

CULTURE

MATTERS

How Values Shape
Human Progress

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Taking Culture Seriously: A Framework and an Afro-American Illustration

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THE CONTRADICTION APPROACH TO CULTURE

There is something very odd about how the culture concept is used today. On the one hand, at no other time in the history of the concept has it been more popularly debated or more seriously considered. In academia the relatively new discipline of cultural studies flourishes. And in the American public arena, so-called culture wars have become what Hunter calls "a reality *sui generis* . . . the defining forces of public life."¹ And yet, at the same time, in academic and intellectual circles, including an influential group of professional anthropologists and nearly all sociologists, there is strong resistance to attempts to explain any aspect of human behavior in cultural terms.²

In the humanities and liberal circles generally, a rigid orthodoxy now prevails that can be summarized as follows: Culture is a symbolic system to be interpreted, understood, discussed, delineated, respected, and celebrated as the distinctive product of a particular group of people, of equal worth with all other such products. But it should never be used to explain anything about the people who produced it. In humanistic terms, culture is often

likened to a text to be read and interpreted. Although explanations of the text are permitted, no claims of objectivity can be made for such explanations. The understanding of culture is wholly subjective and reflects as much about the interpreter as the interpreted.

In sociological circles, culture occupies what Mabel Berezin calls a "fissured terrain" in which there is "epistemological dissidence" between "scholars who privilege the possibility of explanation . . . and those who privilege exegesis or interpretation."³ But even those who favor explanation tend to shun any causal role for culture. Typically, as in the so-called production-of-culture school, culture is the dependent variable, something to be described and, with all due caution, to be explained by organizational, economic, and other such "hard" independent variables. All attempts to reverse this explanatory equation and make culture or elements of culture the independent variable are inherently suspect. Oddly, this is the very opposite of what prevailed during the first half of this century, when the Parsonian theory of values as ends and normative regulators of action was predominant. However, as Ann Swidler has pointed out, because the general rejection of the Parsonian approach left sociologists "without an alternative formulation of culture's causal significance, scholars either avoid causal questions or admit the values paradigm through the back door."⁴ Swidler proposed an approach to the problem that has won wide favor. Although it is a start in the right direction, her conception of culture as a "tool kit" from which people selectively draw their strategies of action as it suits their purposes is too open-ended and voluntaristic to offer real explanatory power. Cultural analysis is reduced to a mere supplement of rational choice theory.

The hostility to cultural explanations is especially marked in the study of Afro-Americans and the many problems that they face. There are good and bad reasons for this. Too many studies of Afro-American problems up to the late sixties—when the reaction set in—relied on a simplistic or untenable conception of culture that was used in a crudely deterministic way to explain Afro-American social problems. Afro-American culture was seen as an encrusted accretion of the Afro-American past that had become a fixed, explanatory black box invoked to explain anything and everything about the group. Outmoded nineteenth-century views of culture as some kind of "cake of custom" lingered in many writings. Hardly more palatable was the over-determining functionalism and values framework of the Parsonian school. Although the more sophisticated advocates of the culture of poverty school such as Oscar Lewis did not commit many of the errors that they are now routinely accused of, in the hands of non-specialists, cultural accounts of the group's problems were too often circular, reductionist, and static.

Unfortunately, it was and is still too often the case that cultural explanations are employed by reactionary analysts and public figures who attribute the social problems of the poor to their "values" and thereby wash their hands and the hands of government and the taxpayers of any responsibility for their alleviation. Indeed, perhaps the main reason why cultural explanations are shunned by anthropologists and sociologists—both very liberal disciplines—is the fact that they have been so avidly embraced by reactionaries or simple-minded public figures. Culture as explanation languishes in intellectual exile partly because of guilt by association.

This last is only the worst of some very bad reasons for the rejection of cultural explanations. Another of these is the liberal mantra, still frequently chanted, that cultural explanations amount to blaming the victim. This is sheer nonsense and a simple analogy reveals its silliness. Consider the all too common case of someone who has low self-esteem and behaves in extremely self-destructive ways as a direct result of having been sexually abused as a child. A sympathetic person might point to the person's psychological problems and urge him or her to seek therapy. It would be absurd to accuse that person of blaming the victim. Yet this is exactly what happens when a sympathetic analyst is condemned for even hinting that some Afro-American problems may be the tragic consequences of their cultural adaptation to an abusive past.

Another bad reason for the censorship of cultural explanations in the study of Afro-Americans is ethnic nationalism and so-called black pride. Ethnic pride, once a necessary corrective to centuries of ethnic dishonor and negative stereotyping, has now hardened into ethnic glorification and Afro-centrism, both given academic legitimacy by multicultural studies. Any scholar who invokes historico-cultural explanations for social problems is seen as an agent who comes to bury and not to praise, a threat to the feel-good insistence on a "usable past" and a proud, non-problematic culture that can hold its place and parade its laurels at the great American multicultural powwow.

Yet another reason for the suspicion of cultural explanations is the misunderstanding, especially on the part of policy specialists and others concerned with correcting social ills, that nothing can be done about culture. This misunderstanding springs from the view of culture as something immutable. Closely related to this reason for the rejection of cultural explanations is a conviction held by many that it is a racist view of a group. Behind this charge is a riot of intellectual ironies. The modern anthropological study of culture began as an explicitly anti-racist reaction against the racialism of social Darwinism, especially under the liberal influence of Franz Boas's cultural relativism. For the first half of this century, culture was precisely that which was

not biological in human development. Cultural relativism, however, has a way of biting its own tail and descending into essentialism, as I pointed out in my critique of its use during the seventies by both ethnic revivalists in America and defenders of the apartheid regime of South Africa.¹ More recently, the same criticism has been made of the latest wave of ethnic celebration in America, Walter Benn Michaels stating flatly that the modern multi-cultural concept of culture and ethnic identity have simply become substitutes for racism.² Although critics of multi-culturalism such as Michaels condemn the multi-cultural use of culture as racist from a universalist standpoint, many multi-culturalists condemn cultural explanations in equally vehement terms as racist, as the long litany of attacks on Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and his report make clear. Thus in 1970 the liberal sociologist Robert Blauner labeled those of his colleagues who emphasized the lower class rather than ethnic distinctiveness of Afro-American life as "neo-racists."³ Incredibly, then, the culture concept has become a term of abuse and has been condemned as racist by both universalists and relativistic multi-culturalists in their quarrels with each other.

A deeper irony in the attack on cultural explanations as racist is the fact that critics of the explanatory role of culture all make one quiet, backdoor exception to the causal use of the concept. The exception is its use in the intellectual war between environmentalists and genetic determinists. In the so-called Bell Curve Wars a few years ago, when the IQ controversy went through its latest cycle in America, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, although losing the war, grievously injured one of the mainstays of the liberal defense of the environmental position, namely, that the persistent single standard deviation difference in IQ scores between Afro-Americans and Euro-Americans is to be explained *primarily* in socioeconomic terms. Herrnstein and Murray drew on the vast body of accumulated evidence to show that this position is no longer tenable. Structural explanations of IQ differences were often vitiated by what Arthur Jensen has called "the sociological fallacy," namely, the fact that the presumably independent structural variables explaining away the IQ effects were themselves partly the effects of subjects' IQs.

I do not intend to rehash the IQ controversy here except to note that when the dust had settled one major point emerged with crystal clarity, and it has both a negative and a positive aspect. The negative aspect is that although genetic factors can explain only a small part of the differences in social and economic outcomes that exist between Afro-Americans and Euro-Americans, neither can standard socioeconomic variables such as family income. This important point, which nearly got lost in the heat of the debate, has been reinforced by more recent findings, especially those reported in a work that is

of far greater scientific integrity than *The Bell Curve*, namely, *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, edited by Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips. The general conclusion of this group of scholars is that, first, the test-score gap between Afro-Americans and Euro-Americans is indeed important in explaining later occupational status and income, although what it is measuring is not so much innate intelligence as learnable cognitive and educational skills. Second, this test-score gap is only partly explained by the class or social background of students. The still substantial income difference between Afro-Americans and Euro-Americans explains, at best, about one point of the large ethnic gap in students' test scores. And when all socioeconomic background factors are considered, such as wealth and occupation, no more than a third of the ethnic gap is explained, which is about the same as Herrnstein and Murray estimated.⁸

If the answer to the skill gap is to be found neither in the g-loading on IQ scores nor in the socioeconomic differences between the two groups, where is it to be found? Here we come to the positive side of what emerged from the Bell Curve controversy. The answer, in a nutshell, is culture. "Cultural beliefs and practices," writes psychologist Howard Gardner in his critique of the Bell Curve, "affect the child at least from the moment of birth and perhaps sooner. Even the parents' expectations of the unborn child and their reactions to the discovery of the child's sex have an impact. The family, teachers, and other sources of influence in the culture signal what is important to the growing child, and these messages have both short- and long-term impact."⁹

Significantly, Meredith Phillips and her collaborators found large effects on children's test scores resulting from parenting practices, accounting for over 3.5 points of the test gap between Afro-Americans and Euro-Americans. What's more, their controls strongly indicated that these practices were wholly environmental.

Psychological studies bear out these findings. It is remarkable that, barely five years before *The Bell Curve* was published, Arthur Jensen, unquestionably the most sophisticated defender of the genetic view of ethnic differences, had very nearly thrown in the towel with his concession that "the genetic hypothesis will remain untested in any acceptably rigorous manner for some indeterminate length of time, most likely beyond the life span of any present-day scientists."¹⁰ Psychologist Nathan Brody, in an exhaustive review of the state of knowledge on the subject, concluded that the "reasons for the differences are probably to be found in the distinctive cultural experiences encountered by black individuals in the United States."¹¹ Responding to Herrnstein and Murray, another distinguished psychologist, Richard Nisbett, arrived at much the same conclusion. Arguing that there "are systematic dif-

ferences in the socialization of black and white children that begin in the cradle," he reviewed several studies, one of which concerned children of mixed marriages:

Under the assumption that mothers are more important than fathers to the intellectual socialization of their children and that socialization practices of whites favor the adoption of skills that result in high scores on IQ tests, one would expect that the children of unions where the mother is white and the father is black would have higher IQs than the children of unions where the mother is black and the father is white. And in fact, this is the case. Children of black-white unions have IQs nine points higher if it is the mother who is white.¹²

Although selection factors could not be discounted, they seemed to work in both directions and cancel themselves out. Nisbett quite reasonably concluded that "the higher IQs of the children born to white mothers would have to be attributed largely to socialization."¹³

There is a profound irony in the uses and responses to the kind of findings just cited. When used in the IQ debate to defend the liberal, environmental position they are acceptable, even eagerly embraced. But in any other context the use of these same findings would be viewed with outrage. Why? Because findings like these are anathema to notions of ethnic pride, identity politics, and the prevailing relativism of liberal academic circles. In any other context statements by Phillips and her collaborators that for "parents who want their children to do well on tests (which means almost all parents), middle-class parenting practices seem to work" or that "racial differences in parenting practices also appear to be important," as well as Nisbett's argument that the cultural practices of Euro-American mothers are more effective than those of Afro-American mothers, would condemn them as certifiable racists and unregenerate cultural chauvinists on any campus in America.

This is a ridiculous state of affairs. Afro-Americans and their academic supporters simply cannot have it both ways. If cultural factors are to be given prime explanatory status in the IQ wars, they cannot be reduced by multicultural and liberal sociological critics to what Margaret Archer has called "a position of supine dependence."¹⁴ This selective censorship of the causal use of the culture concept has distorted the study of Afro-American social history and contemporary issues.

The plain truth, of course, is that there is no necessary conflict between the causal use of culture and its treatment in purely descriptive or dependent terms. Usually the conflicts can be resolved once it is understood that different conceptions of culture are being used and that causal studies often proceed at quite different levels of analysis from those that approach it in

symbolist or descriptive terms. Furthermore, a cultural explanation does not preclude social causes. Often what's most interesting and useful in any analysis is to identify and disentangle the complex explanatory interplay between cultural and non-cultural factors, an interplay in which both sets of factors can be both independent and dependent in one's causal model. Above all, it should be understood that to explain is not to be deterministic. As Goodenough wisely points out, "Biology helps explain human behavior but does not determine it. Similarly, culture helps explain behavior but does not determine it, either."¹⁹

THE CULTURE CONCEPT

By culture I mean a repertoire of socially transmitted and intra-generationally generated ideas about how to live and make judgments, both in general terms and in regard to specific domains of life. It is an information system with varying levels of specificity: on one level it is as broad as a set of ideas about styles of public self-presentation; on another level, it is the micro-information system prescribing the best way to make bagels, curried chickpeas, or Jamaican jerk pork. This information system is more than "what people must learn in order to be able to function acceptably as members of a social group in the activities in which members of the group engage with one another,"²⁰ as Goodenough originally phrased it in a seminal statement. For one thing, as Eugene Hunn has pointed out, the "culture concept must address not only what is formally appropriate, but also what is ecologically effective." Hence, "culture is what one must know to act effectively in one's environment."²¹ For another, culture sometimes embraces transmitted anti-social behavior and not only what is acceptable to a group.²² This point is of special importance to those who study the Afro-American experience, since often the cultural processes one wishes to understand are precisely those that are deviant and not acceptable to either the broader Euro-American society or to the Afro-American group. We cannot restrict the cultural exclusively to what is normative.

I take the very sensible advice of Roger Keesing that it is best "to narrow the concept of 'culture' so that it includes less and reveals more."²³ Thus Roy D'Andrade speaks of a "particulate theory of culture; that is, a theory about the 'pieces' of culture, their composition and relation to other things."²⁴

Culture is acquired or learned by individuals; it is what they know. This, however, does not preclude a collective or shared dimension of culture. How can an individualist, internal view of culture be reconciled with any notion of culture as a shared group phenomenon? Through the notion of cultural models, which, as Keesing argues, "are at once cultural and public, as the histori-

cally cumulated knowledge of a people and the embodiments of a language, and cognitive, as paradigms for construing the world."²⁵

These models, however, are not mere tool kits, as sociologist Ann Swidler argued in her frequently cited paper.²⁶ Although this view is valuable for sociologists in emphasizing the role of agency in cultural analysis, it nonetheless fails to capture two other critical aspects of culture. A tool kit is useless if there is nothing to make or do. Cultural elements are always, first, plans for living, blueprints for how to think, judge, and do things. A tool kit is also useless without the know-how or skill to use the tools. Cultural models are also rules for how to realize cultural plans.

There is some controversy about where these rules come from. It is likely that the same capacity for rule making that directs our acquisition of language also works with the acquisition of some cultural models, especially models of social behavior. Although some rules are inferred by one's innate rule-making capacity, others are taught, and some are derived from a combination of both methods.

Dorothy Holland and Naomi Quinn argue against any typology of cultural models into "models of" and "models for," as some have proposed, suggesting instead that

underlying cultural models of the same order—and in some cases the same underlying model—are used to perform a variety of different cognitive tasks. Sometimes these cultural models serve to set goals for action, sometimes to plan the attainment of said goals, sometimes to direct the actualization of these goals, sometimes to make sense of the actions and fathom the goals of others, and sometimes to produce verbalizations that may play various parts in all these projects as well as in the subsequent interpretation of what has happened.²⁷

In other words, cultural models are the sociological counterparts of biological stem cells.

How are these models acquired? In two ways. They are inherited from the preceding generation through socialization, and they are learned intra-generationally from peers and significant others through imitation and teaching, as well as indirectly from agents such as the media or popular figures. I agree with Robert Boyd and Peter Richerson that social learning is "the transmission of stable behavioral dispositions" and that stable means those "that are substantially divorced from environmental contingencies."²⁸ Although I will be drawing on the cultural theory of Boyd and Richerson in what follows, I differ from them by including within the cultural domain models of behavior that are learned through trial and error by individuals in their responses to interactions with others and other environmental or structural forces.

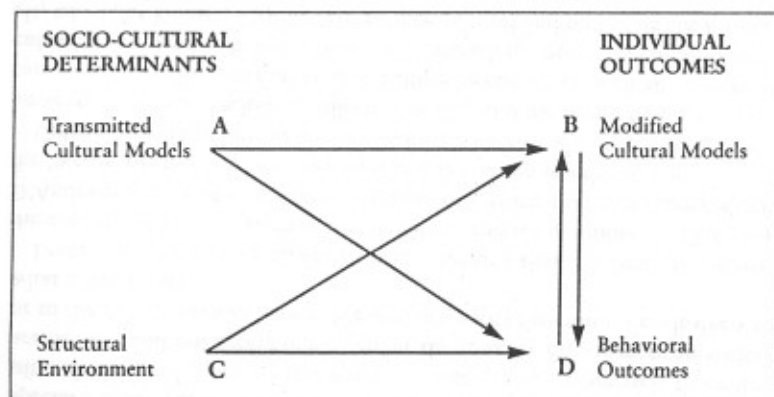


FIGURE 15.1 Interactions Among Cultural Models, the Structural Environment, and Behavioral Outcomes

Two further features of culture should be noted at this point. First, cultural models are not to be confused with behavior. Boyd and Richerson note that "two individuals with identical sets of culturally acquired dispositions may behave quite differently in different environments."²⁵ Second, culture changes and the forces that account for variations and instability are as important in any theory of culture as the forces leading to the transmission of stable models.

THE INTERACTIONAL APPROACH TO CULTURE AND THE STRUCTURAL ENVIRONMENT: AN AFRO-AMERICAN ILLUSTRATION

Let me illustrate the relationship between culture and social structure with an example from the Afro-American experience. Cultural models and structural or environmental factors have cultural and behavioral outcomes for individuals, yielding a causal matrix consisting of (A) cultural models inherited from the previous generation; (B) modified cultural models that are the outcome of changes in the inherited models due to transmission errors in teaching and imitation, as well as adjustments to new strategies of coping with the environment learned by trial and error; (C) the current set of environmental, especially structural, contingencies; and (D) the behavioral outcomes that we wish to explain. Figure 15.1 diagrams these causal interactions.

Let the problem to be explained (D) be the present high rate of paternal abandonment of children among Afro-Americans. This rate currently stands at 60 percent of all Afro-American children. It is the single greatest problem of the group, as well as the source of other major problems. What are the causal interactions accounting for this behavioral problem?

The present generation has inherited a cultural model (A) that originated in one earlier environment, slavery (c. 1640–1865), and was later adapted to, and transmitted through, a second environment, the sharecropping, or lien-crop, system (c. 1880–1940). The Africans imported as slaves would have brought with them well-defined models of kinship, gender roles, and notions of sexuality and paternity. Most of these models were devastated by the new order; in particular, the role of father and husband had no legitimacy or authority. Men had no custodial claims in their wives or children. However, the West African model of high fertility and the view that a man's masculinity and status were enhanced by the number of his children dovetailed with the demands of the slave system. A major preoccupation of the system was the need for a growing slave population, especially after the slave trade was abolished in 1807. Hence planters encouraged stable reproductive units. The result was a behavioral pattern in which two-thirds of all unions consisted of a man and a woman and their children and a third in which unattached women reared their children with the help of kinsmen.²⁶

In *Rituals of Blood* I argued that to call the unions between slave men and women "marriages" and the households they fostered "stable nuclear families" is a sociological travesty. The revisionist scholarly focus on the structural form of slave unions has diverted attention from their functioning, from the nature of the relationships that constituted these unions and from the cultural models associated with them. Most men did not live regularly with their partners. Half of those in stable unions lived on other plantations and a third who had children had no such stable unions. Hence, even on the basis of the revisionist historians' own figures, at least two-thirds of adult men who had children did not live in the same residence and often did not even live on the same farm with their partners and progeny. In addition, there was on every estate a group of unattached men without children who constituted between 10 and 15 percent of all men and whose sexual needs had to be met somehow. Thus the great majority of men during slavery—at least three-quarters of them—lived most of their lives away from stable households with children, including a good number of those in so-called stable unions. Furthermore, whatever the nature of their unions, slaves rarely had time to interact with their children. The whole point of slavery was that slaves were worked like, well, slaves.

After two and a half centuries several cultural models emerged in response to this system. One was a model of compensatory sexuality. Denied any claims to status in the broader society or any legitimate claims to their partners or children, men reinforced the transmitted West African model of virility and high fertility as symbols of male pride and status. Closely related to this was the model of unsecured paternity. This was not African. Rather, it was a direct adaptation to the slave system. The master assumed the responsibility to provide for the slave's children and encouraged adults to have as many as possible. Some may even have engaged in deliberate breeding.²⁷ Because they wanted to own the product of their male slaves' sexuality, masters encouraged their male slaves to mate with slaves on their own plantations. Such unions also greatly reduced the cost of labor control, since slaves in such stable reproductive unions were less likely to run away. Even so, as noted earlier, only half of the regular unions of slaves were with partners on the same plantations.

Other models developed that complemented these two. One was the model of matrifocality, which highly valorized the mother-child relationship and exalted it over the father-child bond. Another was the model of female independence—a transmitted model that was reinforced and modified by the slave environment. Traditional West African societies were unusual for the level of economic participation and relative independence of women. This transmitted model was strongly reinforced by the economic gender neutrality of the slave system with regard to slaves. Women worked equally with men in the fields. The demand for more slaves highlighted their childbearing capacity. Although owners encouraged both sexes to reproduce, legal ownership of slave progeny was determined by the mother. Indeed, some owners strongly favored female familial ties, carefully preserving sororal, mother-daughter, and other matrifocal ties while ruthlessly selling off sons and brothers.²⁸

Finally, there was the simple, brute fact that slave men lacked the one thing that all other men primarily relied on for their domination of women: control of property.

These women-related models greatly reinforced the two male models under study: compensatory sexuality and unsecured or resourceless paternity. Yet slaves also learned many other cultural models during slavery. American slaves were, of necessity, strongly influenced by the cultural models of their Euro-American owners. They adopted and modified their owners' language, religion, music (i.e., aspects of their music), and, naturally, their gender, marital, and familial models. Although some of these models, such as the stable patriarchal ideal of legitimate marriages and families in which the husband-father was the main provider, were beyond reach (and, as such, internalized

mainly as ideals), others, such as the sexual double standard and predatory sexuality of many Euro-American Southern men would have been all too reinforcing of the emerging models of compensatory sexuality among the male slaves.

The sharecropping system that followed slavery included two features of special note. First, although the legal ownership of one person by another was abolished in 1865, the culture of slavery clearly was not. Indeed, if anything, it was powerfully reinforced after the end of reconstruction and maintained the public denial of Afro-American male honor and masculinity. The classic Southern method of achieving this was, of course, communal lynching which, as I have shown elsewhere, was a ritualized ceremony of human sacrifice culminating in the symbolic and literal castration of the Afro-American male.

The second important feature of the sharecropping system was the fact that although Afro-American men were denied most forms of meaningful employment as well as ownership of land, they nonetheless had access to whatever land they could farm as long as they agreed to the lien crop arrangement. This had several devastating consequences, which have been summarized by Tolnay:

The personal "sacrifice" of delayed and slowed family formation often associated with establishment of households in agricultural economies was not only unnecessary for rural blacks but was also largely futile. Alternative economic opportunities were also restricted because of the relative unavailability of nonagricultural employment opportunities for blacks and the generally hostile racial atmosphere after the Civil War.²⁹

These new features of the environment strongly encouraged a pattern of early marriage and high fertility. The only way a man could make his way was by applying as much labor as he could to the available land at his disposal, and the only way he could get this labor was from his wife and children. Thus slavery was followed by a behavioral tendency toward marriage and large families among the mass of poor Afro-Americans. Among the small middle class, as well as the not much larger urban working class, men and women were at last able to realize the dominant cultural ideal of marriage and respectable, patriarchal unions after slavery and did so, reinforced by their fundamentalist faith. But our concern here is with developments among the mass of rural sharecroppers.

What was going on among the mass of poor sharecroppers beneath their formal early marriages and large families? Tragically, this system reinforced the two male models that had evolved during slavery. First, it reinforced the model

of unsecured paternity. Men did not have to take account of resources before having children. Land and other means of production were readily available. What they needed were hands—those of a good, strong woman and as many children as possible. Tragically, children ended up supporting their fathers rather than the other way around (households were best off during those periods when children were most exploited) and were frequently prevented from acquiring even a rudimentary education in order to serve this purpose.

Second, the nefarious targeting of Afro-American manhood by the dominant Euro-American community led to an even greater need for masculine compensation on the part of the mass of poor Afro-American males. Denied all opportunities to prove their worth in the broader society, confined to a semi-serf condition, mocked in blackface and the popular culture of minstrelsy in the northern half of the country, and brutalized into submission in public acts of humiliation and ritual castration in their own part of the country, poor Afro-American men could express their manhood in only one way: through their virility and control of their own women. The women they tried to control, however, were no pushovers. Two and a half centuries under the gender-neutral rack of slavery had seen to that. They deeply resented this compensatory behavior, especially when it took the form of marital infidelity. Unfortunately, most of them had little choice but to remain in their marriages on the tenant farm, since opportunities were as blocked for them as they were for the men. Instead they sought support and solace from their kinswomen. Within this context, according to Anita Washington, "the strong bonds that have been noted to exist between Black mothers and their children, the great value Black women have been noted to place on their roles as mothers, and the priority of this over their roles as wives and workers, are easily understood."³⁰

Here, then, beneath the surface calm of two-parent units documented in the censuses, and the sole focus of revisionist historians, further incubated the tragic conflict between Afro-American men and women and the male cultural models engendered during slavery that were to be transmitted, via the great northern migration, to the present period of the central cities.

To this period we now turn.

Point C in the diagram indicates the largely structural explanation of behavior emphasized by social scientists. Unemployment, low income, and the neighborhood effects of segregated habitats, as well as ethnic and gender discrimination in employment, are the most obvious examples. Included also are government programs aimed at helping the poor: AFDC, earned income tax credit, and the like. Another important feature of this environment that is of special interest to Afro-Americans is the importance of the sports industry and the opportunities it offers to a few but enormously important athletic

stars. These conditions, although important in any final explanation, can directly account for only a small part of D.

Many have argued that poor economic prospects for young, urban Afro-American men account for both their low marriage rate and the higher rate of out-of-wedlock births;³¹ others have pointed to women's employment status in relation to that of their partners.³² It may be true, as Katherine Newman recently observed, that men "who lack the wherewithal to be good fathers, often aren't."³³ But the fact remains that in nearly all other ethnic groups in America, including Mexican Americans with higher levels of poverty than Afro-Americans, and in nearly all other known human societies, including India with its vast hordes of people in grinding urban poverty and unemployment, poverty does not lead to the large-scale paternal abandonment of children. In fact, the best available data show little correlation between job availability and the marriage rate.³⁴ Economist George Akerlof recently argued that marriage explains men's labor force activity, along with a good many other social outcomes. Married men "have higher wages, are more likely to be in the labor force, less likely to be unemployed because they had quit their job, have lower unemployment rates, are more likely to be full-time, and are less likely to be part-year workers."³⁵ Akerlof thinks that changing social factors (by which he means mainly what we are calling cultural models) explain the sharp decline in the marriage rate over recent decades, a decline that in his estimation explains a good part of the increase in crime and other social problems. However, he makes no attempt to account for these cultural changes. His dismissal of economic variables may also be premature. An interactional model of the kind proposed here is better able to explain how cultural patterns interact with structural ones to produce undesirable outcomes.

The transmitted cultural model (AD) is one possible answer. It is certainly possible that a small minority of poor Afro-American men are simply actualizing the models of paternity they learned from the preceding generation. However, I consider such direct effects to be as secondary as direct structural ones. First, recall that models are not the same as behavior. Most Afro-American men exposed to these models have, in fact, adopted others and behave differently. I cannot too strongly overemphasize the following point: *The fact that 60 percent of Afro-American children are fatherless does not mean that anything near this percentage of Afro-American fathers have abandoned their children. Indeed, the great majority of Afro-American fathers behave responsibly toward their children and operate with mainstream models of paternity. Rather, a minority of usually poor men with limited education exhibit this behavior. But because of their higher rates of fertility, they end up creating a problem of fatherlessness for the majority of the younger genera-*

tion of the entire group. It is as great an error to underestimate the group-wide consequences of the reproductive behavior of this minority of men as it is to generalize about Afro-American fathers on the basis of the models and behavior of this minority.

Instead, the major explanations of the behavioral outcome D are the indirect paths CBD and ABD, as well as the more complex causal spirals such as CDBD.

Consider, first, the path CBD. Lee Rainwater gave us an early (and still the best) analysis of this path.³⁹ Lower-class culture, he argued, "represent[s] adaptations to [the] demands society makes for average functioning and the resources they are able to command in their own day-to-day lives."⁴⁰ While holding to mainstream norms, lower-class men and women develop "survival techniques for functioning in the world of the disinherited: Over time, these survival techniques take on the character of substitute games, with their own rules guiding behavior. But . . . these operating rules seldom sustain a lasting challenge to the validity of the larger society's norms governing interpersonal relations and the basic social statuses involved in marriage, parent-child relations, and the like."⁴¹ Instead, "lower class sub-culture acquires limited *functional autonomy* from conventional culture just as the social life of the lower class has a kind of limited functional autonomy vis-a-vis the rest of society." Tragically, it is precisely the disjuncture between the persistent commitment to mainstream cultural models of paternal behavior, especially on the part of women, that leads to the behavioral outcome of marital dissolution and paternal abandonment. Men are only too happy to live with women who put up with their philandering. Afro-American lower-class women, to their great credit, refuse to do so, preferring single mothering than compromising their deeply held models of proper (essentially mainstream) marital and paternal behavior. An important dimension of CB is the fact that the modern urban environment, for the first time, offers relatively better economic opportunities for women as well as welfare support from the state. Unlike wives of the sharecropping era, then, they are not forced to put up with male cultural models and behaviors that offend their own cultural models and sense of independence. Hence CBD.

Note that this interpretation has the great merit of taking account of women's cultural models and socioeconomic condition, as well as men's models and behavior, instead of simplistically considering only male circumstances (CD) in accounting for D.

The path AB refers to the modification of the inherited models under the environmental pressure of C and in response to the adaptive strategies just discussed. We see now that both the models of unsecured paternity and compensatory sexuality are once again reinforced by the new set of struc-

tural contingencies. Both models are now fused into a new model, which sometimes has a misogynistic edge. Lower-class men, with their low educational attainment and unrealistically high reservation wages, are now irrelevant to the post-industrial society that has emerged. Worse, a new post-1965 influx of low-skilled immigrants have entered the system and in many of the large cities are favored by employers.⁴² Black pride and aspirations have led to higher levels of alienation. The inherited model of compensatory sexuality acquires even greater urgency. The fact that women now have the means to resist, somewhat, simply heightens the satisfaction of sexual victory. Male pride is defined now more than ever in terms of the impregnation of women. The majority of Rainwater's respondents "indicated that boys either do not care and are indifferent to the fact that their girlfriends are pregnant, or with surprising frequency, they feel proud because making a girl pregnant shows that you are a man!"⁴³ A quarter of a century after this research was conducted in the mid-sixties, Elijah Anderson and others found identical cultural models, suggesting a system of cultural transmission.⁴⁴

Another new feature of the environment, C, bears directly on the modification and intensification of these two inherited models. This is the elimination of the color bar in the sports industry, leading in turn to the rise of a significant number of young Afro-American super-star athletes, most coming from the ghettos. Although the actual numbers of these multi-millionaire stars are infinitesimally small in comparison with the mass of lower-class blacks, their influence is vast. As role models, however, they have reinforced both the cultural model of predatory sexuality and unsecured paternity. These developments are associated with another, largely cultural, phenomenon: the rise of hip-hop culture which, as with athletics, has seen the emergence of many super-stars from the ghettos. This culture has blatantly promoted the most oppositional models of urban lower-class life, celebrating in "gangsta-rap," as never before, predatory sexuality and irresponsible paternity. It is reasonable to conclude that among a large number of urban, Afro-American lower-class young men, these models are now fully normative and that men act in accordance with them whenever they can.

Thus we have A and C leading to intra-generational and inter-generational variants of B, both variants leading to a fused modified model of sexuality and paternity among young men, expressed in D, which, in turn, encourages attitudes toward mainstream society and work (DB) and a ghetto lifestyle that reinforces the modified models of compensatory-cum-predatory sexuality and unsecured paternity. In this context of opposition to mainstream norms, the likelihood of the modified sexual and paternal models being actualized in D is even greater.

CONCLUSION

My main objective in this chapter has been to bring the concept of culture as a causal factor back to the study of Afro-American problems without falling prey to the methodological, theoretical, and ideological problems of many previous works. I have argued that this task is now of paramount importance, since the best that sociology has to offer has taken us to the limits of purely structural explanations of these problems.

I briefly noted near the beginning that many sociologists are reluctant to take the causal role of culture seriously because of the persistence among them of the hoary old fallacy of cultural inertia. As I have emphasized in this chapter, however, although cultural continuities certainly exist, people are not slaves to them. They use them and they can change them if they really want to.

It is often the case that cultural models can be changed faster and more effectively than structural factors, and to point to their causal role is in no way to condemn oneself to the status quo. Indeed, the sociological critique becomes ironic when it is considered that the discipline's favorite explanation for most matters is class. But what could be more immutable than class?

Consider the fate of one important area of American culture and its class system over the second half of the twentieth century. During that time, the entire culture of Jim Crow—the system of legalized and culturally sanctioned overt social, economic, and political segregation and discrimination, built up during the previous three and a half centuries—was effectively abolished. During that period too there were fundamental changes in the cultural models of gender that had been built up over the previous millennia of human history.

But during that same period, American economic inequality—the class variable so beloved by sociologists as something always ripe for change—has grown greater than at any other time in the nation's history.

Has the time not come for us to start talking about the cake of class?

16

Disaggregating Culture

NATHAN GLAZER

The relationship between culture and the social and economic trajectories of the various minority, racial, and ethnic groups in the United States is embedded in a larger discussion of the role of culture in the fate of nations. The context has been set by such provocative theses on the causes of international conflict and the wealth of nations as those of Samuel Huntington, David Landes, Lawrence Harrison, and Francis Fukuyama, and by the extended debate on Asian values. In that larger discussion, we deal with categories rather grander than American ethnic groups, which for the most part begin their lives in America as fragments of much larger societies, nations, and civilizations and are soon enveloped through processes of acculturation and assimilation into the larger American society. In time, for most of these groups, the boundaries that once defined them fade through intermarriage, conversion, and changing identities. It becomes doubtful just what, if any, elements of cultural distinctiveness they retain, and they become part of a larger American society and civilization.

In the larger discussion that frames this chapter, we deal with world religions, world philosophies, world cultures, of continental scale, as well as with nations and societies. We consider the causes of international conflict, of national wealth and poverty. In the smaller discussion, we deal with less grand issues, such as the relative educational and economic success of various ethnic groups. In most cases, their histories cannot easily be followed beyond two or three generations in America.

Daniel Etounga-Manguelle seems to imply that one cannot live a dignified life and a life that is distinctively African at the same time. As I stated in my essay, I am not a fan of broad categories such as "Latin American" or "African" as ways of identifying cultural communities—Bahia is not San Paolo, the Yoruba are not the Masai. Nevertheless, I do believe, as did Edward Sapir, that "the societies in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached." For a pluralist, "distinctness" or "difference" is not a term of disparagement. With complete respect for all three of my critics, whose sincerity I never doubted, whose company and conversation I much enjoyed, and whose testimonials and arguments I found fascinating, I fully confess to rejecting the idea that the only or very best way to be dignified, decent, rational, and fully human is to live the life of a North American or a northern European.

CHAPTER 14

1. Lawrence Harrison, *The Pan-American Dream* (New York: Basic, 1997), p. 18.
2. Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1998), p. 307 n. 6.
3. Howard Wiarda, "Introduction: Social Change, Political Development, and the Latin American Tradition," in *Politics and Social Change in Latin America: Still a Distinct Tradition?* (Boulder: Westview, 1992), p. 14.
4. Elsa Chaney, *Supermadre: Women in Politics in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), p. 32.
5. Ronald Inglehart and Marita Carballo, "Does Latin America Exist? A Global Analysis of Cross-Cultural Differences," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 30, no. 1 (1997); see also Inglehart's chapter in this volume.
6. Data on women in government can be found at Interparliamentary Union <<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>>; and the U.N. WomenWatch <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch>>. For other aggregate data, see FLACSO, *Mujeres Latinoamericanas en Cifras* (Santiago: FLACSO, 1995); Statistical Division of the U.N. Secretariat and International Labor Organization <<http://www.un.org/Depts/unsd/gender>>; and the U.N. Development Program <<http://www.undp.org/hdrof/child.htm>>. The statistics used in this chapter all come from these sources.
7. Mala Htun, "Women in Latin America: Unequal Progress Toward Equality," *Current History* 98, no. 626 (1999); Htun, "Women's Rights and Opportunities in Latin America: Problems and Prospects," in *Civil Society and the Summit of the Americas*, ed. R. E. Feinberg and R. L. Rosenberg (Miami: North-South Center Press, 1999).
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10. Giulia Tamayo León, "Delegaciones Policiales de Mujeres y Secciones Especializadas," *Acceso a la Justicia* (Lima: Poder Judicial, 1996); Centro Legal para Derechos Reproductivos y Políticas Públicas y Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida (CRLP/GIRE), *Derechos Reproductivos de la Mujer en México: Un Reporte Sombra*, December 1997; Sara Nelson, "Constructing and Negotiating Gender in Women's Police Stations in Brazil," *Latin American Perspectives* 23, no. 1 (1996); OAS/LACHR, "Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on the Status of Women in the Americas," *Annual Report 1997* (Washington, D.C.: Organization of American States).

11. U.S. Department of State, *Peru Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997*. Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 30 January 1998.

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8. Meredith Phillips et al., "Family Background, Parenting Practices, and the Black-White Test Score Gap," in *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, ed. Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), chap. 4.

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