher should seek an alternative design. This situation is one of the major arguments for doing quasi-experiments in clinical settings; quasi-experiments eliminate the necessity of randomization and use of control groups.

Informed Consent

Most research projects require that a subject or a guardian must sign an agreement to participate in the program. Such agreements must contain enough information about the study so that all risks are made clear. The idea is to help subjects make intelligent decisions about participation or not. This process is called informed consent. In basic research experiments, this issue is obvious and the requirements, while possibly complicating the design, are quite clear. However, in evaluation research, the need for informed consent and the form it should take is ambiguous at best. There are numerous points to consider.

In the best of circumstances, the research is compromised if the subject knows too much. The outcome of the treatment can easily be attributed to the demands of the situation. This is especially true in action programs where the subjects have as much stake in looking good as do the staff. Another problem is the Hawthorne effect; just participating in a study can procduce effects on individuals which obscure the treatment effects.

Another aspect of informed consent is related to the power issue. Populations in action programs are receiving benefits which may make them feel beholden to the service provider. In such a situation, the individual is subject to implicit coercion. Although information about treatment effects, the reason for the study, and the voluntary nature of participation are explained to the subject, there remains unavoidable pressure to comply. In cases like this, the informed consent agreement meets the requirement of being voluntary, but violates the spirit of the law to a degree. This is especially true in programs involving prison populations where the coercion is not so

subtle and the benefits of cooperating may be as obvious as reduced sentence time.

The final point is also related to the power issue. Even though the treatment and the study are explained to subjects, in most instances they are not able to understand it as well as the investigators or the program staff, either because they do not know as much about the topic or because they are not as well educated. The onus is on the researcher to make such information as can be shared as understandable as possible.

Some have argued that social experimentation, in contrast to biomedical research, does not pose hazards against which participants must be warned.[8] However, in some cases subjects may be worse off if the treatment is ineffective; subjects might also develop fears and misgivings, needing reassurances from staff. The point here is that investigators should be alert and sensitive to these issues and also flexible enough to alter programs to accommodate those who perceive themselves to be at risk.

What Can Be Done?

It is clear that ethical issues in evaluation research are at best ambiguous, and at worse, serious enough to halt the research. There are some strategies which can minimize the risk that these problems present. At least two strategies are required for all research funded by Health and Human Services. All applicants for research money must describe the risk to human subjects and the steps taken to protect them from these risks. And each program is expected to organize a peer review group to analyze each potential hazard and to make recommendations for effectively reducing such problems as they identify. Many programs go further and submit their proposals to independent review groups.

These policies are excellent ways to reduce the risks to research participants, but the methods only satisfy a portion of the ethical problem. The notion of review groups could easily be expanded to include persons who are representative of the population to be studied. Kelman refers to "participatory research" as a way of including such individuals.[9] When a researcher is designing a study, the researcher can include program staff and neighborhood representatives in the planning. In so doing, each group has a chance to raise questions that are of particular saliency. It also allows client advocates to articulate the fears and cultural concerns that the clients may experience. If researchers sincerely value this type of

cooperation, they may be able to capitalize on the ideas that are generated from staff and lay groups. Program staff have ideas about what they do that is effective and what the goals of the program should be. In participatory research, the investigators help the staff to structure the treatment protocol in such a way as to obtain the best result from an evaluation. Researchers must be honest about what research can and cannot do. Together the three groups frame the research questions. Since all have participated in the planning, all have an interest in seeing the study completed. An added benefit could well be that new ways of looking at old questions may emerge from the cross fertilization of differing perspectives. Participatory research can affect all the issues of ethics that have been raised in this discussion.

The issue of confidentiality and privacy is very complex. Some of the time, the strategies that have been mentioned will prove to be effective and guard against unwarranted intrusions of privacy. However, it is important to realize that review committees are subject to abuse and must be formed with the same care that is used in the research design. These committees are usually made up of other professionals (peers) and citizens of status from the community. It is argued that such persons are needed to provide the necessary expertise to make the judgments asked of them, which may be true in some cases. In the interest of fairness, persons who represent the concerns of the subjects and ordinary community folk need to be placed on these committees.

In a recent review process, one highly placed professional was discovered to be a member of three groups reviewing a research proposal, the clients of which were drug addicts in a treatment program. The proposal was approved; the professional in question is a close colleague of the principal investigator; there were no ex-addicts, community representatives, or treatment staff on any of the three committees. An objective review? Hardly! Yet, on paper, a three level review appears to be very conscientious and rigorous. Given the various risks drug addicts face regarding confidentiality, privacy, freedom of choice, and coercion, it seems imperative that advocates for their well-being be included in the review.

Other protections of privacy are more technical, such as setting a procedure for removing client identifiers from all information to be put in data banks. Indeed, only such information as is needed about a client to provide safe treatment should be obtained at all.

A final suggestion is general and long-term in nature: Social scientists have an obligation to educate the public to the nature of evaluation research and its danger to research participants. Although the state of the art is still at a primitive level, there is no reason why public groups and legislators cannot be informed about what is known. It is only in this way that we can begin to get funding institutions to accept and value the rights of clients regarding ethical issues.

Notes

[1]Herbert C. Kelman. "The Rights of Subjects in Social Research in Terms of Relative Power and Legitimacy." *American Psychologist.* Vol. 27, No. 11 (November, 1972) 989-1016.

[2] Herbert C. Kelman. *A Time to Speak: On Human Values and Social Research.* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc. 1968). See also, Barry Schwartz: "The Social Psychology of Privacy." *American Journal of Sociology.* Vol. 73, No. 6 (May, 1968) 741-752.

[3]Lance J. Hoffman and W. F. Miller. "Getting A Personal Dossier From a Statistical Data Bank." *Datamation.* (May, 1970) 74-75.

[4]John Walsh. "Antipoverty [Research and Development]: Chicago Debacle Suggests Pitfalls Facing OEO." *Science.* Vol. 165, No. 3899 (19 September 1969) 1243-1245.

[5] C. Weiss. "Politicization of Evaluation Research." *Evaluating Action Programs: Readings in Social Action and Education.* C. Weiss, ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1977).

[6]H.W. Reicken and R.F. Boruch. *Social Experimentation: A Method for Planning and Evaluating Social Intervention.* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

[7] T.D. Cook and D D.T. Campbell. *The Design and Conduct of Quasi-Experiments and True Experiments in Field Settings.* (Chicago: Rand-McNally, in press).

[8]Reicken and Boruch. *Op. cit.*

[9]Kelman *Op. cit.* (1972) 1012-1016.

Critique

"Ethical Problems in Evaluation Research" by Elisabeth J. Johnson summarizes some of the salient ethical concerns in social science research such as the relative positions of power between researcher and subject, confidentiality and privacy, and "political interests" or the use of research findings by sponsors. The author concludes with proposals and cautions; of special relevance to readers of this journal is Kelman's "participatory research" which enables people being studied to participate in the research design and implementation.

The subject of the paper clearly has implicit importance to ethnic minorities, for they have often been the objects of social science research. Further, as pointed out by Barnes, the researcher bears special ethical responsibilities when studying minorities because of their generally dependent and relatively powerless position in society, and social science research may be used by "sponsors" to maintain the *status quo* in the case of anthropologists as colonialists. "The use of the methods of inquiry of social science and the application of its findings," warned Barnes, "have become an essential aspect of the machinery of government."[1] Project Camelot and its exposure in 1965 helped to resurrect the issue of ethics, social science, and public policy, and alert Third World communities to such uses of research in preserving the *status quo*.[2]

Joan Moore adds an important point to the discussion of the politics of social science research. She suggests in her description of research among Mexican Americans in the Southwest that ethnic research may be political in another sense. Researchers of ethnic minorities often perceive their work to be for the ultimate benefit of those subject peoples; however, community activists who are the implementers of ethnic research may not be in sympathy with the means or conclusions of that research. The problem for the social scientist is to somehow convince the activist of the importance and validity of the research or to translate its conclusions into community action for social change[3]. Analagously, ethnic studies has directed criticism at traditional social science for research which is perceived as irrelevant to the needs of ethnic communities, inaccurate, and lacking an "ethnic perspective"; a nagging fear on the part of the critics is the question of exploitation by "outsiders" and the use or abuse of the information gathered. Despite its gradual decline, there still exists a degree of anti-intellectualism among activists both in ethnic studies and in the ethnic community.

The social scientist thus faces a dilemma; the possible social consequences of research on a minority community must surely weigh on her conscience. She must be accurate, but ideologically she is committed to conclusions which promote social justice. Those are some of the elements of importance to ethnic minorities implicit in a consideration of ethics and social science research, the subject of Elisabeth J. Johnson's paper.

Gary Okihiro
University of Santa Clara

Notes

[1] J.A. Barnes. *The Ethics of Inquiry in Social Science.* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977) 48.

[2] Irving Louis Horowitz, ed. *The Rise and Fall of Project Camelot.* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967).

[3] Joan W. Moore. "Political and Ethical Problems in a Large Scale Study of a Minority Population." Gideon Sjoberg, ed. *Ethics, Politics, and Social Research:* (Cambridge: Schenkman. 1967), 225-44.

Critique

Johnson's paper contains four assumptions which deserve further attention, especially in the context of ethnic minorities. These four assumptions are both obvious and at the root of the ethical problems: 1) Minorities need services; 2) services are to be provided by the dominant group; 3) the providing of services must be evaluated for cost-effectiveness; and 4) the evaluators are more likely to come from the dominant group than the minority group and hence be more powerful than those being evaluated. This, then, leads to the basic problem addressed by Johnson: How can this evaluation process occur such that the rights and privileges of the minority are protected? Phrased another way, how can this process occur without the dominant group using its power over the minority group?

Johnson notes, I think correctly, that the ethical problems arise because of the politics of providing and evaluating services, and there is no easy, all-purpose solution. Thus, Johnson suggests that within the existing power structure the evaluators, whenever possible and feasible, give those being evaluated a bit more power: informed

consent, participation in the decision making, etc. She acknowledges, however, that such attempts will only be partly successful. One cannot evaluate another and also protect fully the other's rights and privileges.

A rather radical but straightforward solution to these problems would be to give minorities power. If a group has power it can no longer be called a "minority" group, it would not need special services, there would be no dominant group to supply such services, and if evaluations were needed the group could evaluate itself (as, for example, is done in the U.S. Senate or at any university).

Unfortunately, dominant groups attempt to retain their power; they do not give it away. Unless a revolution occurs there will continue to be minority groups who will need and want services, the providers of such services will demand that they be provided in a cost-effective manner, evaluation will occur, and ethical problems will remain.

Another solution would be to change the focus of evaluation research. Specifically, evaluation researchers might evaluate the more powerful, dominant group instead of the victims of power abuse. The evaluators might consider some of the following questions: What is it that dominant groups do that leads to ethnic minorities needing services? How effective would various changes in laws, institutions, and communication networks be in alleviating a minority group's need for special services? Such research would evaluate the source of the problem rather than their manifestations: it would seek to cure the disease rather than temporarily reduce the symptoms.

Essentially, I am suggesting that evaluation researchers, working as they now do for the dominant group, cannot overcome the ethical problems inherent in evaluation research. It is worthy to try to minimize them, as Johnson suggests, but they will remain as long as a dominant group and a minority group exist. Perhaps the most effective solution would be for evaluation researchers to work for the minority group in their study of the dominant group. Of course, there would be not funding for such research, and ethical problems would remain, but these ethical problems would be possessed by the power holders who, after all, caused the problem.

Arnold Kahn
Iowa State University

Symbolic Interaction and Black Mental Health:

Understanding Black Self-Conceptions*

Shirley Vining Brown

The widespread preoccupation with racial identity in the last two decades has been seen not only as a symptom of alienation but also as a move by racial minorities to recapture what has been called a "surrendered identity."[1] This corrective action has its place in the historical evolution of American race relations but, at the same time, it has a price.

The subtitle "Understanding Black Self-Conceptions" is presented here in the broadest sense. That is, in order to understand individuals who differ racially one must also understand them as a collective group. To this end, I have chosen a symbolic interaction perspective to discuss the formation of individual and collective self-conceptions of black Americans as explained by George Herbert Mead's general paradigm and reference group theory.

The following discussion represents several years of thinking about the symbolic nature of the economic, cultural, political, spatial, and social separateness of American racial groups and how the interrelatedness of these phenomena define, shape, and affect the self-esteem of racial minorites.

Formation of Individual Self-Conceptions

George Mead[2] tells us that an individual's self-concept is a social structure which emerges from social experiences and is formed by the definitions made by others. These definitions become important in the formation of the self-concept through the process of perception—that is, the awareness or understanding of how others define and respond to us (taking the role of the other). This human capacity to engage in reflective thinking or "minded" behavior not only enables people to interpret their social world but also enables them to make everyday judgements that guide behavior.

*Accepted for publication June 30, 1980.

Significant symbols (language, gestures, and so on) play an important part in the perceptual process and it is through these media that we develop common understandings which allow us to respond to others on the basis of their intended meaning. These common understandings affect our perceptions of others, our responses (behavior) toward others, and ultimately our self-concepts. The interactional process, however, is not one-way but interdependent. Thus, Mead can be interpreted as saying we affect others as much as they affect us.

If individual self-concepts are formed on the basis of definitions made by others, the same idea has been extended to explain the identity of racial collectives in the writings of black sociologists who have examined American race relations.[3] In his book on race and marginal men and women, Charles V. Willie points out that: ". . .no group, black or white can confirm its own identity. A group, like a person, may engage in self-affirmation but must be *confirmed* by another (emphasis mine).[4]

Who are the others defining black people? What are these definitions? What effect do the definitions made by others have on the mental and social conditions of black Americans? The concept of the reference group partly renders these questions answerable.

Reference Groups and the Collective Black Self-Concept

Mead would refer to a reference group as those significant others whose composite roles and attitudes are acquired through social interaction to form the generalized other part of the self. However, the concept of the reference group has been defined variably in the literature.

Hyman[5] defines the reference group as a point of comparing one's own status; Merton and Kit[6] define it as a group to which one aspires. a third definition characterizes the reference group as a group whose perspective provides a frame work for those outside the group.[7] All three definitions have relevance and application to black Americans who possibly have three distinct referents: respectively, these are the American mainstream (a group to which they aspire); middle-class perspectives (a group whose perspectives they assume); and the black community (a group with whom they compare themselves). The first and second of these reflect white culture and are conceptualized

here as psychological phenomena rather than objectively extant groups of people. That is, blacks as a minority in a white culture are defined by that culture and, more often than not, see themselves through the eyes of white culture; these definitions are mediated directly and indirectly by means of the two white referents as well as the black reference group.

The American Mainstream

The American mainstream has always been the group to which all racial and ethnic minorities in America have aspired. However, the American mainstream primarily symbolizes the exclusion of racial minorities and includes middle and upper-income white Americans who are economically, politically and socially free to make important life choices: free to choose better residential locations, better health care, and better employment opportunities. This freedom is even extended to defining who is acceptable and who is not acceptable to the mainstream in-group. Lieberson and Carter's[8] comparison of black and white ethnic pathways to national prominence reveals interesting differences in the degree to which these groups have been able to move into the national mainstream. While national prominence is not at issue here, the disparities they report are indicative of not only the residual effects of legal segregation, but the extent to which these effects have blocked the mobility of many blacks who wish to move into the American mainstream. The evidence symbolizing exclusion on the basis of skin color is legion: continued discrimination in employment; education, public accomodation; and political participation at all levels of government. A word about each of these should suffice.

According to Herbert Hill, former NAACP national labor director, black people in 1977 constituted over 30 percent of those living in poverty. This economic situation can be directly traced to the high rate of unemployment among blacks, which was more than 2.3 times that of whites in the first half of 1978.[9] Even when gainfully employed, labor market processes operate to systematically allocate blacks, relative to whites, to less rewarding labor positions.[10] Indeed, the income gap which separates the typical black family from the typical white family grew larger in the 1970s.[11]

The National Assessment of Educational Progress in 1974 reports that black performance is consistently below the national average in the sciences, reading, and mathematics and, daily, blacks are confronted with news about white resistence to "forced bussing" into black neighborhoods. The message communicated by these reports and resistance to bussing are threefold: 1) the quality of education provided for black students is inferior to that provided for white students in schools that are better equipped and better staffed in suburban neighborhoods; 2) many Americans believe that heredity rather than quality of education explains racial differences in student performance; and 3) many Americans believe that integrated education will cause a decline in the ability and performance standards of white children. Despite evidence to the contrary, the fallacy of the latter two perceptions, in addition to the very real problem of inferior education, combine to make salient the low esteem in which blacks are held by many white Americans.

Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination in public accommodations, middle and upper class blacks are still made very aware that their presence is unwelcomed in exclusive clubs and restaurants, even in the nation's capital. Moreover, redlining and steering are still common practices in the real estate and mortgage lending industries, which has maintained housing segregation at pre-1965 levels. A recent television documentary examining the progress of blacks in America since 1954 revealed that the gerrymandering of election districts is still currently used in states such as Mississippi to minimize black voting strength and thereby dilute black political power. These barriers not only effectively exclude blacks and other racial minorities from the American mainstream, they symbolically communicate the intended meaning that racial minorities of all classes hold an inferior position in American society and are valued accordingly.

Middle-Class Perspectives

The American mainsteam influences and is influenced by white middle-class perspectives. Social definitions mediated by means of these perspectives are powerful determinants of a group's collective identity. By and large, the social definitions made on the basis of color are negative. To wit, the concepts of the black matriarchy, father-absent families, culturally deprived, underprivileged, and urban blight are terms that have common currency among the definitions

that have been used to characterize blacks and their culture. For many Americans with neither exposure nor understanding of black intragroup differences, these definitions apply to the entire group, notwithstanding class differences. Middle-class belief systems are transmitted by various media and ultimately work their way into all major American institutions. Television programming is a prime example. Racial minorities are generally "invisible" or "absent" on American television, and when present, they are symbolized as subserviant, silly, poor, unintelligent, criminal and invariably produced in father-absent matriarchal families.

These distortions not only misrepresent the stability, strength, and close bonds of one-parent, extended and other variant forms of black family life,[12] but also misrepresent the lifestyles of sixty-one percent of American black families that adhere to the traditional nuclear two-parent family structure.

Visual media that portray distorted views of racial minorities are critical socializing agents and make a decisive impact during the earliest years of personality development. A recent magazine advertisement purchased by the black-owned Communications Alliance illustrates this point. It shows a small black boy looking into a mirror and imagining himself as a white superman. The picture is captioned, "What's wrong with this picture?" and follows with the answer "plenty if the child is black and can't imagine a hero the same color he or she is." This subtle, symbolic denial of black identity has produced what DuBois called the inaudible Negro and what Ellison[13] referred to as invisibility and facelessness among American blacks. Willie's statement on the idea of "nobodyness" is cogent:

> Identity. . .is a social process in which there is a negotiation between what people think themselves to be and what others believe them to be. The negotiating process is continuous, sometimes painful, sometimes pleasant. The anonymous people of this world, often referred to as invisible, are those *who withdraw or who are pushed out of the negotiating process.* They suffer a loss of identity, either because they no longer affirm their personal significance or *because others refuse to recognize their social worth* (emphasis mine).[14]

The notion of "invisibility" applies to institutions other than the television industry. For example, except for specialized courses in specialized departments, educational curricula at all levels exclude racial minority content. For economic as well as possibly racially motivated reasons, movie and book publishing industries follow suit. The point to be made is that the absence of racial content places conditions of worth on the ascribed characteristic of skin color and perniciously denies positive definitions of black existence and culture.

Clearly, when the norm of black absence is inextricably accepted, promoted, and maintained across institutions, the interpretations and indications made by blacks and whites are the same: black people as a group are devalued or ignored in American culture. In the past, most whites and many blacks accepted these definitions. For whites, the effect was to elevate a sense of self in comparison to blacks. For blacks, the effect resulted in self-definitions that were often negative in connotation.

The Black Community

Blacks, as the comparison group for other blacks, are not exempt from the pernicious process described above. Because of coercion under slavery and reluctant but passive acceptance under legalized discrimination, many black Americans have internalized and communicated negative definitions of blackness that are acquired from the dominant reference group. As Billingsley puts it. . . "We have been brainwashed by the sea of whiteness which surrounds us and defines us."[15]

A recent article pointing out sociologist Robert Hill's view on this point illustrates the tenacity of these internalized conceptions:

> "We're so oriented to looking at what is wrong—emphasizing negative pathologies and dysfunctions. But, it is very important for us to be aware of and build on concepts that are positive to ourselves." Hill's concern with the "erroneous type of information as pertains to blacks" — particularly since blacks were believing some of these things led him to develop a report in 1971 on the strengths of black families.[16]

Similarly, Erickson notes that

> The Negro, of course, is only the most flagrant case of an American minority which by the pressure of tradition and the limitation of opportunity is forced to identify with its own evil identity fragments, thus jeopardizing whatever participation in American identity it may have earned.[17]

Thus, this taking the role of the other (the dominant group) is mediated by blacks to other blacks in other ways: returning to hair style preferences that were characterized as "white" in the 1960s and 1970s is just one example.

Certainly the high incidence of black on black crime implies intragroup dynamics that are not positive. Although the frustration-aggression hypotheses has been used to explain this phenomenon, black on black crime is also viewed as a form of self-hatred among American blacks.[18]

To point out, however, the negative consequences of poverty and racial discrimination is not to say they have gone unchallenged or have adversely affected all black people. Many black Americans have been able to develop positive self-concepts even though they directly and indirectly encounter adverse racial conditions. The ability to use support systems and to channel racial pressures constructively have enabled most blacks to enhance and maintain a high level of self-esteem. Indeed, Robert Hill is representative of a cadre of black Americans who have made in-roads into the process of recapturing the "surrendered identity" of black people and their culture. Nevertheless, for a sizable proportion of the black population, the adverse effects of symbolic racism may be more real than apparent as shown in their disproportionate representation in the following statistics on mental health disorders.

Possible Effects on Black Mental Health

Although precise cause has not been determined, discriminatory practices have been suggested as key factors—if not the most important ones—in the etiology of mental disorders of blacks and other racial minorities.[19] Moreover, it is suggested that racism is an important factor in determining the quality of clinical services that are rendered to these groups.

The question of differential diagnosis is always a problem in determining the validity of data on psychiatric disorders. However, certain trends do appear by race in mental health statistics. Briefly, a few are described below.

Institutionalization and Specific Disorders

Institutionalization: The Report of the Special Population Sub-panel on Mental Health of Black Americans summarizes current governmental, epidemiological and social research data on the institutional status of black Americans. Among the findings, the data show that:

— Black adults are under the care of a variety of institutions. In 1970, the rates of institutionalized persons per 100,000 population were 1412.7 for blacks compared to 1004.3 for whites.

— Between 1950 and 1970, the rate of institutionalization for blacks increased, but decreased for whites.

— Black males (particularly in the 18-34 years of age range) consistently show the highest rates of mental disorder based on state hospital data (See Table 1).

— Black admissions to mental institutions are less likely to be voluntary, and blacks are less likely to be committed by relatives.

— Not only are blacks more likely to be in mental institutions than whites, but they are twice as likely to suffer fatal consequences from psychotic and neurotic disorders.

— The type of treatment blacks receive in mental health agencies is different from that received by whites: Diagnoses are less accurate for blacks; disposition of black cases is more nonspecific; blacks are more likely to be seen for diagnostic purposes; and blacks are less likely to be selected for insight-oriented therapy than whites.[20]

The sub-panel attributes these findings to the stressful living conditions that many black Americans endure in a culture where racism erodes their capacity to cope with illness and psychic stress.

Schizophrenia: Schizophrenia, a major public mental health problem, comprises a major proportion of the admissions to in- and out-patient psychiatric facilities in the United States. Studies examining the rates for this disorder generally have found that rates for non-whites (blacks being the largest proportion in this group) were higher than those of white admissions. While reported diagnostic rates should be viewed with caution, Cannon and Locke[21] report that among women diagnosed as schizophrenic in 1975, the rates per 100,000 population were 118.2 for black females compared to 42.8 for white females. A study of Bahn, et al.[22] found that non-white rates for admissions diagnosed as schizophrenic were about as high as the rate for white admissions in Maryland. These racial statistics are not surprising considering the general character of schizophrenia. This personality disorder is described as a personality pattern of persons whose life style demonstrates limited flexibility and are unable to establish stable reciprical relationships with the environment. Further, schizophrenia is a longstanding condition that may deteriorate under stress. The lifestyles of many lower-income or unemployed black Americans produce conditions that could lead to emotional problems that fit this characterization.

Alcoholism: Alcoholism is another national mental health problem. A 1969 nationwide survey revealed that thirty percent of all non-white male admissions to public mental hospitals could be attributed to alcoholism. Non-whites were two times (fifteen percent) more likely than whites (seven percent) to be diagnosed and admitted for alcoholism on an out-patient basis. Limited research on the drinking patterns among blacks reveal that middle-class blacks almost universally use alcohol as an outlet, are heavy drinkers (compared to their white middle-class counterparts), and often have social problems that are related to alcoholism.[23] The inference here is that black drinking patterns are more related to social conditions than those seen for white drinkers. McNeill clearly points to racial pressures as a casual factor by suggesting that black drinking patterns "are those of discomfort i.e., a minority group member competing with a majority group in any culture will suffer strains and pressures for which alcohol can be a temporary remedy."[24] Thus, alcohol abuse among blacks is seen as a way of coping with the pain of racial prejudice and discrimination. McNeill believes that heavy drinking reinforces racial stereotypes among whites; among

black drinkers, it is seen as an act of defiance or self-destruction. As a final outcome, death from alcoholism is three times greater for blacks than for whites who drink.[25]

Drug Abuse: Using an index adjusted for age, sex, and race, Rosen and Goldberg's[26] study found that non-white males were three to four times more likely to be admitted to treatment for drug abuse than any other sex or race category. Again, the index for non-whites was particularly higher for those using public mental hospitals and out-patient facilities. It is estimated that over half of the addicted population is black, Mexican, or Puerto Rican and live in the inner city of large metropolitan areas.[27]

Suicide: Suicide, once thought to be a white problem, certainly has a psychiatric basis and is increasing at an alarming rate among black urban adolescents and young adults. Although many causes are cited, sociologists believe that intolerable social conditions are the major cause of suicide which is a reaction to stressful life conditions that are often associated with feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness.[28]

Even diseases (ulcers, hypertension) with physical manifestations have psychological and emotional causes. Although diet and heredity have been indicated as factors in hypertension (a disease disproportionately represented in black health statistics), it is not unreasonable to assume that symbolic stressors encountered in a racially defined society play an important part in this disorder as well.

The foregoing are just a few of the adverse effects that may be partly attributed to societal pressures that are racially induced. However, we are cautioned by Kramer, et al. that further investigations are needed to trace the etiology of mental disorders:

> . . .investigations of the role of racism in the distribution of mental disorders require data on the incidence and duration of specific disorders and the way racist practices affect these indices. But this is no simple matter. Investigations of incidents of mental disorders are difficult to carry out not only because of the problems of case-finding and differential diagnosis but also because of difficulties in establishing date of onset.[29]

Notwithstanding the methodological problems of researching the effects of racism on the mental health of blacks, the nature of many mental health disorders can be characterized in one word—escapism. It is particularly interesting that the reported rates for disorders imply that avoidance—schizophrenia, alcoholism and drug abuse—are generally higher for non-white than for white groups. These higher rates among non-whites suggest that the dynamics of the disorders may be permutations in the tendency for some marginal people to become "invisible" and "withdraw" from the oppression and non-recognition that they perceive from the larger society.

Concluding Remarks

The discussion presented in this paper is not intended to explain or suggest a definitive casual relation between racism and psychodynamically induced human conduct. At the same time, our present state of knowledge about the etiology of neurotic and psychotic behaviors is so limited that suggestions to the contrary (e.g., socially induced behaviors) cannot be ignored.

Emotional difficulties in personality development have long been cited as a product of faulty interpersonal relationships. However, despite improvements in American race relations, the persistence of various forms of inequality communicate the meaning of resistence to improved economic and status attainment for racial minority populations. In Meadian terminology, these are significant symbols that have a shared meaning for all races and are destructive in their outcomes. Moreover, since prejudice has been found to be correlated with various psychopathic disorders,[30] there is a message here for the majority population as well. By maximizing their own identity at the expense of minority populations, the majority population may, in essence, be truncating their own identity and could very well be creating the same problems for themselves as they may have for minority out-groups.

If the foregoing analysis has any enduring value, it is because the salience of these symbols and their meanings have been presented to raise questions about these phenomena. The article is designed to inspire further explorations into the causal relation between racially defined situations and the present state of mental health of blacks and other racial minorities in this country.

Table 1

Age Specific and Age Adjusted Rates per 100,000 Population of Inpatient Admissions to State and County Mental Hospitals by Race, Sex and Age, 1965

	White			Black		
Age on Admission	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Total admission	296,151,	190,788	105,363	83,367	53,646	29,721
All Ages	161.1	214.2	111.2	344.2	469.5	232.2
Under 18 yrs.	31.6	39.3	23.6	77.8	103.1	52.2
18-24 yrs.	234.0	343.9	129.4	539,6	892.1	241.8
25-44 yrs.	270.2	349.3	194.2	688.3	1032.7	406.3
45-64 yrs.	213.4	276.0	155.7	414.2	414.2	413.9
65 yrs.	85.3	130.9	54.0	171.9	210.8	143.7
Median age	35.2	43.3	37.3	32.1	30.0	38.0
Age adjusted rates*	159.7	213.2	110.0	367.3	509.4	248.5

Adjustment based on distribution of U.S. Civilian Population July 1, 1975.

Source: NIMH, Division of Biometry and Epidemiology — unpublished data.

Notes

[1]Erik H. Erikson. "The Concept of Identity." *Daedalus.* Vol. 95, No. 1 (Winter, 1966) 145-171.

[2]Charles Morris, ed. *Mind, Self and Society.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).

[3]Charles V. Willie. *Oreo.* (Wakefield, Mass.: Parameter Press, Inc., 1975); also see W.E.B. DuBois. *Dusk of Dawn.* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1940).

[4]Willie, Op. cit., 29.

[5]H.H. Hyman. "The Psychology of Status." *Archives of Psychology.* Vol. 37, No. 269 (1942) 94.

[6]Robert Merton and Kitt A. Merton. "Contributions to the Theory of Reference Group Behavior." *Studies in the Scope and Method of "The American Soldier."* R.K. Merton and P.F. Lazarsfeld, eds. (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950).

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[8]Stanley Leiberson and Donna Carter. "Making It In America." *American Sociological Review.* Vol. 44, No. 33 (1979) 347-366.

[9]Patricia Abers. "Steps Towards Economic Literacy." *The Crisis.* Vol. 87, No. 1, Whole Number 768 (January, 1980) 18.

[10]Thomas Daymont and Robert Kaufman. "Industrial Variation in Black - White Differences in Labor Market Allocation Process." A Paper Presented at the *Research Symposium on Social Indicators of Institutional Racism-Sexism.* (Los Angeles, California, 1977).

[11]Reynolds Farley. "Racial Progress in the Last Two Decades: What Can Be Determined About Who Benefitted and Why." A Paper Presented at the 1979 *Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association.* (Boston, Mass., 1979).

[12]Andrew Billingsley. *Black Families in White America.* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.,).

[13]Ralph Ellison. *Invisible Man.* (New York: Randon House, 1947).

[14]Willie. Op. cit., 27.

[15]Billingsley. Op. cit., 10.

[16]Carol Krucoff. "Middle-Class Notions of Structure Seen as Wedge Among Blacks." *The Washington Post.* No. 343, Sec. B-1 (Washington, D.C., 1979).

[17]Erik H. Erikson. *Childhood and Society.* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co. Inc., 1963) 244.

[18]"Black on Black Crime." *Ebony.* Vol. 34, No. 10 (August, 1979) 25.

[19]Morton Kramer, Beatrice Rosen, and Ernest Willis. "Definitions and Distributions of Mental Disorders in a Racist Society." *Racism and Mental Health.* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973).

[20]*The President's Commission on Mental Health,* The Report of the Special Population Sub-Panel on Mental Health of Black Americans, (1978) 101-106.

[21]M.S. Cannon and B.Z. Locke. "Being Black is Detrimental to One's Mental Health: Myth or Reality?" *Phylon.* Vol. 38, No. 4 (December, 1977) 408-428.

[22]A.K. Bahn, E.A. Gardner, L. Alltop, G.L. Knatterud, and M. Solomon. "Admissions and Prevalence Rates for Psychiatric Facilities in Four Register Areas." *American Journal of Public Health.* Vol. 56, No. 12 (December, 1966) 2033-2051.

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[24]Eliot B. McNeil. *Neuroses and Personality Disorders.* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970) 135.

[25]S.R. Levitan et al. *Minorities in the United States: Problems, Progress, and Prospects.* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1975).

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[27]McNeil. Op. cit., 44.

[28]James Comer. "Black Suicide: A Hidden Crisis." *Urban Health.* (1973).

[29]Kramer, Rosen, and Willis. Op. cit., 439.

[30]Thomas Pettigrew. "Racism and the Mental Health of White Americans." *Racism and Mental Health.* B. Kramer and B. Brown, eds. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973).

Critique

Shirley Vining Brown's "Symbolic Interaction and Black Mental Health: Understanding Black Self Conceptions" presents significant and vital information concerning the effects of negative self-concepts on black Americans. The most interesting aspect of the paper is the development of the concept of "negative belief systems." She posits the belief that others, especially white psychologists and sociologists, are the defining agents of Black Culture, ethnicity, and identity. That is, blacks who believe these negative constructs experience mental health disorders: drug addiction, schizophrenia, alcoholism, and hypertension are examples. Buried negative beliefs about "self," in accordance with social injustices in economics and politics, provide the framework for black mental health problems. Negative beliefs about "self," according to Brown, are evidenced by increased black mental health disorders.

Brown's essay is enlightening as she unfolds the dilemma: blacks are systematically reinforced with negative self concepts and they are denied adequate coping mechanisms for handling negative beliefs which result in significant "mental disorders." Her paper lays the basic groundwork for focusing the problems. However, Brown fails to provide solutions for the problems she illustrates.

Blacks need to define themselves. In defining themselves, blacks must formulate concepts which are useful to themselves; blacks must take responsibility for their own realities. A positive belief system might be one method for eradicating negative beliefs perpetrated by white psychologists and sociologists. For example, an avenue open for exploration is the methods used to train psychologists and psychiatrists. The criteria used in most training programs for defining mental health problems is based on a "white" or monocultural model. Exploring mental health *within a black* cultural framework, better yet, within a multicultural framework, would increase the awareness of those trained in mental health services for understanding what a mental health problem is from a variety of perspectives. Mental health agents need to understand that categories which are normally used for "white" mental health disorders are unsuitable for blacks.

The possibilities are endless. The ideas presented in this critique provide further areas for exploring solutions to the problem Brown has addressed. Shirley Vining Brown has focused the problem, but she needs to explore viable solutions for the black Americans who have negative self images.

Barbara Hiura
Sacramento, CA

Critique

Aside from the intrinsic merit of Dr. Shirley V. Brown's "Symbolic Interaction and Black Mental Health,. . ." the paper raises several important corollary issues that need extensive investigation: (1) the effects of one's self-concept upon how he or she views others; (2) the negligible effects of affirmative action programs; (3) the adverse effects of public school integration on blacks; (4) the validity of the assumption that schools in predominantly black neighborhoods are inherently inferior; and (5) the insidious notion that mainstreaming is both possible and desirable.

Probably all too few people realize that the images which they have of others are, in a large measure, the images which they have of themselves. The images that we have of ourselves and others are not independent but rather dependent. It is totally impossible for one to feel good about others without having a positive self-image. For

example, when a black, in despair, talks about the achievements of whites, often expressed in that all-encompassing cliche "a white would do it this way," he is not being althogether complimentary for he realizes that whites have made it impossible for him to "do it that way."

A thorough evaluation of the Affirmative Action Program will probably prove that it is one of the most offensive jokes perpetrated upon blacks. The attrition rate among black students is very high at many predominantly white institutions which have vigorously recruited these students to keep the federal dollars flowing in. Moreover, with a scarcity of jobs, many professors at these institutions are reluctant to graduate minority students who, because of the alleged intent of the Affirmative Action Program, might have an edge on their own children or friends in getting a job. In brief, affirmation is not to be confused with confirmation.

Far too few people realize that, while nothing is so constant as change, change is not always progress. Blacks once believed that integration of the public school was the key to all kinds of opportunities—educational, social, political, and economic. On the contrary, two adverse patterns have clearly emerged. Many white teachers, in regard to the black child, have adopted an attitude which sounds something like this: "The federal government says that you have to be here; but it can't make me teach you." The other pattern is that the staff (faculty and administrators) in most school districts are becoming progressively whiter. Black people are now singing (to the tune of the nursery rhyme "O Where, O Where Has My Little Dog Gone?"): "O Where, o where, have the jobs gone? O where, o where can they be? We have looked around and they can't be found. O where, o where can they be?" Gone are the jobs; gone are the black role-models.

The assumption that schools in predominantly black neighborhoods are inherently inferior because they lack sophisticated equipment and are "poorly" staffed needs extensive evaluation. In many cases, sophisticated audio-visual equipment is used not as a reinforcement of, but as a substitute for, teaching. Did not the teachers in the predominantly black neighborhoods have to meet the same standards for certification as those in the more affluent neighborhoods? Are there not other factors operative in the poor performance of black students? How about the apathy which results from deprivation of all kinds?

Mainstreaming can be taken to an extreme. As Julian Mayfield puts it, "into the mainstream, into oblivion." Only in diversity are there both health and strength . Moreover, the pigmentation of blacks obviates their being melted into that mythical American melting pot.

Jimmy L. Williams
North Carolina A & T State University

The Roles of Ethnic Theater in Immigrant Communities in the United States 1850-1930*

Maxine S. Seller

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries millions of Europeans left their homes to form immigrant communities in the United States. Much of the literature about those immigrant communities focuses upon problems such as their ecomonic hardships, prejudices against them, and their difficulties adjusting to an unfamiliar environment. It is equally important, however, to study the strengths of these communities, their rich internal life, and the institutions that expressed and sustained that life. One of the most significant and least studied of these institutions was the foreign language, or ethnic, theater.

Springing from widely varying historical, cultural, and theatrical traditions, foreign language theater varied in style and content from one immigrant community to another and even within a single community. This paper focuses upon what these many theaters had in common, the roles they played in the lives of European immigrants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For people who were sometimes illiterate, usually poor, and often lonely, ethnic theater played three vital roles: it educated, it entertained, and it provided a focus for social and community life.

The Nature and Scope of Ethnic Theater

As large, identifiable immigrant communities made their appearance in nineteenth century America, ethnic theater also made its appearance. Professional German theater operated in New Orleans and New York before 1840 and in the towns and villages of the midwest soon after.[1] Norwegian and Swedish theater in Chicago dates back to the mid-nineteenth century.[2] Though large scale Polish immigration did not begin until the 1880s, by 1890 Polish theater was performing not only in urban centers such as New York, Detroit, Chicago, and Buffalo, but also in smaller communities such as Winona, Minnesota and Arcadia, New York.[3]

Ethnic theaters were as varied as the communities that produced them. Informal "clubs" met to discuss the theater and to read and sometimes to write plays. Amateur groups gave occasional or regular performances under a variety of sponsorships, including musical and

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literary societies, athletic groups, lodges, settlement houses, churches, labor unions, socialist societies, nationalist societies, temperance societies, women's clubs, charitable societies, youth groups, public and parochial schools, and universities. In addition, the Finns, Germans, Poles, Jews, Italians, and other European groups (as well as the Chinese and Japanese on the West Coast) supported commercial theaters with professional actors, directors, and playwrights.

Amateur or professional, ethnic theaters had many problems. Actors, directors, and playwrights quarreled among themselves. Serving poor communities, ethnic theaters were always plagued by lack of money. Often they faced opposition from their own countrymen. The Augustana Synod of the Lutheran Church condemned Swedish theater as worldly and sinful.[4] A committee of assimilated German Jews tried to block the opening of immigrant Yiddish theater in New York in 1882 because they were afraid it would evoke antisemitism. "Go out into the country and become peddlers," the committee advised, "Find decent work and don't bring shame upon your people with this foolery you call theatre."[5]

There were other problems. During one of many "Indian Wars," Native Americans burned a German theater in New Ulm, Minnesota in 1862;[6] more permanent damage resulted from nationwide anti-German boycotts during World War I.[7] Ethnic theaters were harassed by the police for violating the Blue Laws; Sundays were favorite days for theater in many immigrant communities. Influenced perhaps by stereotypes of foreigners as dangerous radicals, police closed a Polish play about the assassination of Alexander II because of a rumor that a "live dynamite bomb" would be exploded.[8]

Despite these and other problems, ethnic theaters flourished, reaching a substantial portion of the immigrant community during their peak years in the early decades of the twentieth century. Countless amateur groups played for themselves or for audiences of various sizes in church basements, barns, social halls, and living rooms. Professional companies were imported from the homeland or developed from among the amateur talent within the immigrant community. These companies performed weekly, daily, sometimes twice a day in handsome, well equipped structures such as the Finnish Socialist Hall in Astoria, Oregon[9] or the (Italian) Washington Square Theater in San Francisco[10] for audiences of hundreds or even thousands. Individuals who could afford to do so traveled hundreds of miles to see special performances,[11] and traveling companies brought theater to communities too small or too isolated to support their own.

For many immigrants, theater was not an occasional indulgence or a frill; it was a necessity. People who worked fourteen or more hours a day, six days a week in mills, mines, or sweatshops spent their few precious hours of leisure attending ethnic theater, acting in it, or writing for it. Jewish garment workers in the Lower East Side of New York City went without meals to buy tickets to the theaters on Second Avenue, the "Yiddish Broadway."

Members of some ethnic groups brought their love of theater with them from the old country. Many Finns, for example, had seen productions of the Finnish National Theater before immigration and staffed their American theaters with professional actors and directors trained in the homeland. South Italians brought with them a sophisticated knowledge of opera and of regional folk comedy, the traditional Commedia dell'arte. No group were more ardent supporters of theater than East European Jews, however; but for most of them theater was a new experience. Yiddish theater made its first formal appearance in Eastern Europe in 1876, only six years before its introduction into New York City.[12]

In coming to the United States, immigrants cut themselves off from many of the institutions, traditions, and companions that had met a wide range of intellectual, emotional, and social needs in the old world. In the new world they had to develop new ways to meet these needs.[13] Herein lay the increased importance of theater. Ethnic theater helped provide education, entertainment, and social life for immigrants whose needs in these areas could not be met by mainstream Anglo-American life.

Theater as Education

One of the major roles of ethnic theater was education. Though immigrants in general had a higher educational level than their counterparts who stayed at home, many were poorly educated, not only in English but even in their native languages. Deprived of opportunities to learn about their own culture because of poverty, isolation, or political oppression, these people were hungry for exposure to their own language, history, and literature.[14] Ethnic theater provided this exposure.

Ethnic theater made history, literature, and folklore of the homeland accessible to the literate and illiterate alike and gave the American-born children at least some contact with the culture of their foreign-born parents. Yiddish theater presented dramas about Biblical and medieval heroes and about contemporary persecutions;

Swedish theater told of peasant uprisings against Danish rule and of Gustavus Adolphus and the Thirty Years War; German theater dramatized the exploits of Frederick the Great.[15] Polish theaters presented so many plays on historical and national themes that a nationalistic Polish journalist praised them as "the schools of patriotism."[16] Plays based upon legends and folklore as well as history were common in all ethnic theaters and were popular in professional as well as amateur productions.

Many ethnic theaters presented the classics of theatrical traditions other than their own, as well as the best of contemporary theater from all over the world in translation or in special adaptions. Shakespeare was performed in Yiddish, German, Swedish, and Italian. German theaters presented a variety of classics as well as the works of modern German dramatists such as Gerhart Hauptmann and Frank Wedekind. Italian theater goers in San Fransisco saw not only a complete range of operas, but also the works of Dumas, Goethe, Sudermann and Verne. The most cosmopolitan ethnic theater of all was the Yiddish theater of New York, which introduced its audience to Moliere, Schiller, Goethe, Tolstoy, Groki, Sudermann, Hauptmann, Ibsen, Strindberg, Molnar, and Shaw, as well as to a variety of Yiddish playwrights such as Jacob Gordin, Leon Kobrin, and Sholom Asch.[17]

An important facet of the educational role of ethnic theater was its role in Americanization. Plays adopted and translated from the American stage introduced immigrants to many aspects of mainstream American culture. The Finnish theater of Astoria plunged its socialist supporters into the Anglo-Saxon version of "how the west was won" by presenting Finnish language "cowboy and Indian" productions.[18] American movies became part of the regular offerings at many theaters, including the Italian "nickelodeons" of San Francisco.

Ethnic theater taught immigrants the classical vocabulary of their own language (many spoke regional dialects when they migrated), but it also introduced English in a visual context that promoted understanding. Skits or special productions were occasionally performed in English. Often English expressions slipped almost unnoticed into the later scripts, reflecting the changes in the language of immigrants who were becoming Americanized and stimulating such change among the more recent arrivals.

Finally, the educational role of ethnic theater included exposing immigrants to sophisticated dramatic examinations of the social

problems of the day. In this area, ethnic theater was far ahead of Broadway. For example, in 1896 the Irving Place German Theater presented Hauptmann's *The Weavers,* a graphic portrayal of a labor uprising in Silesia and its brutal suppression; the play was not presented to the English speaking public until 1915. Politically progressive Germans, Jews, Swedes, Finns and Hungarians formed special theater groups in which they used the works of Shaw, Ibsen, Strindberg and others, as well as original plays, to explore temperance, pacifism, the problems of the aged, the class struggle, and the status of women.

While plays incorporating political ideologies appeared in the repertory of many immigrant theaters, no group used the theater for political education more consciously, more extensively, and more effectively than the radical Finns. By the turn of the century socialism had become widespread in Finland as the symbol of resistance to foreign domination and economic oppression. In the United States, Finnish radicals led strikes in the iron and copper mines, embraced the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), socialism and communism, and organized a cooperative movement of 50,000 members.[19] Theater was central to the Finnish critique of capitalist society; indeed, socialist halls in Finnish communities were built "as theaters first and as meeting places only incidentally."[20] Proletarian plays produced in the halls, including such titles as *Women on Strike, Red Army Maneuvers, Solidarity Helps, Factory Girl, Banished from America,* and *Difficulties of a Farm Home,* indicting the capitalist system for oppressing workers by denying them education and culture as well as bread. A catalogue of scripts issued by the Finnish Workers Federation Dramatic League in 1922 even included a political play for children, *The Price of Coal,* by Helmk Mattson, editor of an IWW journal for women.[21] Plays written specifically to disseminate political ideology were less popular with audiences, however, than the more traditional folk plays, musicals, and classics which composed the majority of the repertory, even among the radical Finnish theaters.

The "woman question," like the class struggle, was explored in the ethnic theater. Ibsen's controversial drama, *A Doll's House,* played in German, Swedish, Finnish and Yiddish. The first Polish play in Chicago produced in 1873 was Teofilia Samolinska's *The Emancipation of Women.* Yiddish playwright Jacob Gordin wrote dramas such as *Minna* and *Without A Home* which, though not consciously feminist, were sensitive and sympathetic portrayals of the problems of immigrant women.

Theater as Entertainment

One reason for limited popularity of overtly ideological plays, socialist or feminist, was that most immigrants, like most other theater goers, were looking first and foremost for entertainment. Immigrants were more likely than other theater goers to lead lives constricted by poverty and by the ugliness of the urban slum. They came to the theater for excitement, diversion and glamour. Ethnic theater met the immigrants' need for pageantry and excitement.

> "I do not go to the theater to think but to forget," wrote a Jewish immigrant who called himself 'the average theater goer.' "I seek there to forget my wife, the children, the crowded tenement, the littered wash, the bad ventilation. . .I want to see men dressed in armor or in the costumes of wealthy sheperds who wear silk chemises. . .On the women I love to see as much exposed as possible because you see I have already been married many years to my own wife. . .when I am in Thomashevsky's theater and I see on the stage a beautiful room with expensive furniture and chandeliers. . .I pretend that the well-to-do Thomashevsky has invited me to his house and is showing off his wealth to me. . .I am just a poor fellow. . .and all this costs me but half a dollar. Isn't it worth it?"[22]

Various Slavic theaters featured colorful traditional costumes, horses pranced across the Yiddish stage, and Swedish companies treated their audiences to elaborate folk tableaux complete with dancing and singing and realistic representations of battles, seiges, and processions. Pageantry filled a need for the actor as well as the audience. "He who but yesterday earned his bread with a shovel today dons a royal robe and crown, if at least for a moment, to become the prompter's dugout,"[23] wrote an observer of Polish amateur theater.

On virtually every ethnic stage vaudeville revues—song, dance, short skits, farce, and various forms of comedy from the slap-stick to the sophisticated—were immensely popular. Popular too, among audiences if not among critics, were "formula plays" about everyday life in the new country or the old. In these plays stock characters—the cruel husband, the unfaithful wife, the deaf servant, the marriage broker—were put through their paces. Audiences were delighted when the rapacious landlord was outwitted by the wiley peasant, true loved triumphed over all obstacles, and the hero was victorious and the scoundrel defeated, because their own lives were often marred by problems they could not solve and injustices they were powerless to correct. As one theater goer put it, "When I see how the villain is finally punished in the fourth act and the hero is rewarded, I am

touched to the heart because. . .I am a very honest man, but my neighbor is a. . . good-for-nothing."[24]

One of the most popular subjects for comedy on virtually every ethnic stage was the newly arrived immigrant, the greenhorn, who made ridiculous mistakes and was victimized by his own countrymen as well as by the native-born American. These comedies were popular because they allowed immigrants to measure their own progress against that of the greenhorn on the stage and rejoice in how far they had come. These comedies also provided ample opportunity to satirize the immigrant community itself—the boarding house proprietor, the saloon keeper, the self-serving politician, the entire social structure, as well as to criticize the hypocrisy and corruption in mainstream American life.

Tragedy as well as comedy was an important part of ethnic entertainment. Plays filled with anger, violence, passion, revenge, suicide, and murder were well received, whether they were Shakespearian or other classic tragedies or melodramas written by contemporary local playwrights. Often these plays exposed in exaggerated but recognizable form the problems familiar to the world of the immigrant. For example, Jacob Gordin's drama, *The Jewish King Lear*, showed a pious Jewish father abused and neglected by his heartless daughters, a theme close enough to reality to bring tears to the eyes of many foreign-born parents who were less than satisfied with the behavior of their Americanized children.

Tragedy as well as comedy could be comforting to the immigrant audience. At least their spouses were not as cruel as the one portrayed on the stage, their children not as heartless, their poverty not as hopeless. Tears, like laughter, provided emotional relief for people whose lives were often filled with strong emotions. Tragedy helped immigrants to express the grief they felt at having left friends and family behind. It also helped them to handle the very real problems that confronted them in the United States.

"I go to a heart-rending drama because my boss has deducted a cent-and-a-half a dozen sleeves and my heart is heavy—and I am ashamed to cry," explained a Jewish theatergoer. "Therefore when I see. . . how Hamlet holds in his hands the skull of his friend Yorick and speaks of life and death, I suddenly recall that they have deducted a cent-and-a half a dozen sleeves and I cry real tears."[25]

Tragedy or comedy, ethnic theater was more than just entertainment. By allowing immigrants to view their own problems and emotions from the relatively safe vantage point behind the

footlights, it eased the pain of the transition from the old life to the new. Equally important, it provided something safe and familiar to people who were often overburdened by the need to adjust to new conditions. By bringing to America the songs, stories, and tableaux of the homeland, ethnic theater became a cherished link with the past.

Theater as a Social Center

Ethnic theater had communal or social as well as individual dimensions. It provided a social world for actors and for audiences and helped to create and sustain the immigrant communities of which it was a part. Ethnic theater provided a close knit circle within which actors, producers, and playwrights developed lasting and rewarding relationships. Many marriages took place between "theater people," whose children often made their debuts on stage as soon as they could walk and talk.

The special social world of the theater was particularly important to immigrant intellectuals, whose lack of English cut them off from the learned professions they had pursued in the homelands and who had little in common with the majority of their working class countrymen. Such people often found rewarding careers in the ethnic theater or the ethnic press or both, as the two areas were often closely connected and mutually supportive.

The ethnic theater also provided a uniquely supportive environment for women, who were shut out of many areas of activity in the ethnic and the mainstream American communities by narrow stereotypes of "woman's place." Energetic, talented, and independent women found the theater one of the few places where they could escape traditionally subordinate and domestic roles, earn money, acquire power and prestige within their communities, travel, and adopt unconventional lifestyles that in any other environment would have led to social ostracism. Women like Teofilia Samolinska, Rosa Lemberg, Sara Adler, and Antonietta Pisanelli Alessandro won fame not only as actresses but also as successful directors, playwrights, and owners and managers of theaters.

Theater played an important social role for the audiences as well as for "theater people." Just as the lodge, the saloon, or the church did, the theater provided a place where immigrants who often lived in cramped, and dismal tenements could meet one another and enjoy being together.[26] In the Polish, Swedish, and Finish communities theater performances were usually followed by parties with music, dancing, food, beer, and other strong drink (one reason for the

opposition of conservative religious leaders). In Italian and Yiddish theaters the entire evening took on a festive atmosphere; the theater was a place for dressing in one's best clothes, courting, gossiping, quarreling, eating, joking, and nurturing friendships.

In many communities the theater was more effective than any other single institution in bringing together people of different ages and sexes, and of widely divergent, social, intellectual, and ideological backgrounds. Here the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the educated and the uneducated, the newcomer and the long time resident, the radical and the conservative could meet together and share a common experience. The theater contributed greatly toward the building of a sense of community among ethnic populations such as the east European Jews of the Lower East Side of New York City and the Italians of the North Beach area of San Francisco.

An important community institution itself, ethnic theater also helped to support other institutions within the ethnic communities. Swedish theater groups in Chicago entertained at picnics and other outings sponsored by social and cultural associations and raised money to support employment agencies, legal aid services, and other social services for the Swedish colony. Italian theater clubs in St. Louis supported parochial schools. Polish amateur theater raised money for the building of churches and schools and for relief of Poland in times of need. Yiddish theaters routinely sublet the entire "house" for benefit performances sponsored by lodges and other organizations.

In addition to strengthening the internal lives of their local communities, ethnic theaters helped forge links between those communities and the outside world. Traveling companies helped keep local ethnic communities in touch with one another and with the mother country. Sometimes theaters of different ethnic groups launched cooperative ventures; Swedish and Norwegian theater groups gave joint performances in Chicago, and Italians and Jews shared theaters in New York. Actors from the ethnic stage made occasional appearances on the American stage; Jacob Adler, for example, gave a highly praised performance of Shylock in an otherwise all English Broadway production of *The Merchant of Venice in 1903*[27] More often, observers from mainstream American life came to the ethnic theater. Sometimes their impressions were unfavorable; for example, a bigoted journalist who visited a professional Italian marionette theater in Boston in 1897 thought it "too dull to be popular, even for an Italian who has little else to do."[28] Other observers reacted favorably, especially if they approached

ethnic theater free of negative stereotypes. Many came away with admiration for the quality of the performance and with, it may be assumed, increased understanding of the culture and community of the performers.

The Decline of Ethnic Theater

The theaters of the European immigrant communities reached their peak between 1900 and 1925. After this point they declined rapidly in number, in the frequency of performances, and, according to some critics, in the quality of those performances. Although it had attracted many of the American born as well as the foreign born, ethnic theater was primarily an immigrant theater, offering inexpensive, informal entertainment in a familiar language and a convenient location. The cessation of large scale European immigration with the Natural Origins quota laws of 1924, and the increasing affluence, Americanization, and geographic dispersion of the original audiences and their children undermined the European language ethnic theater, shrinking its audience and its influence. By the mid 1920s new forms of entertainment were available. Movies and radio were becoming increasingly popular, not only with the second generation but also with their increasingly acculturated parents. Ironically, ethnic theater contributed to its own demise. By helping immigrants to learn, to cope with the stresses of cultural change, and to feel good about their heritage and themselves, it eased their entrance into main stream American life.

Ethnic theater did not suddenly and abruptly vanish. Many actors and actresses passed from the ethnic stage into mainsteam American entertainment, bringing elements of their own traditions with them. Some amateur and professional ethnic groups remained active, though on a limited scale, into mid-century and beyond. Small "art theaters," companies with an interest in artistic experimentation, in promoting social change through theater, or both, were influential in the 1930s—the Yiddish Artef theater in New York, for example, and the Swedish folk theater of Chicago. Indeed, according to Professor David Lifson, historian of the Yiddish theater, one of the main roles of Yiddish theater throughout its history in the United States was to serve as a bridge over which creative and innovative theater ideas were transmitted from the old world to the new.[29] Finally, in some ethnic communities new theater companies have formed in recent years, stimulated by the arrival of post-World War II immigrants and by the "new ethnicity" movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Immigrant theater is an important institution which has received surprisingly little systematic study. More research is needed on the personnel and literature of these theaters, their origins and development through time, their relationship to the theater traditions of their respective homelands and of the mainstream American theater, their relationship to other "minority" theaters (such as Puerto Rican, Mexican American, Asian American, black, and feminist theater) and their impact upon the lives of individuals and communities.

Notes

[1]Elbert R. Bower. "The German Theater of Early Rural Missouri." *Missouri Historical Review*. (January 1952) 157.

[2]George R. MacMenn. *The Theater of the Golden Era* in California (1941), and Henrietta C.K. Naeseth, *The Swedish Theater* in Chicago 1868-1950. (Rock Island, Ill.: Agustana Historical Society, 1951).

[3]Matthew J. Strumski. "The Beginnings of the Polish American Theater," *Polish American Studies*. Vol. IV. (1947), 31-36; (This article is mainly a translation of an essay by Karol Estreicher, "The Polish Theater Beyond the Ocean," which appeared in *Zboda*. (June 18, 1890) 6.

[4]Naseth, *ibid.* 5-6.

[5]Lulla Rosenfeld. *Bright Star of Exile: Jacob Adler and the Yiddish Theater*. (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1977), 217. See also Charles Cooper: "The Night Yiddish Theater Came to New York," *The Jewish Exponent*, (Philadelphia: April 3, 1976), 65.

[6]Hermann E. Rothfuss, "The Early German Theater in Minnesota." *Minnesota History*. Vol. 32 (June, 1951) 100-125.

[7]John Higham. *Stranger in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism: 1860-1925* (New York: 1963).

[8]Strumski. *Op. cit.FT1, 34*.

[9]*Walter Mattila, ed. The Theater Finns*, Vol. 7, No. 2. (July 1972).

[10]Laurence Estavan, ed. "San Francisco Theater Research Monographs," Vol. X, (San Francisco: Works Progress Administration, 1939). 26.

[11]Strumski. *Op. cit.*, 32.

[12]Rosenfeld. *Op.cit.*, 39.

[13]Strumski. *Op. cit.*, 36.

[14]Robert Park. *The Immigrant Press and Its Control.* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1922), 7-8.

[15]*Ibid.*, 131.

[16]Strumski. *Op. cit*, 36.

[17]Hutchins Hapgood and Lincoln Stefens considered Yiddish theater "about the best in New York at that time, both in stuff and in acting." Rosenfeld. *Op. cit.* xii. For a more specific sampling of the richness of Yiddish theater, see the lists of plays and authors in Appendices A, B, and C of David Lifson. *The Yiddish Theatre in America,* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1965). 576-594.

[18]Mattila, *Op. cit.* 53.

[19]Michael G. Karni. *"Yhteishyra" — or For the Common Good: Finnish Radicalism in the Western Great Lakes Region 1900-1940.* Ph.D Dissertation. (University of Minnesota, 1975), 115-195.

[20]Michael G. Karni. "Finnish American Theater 1900-1940" Unpublished paper. presented at the *Organization of American Historians* Annual Meeting, New York, April 14, 1978). 2.

[21]Mattila. *Op. cit*, 8.

[22]Mosche Nadir. "I, the Theater Goer," by permission of the *Big Stick* (March 1918), reprinted in Etta Block, ed. *One Act Plays from the Yiddish.* (New York: Block Publishing Company, 1929). vii-viii.

[23]Strumski. *Op. cit.*, 32.

[24]Nadir. *Op. cit.*, X.

[25]*Ibid.*, ix.

[26]For vivid descriptions of theater as a social center, see Hutchins Hapgood. *Spirit of the Ghetto: Studies of the Jewish Quarter of New*

York. (New York: Schocken, New York, 1966) 118-120. See also J.M. Scanland: "An Italian Quarter Mosaic." *Overland Monthly.* (April, 1906).

[27]Rosenfeld. *Op. cit.*, 32.

[28]Frederick O. Bushel. *Arena.* (April, 1897) as cited in Wayne Mocquin, ed. *A Documentary History of the Italian Americans* (New York, 1942). 53.

[29]David Lifson — remarks made as commentator at Panel on Ethnic Theater at the *Organization of American Historians* Annual Meeting; New York: April 14, 1978.

Critique

A major point of ambiguity in the essay on ethnic theater, namely the inexact, overly-generalized application of the term ethnic, unwittingly perpetuates a wide-spread misconception about immigrant groups and unfortunately weakens valuable observations on immigrant culture. The study reinforces the tendency to perceive groups other than one's own as homogeneous and undifferentiated.[1] Quite the opposite is true. Ethnic groups are always heterogeneous and differentiated. Simplified categorization encourages simplified interpretation; neither one can accommodate the complicated nature of immigrant activity as reported in the essay. In order to understand the remarkable diversity of goals manifested in the development of ethnic theater, the diversity of membership in an ethnic group must be appreciated. It is this diversity which stimulated the cultural awakening recorded in the survey. Ironically, the advent of thorough analyses revealing the complex nature of immigrant culture may very well have been due to the reaction precipitated by similar inadequate and ambiguous labeling in early studies of ethnic minorities.

Recent scholarship has isolated three sets of variables which influence the relationships within an ethnic group and, consequently, that group's acceptance by the host society.[2] The first—the preemigration histories of the members — includes the different geographic, educational, and economic backgrounds of the individuals, as well as their varied political, social, and cultural views. The second set refers to the immigration itself: the motivation (usually political, religious, or economic), the conditions leading to the decision to emigrate, and the intervening history. Finally, each individual within the group is affected differently by the contact

situation, which refers to the position the immigrant achieves both in the new society and within the ethnic group. Once these influential factors are recognized, it becomes clear that ethnic communities do not appear fully-evolved overnight, with an established code of values, a standard dialect, a common religion, or even a shared perception of history. Social cohesion and a common identity emerge only after considerable internal conflict and accommodation. An immigrant community develops slowly; its identity reflects diverse individuals who have gradually adjusted to one another and a new environment.

An examination of the composition of the ethnic groups mentioned in the essay would doubtlessly illuminate the reasons that the style and content of theatrical productions varied within a single community and from one community to another. The essay equates foreign language theater with ethnic theater, implying that the standard use of foreign languages in these theaters becomes the basis for the ethnic designation. Yet, ethnic theater frequently did offer productions in English. Within the wide range of theatrical presentations noted, there is no single identifying characteristic that can be considered uniquely ethnic. Logically, the institution of ethnic theater cannot be declared ethnic on the basis of language, nationality, religion, or even social status. No common denominator seems to exist. To say that a common basis is provided by the roles of the theater in immigrant communities presumes that a contextual definition has already been formulated. It has not, and we are thus led to feel that we must either accept this phenomenon on intuitive grounds, recognizing its origin in the immigrant adjustment to American culture, or dismiss it on the grounds of logic. This dilemma reconfirms the importance of understanding the composition and history of an immigrant community. The differing motivations for emigration and the diverse cultural interests represented in each group explain the apparent contradictions; they explain why both amateurs and professionals participated in theater, why immigrants as well as imported foreign companies performed, and why both newly-composed and classical materials were presented.

It is comforting to find that the confusion, the inconsistencies, and the countless variations which permeate descriptions of ethnic theater do not, as initially thought, defy efforts to define it as ethnic, but give us an authentic record of the tangled loyalties and aspirations of immigrants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The difficult and painful process of adaption and acculturation found its expression in the dynamic, protean art of theater, where every emotion could assume a shape. The rewards of

such a dramatic outpouring were certainly many for generations of immigrants. Perhaps most precious of all was a temporary freedom from the conflicts and pressures of intense role-playing in the world beyond the stage.

Zora Devrnja Zimmerman
Iowa State University

[1]Annenstasi and John P. Foley, Jr. *Differential Psychology*. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1956). 704.

[2]Djuro J. Vrga. "Adjustment vs. Assimilation: Immigrant Minority Groups and Intra-Ethnic Conflicts" in *Ethnic Groups in the City*. Otto Feinstein, ed. (Lexington, Mass: D.C Heath and Company, 1971). 40-41.

Critique

Seller's broad overview of the functions of ethnic theater in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century provides a useful compilation of information hitherto scattered throughout a variety of often obscure publications. Commenting chiefly on Scandanavian, German, and Yiddish theater, she presents a glimpse into a complicated and rich social and cultural life through which American communities of immigrants established and maintained a sense of identity with their place and culture of origin and through which life in Europe was sea-changed into a different but still distinct life in America. Seller sees three vital roles for the theater of these immigrant peoples: a tangible focus for community life, an entertainment and release from the rigors of life in city tenements and prairie towns, and a vehicle for education both of the immigrant generation and of its children. The entertainment function is hardly unique to ethnic theater, of course; circuses, whether provided by the government or the community itself, have always substituted for an insufficiency of bread. The other two functions, however, are more special to community theater (whether defined ethnically or not), and it is they that provoke the most specualation for future work in this area.

The more complex of these other vital roles is the one Seller discusses in terms of "theater as education," which she claims compensated in part for the immigrants' having been "deprived of

opportunities to learn about their own culture through poverty, isolation, or political oppression." It would seem that the rubric "education," as Seller uses it, is perhaps too encompassing for all ethnic theater, for, while second and third generations may require the somewhat artificial tutelage of drama to learn facts of their ancestors' culture, the immigrants themselves clearly need no such instruction. Culture is not a collection of physical and mental artifacts, but rather a set of perceptions, judgments, and modes of behavior which characterize a group of people. Culture, like ecology, simply is, and by definition one holds shares, willy-nilly, in the culture of one's community. We should thus expect to find differences, perhaps quite radical, between the theaters of immigrant communities made up of people with pre-immigrating connections and those of people whose interconnections were more tenuous. One end of this continuum might be represented by groups such as Scandanavians (who often transplanted virtually entire villages from the Old World to the New) or others such as Jews, with powerful nonlocal cultural ties (a common language, Yiddish, and a complex religious tradition, which provided immediate fellowship). The other end of the continuum might be represented by people such as Italians or southern Slavs (whose linguistic systems were sometimes not mutually intelligible and whose regional cultures were often very distinct). For the latter type of community (and here we perhaps should include peoples who already spoke some dialect of English, like the majority of the Irish and the English, whose theaters were equally "ethnic" and similar in function to those of non-English speakers), we may expect to find new definitions of what it meant to be an Italian, an Irishman, or a Serbian in America. (For example, we might consider here the uniquely American image of the "exiled Irishman," unable to return home to his native land—an obvious falsehood, which nonetheless was nurtured in song, fiction, and drama by immigrant Irish who wished to adduce a reason not to give up the relatively richer life in America.) For the former type of community, we may expect that the theater would be more celebratory than constitutive or "educational," for it would serve to remind the immigrants of what they had in common with each other, as well as what they shared with their Old World counterparts.

On this aspect of the celebratory nature of theater—the public acknowledgement and sharing of cultural commonalities—the theater of a closely-knit immigrant community may be comparable to that of traditional peoples who have not been split by emigration. Native American theater is a case in point. Native American dramatic art (like that of many other traditional peoples) must be defined broadly, to include the dramatic elements of many religious activities, dances, potlatch plays, as well as more recent drama superficially modeled on Euro-American theater, such as Hanay Geiogamah's

plays. Such drama, in a fundamental sense, is not the creation of an individual alone; the artist is fully embedded in the community and by that embedding acquires (often unconciously) an understanding of the principles of theater which hold for the society. Thus the community, the audience, is an integral part of the creative process before and after the fact of performance, because the performance realizes an aesthetic immanence of that society. There are several interesting results of this circumstance. Since Native American dramatic events (including those of a religious nature) do not recognize the inviolable boundary between the performer and the audience which is a characteristic of Euro-American drama, we may see little of the respect bordering on awe that Western audiences usually bestow upon drama (and always upon religion). But if Indians fail to applaud when their friends and relatives dance or otherwise demonstrate their impulse for dramatic expression, it is not from distain or disinterest; instead their quiet acceptance acknowledges an unprepossessing participation in the entire event, whose boundaries do not end at the edge of the moving circle. Further investigation of this celebratory aspect of ethnic drama may reveal socio-cultural principles by which people draw themselves together, principles that unite all small communities, whether of long tradition or not.

Ethnic theater is an exciting field for investigation. It is rich in possibilities for truly interdisciplinary work, involving the talents of historians, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, linguists, and literary critics. Seller's brief article has provided a generous sketch of a complex but intriguing dimension of human experience that awaits, and will reward, analysis in depth.

Jeffrey F. Huntsman
Indiana University

An Invisible Minority: An Examination of Migrant Education*

Margaret A. Laughlin

If one had the task of identifying the most educationally disadvantaged group of youngsters in the United States, the ones who under-perform all other groups enrolled in school, who have the highest school dropout rate, who have the lowest academic achievement level and highest number of school failures, no doubt the group readily identified would be the children of migrant agricultural families. These children face a unique set of problems. The migrant family, moving from state to state, alone or in groups, has created a unique life style reflecting the unpredictable agricultural conditions. Available statistics concerning the educational plight of migrant children are deplorable. For example, these children, if they attend school at all, enroll in an average of three different schools each school year for a total of approximately seventeen weeks of instruction. In one Texas evaluation of its migrant education program in 1968, an attempt was made to determine the percentage of migrant youth who dropped out of school prior to high school graduation. The numbers became virtually meaningless when evaluators discovered that an estimated twenty percent of all migrant children in that state never enrolled in any school at any age.[1] Nationwide, fewer than ten percent of the migrant students graduate from high school. Enrollment in higher education is rare.

Who are the migrant agricultural workers? The vast majority of migrants are people of Mexican-American, black, and Puerto Rican heritage. Children of these ethnic/racial groups already suffer deprivation and isolation. Migrant children, additionally, suffer economic, cultural, and social discrimination due to their high level of mobility and the low socio-economic status foisted upon them by the dominant society. Value conflicts are frequent and should be self-evident. Migrant children frequently become third class baggage of second-class citzens.

Survey research concerning characteristics of migrant workers in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas has identified several major characteristics of the migrant family. The survey revealed the following characteristics of the migrant workers in those states.

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1. Some 85 percent of the migrants were of Spanish American ancestry.

2. The average family consisted of six children plus other related adults.

3. Family unity is very strong.

4. The migrants tend to seek employment for the total family, including older children.

5. There are few unattached males in this population.

6. Permanent homes, where existent, are generally inadequate with much overcrowding.

7. Migrant camps range from acceptable to deplorable.

8. Educational level is very low.

9. Their subculture is not easily compatible with "accepted" values.

10. Annual income is very low.

11. Migrants are not fervent about religion. They are not blindly subordinate to the clergy.

12. The strong family unit does not extend to kin not in the immediate family.

13. Migrants are necessarily preoccupied with making a living.

14. They are very "present" time oriented.

15. Migrants tend to be very passive.

16. Contentment seems to prevail with the family unit.[2]

Migrant workers are usually hired in areas where the base of the local economy is agricultural but where the local agricultural labor supply is inadequate especially during harvest times. Major reasons for agricultural migration include the inability of the worker to secure regular employment in the home community, mechanization of

agriculture, crop allotments, soil banks, and high birth rates. The migrant has no roots, no single motivating force, and usually no specific organization to be of major assistance.

It is estimated there are at least three million agricultural workers in the United States who subsist on migrant and seasonal agricultural work. Most of these workers become part of one of the three migration "streams" with origins in California, Texas, or Florida.[3] Mexican-Americans are the dominant group in the so called "western" and "central" streams originating in California and Texas. Blacks and Puerto Ricans constitute the bulk of the "eastern" migration stream moving along the eastern seaboard northward to the New England states and Canada.

From California the migrants move to Arizona, Oregon, and Washington; from Texas migrants move either northeast through Arkansas and Mississippi to the Great Lakes region or to the northwest through New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana. In all three geographic areas, the migrants remain in the area only as long as there is productive work. Then the movement northward continues for as long as the agricultural season lasts.

Mobility patterns vary widely among the migrants. Some migrant families move only within one state and thereby become "intrastate" migrants. Those who move across state boundaries are" interstate" migrants. In addition to the three "home base" states, there are thirty-five other states where there is a substantial migrant agricultural labor force residing from three to six months each year. Migrants are commonly employed for shorter time periods in ten other states.

Children of migrant workers are particularly victimized by these conditions. Migrants are unable to take advantage of basic institutional social services available to most people residing in the United States, including opportunities for elementary and secondary education for their children. Migrant children are almost completely excluded from mainstream educational programs. Because of the mobility of the family, these children are withdrawn from school in order to accompany the family's annual work trek northward. The children may or may not be enrolled or reenrolled in another school in the new work location; usually they do not and their education is again interrupted. Without education, these children are not afforded the opportunity to break out of the migrant agricultural pattern of their parents.

With increasing mechanization in agriculture and the reduction of the number of migrant agricultural workers, the need for education and technical training for migrant youth becomes more vital each passing agricultural season. With less agricultural work available it is a matter of personal survival and economic necessity that children of agricultural workers find employment outside agriculture. Of necessity this means these children need to adjust to a different lifestyle and environment. The need for migrants to learn basic survival skills should be obvious. The opportunities, however, may be lacking. The migrant's cultural uniqueness is being challenged by agricultural pressures and the demands of a technological society.

Only within the last decade and a half has there been a national commitment to improve the educational opportunities of migrant children. For example, in the decade of the 1930s religious organizations, e.g., the National Friends Society, National Council of Churches, and the Catholic Rural Life Conference, provided services to the migrant families by sponsoring part time summer schools and day care centers. During the 1940s and 1950s federal and state agencies began to become concerned with problems faced by migrants. However, Federal funding for migrants was not available until the 1960s. In 1962 Congress passed the Migrant Health Act which provided health care to migrants; in 1962 Congress funded the Economic Opportunity Act (Title III-B) to assist migrant families with day care centers, health and nutritional care, minimum standard housing and vocational training. Finally, Congress provided categorical aid to provide special educational services for migrant children under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.[4] The latter two legislative actions were part of the "War on Poverty." As federal support for migrants has increased, so has the number of children serviced by the federally mandated programs.

Congress, through Title I ESEA funding, clearly understands that the education of migrant children is important and a problem of interstate and national concern. There are, however, no uniform procedures for assessing the needs of migrant children. Extensive coordination of efforts between states is lacking. Program planning seems to be done locally and for the most part seems to fit local district needs and priorities rather than concentrating on the special educational needs of the migrant student. Evaluation of migrant programs remains a problem. The uniform Migrant Student Record Transfer system housed in Arkansas does not fully solve the problem since these records reflect a hodgepodge of needs assessments and program evaluation, rather than learning achieved. Furthermore, such records may not have current data as there seems to be some laxity among school personnel in recording and forwarding such

information.

To implement migrant education programs authorized under ESEA Title I, states and school districts are required to design programs to meet the educational needs of both current and former migrant students (students who have been migrants in the preceeding five years). Audits of selected Title I programs indicate that districts in some instances were using these special funds for general aid or regular educational services. Misuse of funds may be attributed partly to local district personnel who assume little responsibility for educating migrant children whose parents are transitory, who do not vote or pay taxes in the district and who are only in school for part of the academic year.

The challenge of securing an education for the migrant student is formidable. Migrant children may be in school at most four or five months of the school year. Crop vacations (schools closing to allow local students to help harvest crops) further reduce the opportunity for migrant children to enroll in local schools. Migrant children are usually over age for their respective grade level; they live in a limited cultural environment; and they are unreached by usual teaching strategies. Language skills in either Spanish or English are lacking. For example, in Oklahoma it was found that only one-third of the migrant adults were able to read and write English and that fewer than one half could read and write Spanish although this was their primary language. The adults had developed a linguistic code (colloquialisms) to maintain social relationships. This code, however, was not suited for sharing familiar experiences and opinions, for analysis and careful reasoning, for dealing with hypothetical situations beyond the present, or for dealing with complex or abstract thoughts.[5] The parents' limited communication skills handicapped their children's communication skills and speech development patterns and further hindered their children's learning opportunities.

What steps have been taken to assist in the educational process for migrants? Efforts vary from state to state. The quality of the program depends on available resources, personnel, learning activities, and so forth. The number of students reached varies considerably depending upon geographic location of the educational facilities in relation to the migrant camp, camp facilities, parental cooperation, efforts to recruit students, and programs offered.

The establishment of day care centers at or near camp sites is an important component in educational and social services available to migrant children. In general, day care centers, operating for children

under five years of age, provide academic training and opportunities for social participation. Providing health and dental care and establishing sound nutrition habits are considered integral to the day care program. In many instances parents support the day care program as a vehicle to help their children gain basic learning and social skills needed for success in regular schools. However, some parents view the day care programs as a means to allow them to work in the fields without being hindered by leaving younger children at home alone or in the care of older siblings or even locked in cars.

Usual activities in day care centers include language development activities, field trips, physical exercise, listening skills, nutrition breaks, medical/dental check-ups, and rest periods. For the migrant children with regular attendance teachers frequently note growth in social skills, self esteem, and self-concept stemming from the learning activities in day care programs.

Once the migrant child has reached school age the ideal would be regular attendance in the local school. This, however, is an unreal expectation. Short term summer school or summer programs have been established by various states and school districts to help meet the presumed needs of migrant youth. A wide variety of programs exist. The focus at this level remains on language development, including English as a second language and reading skills. Field trips create additional motivation for learning. Mathematics, science, and social science receive less attention or focus in most existing programs. Individual or small group instruction is usually the dominate mode of instruction. Usually weekly learning themes are developed for an integrated curriculum approach to learning. This approach has been selected to allow for maximum student learning and success with school oriented tasks.

Visits to the migrant camps by the teachers encourages parents to help their children learn. These visits often help parents to overcome their own previous negative experiences related to education. Most migrant parents did not complete elementary school. Parental attitudes concerning education and views of society are conveyed to the children. Educational attainment is not usually a high priority for the migrant family. School attendance declines as migrant youths become older. They fall further behind academically and become more frustrated. Education for the secondary student becomes even more of a problem and challenge. School districts with secondary programs usually develop some type of learn/earn program to enable

the secondary student to learn basic skills, to earn money, and to gain job-related experience in a field other than agriculture. Health education and career orientation are usually included in these programs.

Efforts to measure achievement levels of migrant students systematically are usually invalid because of student absence during the testing periods, difficulty in obtaining meaningful pre/post test results, inability of the testers to speak the language of the children, and the difficulty in establishing test rapport. It is known that many migrant students lack facility with the English language and the level of their basic academic skill achievement is typically two to four years behind grade level expectation based on chronological age. This may mean that several children of different ages from the same family may be assigned to the same grade if and when they are enrolled in school. In addition, these children generally are faced with severe health and dental problems due to inadequate diet and poor health care. Malnutrition is common among migrant students.

The average yearly income of a migrant family is approximately $3,000, well below the poverty level. This economic condition contributes to non-attendance at school. Migrant children frequently do not have sufficent clothing or the proper clothing for school. Brothers and sisters frequently share clothes and shoes which may result in the children taking turns attending school — hardly conducive to continuity in learning. School fees required in some districts may also present economic burdens to the family.

At all levels of education regular attendance for continuity of learning is a major problem. As migrant children become isolated from their classmates both socially and intellectually, they grow to resent school and view it as an unpleasant place of failure. Dropouts are usual. With state after state imposing minimum competencies for high school graduation it can be assumed that fewer migrant students will become high school graduates and able to withdraw from the migrant cycle of work. The cycle of illiteracy and poverty will continue for the migrant.

Schools frequently perceive the educational programs for migrant children as temporal and have responded accordingly. For example, physical facilities may be inadequate, curriculum materials and supplies may be lacking or entirely inappropriate. Migrant children using materials developed for white English-speaking children will

find these materials and methods irrelevant — culturally, linguistically, economically, and perceptually. Many times migrant children are encouraged to disregard their cultural heritage and self-esteem. Existing curricula have built-in continuity and sequence and presume certain prerequisite skills have been mastered. For the migrant child, the assumed prerequisite skills may not have been mastered. The migrant child is forced to move from unknown to less known rather than from known to unknown.

In some school settings migrant children are segregated from the rest of the student body and have only limited, if any, contact with the resident children. In some districts migrant children were assigned to an extended day program lasting two hours after the regular school day. Migrant children saw the resident children leaving school at three o'clock and interpreted the added school hours, more of the same, as punishment for being a migrant. Many times teachers assigned to migrant children classrooms do not meet the highest professional standards, have limited cultural sensitivity to the migrant child, and view their culture, language, work, and instability in a negative manner.[6] Thus a negative self-image becomes reality for migrant children.

An earlier California survey of eighty administrators of schools serving migrant children reported the following as serious problems related to the education of migrant children. The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of respondents identifying a particular problem.

1. Migrancy itself including such areas of concern as the mobility of the children themselves, loss of school days, irregular attendance, lack of continuity in learning, the need of the children to frequently adjust to strange groups, new teachers and new environments. (39)

2. Low student achievement in virtually all areas of study (20)

3. Record keeping problems related to recording achievement and learning activities. (19)

4. Finding the achievement levels, assigning children to the proper class and grade was complicated due to differences in curriculum, grading and reporting practices in the various states. (15)

5. Real or perceived indifference of parents regarding the welfare of their children. (13)

6. Problems of health and cleanliness. (13)

7. Lack of proper food and/or clothing. (13)

8. Poor housing coupled with a general background of social and cultural deprivation. (12)

9. Lack of emotional stability, interest and purpose coupled with a poor social adjustment and low morale on the part of students (16).

10. Need for English-as-a-second-language instruction. (11)

11. Need to have sufficient books and materials for the children. (5)

12. Attendance problems related with the need for children to work for added family income.

13. Irregular school attendance because a low average daily attendance count reduced the amount of funding available to the district. (2)

14. Entrance of migrant children to classes disturbs the morale of the teachers and children of a school or district who are the permanent residents of in the area. (3)

15. Increased class size with the arrival of migrant children. (1)

16. Increase in the need to have an adequate supply of credentialed teachers available to meet increased enrollments when migrant children enroll in local schools. (1)

17. Housing for teachers would assist in the recruitment of teachers to serve the migrant students. (1)[7]

Migrant children do poorly because they are mobile, poor, culturally, and linguistically different. These characteristics are perceived as negative by society, and are expressed by the schools and easily experienced and learned by the child. Until there is a comprehensive change in educational practices this segment of our society will be denied equal educational opportunity and the opportunity for a better life.

A sense of urgency is needed to help improve the educational opportunities of an invisible minority. Old attitudes of indifference and negativism on the part of schools must be eliminated. New opportunities and practices must be developed. Schools are not the only institutions which do not respond to the special needs of migrants. Other social institutions contribute to the problems of migrant workers and their families. Efforts to alleviate their plight have been unsuccessful because of efforts to extend a system incompatible with the characteristics of a migrant. Traditional attempts to provide more of the same have not been successful. *Equal treatment does not constitute equality of educational opportunity.* Schools can meet the special needs of these children through adaptability, comprehensiveness, and resources. Revamping needs to take place in institutional philosophies, administrative policies, scope and sequence, curriculum, extra-curricular activities, staffing, student personnel services, non-instructional needs, community involvement, and evaluation. Educational responses must be comprehensive to be meaningful and relevant.

Notes

[1]Jose A. Cardenas. "Education and the Children of Migrant Farm Workers: An Overview." *Inequality in Education*; (Cambridge: Center for Law and Education, Harvard University, June, 1976).

[2]James O. Schnur. *A Synthesis of Current Research in Migrant Education* (Las Cruces, New Mexico: ERIC/CRESS, 1970).

[3]"Selected Farm Wage Worker Households and National Farm Worker Programs." *Economic Research Service*. (Department of Agriculture, Washington D.C., 1975).

[4]42 U.S.C. 24th and 42 U.S.C. 2861 et. seq.

[5]Schnur. *Op. cit.*

[6]Cardenas. *Op. cit.*

[7]Afton Dill Nance. *Migrant Children in California Schools: A 1961 Survey of School serving Children of Seasonal Farm Workers.* (Sacramento: State Department of Education, 1961). ERIC 002 611.

Critique

"An Invisible Minority" is a well-written, sensitive, and on the whole, accurate article which could have been written a decade ago. I am reminded by it of an astronomer who periodically releases to the press a statement outlining the difference between astronomy and astrology as a professional obligation. So too, people need to be reminded of the terrible toll extracted from migrant worker families.

Often when severe societal problems are identified two institutions are targeted for blame and reform—the family and the schools. The private reforms began at least twenty-five years ago with the schools and some family services, leading to the modest public effort so well illustrated by Laughlin.

There have been some positive results from the various programs over the years which are not the subject of this article but which I think are significant enough for mention. First, large numbers of migrants and their advocates have learned how to gain access to the social welfare system. Second, many migrant programs have provided employment to migrants themselves. One result of these two factors has been that more migrants are settling in communities away from their home-base area.

In my opinion, however, both the causes and direction of permanent solutions to the migrant family's plight are not to be found in the familial and educational settings. The basic reason for the problem has been the policy, both indirect and overt, of subsidizing the cost of food for the urban population at the expense of the rural sector. This wealth transfer has been the cornerstone of American industrial growth. The process began with the opening of the Great Plains in the nineteenth century, accelerated with the massive mechanization of agriculture during the Great Depression, and it continues even more rapidly with the substitution of machines for labor. An examination of priorities by people concerned about the migrant family should keep in mind that farm labor was excluded from the National Labor Relations Act from the beginning in 1935. This pattern of priority continues today.

The technological fix of mechanizing agriculture solves the basic social problem of feeding the growing population and more recently pays for massive imports of petroleum. A crisis point is rapidly appproaching, however, as the economic balance of labor versus machines is tilting to more labor in the field. A re-ordering of economic and political priorities must be accomplished using the

broader perspective outlined above in conjunction with the knowledge and experience chronicled so well by Laughlin.

Dennis Stewart
Rubicon Programs, Inc.

Wiesel's Memoir and God outside Auschwitz*

Mildred L. Culp

Night records Elie Wiesel's internment at Auschwitz, and it raises questions about God's and humanity's respective roles in the death camps. Today's literary critics and theologians, however, highlight Wiesel's gift for story-telling of his theology and miss the quality of the writer's individual works. Tending to group all of the author's Holocaust stories to illuminate a particular theme, they have failed to recognize that Wiesel's theology in *Night* is manifest only when they perceive "that there is meaning in [it, which] comes only when the elements that go up to make that thing" appear in their relatedness.[1] They do not see that Wiesel's text is a memoir rather than a short story or autobiography, and that the meaning of *Night* is that God makes the conscious choice of turning away from the world when humanity assumes God's role in it.[2] This essay will prove that the book is a memoir rather than an autobiography and, through textual analysis, that Wiesel believes God was inoperative at Auschwitz.

A brief note on Wiesel's attitude toward the Holocaust suggests why *Night* merits examination as an autobiographical act written from a theological perspective. Recently, Wiesel observed that he remains incredulous about his experiences at Auschwitz: "I do not believe it. The event seems unreal, as if it occurred on a different planet."[3] Clearly, the author is concerned with the meaning behind the crucial event in his life, and *Night* reflects his attempt to achieve some degree of understanding. Thus, the book deserves to be analyzed as a testimonial to its author's personal experience in a theologically confusing world.

In a recent book, Karl Weintraub observes that autobiography "is written from a specific retrospective point of view, the place at which the author stands in relation to his cumulative experience when he puts interpretive meaning on his past."[4] When *Night* opens with its remarks about Moche the Beadle, it seems to be a very simple story. But by the third paragraph Wiesel is telling the reader that his acquaintanceship with the curious man began in the closing months of 1941, when the narrator was a devout Jew. The book promises to examine the narrator's religious beliefs[5] through the medium of art. Wiesel works through the particular to reach the abstract; he recounts history to achieve universal truth. He promises insight into "the nature of our own selves and our share in the human condition."[6]

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As autobiographical literature *Night* reflects what Roy Pascal calls '*Selbstbesinnung,*' a search for one's inner standing."[7] Wiesel's tale is an attempt to analyze history until it "partakes of the recurrence of myth."[8] In fact, the author is participating in ritual by reopening communication with the past and with literary form. Published in 1958, *Night* is Wiesel's first book, which suggests that the writer perceived a somewhat metaphysical urge to understand a past rooted in the events of the Holocaust. Its narrator tries to formulate a philosophy based on that experience. *Night* is a memoir and a *Bildungsroman* centering on the religious awakening of an already religious boy of fifteen. While the term "memoir" has carried with it connotations of informality[9] in this case it has been chosen to reflect serious purposes. The book is a type of autobiographical writing, but not an autobiography, which is slanted toward the individual. Wiesel's memoir moves beyond personal considerations to critical theological issues arising in an irrational universe. The author recognizes that "religion. . .involves a complex of emotions and relationships and an energetic principle of living."[10] Wiesel's special gift is the ability to synthesize the powers of observer artist and historian theologian.

As a record of Jewish life under Hitler's regime, *Night* has been misread as providing evidence that God has broken the covenant with the Jews. But textual evidence reveals that humanity's betrayal of God leads to unprecedented banality and emptiness. Because the Holocaust is an attack on humanity by humanity, Wiesel's record necessitates "that luminous patterning of which the artist alone is capable. . .to show us what is significantly human in the destruction of six million people."[11] Textual analysis reveals that humanity has created the evil of the Holocaust by trying to play God.

Wiesel is not concerned primarily with the political issues precipitating the Holocaust or the physical suffering of the Jews. His attention rests squarely on fundamental questions of the human spirit when human beings decide, like God, who will live and who will die. The author's focus is Eliezer, the martyr/hero whose name begins with the prefix "El," the Hebrew word for God, and how unmitigated suffering robs him of his previous belief. *Night* is a spiritual dialectic addressing God's effacement and the dilemma of living when one has confronted ultimate evil and has had to survive without divine intervention. In part, it is Wiesel's Kaddish to his spiritual infancy and the victims of the Holocaust.

Night tells the compelling story of the Holocaust as only art can. It is at once historical and beyond history. A memorial to the dead, it is a living reminder of the need to reflect upon history for the insights it bequeathes the present. But it is told in the form of a story, which

suggests to the reader that Wiesel values art for its ability to find ultimate meaning. To personalize that story, he juxtaposes the Holocaust with a child's recollection of his experiences and creates "a curious blend of beauty and suffering."[12] The author's use of the first-person narrative makes his material even more immediate. This technique of memoir also transforms history into an organizing principle for form.[13] The "I" organizes the form of *Night* and, finally, becomes its form.

Wiesel is in dialogue first with the "I" creating the memoir and then with the events of history that lead to a theology. The second dialogue proves more interesting than the first, but too many critics alight on it only briefly and bypass formal considerations. If Wiesel's "message" were intended to be expressed without the aid of metaphor, the author would have exchanged the memoir for an essay or for historical analysis. The autobiographical writing suggests that Wiesel believed his self-actualization could be communicated best through the medium of art. Therefore, it is formal considerations to which we must turn.

Wiesel uses the tools of the consummate artist. Evidence of his technique appears throughout the narrative in comic incongruity, irony, temporal changes, symbolism, imagery, and appropriation of the *Bildungsroman*. While none of these can be separated from Wiesel's theology, the last is completely bound up in it. Comic scenes are created to magnify the tragic quality of the story. As if to underscore the seriousness of his subject, the writer refers to the wish of the Jews of Sighet that Passover end, "so that we should not have to play this comedy any longer."[14] Passover, therefore, has turned into a religious celebration that is completely out of place. Later, after Eliezer is permitted to keep his pair of new mudcoated shoes, he thanks God for "having created mud in his infinite and wonderful universe." (p. 48)[15] Under normal conditions, God is not usually exalted for the mud of the earth, and the universe of *Night* is not "wonderful."

In a world where comedy is incongruous, brutality transforms human beings. Just before the liberating Russian army arrives, for example, the prisoners dress in layers for the evacuation. Wiesel comments, "Poor mountebanks, wider than they were tall, more dead than alive; poor clowns, their ghostlike faces emerging from piles of prison clothes. Buffoons!" (p. 94) This scene is a reminder of the early incident in which the thinnest prisoner swims in his uniform, and the heaviest one is barely covered. But the reader does not laugh at this comedy, because the writer is recounting the life of suffering in a world where reasonable expectations are confounded and where

human responsibility has been abandoned. The boy's world is dreamlike and must be shared through the story-telling impulse: "it was like a page torn form some story book." (p. 26)

If the reader misses the significance of the incongruity, Wiesel adopts irony as a stylistic device to communicate the irrationality of the concentration camp experience. The Jews of Sighet, crammed into a box car travelling to Auschwitz in the spring of 1944, have never heard the name of their destination. In fact, the group is so oblivious to its fate that it believes what it is told: "There was a labor camp. Conditions were good. Families would not be split up. . . We gave thanks to God."(p. 37) The ultimate irony, thanking God at Auschwitz. Every sentence is clipped and matter-of-fact. Wiesel's genius is clear in his ability to keep the reader as aware of the deception in the "facts" as the Jews are taken in by them.

Irony strikes the reader once again on Yom Kippur, when the starving Jews debate whether they should fast. Some of the prisoners believe that challenging the danger inherent in observing the holiday under the circumstances of the concentration camp would impress God as devout.[16] In this incident "the absurd[emerges as] the breakdown of the accustomed order in God's world, the dissolution of a long established relationship between man and God."[17]

A third narrative device involves changing the shape of the dimension of time. *Night* itself denies temporality the character it usually assumes by repeating history and creating a perspective which shows the author within history and outside of it simultaneously. For the Jews, though, the present alone has meaning, because it is the abnormality, the very brutality of that present with which they must contend in order to survive. From this standpoint, the future and past lose their meaning. This is particularly noticeable in Eliezer's repeated comments about the inactive memories of the prisoners, and the reader's perception that the boy wonders only occasionally what happened to his mother and Tzipora, his little sister.

More particularly, however, the narrator leaps out of his story by presenting an analogous incident which occurred after the camp experience but reinforces its universal qualities. First the author establishes the dreamlike nature of the world by disclosing that Elizer's senses are blurred when he arrives at Buchenwald. The transtemporal qualities of the Holocaust are disclosed in three specific incidents. The first occurs when Eliezer's father expresses minimal concern for having to wear the yellow star: "The yellow star?

Oh, well, what of it? You don't die of it." Wiesel's aside, "(Poor Father! Of what then did you die?)" (p. 20) comes from the present but speaks of oppression against the Jews throughout history.

The second scene is Eliezer's beating by Idek. The child's blood runs and a French girl, who is passing as Aryan and does not speak with other prisoners, tries to comfort him. Although Eliezer is uncertain of the girl's background, the act reinforces his sense of her Jewishness. Wiesel then moves directly to his chance meeting with her on the Metro in Paris many years after the war. The significance of the meeting reflects that "the solidarity of Jewish people is based on the simplest and most courageous of human acts: the coummunication of one Jew to another that he is a Jew, and thus shares his identity."[18] When the woman affirms their common heritage, the writer attests to the transtemporal dimension of the affirmation.

A more arresting episode occurs during deportation as the Russian front closes. When a German workman throws a piece of bread into the wagon, a boy, like a ravenous wolf, kills his father over the food. And then he is killed by the other men.

But the author demonstrates that the significance of the incident is not isolated to the Holocaust, because he shifts to an experience in Aden some years later. In this particular scene some passengers on a pleasure boat are amused by the reactions of "natives," to whom they are throwing coins. When Wiesel sees two children on the verge of killing each other over some money, he asks a wealthy Parisienne to stop tossing coins overboard. She responds indifferently that she enjoys giving "to...charity." (p. 112) Each of these events illustrates Wiesel's perception that the experience and meaning behind the Holocaust are not confined to the concentration camp alone.

Wiesel's command of symbolism permeates his book. The symbols suggest death, evil, and insight. Each assumes a significance beyond itself and keys the reader into the main theme of the memoir, which is the opening of Eliezer's—and the reader's—eyes to God's dissociation from the events of Auschwitz. Indeed, the symbols in *Night* come to suggest that when humanity assumes responsibility for the Jews or any other group of people, God faces the death of God's creation and therefore moves outside of it.

Death imagery pervades the personal record, and symbols of life are transformed into symbols of death. Before leaving Sighet, for example, the townspeople are shadows whose lives are being drained. They are the goods of the market place, a commodity whose humanity is denied by the events of the Holocaust. In fact, the faded

portraits symbolize the Jews of Sighet whose value has disappeared. Thereafter, the Jews are "dried-up trees, dried-up bodies, numbers, cattle or merchandise, rags, starved stomach[s]." (pp. 47, 74, 63) Depersonalized and dehumanized, they are closest to death when, like the narrator's father struck down by dysentery, they become ghosts.

Even religious symbols hint of death. Altogether, these reflect the Jews' very real concern for their once vital faith. The world of Sighet becomes "an open tomb" (p. 27) leading to death. In such a place there are numerous travesties made upon Judaism. Hitler's agents choose the Sabbath to deport the Jews and the synagogue to detain them. This synagogue the deportees must profane by relieving themselves in it. Then at Birkenau, someone faced with the prospect of dying in the crematorium begins to recite the Kaddish. Wiesel observes poignantly, "I do not know if it has ever happened before, in the long history of the Jews, that people have recited the prayer for the dead for themselves." (p. 43)

Wiesel's imagery is most effective when it illuminates the omnipresence of evil through images and symbols of darkness and light. As in most literature, night stands for evil or death, but here light is distorted to mean the same. Fiery stars foreshadow the crematory ovens. Eliezer asks if his experience is not a nightmare and comes to realize that a series of nights, one "last night" after another, will introduce him to evil. Here he describes the first:

> Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. . . .Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. . . .even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never. (p. 44)

This passage in *Night* incorporates many of the important images used by Wiesel and provides insight into his theology. It shows how the prisoner's days are converted into nights which darken their souls, but that God exists. It makes the light of the furnace satanic, because the furnace stands as a mockery of the candles lighted on the anniversary deaths of loved ones. In fact, the word "furnace" is meaningful as a reflection of the atrocity inflicted upon the Jews. As one theologian has observed, A fire lit by men with the purpose of consuming men strikes at the very heart of creation,"[19] because this

is a world overseen by humanity—not God.

Eyes, Wiesel's most frequently used symbol, direct the reader to the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. In one moving scene, while a little boy called "a sad-eyed angel" (p. 75) is dying an agonizing death symbolic of the cosmic tragedy Wiesel recounts, the prisoners are forced to march in front of him and look directly into his eyes. Theologically, this is one of the must crucial sections of the memoir. Many readers have concluded that the incident symbolizes the death of God, when actually a close reading of *Night* suggests the slow destruction of a tortured child with refined and beautiful features as an act of humanity. When Eliezer says his own eyes are open to a world without God or humanity, he is speaking of Hitler's world. He remains above the bestiality of that world only through the act of reflecting upon it.

The concept of vision is abstracted by three prophets, Moche the Beadle and Madame Schachter, who are the seers capable of providing advance warning to the Jews, and Akiba Drumer, who appears to be a false prophet. The first two are victimized for their appearance of insanity. Moche is cast out; Madame Schachter, labeled insane. The mystic who has cabbalistic dreams of the deliverance of the Jews finds a verse in the Bible which may be interpreted to mean that his people will be saved within two weeks. Then the selection determines his fate. Wiesel's message is clear: medieval Jewish mysticism is irrelevant in the concentration camp, because the God of this tradition is not operative there.

Wiesel even enlists the aid of his reader's eyes when his characters may be unable to comprehend the significance of certain relationships. The orphaned Czech brothers who "lived, body and soul, for each other" (p. 61) are virtually inseparable. A rabbi and his son struggle to maintain eye contact. In particular, Eliezer's relationship with his father establishes a new covenant,[20] and the two remain within the sight of each other whenever possible. All of these reflect the author's perception of "the crucial" importance of human relationships in the camps,"[21] which lend stability by affirming the importance of the human community in an inhumane world. They also show that God's covenant with God's people is still very much alive.

Still, the hero's perspective on God changes as the boy fights to survive when Nazism assumes God's dominion over the creation. Young Eliezer's spiritual journey is, theologically and literarily, the most interesting part of the memoir. It is central to Wiesel's theology and as such merits analysis. In the beginning, the child is twelve and

an ardent student of the Talmud. At night he goes to the synagogue and weeps "over the destruction of the Temple. . .because of something inside me that felt the need for tears." (pp. 12-13) Eliezer's very being finds expression in prayer. It is an instinctive act, like living and breathing. On his way to the ghetto, he experiences his first hatred toward human beings as "the first of the faces of hell and death" (p. 29) that is, as the creators and perpetrators of an evil world. But he remains able to pray to God for help.

Upon arriving at Birkenau, the child is incredulous at the burning of people and children—and the world's silence at such atrocity. As the *Kaddish* is being recited, he expresses his questioning: if the lord of the Universe is silent, why should he offer thanks to such a ruler? Eliezer's childhood God is murdered that first night: "A dark flame had entered into my soul and devoured it." (p. 47)

Eliezer denounces God on the eve of Yom Kippur by asking, rhetorically, the meaning of God's greatness amid the dying Holocaust vicitims. He refuses to bless God, because doing so would signify blessing the One who permits the crematorium to consume the Jews. The hero's religious position has not matured completely. Remembering that he was once a a mystic who believed that his prayer could save the world, Eliezer decides that humankind is stronger than a God who cannot be understood: "I was the accuser, God the accused. My eyes were open and I was alone — terribly alone in a *world without God* and without man." (p. 79) Nazism perverts the traditional relationship of God and humanity. On Yom Kippur the boy feels a void after eating, but refusing to fast is his rebellion and protest toward the now forsaken God of his childhood. After all, the child views the camp experience as a Calvary, where sensitive people like Akiba Drumer lose their faith.[22]

The main character's spiritual change progresses when Eliezer begins to see himself "as two (separate) entities— my body and me." (p. 97) This distinction reflects the boy's rejection of the Jewish belief in the unity of flesh and spirit. Marching away from Auschwitz, the child toys with the idea of dying because of death's immunity from physical and spiritual suffering. In a final attempt to make contact with God, he prays to the God he has denounced for strength to protect his father from death. His insincerity is punished by the just God of his childhood, who presides over the son's silent appeal to "get rid of the dead weight." (p. 118) Eliezer is shamed by his own words, and the covenant remains.

Overcome by the evil he encounters, Eliezer is transfixed on two different occasions by his father's being beaten but, like the God of

Aushwitz, is silent. When the prisoners make an effort to sing more Hasidic melodies, speak of God's mysterious ways and the sins of the Jews and their future deliverance, Eliezer announces that he has already stopped praying. He knows the God of Israel will not hear him. He identifies with the tormented Job and does "not deny God's existence, but I doubted His absolute Justice." (p. 56) In transition spiritually, the boy nevertheless believes that God is present.

As Eliezer's father is dying, the son does not respond to a last cry for water and, even in his duplicity, feels free. Transformed spiritually, Eliezer lacks the continued guidance of his traditional God. When he sees himself in the mirror, Eliezer confronts a face marked by death. Stylistically, this scene reitierates the boy's initiation into the death of a once familiar world and thus convolutes the outcome of the *Bildungsroman*.[23]

These incidents reveal Wiesel's perspective on the God of Auschwitz. The memoirist does not deny God's existence: he actually affirms it. We have already seen in the first night experience that Wiesel believes God will always be alive. In fact, Wiesel implies that his God exists *outside* Auschwitz, but not within it, because the Holocaust is not God's creation. God is not ineffective or weak, as Thomas Idinopulos charges, and the Holocaust does not prove that God rules badly.[24]

Moreover, Wiesel is not stating forthrightly that God is unjust. Instead, he asserts that God's justice *may not be* (this is different from "isn't") absolute. It is not certain, not necessarily perfect or relative; it may not be ultimate. The eyes of the narrator come to see the concentration camp as a lonely world in which God's justice is not the ruling force.

At one point the prisoners cry simultaneously in all the cars without "knowing against whom we cried. Not knowing why." (p. 115) The men have joined in the acknowledgement of Holocaust victims and the God who stands outside the Holocaust. Wiesel does not pretend to understand Auschwitz here, except as a product of human evil. And in fact, it is precisely at this point that his memoir fascinates us, for it "demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure."[25] The author does not, he cannot explain the relationship between humanity and God that existed there. Nine years after *Night* was published, he said that "the Holocaust. . . can be explained neither with God nor without Him."[26] Wiesel is not speaking of an immoral or weak God. He avoids such value judgments. As an observer, he records God's conscious inoperativeness in the hell which is the Holocaust. Amid the brutality and suffering the writer

"achieves pathos because his aim is not to shock the mind but rather to convey, through feeling, moral and spiritual knowledge."[27] The world Eliezer perceives is one in which humanity rules, and Wiesel says there are no answers to the questions of what kind of paradoxical God he portrays. This theological position has not changed, for Wiesel asserted recently:

> Those experiences of which I try to speak have no answers, should have no answers. I'm afraid of anyone who comes with a theory, a system, based on that experience. . . I believe the experience was above and beyond theories and systems and philosophies.[28]

In the end, the recollection of that suffering and its translation into *Night* become at once a *Kaddish* to concentration camp victims and an act of faith toward the God who stood outside Auschwitz. Through memoir, Ellie Wiesel invites a communal response to human evil, when humanity creates a structure empowering itself to act like God.

Notes

[1]James Olney. *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) 30-31.

[2]This contrasts with a remark of Hamida Bosmajian, who suggests that Eliezer believes that the withdrawal is defensive. See Hamida Bosmajian. *Metaphors of Evil: Contemporary German Literature and the Shadow of Nazism.* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1979).

[3]Lawrence L. Langer. *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). 78.

[4]Karl Joachim Weintraub. *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 18.

[5]One critic attributes a specifically religious quality to the autobiography when he observes that "all. . . formulations and facts of religious belief, [sic] are founded deep in autobiography." Olney. 49.

[6]Ibid. 7.

[7]Roy Pascal. *Design and Truth in Autobiography.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) 182.

[8]Mutlu Konuk Blasing. *The Art of Life: Studies in American Autobiographical Literature*. (Austin: University of Texas, 1977) 19.

[9]Elizabeth W. Bruss. *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre*. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976) 7.

[10]Pascal. 102-103.

[11]Thomas A. Idinopulos. "Art and the Inhuman: A Reflection on the Holocaust;" *The Christian Century* Vol. 91 (October 16, 1974) 957.

[12]Thomas A. Idinopulos. "The Holocaust in the Stories of Elie Wiesel;" *Soundings: An Inerdisciplinary Journal*. Vol. 55, No. 1 (Spring, 1972) 202.

[13] Blasing explains the transformation by noting that "the 'I' in its self-consciousness constitutes at the same time the historical subject, the shaping form, and the personalizing style of autobiography." Blasing. 13.

[14]Elie Wiesel. *Night*. (New York: Avon Books, 1960), 19. Future references will appear in the text of the article.

[15]Another critic interprets the remark as resembling a curse. See Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi. *By Words Alone*: The Holocaust in Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980) 122.

[16]The irony is clear when one considers a statement made about "religion [as] the way in which we share our predicament; it is never the way in which we overcome our condition." Richard L. Rubenstein. "Death of God, Theology and Judaism." *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism*. (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1976) 263. As Wiesel suggests, some Jews of Auschwitz share their predicament by not affirming their beliefs, and there is certainly very little hope of overcoming their condition.

[17]Josephine Knopp. "Wiesel and the Absurd." *Contemporary Literature*. Vol. 15, No. 2 (Spring, 1974) 214. Knopp argues convincingly that theologically serious Jews must affirm their relationship with God, or Judaism itself is undermined. Ibid. 213. Here we see the debate as a recognition of the covenant and a reiteration of the protestant impulse in the Jewish tradition. Thus, God is not being dissociated from the Holocaust.

[18]Idinopulos. "The Holocaust in the Stories." 210.

[19]Ibid. 200.

[10]Irving Halperin. "Meaning and Despair in the Literature of the Survivors." *Essays on Jewish Booklore*. Philip Goodman, ed. (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1971) 160.

[21]George K. Beach speaks of covenants which are difficult "to sustain. . .under conditions that breed cynical disregard for moral obligation" and cites "the concentration camp [as] the extreme case." See George K. Beach. "Covenantal Ethnics." *The Life of Choice: Some Liberal Religious Perspectives on Morality*. Clark Kucheman, ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) 125. Frederick Garber suggests, "Eliezer. . .knew. . .that it was only his association with his father that held him above much of the unendurable bestiality. . .Sanctified by tradition, even more than by instinct, the relationship of father and son was all that time's knowledge had left as a possibility and valuable action in the immediate present." Frederick Garber. "The Art of Elie Wiesel." *Judaism* Vol. 22 (Summer, 1973) 302.

[22]This commonplace of the camps reflects the Nazis' ultimate triumph through "the final exasparation of the Jew." David L. Edwards. "The Presence of the Holocaust: The Vision of Elie Wiesel." *Lexington Theological Quarterly*. Vol. 7, No. 1 (January, 1973) 55.

[23]Langer observes, "The ritual incantation which marks his inauguaration into *l'univers concentrationnaire* inverts the traditional pattern of autobiography and *Bildungsroman* by beginning with a repudiation that depletes the possibilities of life scarcely after it has begun; it signifies not only a boy's despair, but the exhaustion of meaning in a world henceforth unlike men have ever encountered." Langer. 82. While this phenomenon may appear to be typical of Holocaust literature alone, it conforms to the pattern of Jewish literature, wherein heroism is equated with martyrdom. See Trude Weiss-Marin. "The Heroic Element in Jewish Life and Literature." *Essays in Jewish Booklore*. 106.

[24]Thomas A. Idinopulos. "The Mystery of Suffering in the Art of Dostoevsky, Camus, Wiesel, and Grunewald." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* Vol. 43, No. 1 (March, 1975) 52, 59. Idinopulos is not alone. One Jewish scholar refers to Jewish protestantism, which began in Genesis 18:25: "Shall the Judge of all the earth do no justice?" Byron L. Sherwin. "Elie Wiesel and Jewish Theology;" *Judaism*. Vol. 18 (Winter, 1969) 40.

[25]Paul De Man. "Autobiography as De-facement." *MLN*. Vol. 94, No. 5 (December, 1979) 922.

[26]Elie Wiesel. "Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future." *Judaism*. Vol. 16 (Summer, 1967) :281.

[27]Idinopulos. "The Mystery of Suffering." 58.

[28]Harry James Cargas. "Elie Wiesel and the Holocaust." *Commonweal*. Vol. 103, No. 19 (September 10, 1976) 596.

Critique

It is not exactly a guarded secret that Jews, for three or four thousand years, have questioned who they were, who they are, and who they are going to be as individuals and as members of the various groups within which they associate. And through those many centuries they have often cried out in anguish and ambivalence to their God. Elie Wiesel, who writes with great power and also great agony, is certainly not the first writer to express these themes. Nor is the German Holocaust with all of its unspeakable and unfathomable horrors the first event to evoke these emotions. Having witnessed the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, for example, the prophet Jeremiah, pondered these problems and sent a message to Jews who had been carried off into captivity in Babylon. Essentially Jeremiah's message was that God is everywhere. The significance of this statement, beyond the fire and brimstone of sermons and the finesse of the endless Talmudic debates, is that being Jewish is a matter which transcends time and space and that the values of Judaism are universal. Fundamentally Wiesel says that too, though the pain with which he speaks and the implications of his message are even more horrifying to us because the space and the time about which he speaks are closer at hand.

In her essay focused on Elie Wiesel's book, Culp provides more a book report on *Night* than an interdisciplinary insight into the facts and ramifications of Wiesel's internment at Auschwitz. To be sure *Night* is not considered *in vacuo*. Culp draws on a number of sources indicated in her notes, in an attempt to demonstrate her basic theses that (1) Wiesel's book is a memoir rather than an autobiography, and (2) that Wiesel believes that God was inoperative at Auschwitz.

Whether Wiesel's book is an autobiography, a memoir, a fictional account, or, for that matter, an ethnographic or sociological study, is a matter of considerable scholarly interest. Discussion of this question

might elucidate the author's background, biases, experiences, and resulting perspectives. The consideration might also reveal the quality of the data base and the significance of the conclusions whether they be philosophical or aesthetic communications or the end products of strict scientific testing within the Aristotelian logic system. Ultimately, after we fit a piece of writing into our preconceived categories of "autobiography," "memoir," or "fiction," we have to ask ourselves some questions. What is the significance of this categorization? What perspectives does the piece give us in understanding human behavior? Such discussions are often heated and the resulting answers are not always clear. Anthropologists, sociologists, and specialists in the study of literature, for example, started arguing over the nature and meaning of the writings of Carlos Castaneda immediately upon the publication of *The Teachings of Don Juan*. The subsequent publication of *A Separate Reality, Journey to Ixtlan, Tales of Power,* and *The Second Ring of Power* have fanned the flames of the controversy. Questions as to Castaneda's field methods, the accuracy of his descriptions, and the specific tribal affiliation of his informants are legitimate and germane beyond mere curiosity. However, there are matters of greater import in attempting to understand human behavior via Castaneda's works. If nothing else, one can get some glimpses into the difficulties of understanding individuals and groups of people whose world-views are different from one's own *Weltanschauung*. In discussing *Night*, Culp presents some convincing arguments that Wiesel's book goes beyond an autobiographical account or a *Selbstbesinnung* to the realm of a memoir or *Bildungsroman*. Culp thus concludes that Wiesel has performed the functions of the observer/artist as well as the historian/theolgian. While this statement is provocative and challenging, the ultimate significance of this knowledge is not articulated in Culp's essay. Does this conclusion, as stated, help us in various disciplines better understand Jews or the nature of cross-cultural perceptions of various ethnic and minority groups?

Culp's second concern is demonstrating her thesis that Wiesel believes that God was inoperative at Auschwitz. Identifying as a Jew and having experienced the Holocaust, Wiesel himself says there is no answer to that consummate question. In so doing, Wiesel joins a long line of people who have identified or been identified as Jews and who have experienced atrocities, borne pain, and posed questions from the depths of their despair. The line extends back centuries, even millennia, from the Holocaust in Germany, to pogroms in Eastern Europe, the Inquisition in Spain, the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the exile in Babylon. If potsherds and stone artifacts could speak so specifically, the line would undoubtedly

extend beyond the written records of history into the periods of prehistory. In other words, there are matters here which, if not completely universal, do transcend time and space. Jews may doubt or even deny the existence of their God. Yet their attendant ways of behaving more often reflect a belief in a superorganic force or being, one of the tenets of Judaism.

The *Kaddish*, as Wiesel so poignantly expresses, is just one of the manifestations of this paradox. Culp recognizes this fact but does not exploit it fully. The *Kaddish*, as a prayer and a ritual, represents one of a series of important boundary-maintaining mechanisms which operate across space and back through time. Beyond the glorification of God, for example, the *Kaddish* is not only an explicit expression of the relationship between living individuals and their deceased kinspeople but also a symbolic conceptualization of the social solidarity which reaches out to unknown ancestors and past events in the continuing though evolving religious tradition. Understanding this ritual is important in comprehending certain dimensions of being Jewish. But the process of the ritual and the ramifications of the belief system are not unique to Jews. A clearer reflection upon these points in a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective would be valuable for readers looking for a deeper understanding of world-views and group identifications across cultural or other boundaries.

The facts and results of the Holocaust and the profound searchings represented in Wiesel's writing—as well as those of others who survived the Holocaust—are of obvious interest to Jews. Many insights if not final answers to individual and group identities lie in those discussions. The social and philosophical implications of Wiesel's words vex and intrigue more than Jews in today's world. Why? Perhaps because there are so many examples of atrocities around us and so many instances of xenophobia on the world scene, within the United States, and in the smaller communities and neighborhoods within which we reside. And so we ask ourselves questions as individuals living our own lives and as professionals in various disciplines trying to bring our diverse perspectives into a single focus. What are the dimensions of "ethnic" or other "minority group" identifications? How are these dimensions maintained by members of the "in-group"? How are these boundaries enforced by outsiders? What choices are there in continuing or changing these boundary-maintaining mechanisms through time and in different places? These questions are not parochial to the situation of Jeremiah and the exile of Jews in old Babylon as Wiesel shows in speaking of ideas, individuals, and events in the 20th century C.E. For a greater understanding of the significance of these questions in interdisciplinary ethnic studies, readers will have to turn to the works

of Wiesel for themselves or go to other critical reviews and essays on Wiesel's writing. Unfortunately these insights and their broader meanings are hinted at but not sufficiently developed in Culp's handling of Elie Wiesel's *Night*.

David Gradwohl
Iowa State University

A Note On Reviews

This issue (January 1981) of *Explorations In Ethnic Studies* is the last in which book reviews will appear. In March we will publish our first annual review supplement, *Explorations in Sights and Sounds*. *Sights and Sounds* will consist entirely of reviews and we plan to include non-print media such as records and films, as well as books, monographs, and new journals.

Our intention is to present critical assessments of as many current publications as possible and therefore reviews must be brief (300-500 words). We will no longer publish review essays. Reviewers who feel particular titles merit lengthier discussion are invited to submit their analyses as articles to be considered for publication in *Explorations in Ethnic Studies*.

I have saved for last what we want to emphasize most: NAIES is an organization with a purpose. That purpose is the exploration of solutions to cultural oppression, particularly as it is experienced by ethnic people of color. Accordingly, the essential criterion we expect reviewers to use in evaluating a given title is how it relates or fails to relate to this purpose.

Helen MacLam, Associate Editor
NAIES Publications

Reviews

Emerson Blackhorse Mitchell and T.D. Allen. *Miracle Hill: The Story of a Navaho Boy*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967, 1980).

A unique experience awaits readers of *Miracle Hill*, the autobiography of Blackhorse Mitchell, nicknamed "Barney," a young Navaho boy who began his own story as an assignment in his twelfth grade English class in the Santa Fe Institute of American Indian Arts under the tutelage of Terry D. Allen. Unlike the other students in the class, who finished their life stories in half an hour or so, Barney found that he had a whole book stored up inside him, just waiting to

be put on paper But Barney was still in the process of learning English as a second language, and so his manuscript was full of errors; Allen decided, however, that correcting the manuscript would result in less communication of Barney's colorful world view, in a less authentic transmission of his personality. So although she is listed as co-author, Allen did a miminum of editing and asks the reader to "hang loose" and let Barney's honest emotion flow through, despite his violation of conventional rules of grammar and spelling. Perceptive readers will find they are far less bothered by Barney's unconventional use of English than they would have supposed possible, for soon one becomes completely charmed by Barney's story and manner. In fact, those readers sensitive to language will often find Barney's "slips" felicitous—their metaphorical aptness conveys a freshness of viewpoint that is more characteristic of poetry than of prose and lends real insight into the working of Barney's mind. It becomes evident that with *Miracle Hill* "The entire production, in substance, form, tone, style, is woven out of the inner consciousness of the autobiographer,"[1] as Waldo H. Dunn said that good autobiography should be.

Beginning with his birth in March of 1945 in New Mexico near the Four Corners area, Barney enthusiastically tells the story of a boy he calls "Broneco." Until the age of seven, Broneco spent most of his time with his grandparents herding sheep. His only contact with the white world and the English language, except for the few words his grandmother knew, was with a white boy named Dale in a town five miles from Broneco's home, but that was enough to instill in Broneco a desire to learn English and white ways, a desire which became his central motivation despite the disapproval of his grandmother, the most important person in Broneco's life. When he went away to an Indian school in Colorado, Broneco's studiousness and high esteem of white ways seem to have sometimes estranged him from Indian companionship, though Barney does not explain his "differentness" in exactly those terms. Broneco's school experiences for the next twelve years, the personal relationships formed at school and those retained at home, his growth from an appealing, sensitive child to a charming, idealistic young man and budding author—these are the essence of this Navaho *bildungsroman*.

Not every adolescent will appreciate this book, for it is not filled with high adventure or plot intrigue. And some young readers will find the unconventional use of English a stumbling block. Still, adolescents surely can identify with Broneco's fears in the face of new situations, his disappointments when he feels betrayed or

ignored by friends, his stumbling efforts to establish relationships with girls, his conflict with his grandmother over the course his life is to follow, his grief over his grandmother's death, and other universal emotions and patterns. Adult readers will enjoy this very personal glimpse into the life of an intelligent and receptive human being trying to live in two extremely different cultures. Although Broneco clearly values the English language and white culture, he also values his home, his relatives, and his Indian way of life. He does not attempt to pull up his roots; rather he uses them for renewal and balance. The hill referred to in the title is a hill near his home from which he could see great distances, on which he and his grandfather sat and talked many times of Indian dreams. This hill is the source of his roots, as well as of his dreams of the wider world, and the book closes as he returns once more to the hill.

Moreover, the book is worthy of study as literature because, although some aspects of it are amateurish, it is a unified work of art with a coherent structure, three-dimensional characters, and fitting symbolism. The hill from which the book takes its name is skillfully developed from a physical place to a metaphysical symbol that informs the entire plot and philosophy of the book. Work with the book in a creative writing class comparable to the one which sparked its genesis would be especially rewarding.

Though *Miracle Hill* ends before Broneco has found his niche in the world, readers will be happy to know that Blackhorse Mitchell, as he now prefers to be called, did learn to live successfully with, as he puts it, "one leg in the white world and the other in the Indian world." Mr. Mitchell teaches Navaho studies to both Indian and non-Indian students at Navaho Community College, Shiprock, New Mexico. He is a published poet and is working on a Master's Degree in Elementary Education Administration at the University of New Mexico.

Dona Hoilman
Ball State University

Note

[1]Waldo H. Dunn. *English Biography*. (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1916). 272.

Evelyn Gross Avery. *Rebels and Victims: The Fiction of Richard Wright and Bernard Malamud.* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1979) 116 pp. $10.00

Rebels and Victims is a useful contribution to the comparative analysis of ethnic literature. This balanced, thorough presentation on the fiction of Wright and Malamud examines their ethnic literary works. Avery touches on many interdisciplinary factors which make the book of some interest to those discussing Afro-American and Jewish-American ethnic groups functioning in society.

Avery's work concerns the literary treatment of the "marginal man" in ethnic perspective. Fictional characters are examined for behavior patterns in response to socio-ecomomic status outside the mainstream of American society. Avery sees the rebel and the victim as characters created in direct correlation to the ethnic backgrounds of Wright and Malamud.

While Avery is on target for those works of fiction knowledgeably discussed in detail, there are generalized implications throughout the book which encompass Afro-American and Jewish American fiction and life with the rebel/victim concept. Rebels and victims as presented by Wright and Malamud are not consistent characterizations in Afro-American and Jewish-American literature and the two do not fully represent the ethnic groups' experiences. Perhaps it is because we are sensitized to stereotyping that, from an interdisciplinary viewpoint, literary archetypes lack credibility and acceptability when applied to ethnic group experience. Fiction from an ethnic perspective draws upon the author's experience. It is the individual creative spirit which redefines actions in terms of personal perception.

Avery emphasizes the strength of Judaism and Malamud's firmly established ties with his religious and cultural heritage. History, culture, and religion of the Jewish group are closely intertwined in Malamud's concepts of life. Avery explains a bond in being Jewish which is ingrained in the historical identity.

Avery contends that Christianity, as a white religion, has not provided the spiritual foundation blacks require. She provides supporting documentation of Afro-American literature showing a

contrast between black Christianity as a negative force and the positive strength of Judaism in American ethnic literature. Avery states her belief that Afro-American literature often displays a lack of cultural identity due to the historical removal from the ancient cultures of Africa, and the damage of slavery and segregation.

Essentially the book does not recognize that despite all that has been done to blacks in America, Afro-Americans have maintained a strong and vital heritage. Afro-Americans survive as an ethnic group in American society through an inherent bond to life, group history, and rich tradition. Christianity is not synonymous with heritage for the Afro-American for black heritage and culture transcend specific religious boundaries. The influence of Christianity cannot be denied, but it should be examined in context as one of many angles in a multifacted pattern of group experience.

In examining relationships between Afro-Americans and Jewish-Americans, Avery points to certain issues of our time as well as historical religious ideas which have divided the two ethnic groups.

Rebels and Victims is recommended for academic libraries. It will be useful, perhaps because of its failings as well as its assets, in provoking discussion of interdisciplinary ethnic studies.

Paula M. Henry
State University College of Arts and Science, New York

Salvatore J. LaGumina. *The Immigrants Speak, Italian Americans Tell Their Story*. (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1979). 209 pp $14.95.

Salvatore J. LaGumina has been a tireless researcher, writer, lecturer and teacher in ethnic studies in general and in the Italian American experience in particular. His books include *Vito Marcantonio: the Peoples' Politician; Italians in the United States: A Bibliography; An Album of the Italian American; WOP: A Documentary History of Anti-Discrimination in the United States;* and *The Ethnic Dimension in American Society*. It was inevitable that his interests would direct him to oral history.

In *The Immigrants Speak, Italian Americans Tell Their Story* LaGumina has fashioned fourteen personal life histories that include miners, shoemakers, a poet, an artist, theater people, a social worker, a soldier, a lawyer and an entrepreneur. Through their recollections they have increased our understanding of the Italian American experience. Their stories, told in the first person, both dramatize and illuminate the role of ethnicity in the twentieth century. As LaGumina states, "These stories detail the lives of a people bridging two cultures in modern history."

The author's foreword sets the stage by providing basic background information concerning the Italian ecology and heritage. The institutions of *campanilismo* and *frazionamento*, are succinctly defined to illustrate the cultural baggage the *contadini* brought with them to America during the peak period of immigration.

The Italians were primarily a working class population and the Italian proletarian narrators poignantly describe the exploitation, low pay, long hours, dangerous working conditions, padrone system, sweatshops, and company towns. Aware of the poverty in Italy, these personal histories present the tale of downtrodden immigrants' dedication to hard work and their involvement in an emerging labor movement. One of them, Remegio Pane, an immigrant shoemaker laboring seventy hours a week during the Great Depression, helped to organize a union in which he served as secretary. He persevered to get an education and to become professor and chairman of Italian at Rutgers University where he remains today as a dean. Though these biographies concentrate on the urban northeastern section of the country, Bruna Pieracci, a miner's daughter, provides a rich description of the drab life in rural Iowa.

Glimpses of other phases of American life are depicted. Poet Joseph Zappulla is critical of the Italian American press because he claimed the Italian Americans did not read and did not demand quality journals. Zappulla himself wrote scripts for radio station WOV in New York City. In another autobiography, Julian Miranda relates one of the best accounts of the Italian American radio theater covering the years 1932-1950.

Ethnic pride is a constant theme of these personal histories. Pride of family and language and a sense of roots pervades their stories. The tragedy of Sacco and Vanzetti symbolized anti-Italian discrimination and was felt in the Italian communities. The triumphs of Fiorello LaGuardia were experienced by the Italian American population. Immigrant Giovanni Pinna, in relating his life in the Sardinian-Italian community in Port Washington, Long Island, stated he "left Italy to come to Italy."

These personal histories are uneven, however. Some of the autobiographies are vividly woven as in the case of Frank Tarallo whose tenure in the OSS during World War II was smoothly detailed, as was Saverio Fizzo's mining experiences. However, Clara Cirica Grillo's recreation of community life in Cleveland was interesting; but even though she is included in the chapter on "The Theater People," she provided insufficient information on theater life. In addition, many of the assertions made by Julian Miranda are tenuous, and at times his meandering takes him off the subject as he becomes preoccupied with his political views rather than his life story. Also, Elvira Adorno's description of her father's flag-making business is fascinating, but I wanted to know more about her career as a teacher and her contribution to the Italian Cultural Council which she founded and directed. Moreover and most important, a concluding chapter could have been included to summarize the substance of these personal histories. It would have dramatized significant currents of their lives and allowed for greater in-depth analysis.
LaGumina has presented a generally effective narrative history of "ordinary" Italian immigrants. It is history from the bottom up, a people's story. In this time of quantitative computer-based studies, it is refreshing to read the personal histories of "real" people.

Frank J. Cavaioli
State University of New York at Farmingdale

The Editor Notes

I thank George Carter for his willingness to give advice to the new editorial staff, in his last editorial for *Explorations* (Vol. 3, No. 2.), concerning the frustrating experiences we would have in attempting to produce a quality journal. This is our premier edition, and we trust that it will improve with age.

While it is true that we will always want the results of change to be better than what has gone on before, with the expectations for a bright and exciting future, it requires time to assess their impact. Clarity of what we envision is important to the functioning of NAIES; we invite you to share with us your comments as we explore our collective futures.

Charles C. Irby

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

Elisabeth J. Johnson
is a psychiatric nurse in Boston.

Gary Y. Okihiro
a member of the NAIES Executive Council, is Director of Ethnic Studies at the University of Santa Clara.

Arnold Kahn
is a professor of psychology at Iowa State University and has published widely in the areas of sex roles and prejudice.

Shirley Vining Brown
is in the School of Social Work and Community Planning at the University of Maryland at Baltimore.

Barbara Hiura
is the president of NAIES and a frequent contributor to **Explorations** and the **Newsletter**. She teaches in an alternative school in Sacramento, California.

Jimmy L. Williams
chairs the Department of English at North Carolina A & T University in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Maxine S. Seller
teaches at the State University of New York at Buffalo and is editing **Ethnic Theatre in the United States** for Greenwood Press.

Jeffrey F. Huntsman
is in the Department of English at Indiana University where he teaches American Indian literature. He has recently edited *New American Drama: Three Plays By Hanay Geiogamah*.

Zora Devrenja Zimmerman
is in the Department of English at Iowa State University where she teaches folklore and comparative literature.

Margaret A. Laughlin
is a professor in the Professional Program in Education at the University of Wisconsin—Green Bay where she specializes in multicultural education.

Dennis Stewart
works with emotionally and mentally disturbed adults for Rubicon Programs Inc. in Richmond, California.

Mildred L. Culp

is affiliated with Matteo Ricci College II at Seattle University and has published in several interdisciplinary journals.

David M. Gradwohl

is a professor of anthropology at Iowa State University and is a member of the faculty of the American Indian Studies Program.

Dona Hoilman

is a professor in the Department of English at Ball State University and specializes in the teaching of American Indian Literature.

Paula M. Henry

is Associate Librarian for the Milne Library at the State University College of Arts and Science in Geneseo, New York.

Frank J. Cavaioli

is a professor of history and politics at State University of New York at Farmingdale.

Gretchen M. Bataille

is the former Chair of the Iowa Civil Rights Commission; she is a member of the faculty of the American Indian Studies Program and teaches in the Department of English at Iowa State University.

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Mail to:
George E. Carter
Ethnic Studies Department
California State Polytechnic Univ.
3801 West Temple Avenue
Pomona, CA 91768

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