CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: DEEP SOUTH—A SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF CASTE AND CLASS

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THIS book describes the life of the Negroes and whites in a community of that area of the United States known as the "deep South." In order to study the area, a Negro man and a Negro woman, and a white man and a white woman, lived with the natives of Old City and Old County in Deep South for two years. In this book they have presented the results of their research on the culture of the community and the social life of its people. These four social anthropologists, all of whom received their training in anthropology at Harvard, have attempted to understand the social structure and customs of the Negroes and whites of Old City with the same perspective and minimum of bias which their fellow-anthropologists have used when they have told of the natives of New Guinea, the Indians of the Amazon, or the aborigines of Australia.

Old City is a small city of over 10,000 people, of which number over half are Negroes. It is a trade center for the large plantations of the cotton counties which surround it. These rural areas are about 80 per cent Negro.

Old City and Old and Rural counties are located in the heart of the "deep South," an area which can be defined roughly as the states of South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, overlapping into the adjoining states. Before the Civil War, great plantations flourished here. Many of the planters made cotton fortunes, built great houses, and lived in feudal grandeur. They became the
aristocracy of the white owning group and were known to be superior to all white freemen; and all white freemen lived in another and higher world from that "other species" of man, the black slave. When the South was defeated, the old social system of white master and Negro slave was destroyed, although they continued to raise cotton.

AMERICAN CASTE AND CLASS

But a new social system in Old City and its country side began to evolve out of the destruction of the old. It, too, organized the relation of Negroes and whites among themselves and with each other. It controlled the relations between Negroes and whites, and it regulated the social behavior of the different groups among the whites and among the Negroes.

The new social system also set apart from those jobs which were unpleasant and poorly paid the pleasant and well-paid jobs, a division of labor deemed necessary for the raising of cotton and the maintenance of daily life. The new system continued to place all Negroes in inferior positions and all whites in superior positions. It gave certain of the family groups among the whites superior positions to all other whites, and certain family groups the most inferior and least desirable places within the white society.

As the years have gone by, this new social system has become less like the old master-and-slave system out of which it was created. The Negro group has gradually changed its character, and new groups have formed within it. Its social life has become more like that of the larger white community of the rest of the country. All the pleasant and profitable jobs are no longer controlled entirely by the whites, and all the poorly paid and unpleasant jobs are not now done entirely by the Negro. The more desirable activities are now shared, although unequally in proportion, by both Negroes and whites. The educated Negro, the Negro professional men and women, and the store- and farm-owners recognize themselves,
and are recognized, as being different from those laborers and the domestics who now work for both whites and Negroes. This difference between them is evaluated by all of them; the Negroes in business and the professions are felt to be superior, and the laboring group inferior, in status. Those Negroes who occupy an intermediate position are believed to be different from those below them and from those above them. The differences among them are recognized and evaluated as higher and lower not only by the Negroes but also by the whites. This new social order we have called a "class and caste system."\(^1\)

One of the terms used in popular currency to express the feelings whites have for Negroes and Negroes for whites is "prejudice." The so-called "more liberal" whites say that certain of their members are "biased" or "prejudiced" against the other group, and some of the "more liberal" Negroes use these same terms when they refer to the attitudes of members of their own group. Both terms refer to the same social phenomena but, while expressive of certain of the attitudes felt by whites and Negroes about the other group, do not adequately represent the whole social situation to which they refer.

A man can have a prejudice against a certain individual or against things which he eats or wears; but when he and all the other members of his group express in their actions, feelings, and beliefs a large number of these "prejudices" about the members of another group in the community, it is necessary to re-examine the problem to determine whether our understanding of the problem—and the language used to refer to our understanding and to the facts—are correct. This need becomes increasingly strong when we find that the prejudices

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\(^1\) The presence of caste and class structures in the society of the deep South was reported upon first by a member of our research group in an article, "Formal Education and the Social Structure," published in the *Journal of Educational Sociology*, May, 1936, and later, in an article, "American Caste and Class," in the *American Journal of Sociology*, September, 1936.
have a core of sentiments which are emotionally held by all individuals who are members of the white group and that another body of sentiments in opposition to the first is carried by the Negroes. The sentiments are expressed in attitudes which place all Negroes in an inferior position and all white men in a superior position and which control the social relations of all individuals who live in the community of Old City.

This organized system of sentiments and attitudes is expressed in the social practices of the groups and in the beliefs they hold about themselves. We have called this part of the social system a "caste system."

THE CASTE SYSTEM

The second chapter of this book describes the caste system in detail and points out how the system is organized around the control of sex, with the placement of the offspring of inter-caste sexual relations in the lower caste, and those of intra-caste sexual relations in the group in which they are born. In the case of sexual relations between the castes, the community refuses the child and its parents a recognized family position in the upper caste and forces the child into the lower caste. In almost all such cases the mother is Negro and the half-caste child becomes a social Negro with white blood who lives with its mother; but if the mother is white, all the child's family relationships are destroyed by action of the community. The child may be given to a Negro family to raise, the father "run out of town" or lynched by community action, and the mother also forced to leave town. In any case, the community maintains the caste relationship by keeping all children who have a Negro parent in the lower group and by refusing to recognize the relation of the white parent to the child.

The "purity of southern womanhood," even if it is fictitious, functions as one device by which the upper caste prevents a half-caste child from becoming a part of the upper caste and possibly destroying the group's unity. This device
also works to allow the ordinary "double-standard" sexual mores of our group to continue in a caste situation. The upper caste may have extramarital sexual relations with Negro women but not marital ones, and may never have fully recognized parental ties with the offspring of such unions. In the ideal caste situation the upper-caste woman is forbidden all extramarital relations; and since no women of that group can marry a Negro, all sexual relations between white women and Negro men are theoretically impossible. Sexual relations as "fun" are allowed to the men and not to the women; but should a man be serious enough about his cross-caste sexual relations to recognize the resulting offspring and accept the normal responsibility expected of a father in American society, social condemnation is his lot. So long as the factor of Negro-white relations is not involved, any white member of this community in the deep South immediately recognizes that such ethics are wrong and contrary to the general moral code of Americans. This contradiction between the general ethical and moral codes and the feelings aroused against a male white who recognizes his half-caste child indicates that the social system of the deep South provides a new code, a caste code. By this addition to the general moral code the members of the two groups organize thinking and behavior between themselves.

RELATION BETWEEN "CASTE" AND "RACE"

Another point must be made clear before we continue with our discussion. In popular and scientific speech in this country Negro-white relations are often spoken of as "race" relations. Many of the "white men" of Brazil and certain Caribbean countries, however, would be Negroes in Old City because the social definitions of what a Negro is and what a white man is are different in the latter locality. The awkward situation in Old City in which such a white-skinned man or woman is socially defined as a Negro is reversed if the social Negro moves to a new community and becomes a social white. If
the word "race" were to have any meaning at all when applied to Negroes, it should indicate that Negroes produce Negro offspring. But some of the Negroes in Old City could not produce a "racial" Negro no matter how often and hard they might try. This is true for the very good reason that, by all the physical tests the anthropologists might apply, some social Negroes are biologically white and, when mated with their own kind, can produce only white children. Some Negro men and women may have a Negroid genetic structure, and some white men and women may have a Caucasoid genetic structure; but any physical relations of Negroes and whites in Old City are controlled not by their genetic structure but by social traditions organized into a social system which allows and forbids certain actions.

THE SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGIST LOOKS AT THE DEEP SOUTH

Discerning the relationships between the biological and the cultural aspects of society is one of the anthropologist's main problems. Studying the culture of a society is the special province of social anthropologists. The methods of their profession are comparative. The social anthropologist looks at all the societies of the world, where he observes the similarities and differences in the social institutions, beliefs, and customs of the people he is studying. The present-day social anthropologist has added his own society to the others as part of his comparative scheme. We feel justified in being just as much interested in the life of our modern American communities as some of our colleagues are in the peculiar practices of the polyandrous Toda.

Since the modern social anthropologist does study his own society in the general framework of comparative sociology, it becomes necessary, for the purposes of coherence, to apply the same terms to the same kind of social phenomena or principles of social behavior, whether they be found in inner Tibet, this community of Old City in the deep South, or among
the Andaman islanders in the Bay of Bengal. So it must be with Negro-white relations in the deep South.

A. L. Kroeber, professor of anthropology at the University of California, defining "caste" in the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, states that "a caste may be defined as an endogamous and hereditary sub-division of an ethnic unit occupying a position of superior or inferior rank or social esteem in comparison with other sub-divisions." The social system of Old City (and, in all probability, of large parts of the South and some sections of the North) fits this definition of Kroeber's and of most of the ethnologists and social anthropologists.

THE CLASS SYSTEM

In the social organization of the deep South there seems to be not only a caste system but also a class hierarchy. Ordinarily, the social scientist thinks of these two different kinds of vertical structures as antithetical to each other. "Caste," as used here, describes a theoretical arrangement of the people of a given group in an order in which the privileges, duties, obligations, opportunities, etc., are unequally distributed between the groups which are considered to be higher and lower. There are social sanctions which tend to maintain this unequal distribution. This much of the definition also describes "class."

A caste organization, however, must be further defined as one where marriage between the two groups is not sanctioned and where there is no opportunity for members of the lower group to rise into the upper group or for the members of the upper to fall into the lower one.

In "class," on the other hand, there is a certain proportion of interclass marriage between lower and higher groups; and there are, in the very nature of the class organization, mechanisms established by which people move up and down the vertical extensions of the society.
Obviously, two such groupings are antithetical to each other, the one inflexibly prohibiting movement between the two groups and intergroup marriage and the other sanctioning intergroup movement and at least certain kinds of marriage between higher and lower classes. Nevertheless, they have accommodated themselves to each other in the southern community we are examining. Perhaps the best way to present the relationships between these two types of social stratification as they exist in the deep south is by means of the accompanying chart (Fig. 1). The diagonal lines separate the lower Negro caste (N) from the upper white caste (W), and the two broken lines in each segment separate the three general classes (upper, middle, and lower) in each caste from one another. The two double-headed vertical arrows indicate that movement up and down the class ladders within each caste can and does take place and that it is socially sanctioned, but that there is no movement or marriage between the two segments. It will be noticed that the parallel lines which separate the Negro and white castes do not run at right angles. Their arrangement expresses the essential skewness created by the
conflict of caste and class in the South. The gradual elaboration of the economic, educational, and general social activities of the Negro caste since slavery (and to some extent even before) has created new groups which have been vertically arranged by the society until certain fairly well-marked class groups have developed within the Negro caste. As the vertical distance of the Negro group has been extended during the years, the top Negro layer has been pushed higher and higher. This has swung the caste line on its axis \( c \), so that the top Negro group is higher in class traits than the lower white groups and is so recognized. (This recognition is expressed in circumlocutions and by unconscious actions, but at times it is also consciously and openly stated by the members of both the white and Negro groups.) If this process continues, as it seems to be doing at the present time, it is possible, and indeed probable, that the lines \( A-B \) might move on the axis \( c \) until they approximate the hypothetical line \( d-e \). (Theoretically, of course, this process could go farther, but it seems unlikely.)

This tendency to bring the two groups out of the vertical opposition and organization into a horizontal arrangement is being reflected at the present time in such movements as "parallelism," a "solution to the race problem" expounded by many Negro and white leaders. Such terms, of course, are kinds of collective representations which have come into existence and which approximately express the social facts of the changing social structure, at the same time allowing the sentiments of some of the people who live in the structure to find expression also. Should the line \( A-B \) reach the position \( e-d \), the class situation in either group would be equivalent to that of the top white, while the lower classes in each of the parallel groups would also be equivalent. Even the present approximation of this gives the top Negro group certain advantages over his lower-class fellows which he is anxious to maintain.

It is interesting to speculate as to what might happen to caste relations if this process continues. It is possible that the
ordinary social sanctions which apply to cross-caste "social" relations might finally be weakened with the increasing differentiation in the Negro community and the disappearance of the caste differentials in power and prestige. Even the taboo on intermarriage might be relaxed. The children of such marriages would no longer necessarily be placed in the lower caste. They might conceivably take their place on either side of the caste line, thus progressively destroying the definitive nature of that division. Unless further sanctions were developed to maintain endogamy, the whole system of separate caste groups might disappear and new social forms develop to take its place.

On the other hand, the social skewness created by the present class-caste conflict, and which results in the process of changing the social location of the caste line, has placed the upper-class Negro in a decidedly difficult situation. The Negro who has moved or been born into the uppermost group (see Fig. 1) of his caste is superior to the lower whites in class but inferior in caste. In his own personality he feels the conflict of the two opposing groups, and in the thinking and feeling of the members of both groups there is to be found this same conflict about his position. He is known to be superior to the "poor white" (he is a doctor, say); but he is still a "nigger" or "Negro," according to the social context in which the words are used. Metaphorically speaking, he is constantly butting his head against the caste line. He knows himself to be superior to the poor white; yet to the poor white, the upper-class Negro is still a "nigger," which is a way of saying that the Negro is in a lower caste than himself. Furthermore, if it ever came to a crisis, the superordinate white class would maintain the solidarity of the white group by repudiating any claims of superiority by any Negro to the lower-class whites. The present and past political behavior of the South has to be understood in terms of the maintenance of the caste lines and as an effort to prevent the continued elaboration and segmentation of the class groups within the
lower caste. The unequal distribution of the school funds and
privileges are an excellent example of how the system tends
to maintain itself through the changing generations. The
operation of the courts and the activities of the police also re-
fect the same conscious or unconscious maintenance of control
by the superordinate white caste. For that matter, all social
institutions in the South, including the family, school, asso-
ciation, clique, church, and so on, are formed to fit the
dominant-caste social situation.

An interesting hypothesis may be built out of the “skewed”
social position of the upper-class Negro. It seems possible that
the emotional instability of many of the individuals in this
group (as compared, let us say, with the Negroes of the lower
positions) may be due to the instability and skewness of the
social situation in which he lives. He is always “off balance”
and is constantly attempting to achieve an equilibrium which
his society, except under extraordinary circumstances, does not
provide for him.

In the chapters which follow, the caste and class attitudes
are given in full. The family, clique, and associational organ-
izations are carefully described, to demonstrate how caste and
class are organized into the daily lives of the people who live
in the community of Old City. The political and court pro-
cedures are fully described; and they, too, clearly demonstrate
that, although the formal statements of the law books, on the
whole, show no discrimination between the two castes, the
actual practices, while taking into account the moral code
expressed in the law books, usually reverse the democratic
code of the law when dealing with whites and Negroes. The
economic system is described in a number of chapters, and
the problem of the division of goods from the community’s
labor is carefully related to the class and caste systems.

The intricate relations of this complex organization of
human behavior are presented by the authors as a whole
system, a system which represents a way of life that would
seem as peculiar to the South Sea Islander as the South Sea
Islander's way of life does to a native of the deep South. It is but one more example of the almost infinite variety of social systems which man has devised to maintain ordered relations with the rest of nature and with his fellow-beings.

This book is one of several which are being published as a result of a number of years of research on modern American communities. The authors received their training in the study of American communities by the research they did for me on a New England community. The research on the New England community is now being published under the general title of *Yankee City*.

The Davises and Gardners have produced an excellent book. They have written a book which, it seems to me, gives us a keen insight into the human behavior of the deep South, and they have presented some of the facts necessary for a better understanding of the world in which we live.

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