ARTICLES

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Introduction: Black and White in Color

THIS SET OF PAPERS ANALYZES the redefinition of ethnic relations occurring as new Asian immigrants confront a society that historically has been rigidly polarized around a black/white dichotomy. The articles are the product of a coordinated set of projects undertaken in St. Louis, Missouri, by a team of anthropologists in 1987–88 and complemented by follow-up research continuing through mid-1989. Preliminary versions were presented at a symposium on "Disordered Discrimination" held at the 1988 meetings of the American Ethnological Society. The papers are set in a political-economic theoretical framework that relates patterns of ethnicity and gender to structural transformations in the regional economy and the organization of the local labor market. Nevertheless, our underlying theoretical message is a call to revalue culture and ideology as driving forces in social processes. The insights of political-economic approaches—even those with a materialist focus—need not tend toward economic reductionism. Our examination of the changing parameters of cultural diversity in the American Midwest demonstrates with full ethnographic detail that ideas powerfully embedded around race and gender can be creatively recharged into new patterns of ideological—and ultimately political and economic—domination.

St. Louis provides an important case for the examination of ethnic confrontations in an inner-city context because of the city's central location within the United States. With the exception of Chicago, the urban inner city in North America's heartland has been neglected in favor of East Coast and West Coast metropolises, with some reference—especially prior to the 1960s—to the Deep South (cf. Harrison 1988). Usually when overarching statements about race relations are made in the United States, either they refer to the rigid two-caste black/white polarization in the Deep South or they critique some variant of the melting-pot thesis of ethnic diversity in the Northeast (cf. Glazer and Moynihan 1970; Steinberg 1981). Regional patterns of ethnicity in cities like Cleveland, Cincinnati, Detroit, or even Memphis or Houston—areas closer to the population center of the United States—have not been extensively documented.

Philippe Bourgois argues in the first of this set of papers that St. Louis represents almost a caricature of America arising from the intersection of three different political-economic and cultural dynamics, all set in the throes of the prolonged industrial crisis of the Midwest rust belt: low-density western suburban ecology, Deep South black/white polarization, and frustrated northeastern aspirations toward world-class status. In St. Louis, the combination of extreme housing segregation and the lack of an effective public transportation system means that most residents go through their daily routines without any direct contact with other ethnic groups. In this context, images of "the other" become especially charged ideologically. Although the political and economic systems are structured by the black/white dichotomy, whites have only abstract notions of what it means to be black, and (to a large extent) blacks have a similar misunderstanding of whites. Unlike their counterparts in New York or San Francisco, or even Atlanta, white St. Louisans may never have sat next to blacks on public buses or even attended the same movie theater. For this reason, ethnographic fieldwork in St. Louis provides a perfect opportunity to delve into how ethnic identities are reshaped around shifting parameters of power, money, and ideology upon the arrival of new Asian immigrants who do not initially fit into either of the city's reified racial categories. By looking at the ideological adjustments made by all three groups—white, black, and Asian—we can better understand how members of the various groups view themselves and the others.

In this context, Bourgois's history of the regional configuration of race relations in St. Louis is meant to set the stage for the next four articles, which draw primarily on contemporary ethnographic data. The historical background allows us to understand that the especially charged nature of black/white relations in the city can be understood as more than merely a random buildup of irrational ideas. Racism is not taken as a given in the contemporary ethnographic studies: it has historical roots and a structural configuration. The ethnographic data provided by the rest of the team document that new immigrants still must take sides in the city's black/white discontinuum in a manner that confirms or even recreates the historical patterns of discrimination.

Ironically, in view of this polarized context, Carol Maxwell's article on the reception of impoverished Lao immigrants into a white working-class church community might contain some seeds for hope, despite the profound sexism, racism, and paternalism of the church's ideology. The flexible inconsistency of their racism and sexism allow them to "love" these non-white immigrants, legitimize the refugees' use of welfare, and support Lao women in their struggles for economic independence. Of course the frame of reference of the evangelical church members remains the ubiquitous hegemony of a racist black/white divide. Their preliminary embrace of a new ethnic group is ultimately experienced more as the generosity of granting a "funny-looking" people the status of "honorary white" and "worthy poor" rather than a self-critical awareness of racism or a long-term appreciation for cultural pluralism.

The overarching importance of the black/white divide is further elaborated in Miyako Inoue's description of the rapidity with which white St. Louisans absorbed Japanese and Japanese-American immigrants in the 1940s. Some of the statements she collected from elderly Japanese-Americans comparing their former traumatic experience of exclusion—and ultimately expropriation and de-

tainment—in California with their unproblematic integration in St. Louis portray especially succinctly the tenor of the city's race relations. The redefinition of Japanese-Americans as "honorary whites" conflates with their upward class mobility; it also reaffirms itself in the gulf between the *sansei* (third generation) and *nisei* (first generation) Japanese. Will Japanese-Americans in St. Louis disappear as a distinct ethnic group in one more generation as their offspring systematically marry non-Japanese for the second generation in a row? In other words, is the classic American melting pot still cooking for ethnic groups set in contexts such as this?

Carmen White's fieldwork on the floor of a garment factory "sweatshop" required exceptional personal commitment as she spent two summers earning minimum wage, working full time with temperatures often exceeding 100 degrees. Herself a black American, she had unique access to the perspectives of some of the workers being displaced by the new arrivals. This was the flip side of the dynamic being examined by Ann Rynearson, who was interviewing white factory owners from the delicate participant-observation perspective of a researcher from an institution dedicated to "integrating" new immigrants into St. Louis. Both their studies are at the theoretical core of the research team's focus on the political economy of ideologies around ethnicity. Each provides the nitty-gritty documentation of conflicting viewpoints on the work process—including the conflation of ethnicity with differential enforcement of labor discipline and the intra-class as well as cross-class confrontations this engenders.

We considered it important that these papers be published together because much of the project was carried out as a group endeavor, joining anthropologists in both academia and the community. Although we met on a monthly basis in a strictly academic setting in the anthropology department at Washington University, the project was structured as a partnership with the International Institute, the largest refugee resettlement agency in the St. Louis region. Rynearson directs an applied research program at the institute and her ties to the local community gave us easy entrée to St. Louis institutions, such as churches and businesses, that are often closed to academic researchers. Rynearson's ethnographic input was not restricted to the white factory owners about whom she writes in this collection. Even more important to the dynamic of our research team has been her ongoing, long-term commitment to the St. Louis Lao community, including not only fluency in the Lao language but her emergence in a crucial position of leadership within the community's complicated structures of factional politics. Rynearson, consequently, was able to challenge and complement data on the Lao being collected by other researchers.

The research team spanned many differences, race, gender, age, class, and institutional and educational background. Ethnic identity ranged from black American and Japanese-American to midwestern white, southern white, and New York "Yankee." The diversity of the team, together with our applied/academic focus, gave us privileged access to a range of different ethnic groups with contrasting perspectives on the integration of immigrant groups in St. Louis. At the monthly discussion sessions, team members were able to provide one another with insights—sometimes contradictory viewpoints on the very same events. For example, Maxwell kept Rynearson up to date with her fieldwork on the white working-class evangelicals who minister to Lao refugees. The mid-

western white religious identity she shared with them helped Maxwell gain acceptance from the congregation and enjoy the time she spent with them. Especially interesting was her information on the public portrayal of self provided to the white churchgoers by the Lao who were desperately negotiating for economic support and the ideological welcome of a new-American status. Armed with Maxwell's insights into the white American perspective on events, Rynearson would go back to the Lao community and collect new versions of the same affairs. This in turn provided a grist of conflicting data for the next month's fieldwork discussion session—sometimes poignant, sometimes funny, always illuminating.

Comparative material on the Lao experience dominated much of our fieldwork discussions. It also contributed to Inoue's analysis of the experiences of another cohort of Asian immigrants who are now enveloped in entirely different class relations and who are responding to a distinct historical continuity. White's observations of relations between new immigrants and American blacks on the shop floor were enriched by Bourgois's historical perspective on the black/white dichotomy in St. Louis. At the same time, Rynearson was interviewing owners who were employing new immigrants in precisely the kind of setting where White was working. This provided us with uniquely contrasting insights from both sides—management and labor—of the head-on confrontation taking place between black workers and new immigrants competing for a place on the bottom rung of the local labor market.

We hope that these papers demonstrate the advantages of a team approach to ethnography that spans ethnic, gender, generation, and class boundaries to provide special access to otherwise confrontational and bounded realms. We hope also that this research will contribute to knowledge about all low-visibility ethnic groups that exist in the interstices of ethnically dichotomous systems, such as the Chinese in Mississippi (Loewen 1971), the Lumbee Indians of South Carolina (Blu 1980), the "Coloreds" of South Africa (Wheeldon 1969), Mexican-Americans in St. Louis (Rynearson 1980), and the Samoans of Seattle (Kotchek 1975). Having no clear place in the prevailing black/white dichotomy in St. Louis, new immigrants, especially Asians, are emerging as one of these interstitial groups. By shaking up the status quo of race relations, such minorities engender a situation that may ultimately bring about dramatic culture change. Research on interstitial ethnicities provides insight into the ideological processes and the political-economic structures shaping regional patterns of ethnic relations.

These papers should not be read merely as academic documentation of an understudied part of America or theoretical contribution to ethnographic methodologies for understanding ethnic and class relations. There is a deeper tension and commitment coursing through this ethnographic and historical collection. The very planning and execution of the research were guided by a deeply held belief that America has to face the most urgent item on its social agenda: polarization around ethnicity and class in the inner city. By breaking traditional boundaries and categories of inclusion and exclusion in our research design and thereby maximizing our access to diverse and sometimes contradictory perspectives, we have tried to contribute in a well-documented manner to a better understanding of the dynamics of race relations in the United States. We hope

this team study will be appreciated for its methodology and its ethnographic insights, but we also hope it will contribute to a sense of concern about the further deterioration of ethnic/racial relations in the nation's heartland.

Acknowledgments. Both authors would like to thank the Washington University Department of Anthropology and the International Institute, St. Louis, for their logistical, financial, and moral support for the duration of the project. We are also grateful to the U.S. Census Bureau for its financial support during the final phase of this research. Bourgois would also like to thank the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research for additional economic support during the write-up, and he is especially appreciative of Rynearson's editing of drafts of the articles and her coordinating of the research project after his departure from St. Louis in May 1988.

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