

## Critique

In the sixties, the scattered attacks against various manifestations of racism briefly coalesced into a broad based movement. Some gains were made, chiefly in the areas of voting rights, consumer discrimination, and education. However, the movement failed to significantly alter the wealth distribution system through the achievement of employment equity, this could only have resulted from affirmative action in all sectors and at all levels of the economy. But in the employment struggle, the confrontation was much closer to the heart of capitalist institutions and was perceived as a greater threat to the stability of those institutions.

To win this struggle, a sustained attack was necessary. The movement of the sixties was doomed to failure. Always fragmented; based on sincere, but rarely ideological, reactions to oppression and lacking a clear understanding of institutions, the protagonists were poorly prepared to win this crucial battle. Now, in this time of retrenchment, even the meagre gains are threatened. If the movement is to re-group and ultimately win, its participants will need to be better armed this time around. One weapon must include a better understanding of the nature of institutions. They will also need an intellectual framework upon which an ideology can develop.

Deloria's essay is an important step toward an analysis of institutional factors which impede the anti-racist struggle. It also contains the beginning of an intellectual frame work for the needed ideology. This step is taken despite a shaky start in which institutions are personified as female in nature. Without more elaboration, this definition is obscure at best, and with the black widow imagery, has worse implications. Deloria quickly moves to solid ground by developing the thesis that institutions based on western rationality assume a life of their own. The primary institutional goal becomes self perpetuation of the institution and a subversion of the higher goals proclaimed by the society takes place. The goal of self perpetuation is threatened by changes of any kind.

Institutions which developed historically within a culture

of white males are severely challenged by the arrival on the scene of other races, sexes, and cultures. Since total loyalty and internal cohesion are demanded, these new elements are especially threatening if they continue to subscribe to values and goals of their subgroup. As Deloria points out, they can safely be admitted either as clients, who do not really "belong" to the organization, or they can be admitted if they drop references to their subgroup. The only other alternative is to allow "reservation" type institutions which are allowed to administer to the needs of a particular group. This "reservation" institution exists in a state of powerlessness and can be eliminated if it poses a threat to the dominant institutions.

If individual racism were completely eliminated, institutional norms and processes would dictate that inequality based on race would continue. For example, such procedures as I.Q. scores, job seniority, and business equity were largely developed within the historical white male context. The merits and demerits of these factors can be rationally debated outside of the context of racism and sexism. Even though the data are now overwhelming in demonstrating how these institutional practices reinforce inequality, they remain unchanged. Why? Because it is in the interest of stability of the institutions that the newer and more accurate data be ignored and that the debate over these practices continue within the old white male parameters.

Where do we go from here? Deloria suggests that an attack on the outward forms of racism without transforming institutions is futile. Even if one could, Deloria is saying, one should not buy into institutions whose structures and norms are so sterile. If carefully thought out, this position could be the foundation for a new ideology for change around which all oppressed people and human rights advocates can rally. Deloria and others are encouraged to elaborate this ideology.

All of this seems to imply an abandonment of affirmative action and integrative goals. To do so would be a mistake for several reasons. First, the dialectics of change are slow and uncertain at best.

To abandon past goals before the new intellectual frame work is in place would be to repeat some of the worst mistakes of the past. More important, a real affirmative action program might not be as contradictory to Deloria's aims as he seems to imply. Cooption is not the only possibility even though this has often happened. The potential for a fifth column is also there.

Coooption occurs because of the very small numbers of oppressed people who are placed in decision making levels of the institutions. If larger numbers were forced onto the institutions, the system would suffer some degree of indigestion for the reasons presented by Deloria. The result would create a climate for the conversion of the process of cooption into a process of institutional subversion. Indeed, on the world scene, the present cultural revival within the Soviet Union's Moslem borderlands demonstrates this possibility.<sup>1</sup> A revival is being led by the very Moslem elites who were trained to be the cadres of russification and Soviet acculturation. These Moslem leaders advise their compatriots to join the Komsomol and other institutions in order to give them a Moslem meaning.

Marvin J. Happel  
Great Lakes Multi-Ethnic Institute, Inc.

#### Note

<sup>1</sup>Hélène Carrere d'Encausse. "Political Socialization in the USSR With Special Reference to Non-Russian Nationalities." *Slavic and European Education Review*. Vol. 1 (1981) 1-10.