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THE CULTURAL DYNAMIC OF PUERTO RICAN SPIRITISM: CLASS,  
NATIONALITY, AND RELIGION IN A BROOKLYN GHETTO

*City University of New York*

PH.D. 1981

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THE CULTURAL DYNAMIC OF PUERTO RICAN SPIRITISM  
CLASS, NATIONALITY, AND RELIGION IN A BROOKLYN GHETTO

by

JOSÉ E. FIGUEROA

A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the re-  
quirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
the City University of New York.

1981

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

THE CULTURAL DYNAMIC OF PUERTO RICAN SPIRITISM  
CLASS, NATIONALITY, AND RELIGION IN A BROOKLYN GHETTO

By

José E. Figueroa

Adviser: Professor George Fischer

This study seeks to determine the role that spiritism plays in enhancing or diminishing both national self awareness and working class consciousness. To obtain the relevant data we used the method of participant observation among Puerto Rican workers in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

This study demonstrates that in a case such as Puerto Rican spiritism, religion can play a much more positive role, and a more liberating one than Karl Marx allowed for. As against the alienating aspects of religion that Marx tied to accommodation, this study shows that a liberating aspect of religion tipped the scale toward resistance. We show, through various case studies and a collective action, that religion, in our case spiritism, can at times become a tool that challenges, urges, initiates, and perhaps achieves changes within the structure of everyday life. We stress that the contradictions of conformity versus accommodation, and religious creativity versus religious

escape, interact with each other and in this way can bring about both national self awareness and working class consciousness.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION: PROBLEM, SETTING, AND METHOD

#### 1. Problem

This study brings out the cultural dynamic of spiritism. A key contradiction makes up that cultural dynamic: the continual clash between a passive, alienating acceptance of the status quo and a turn to cultural resistance based on the dual shaping of national and class consciousness opposed to the same status quo. To offer a critical interpretation of this cultural dynamic is the problem addressed by this study.

To deal with this problem, I look for cultural resistance and accommodation among Puerto Rican workers in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. I ask at each step: How does spiritism contribute to cultural resistance or accommodation? How does it contribute to Puerto Rican working class political doctrine or ideology?

Puerto Rican spiritism can be treated from a variety of angles and on the basis of different criteria. There are those who treat spiritism from a psychotherapeutic perspective (Rogler and Hollingshed, 1961; Garrison, 1972; Seda Bonilla, 1973; Morales, 1976). Hence, they do not feel the need to relate spiritism to other socio-historical, political, and cultural factors.

The present author prefers the approach by which spiritism is related to such factors. The psychotherapeutic approach is not negated. Nor is spiritism as such. Rather, the psychotherapeutic approach is considered one of the many roles played by spiritism.

Of course, Puerto Rican spiritism can only be analyzed in relation to concrete secular conditions. In this sense I follow Vittorio Lanternari's approach:

These conditions may be described as the existential experiences to which human society is bound at any given historical moment, at which in turn give rise to cultural exigencies which apply likewise to that particular moment. These experiences and exigencies are to be found at the root of every religious manifestation. (Lanternari, 1963, vi)

Furthermore, I share Lanternari's strong linking of religion to history as well as eschatology:

Probably there is no phenomenon which reflects more clearly than do the religious movements among oppressed peoples the contradictory, yet indissoluble, bond between current reality and future goals, between history and eschatology, which lies at the root of almost every major human experience. (Lanternari, 1963, xii)

The literature on race and ethnic relations in the United States has been written mainly from a particular perspective. This perspective takes for granted -- as given -- the status quo. This perspective fails to consider racial oppression as defined by Blauner (1971) and Carmichael (1967). It is assumed that assimilation is the inevitable final outcome. Even the religious experience of the immigrants becomes a catalyst for assimilation. Therefore, it is

concluded that the immigrants inevitably accommodate to one of the three main religious groups -- Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish.

Coming from this perspective many American as well as Puerto Rican social scientists argue that the experiences of the Puerto Rican migrants parallel the experiences of previous groups. The colonial relation between Puerto Rico and the United States is either taken for granted or denied.

Although this perspective sees the poor conditions of the Puerto Ricans in the United States, we find a belief (or hope) that this condition is only temporary. The notion of institutional racism is disregarded. Since it is assumed that assimilation is inevitable, writers who share this perspective fail to consider that Puerto Ricans might prefer to develop their own working class way of life. These social scientists do not even play with the notion that a colonial relationship might exist between the Puerto Rican communities in the urban ghettos of the United States and the larger ruling system.

An example of such a colonial relationship might exist in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. It is not too difficult to realize that the major institutions and the life of the Puerto Ricans in this community are controlled by outsiders. Although the area is one of the most industrial in the city, the rate of unemployment is one of the highest. Here we find one of the lower rates of people participating in the labor

force. There is also a low rate of high school graduates, etc. In general, the conditions of the Puerto Ricans in this neighborhood are similar to the ones experienced by colonized working class people elsewhere.

Instead of only seeing a force whereby Puerto Ricans assimilate American norms and values -- or accommodate -- I also see a force of resistance. This resistance comes in the form of Puerto Rican awareness of national and working class consciousness. There are, of course, different levels of awareness. These levels are not static stages that follow one after the other. Rather, these levels are dynamic, ever clashing states of individual and collective consciousness.

These levels of consciousness are products of everyday experiences. As people experience the world in their everyday existence they confront certain contradictions. They must use the cultural tools handed down to them and create new ones to deal with the constantly changing world. It is a constant everyday struggle. People must shape the world at the same time that they are being shaped by the world. For a colonized working class people these everyday contradictions are colored by super-exploitation, racism, degradation, and other adversities that need some kind of relief. Therefore, as Lanternari puts it,

The people seek relief from their frustrations and suffering in religious ways -- in many cases even before attempting to do so by political means. In such a situation all the manifestations of the native culture -- economic, social, political, or philosophical -- become permeated by a deeply

religious spirit. When a people is unable to repel the intruders...Thus, by making a display of their religious independence, forced acculturation or destruction of tribal life imposed both by the missionaries and by the colonial administrators. (Lanternari, 1963, 4)

The experiences of the Puerto Rican workers with American imperialism in the course of the last eighty years, including the stress of migration, has created the need for some kind of relief. Among all the different kinds of relief developed by Puerto Rican workers, one of the most important for urban migrants is spiritism. As expected, "...during the last few years spiritism has enjoyed resurgence." (Seda Bonilla, 1973, 135)

The impact made upon the Puerto Ricans on the island as well as on the mainland by American imperialism has brought about the conditions favoring the rise of a religious fervor along with an awareness of Puerto Rican nationalism and working class consciousness. One must realize, however, that such fervor has emerged in reaction to oppression of other kinds. In the last century the motivation was, of course, the struggle against Spanish and Catholic domination. But today, the pressures of adaptation to new environments and new social conditions in Puerto Rico as well as in the United States "...compels the internal forces...to make a choice between clinging to traditions rendered obsolete by events or developing patterns of culture better able to meet new challenges." (Lanternari, 1963, 30)

A lot of writers have dealt with religion as an escapist human activity. (Niebuhr, 1971; Pope, 1942; Clock and Stark, 1965; Elison, 1965) Karl Marx also dealt with religion in this sense.

To Marx, religion is "illusory happiness." It tends to provide a rationalization and justification of the established social order. Religion becomes the "opium of the people," because it treats social conditions as being out of people's control. (Marx, 1964, 43) Nevertheless, Marx was not so simplistic in his approach. Even he recognized that religion can be more than an escape. Marx understood that religion can become a form of protest against human oppression. But, as Lefebver noted:

Marx, however, had very little to say about the protest function of religion. His writing dealt more with the way religion reflects the social order than with the way religion shapes the social order. (Lefebver, 1977, 266)

I will not and cannot refute Marx's claims. On the contrary, like Marx, I also see an escapist tendency in Puerto Rican spiritism. But unlike Marx, I see and stress a creative force. As Kitzinger rightly observed, "...religion does not appear always to serve social ends...far from reinforcing the social system, faith may undermine or dislocate it." (Kitzinger, 1969, 259) Spiritism has both escapist as well as creative tendencies. Both tendencies are constantly clashing just as do the resulting accommodation and resistance I argue here, to repeat, that this brings about

constant conflict. At times, the clash leads to innovations in the cultural and spiritual life of oppressed people. This is the main thrust of the present work. Here my work follows Lefebver:

...the religion of the poor is complex, multifaceted and paradoxical. The religion of the poor functions as both an escape and a creative force, as both a polliative and as a positive source of cultural and social meaning. (Lefebver, 1977, 234)

A number of scholars have dealt with religion as a millenarian or messianic movement. Norman Coon (1961) studied the history of millenarianism in medieval Europe. Eric J. Hobsbawn (1959) gave some consideration to millenarian movements in Spain and Italy during the 19th and early 20th centuries. From Vittorio Lanternari (1963) we get an insight into millenarian and messianic movements among different oppressed people in the world. George E. Simpson (1977), Kitzinger (1969), and M. G. Smith, Roy Angier, and Rex Nettleford (1967) studied the Ras Tafari movement in Jamaica. From E. Eric Lincoln (1973) we get an account of the Black Muslim movement in the United States. G. Llewellyn Watson (1973) makes a comparative analysis of the Ras Tafari movement in Jamaica and the Black Muslim movement in the United States. Although there are disagreements on basic theoretical and methodological matters, most of these scholars agree that the study of such movements might shed some light on the relation between religion and social change.

The millenarian movements are essentially religions of the oppressed -- the peasants, the colonized, the poor in the cities. They are reactions to severe hardships, suffering, change in society, migration, and unsatisfied expectations. Hobsbawn insists that millenarianism is essentially a pre-political phenomenon. It spreads among those who traditionally have been politically passive and have no access to political power. Therefore, according to his analysis, millenarianism grows out of great distress and political helplessness. Since it demands a fundamental transformation of society and not just improvement and reform, it can be considered revolutionary in nature. This radical aspect of millenarianism incites the followers to actively anticipate the advent and in some cases to revolt. The belief in complete group salvation generates a supreme effort without which a complete break with the existing order is impossible.

I am not going to characterize spiritism as a millenarian or messianic movement. Puerto Rican spiritism seems not to have such a critical and radical outlook on society. Rather, I am going to treat spiritism as a more routinized activity that affects the everyday life of Puerto Rican workers. My main empirical objective is to analyze just how spiritism does contribute to the perception of everyday reality.

In order to perceive (to be conscious of) the

objective world, people must learn how to order the data in front of them. This learning to perceive (to be conscious of) the objective world is the mental basis of all social knowledge. Consciousness (knowing the world), inseparable from language, can be seen as a blending of social constructs -- of various definitions of reality people develop together.

Spiritism is of interest as one such construct. In spiritual gatherings the Puerto Ricans, through language, express how they view the world. In their daily life, working people come into contact with certain institutions that are supposed to help them. Their experiences with these institutions show quite the contrary. People are beginning to see these bureaucratic and authoritarian institutions with discontent and sometimes hatred. Their discontent and hatred are expressed in many ways. One such way is through spiritism.

The cases analyzed in this work indicate that people constantly described secular conditions as stemming from supernatural forces. In order to transcend their problems, certain rituals are performed. Here, I notice people's lack of understanding of social interaction. They view their problems as stemming from spiritual forces rather than from social interaction. Hence, these spiritual forces need to be controlled first. Once the spirits are under control, an individual's problems can be solved. But this is not to

say that people are completely blind to social forces that affect their lives. In their everyday speech (or complaints) during spiritual gatherings, we find elements of protest against the institutions that do not represent them.

In the process of social oppression and conflict, working people tend to learn more about the purpose of those institutions. The case studies presented here show just how Puerto Rican workers in Williamsburg, Brooklyn seem, in their day to day lives, to be learning that such institutions do not serve their interests as a class or even as a nationality.

The people this work deals with express their discontent and hatred before, during, and after the spiritual seances. They also express their feelings in private consultations with the spiritualist. Through spiritism, in one way or another, Puerto Rican working class people get to discuss in small groups their experiences with welfare, courts, factories, etc. (Salgado, 1974) It is, in part, through these discussions that they begin to find their common interests.

In this social activity I found that people are making available to themselves a different way of speaking about the world (language), way of knowing (perception), and perhaps future rules of action. Thus, through this social activity people begin to question many of their past assumptions about the world. In the course of the religious

activity, new perceptions of the world are being formulated. This can lead to a new way of organizing, in people's minds, the world around them. Their discontent with what is might lead them to aspire to a different form of life. The Puerto Rican workers are becoming conscious of a form of life in which they are to be treated as human beings.

This is not to say that Puerto Rican workers have a clear understanding of the exploitation that they suffer. In fact, these workers lack a clear understanding of the nature of the society which is exploiting them to the fullest. For the most part, the Puerto Ricans feel proud of being both American citizens and Puerto Ricans; that does not seem to constitute a contradiction. But the statements and actions of Puerto Rican workers indicate that they feel something is wrong. They experience the material world and see that it contradicts the common belief in a rich and free America for all.

As they complain and begin to recognize their common conditions of oppression, they begin to offer to themselves (consciously or not) the possibility of a different social world. They begin to make available to themselves the possibility of a new world in which to conduct their lives. Then, the world begins to appear differently because they begin to experience it as consisting of different relations, expressing different meanings from those they perceived yesterday.

In their everyday talk or complaints they are beginning to formulate an ideology, a working class world view. This is how I understand ideology for the purpose of this dissertation.

John C. and Michele R. Pollock (in Nash, 1975, 158) explained how ideology cannot be treated as something separated from objective reality, human interests, purpose or actions. The most useful definition of ideology is that which links objective social reality to human interests and action. In explaining how the press reported the Chilean situation, the Pollacks used Nigel Harris' definition of ideology. I find Harris' definition very useful to my own analysis. According to him ideology is

...the language of the purpose of a social group, recognizing that one's estimate of ideology turns on whether or not one thinks those purposes are reasonable. "purpose", the word substitutes here for what others have called "interest", cannot however be identified separately from an ideology. It is not the case that in the beginning there were purposes, and men created ideologies to relate those purposes to the world they faced. Rather does the definition of purpose arise during men's exploration of the world...

Ideologies are not disguised descriptions of the world, but rather real descriptions of the world from a specific viewpoint just as all descriptions of the world are from a particular viewpoint. (Emphasis added. Nash, 1975, 162)

Unlike the Pollocks, who were concerned with understanding ideology as the language of the purpose of powerful socio-economic groups, I am concerned with understanding ideology as the language of the purpose of the oppressed socio-economic groups, in my case the Puerto

Rican workers. Here ideology as the language of the oppressed is examined by suggesting that its role is to explain their subjugated conditions and the chances to reach an alternative way of life. A major instrument is the use of key words, expressions, and everyday conversations in specific social activities (spiritism) which carry hidden ideological connotations. This we see as the beginning of an ideological alternative, a base that the Puerto Rican workers are shaping within the community under study.

Contrary to the prevailing language of the bourgeoisie, this type of language reflects a Puerto Rican working class reality. The Puerto Rican confronts an objective world that acts as if it believes in the existence of an American Dream or Creed. It is in the process of day to day troubles, complaints, debates, discussions and finally struggles that the workers begin to shape a more concrete counter-rhetoric (ideology) that best expresses their understanding of reality. During the spiritual gatherings the Puerto Ricans, although still unaware, have the opportunity to discuss (and even debate) the contradictions in their emerging counter-ideology. In a very simplistic, or at least simple, way the Puerto Rican workers are finding out who is benefiting from their miseries.

In order for an ideology to be effective it has to lead to some type of social action. For a working class counter-ideology to do that, the social action must

represent their interest. During spiritual seances I find the Puerto Rican workers posing to themselves the question of class action. Such a class action deals with certain problems that as workers they confront in their daily lives at work or at home.

Behind this understanding of future action we find hidden the need of breaking away from the present social structure. Although not yet clear to Puerto Rican workers, they seem to be finding out in such discussions that the only way to solve their problems is by changing the social system. We find present throughout the cases to be presented the shaping of Puerto Rican awareness of thier own nationality. Individuals come to the spiritual gatherings with different experiences and degrees of awareness. In their conversations and complaints I see the formation of a different type of language to that which is handed down to them by different institutions in our society. They are talking about what it means to be Puerto Rican in a society which treats them unfairly. The spiritual gatherings are giving them the opportunity to develop a different type of ideology that articulates their interests as a nationality within the United States working class.

This ideology can result in a cohesive action in the everyday life of the group. For example, I will demonstrate how a group of tenants living in Williamsburg use spiritism in order to collectively act against an insensitive

landlord. It is here that we can best see the creative side of spiritism. Not only did the tenants use -- as tools of struggle -- the opportunity (or time) offered by the religious gatherings, they also used some of the rituals and beliefs of spiritism.

Each individual participated in accordance with his/her level of social consciousness. Some of the most conscious individuals took the leadership. But these leaders never acted without the spoken approval or consent of all the tenants.

At the root of this collective action I found the main contradictions to be stressed throughout this study: secular resistance versus accommodation and religious creativity versus religious escape. These contradictions interact with each other, bringing about the very dynamic this work singles out. No individual goes untouched by this dynamic. The dynamic and underlying contradictions seem to be an integral part of the lives of the individuals as well as the life of the group.

## 2. The Setting

Here, I will be looking at the Puerto Rican ghetto in Williamsburg, in Brooklyn. I will do so from the perspective of development economics. I am concerned with this Puerto Rican ghetto as an economic unit of a racist society.

The Puerto Rican community in Williamsburg can be

best understood as an underdeveloped and systematically exploited ghetto controlled by the dominant white society. C. E. Rodriguez, speaking of the Puerto Ricans in New York City, noted:

...the figures indicate fairly clearly that Puerto Ricans have only marginally been integrated into the New York economy. (Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 1979, 203)

Alfredo Lopez's observations seem to support Rodriguez's claim. Lopez stated:

There is no possibility of maintaining an independent economy in the Puerto Rican community. The whole economic structure in the community and among the people of this section of the nation is one of total dependency, of total subsidy (in that all the operations revolve around goods which are brought into the community from the outside). (Lopez, 1973, 92)

So, what are some of the problems confronted by Puerto Rican workers living in Williamsburg? Are the conditions in Williamsburg similar to the ones presented by Rodriguez and Lopez? Can one conclude that they have been only marginally integrated into the economy?

Williamsburg is a neighborhood just south of Greenpoint in the northern part of Brooklyn. The boundaries are North Seventh Street, The Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, Newtown Creek, Flushing Avenue, Kent Avenue, and the East River. (See Map 1.) It was founded in 1810. (Stiles, 1894)

By 1970 the estimated total population of Williamsburg was 135,528 or 5.2 percent of the Kings County (Brooklyn) population. (1970 Census Tracts) The largest ethnic

Map of Williamsburg, Brooklyn



group living in the area was the hispanic. It made up 46 percent of the population. Of the 46 percent 38.4 percent were of Puerto Rican birth or parents. Seventeen and seven-tenths percent of all hispanics (including Puerto Ricans) in Brooklyn lived in the area. And 19 percent of the Puerto Ricans in Brooklyn lived in Williamsburg.

The hispanics were followed closely by whites who constituted 40.4 percent of the population. But only 3.3 percent of Brooklyn's whites lived in Williamsburg. A very small number of blacks lived in Williamsburg. They composed only 13.6 percent of the population living in the area. In terms of Brooklyn as a whole, only 2.8 percent of the blacks lived in Williamsburg. (See Table I.)

Table I

POPULATION BY RACE/ETHNICITY (1970)

	<u>Kings County</u>	<u>Williamsburg</u>
Whites	1,653,205	54,743
Puerto Ricans	271,764	51,554
Blacks	656,194	18,371
Other Hispanics	120,806	10,840
Totals	2,601,974	135,528

As the Census data show, the main groups were the hispanics (mostly Puerto Ricans), whites, and blacks. But Williamsburg is far from being an integrated neighborhood. Each group lives in its own established separate community.

The Census divided Williamsburg into 35 tracts. There were 17 tracts where the population was mainly white. The total population of these 17 tracts was 52,180. In these tracts, 74.9 percent of the people were whites. There were 20.5 percent hispanics and 4.7 percent blacks living in these tracts.

Furthermore, there were 16 tracts where the population was mainly hispanic (65.5 percent). There were only 20.4 percent whites and 14.1 percent blacks living in these tracts.

Only two tracts were reported as having a population of mainly blacks. There were 33.3 percent hispanics and only 5.4 percent shites. (See Table II.)

Table II

POPULATION BY TRACTS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

	<u>White tracts</u>	<u>Hispanic tracts</u>	<u>Black tracts</u>
Whites	74.9%	20.4%	5.4%
Hispanics	20.5	65.5	33.3
Blacks	4.7	14.1	61.3
Total No.	52,180	74,491	8.837

Still, even these data tend to obscure reality. They tend to show more integration than what in reality exists. This increases the illusion that different groups live in the same community. It does not show that in some instances, for example tract 519, the whites congregate in one portion

of the tract (to the north) while the hispanics congregated in another section.

One of the major social problems in Williamsburg is the high rate of unemployment. It must be understood that unemployment is a very selective classification. It does not include all the people who are not working. Excluded from classification are the sick, the disabled, the old or too young, the ones going to school, the ones who have part-time jobs, and finally, the people who are not working but also not looking for work. All of these people are classified as "outside of the labor force."

The 1970 Census estimated that there were 40,613 males and 46,177 females, or 86,788 people sixteen years and older able to work in Williamsburg. Out of this total, 5.6 percent of the male population and 35.9 percent of the female population were "outside of the labor force."

There were 5.3 percent white males and 24.1 percent white females "outside of the labor force." Furthermore, 21.6 percent of the black males and 77.4 percent of the black females were also "outside of the labor force."

At the extreme end we find the Puerto Ricans. No less than 30.2 percent of the Puerto Rican men are officially out of the labor force. So are 89.4 percent of the Puerto Rican women. This is significantly worse than the overall situation of the Puerto Ricans in New York City (22 percent of the Puerto Rican men and 71 percent of the

Puerto Rican women were not in the labor force). To quote Alfredo Lopez:

These are the lumpen, as many call them; they are the people without any real stake in life. Many are probably on welfare, eking out a living of the fifty dollars a month, hustling from their neighbors in between checks -- living while dying, dying while living. They are unable to stand tall; many of them cannot stand at all. These are society's scum, the superfluous people, and they also make up 30 percent of our people. It is a disgusting picture. (Lopez, 1973, 93)

Now we come to the unemployed. The Census defines "unemployed" as those who were working of late and are now looking for a job. This group of men and women are considered part of the labor force.

There were 27,330 males and 15,051 females or 42,381 people classified as part of the labor force in Williamsburg. Out of this total 3.7 percent of the males and 2.9 percent of the females were unemployed. That is, 6.6 percent of the total population of Williamsburg was unemployed (higher than Kings County's 4.6 percent).

The white population had the lowest unemployment rate in Williamsburg: 2.4 percent. While the white males had an unemployment rate of 1.3 percent, the white females showed 1.1 percent. The unemployment rate for blacks (5.2 percent) was worse than for whites -- 2.7 percent of the black men and 2.5 percent of the black women were unemployed.

Once again, the reality of the colonized Puerto Rican was much worse. The average unemployment rate was 7.3 percent. Officially, there was 4.3 percent unemployment for

males and 3 percent for females. Here again, we can echo Alfredo Lopez's observations:

These figures indicate and illustrate the position of Puerto Rican labor power in the industrial areas of the American economy. For the most part, all the rates of employment are substantially lower than for blacks, another cheap labor force, and definitely lower than for whites, who have it bad enough. In fact, as a group, we rank lowest on the pay scale. We are cheap -- very cheap -- labor. (Lopez, 1973, 93)

But what about those who work? How well or badly off are they?

The median family income for those living in Williamsburg was \$6,708 a year. (This was much lower than the median income -- \$8,857 -- of the families living in all of Kings County.) The whites had the highest median family income, \$7,583 a year. They were followed by blacks with a median income of \$6,775. The Puerto Ricans had the lowest family income: \$5,330.

Based on the yearly median income, the Puerto Rican families earned an average of \$103 per week as compared to \$131 for black families and \$146 for white families.

But the Puerto Rican situation is still worse. When one examines the distribution of income, as much as 50 percent of the Puerto Rican families earned less than \$96 per week compared to 29 percent for both white and black families. (See Table III.)

Table III

INCOME BY RACE/ETHNICITY

<u>Income 1969</u>	<u>Weekly Income</u>	<u>Puerto Rican</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>
Less than \$1,000 to \$4,999	Less than \$96	49.8%	28.7%	29.2%
\$5,000 to \$7,999	\$97 to \$154	28.6	27.0	26.9
\$8,000 +	\$155 +	21.5	44.3	43.9
	Average yearly income	\$5,330	\$6,775	\$7,583
	Average weekly income	\$103	\$131	\$146
	% poverty level	34.8%	20.0%	17.2%

Even worse, 17 percent of the Puerto Rican families were earning less than \$77 per week compared to 22 percent for both black and white families. Imagine, all this is before taxes!

The picture is as skewed at the higher end of the pay scale. While 44 percent of the black and white families received weekly earnings of over \$155 per week, only 22 percent of the Puerto Rican families received such earnings. According to the Census, a family of four earning \$3,743 per year or \$72 per week was considered living at the "poverty level." Furthermore, 20 percent of all blacks also lived below the poverty level. But again, life for the Puerto Ricans was worse. Even by official standards, over one-third (34.8 percent) lived in complete poverty.

As one examines the high income families, one notices a greater gap. The data show that 23.6 percent of all the families in Williamsburg received incomes above \$10,000 per

year. While 30.4 percent of all white families and 29.8 percent of all black families earned above \$10,000 per year, only 11.4 percent of the Puerto Rican families earned as much. No wonder Alfredo Lopez emphasized the cheapness of Puerto Rican labor.

But which positions and what kind of jobs did Puerto Ricans hold? Were they moving up the ladder of occupational success?

The fact that 42.6 percent of the people in the labor force in Williamsburg were white collar workers might lead us to believe that one out of every two people in the area had fairly good positions. But the truth of the matter was, of course, that 25.8 percent of the males and 40.6 percent of the females were clerical/sales workers. People in this line of work not only suffered from instability in their jobs but also earned inadequate salaries.

As one examines these statistics in terms of ethnic and racial groups, one finds the Puerto Rican reality at its worst. While 52.8 percent of the whites and 51.6 percent of the blacks were classified as white collar workers, only 28.2 percent of the Puerto Ricans were classified as such. This was an almost two to one ratio. (See Table IV.)

Even in the lowly category of clerical/sales workers, the Puerto Ricans fell behind. While 31.5 percent of the black males and 47.6 percent of the black females held clerical/sales positions, 29.1 percent of the white males

BREAKDOWN OF WILLIAMSBURG LABOR FORCE

Total Employment	Williamsburg			Puerto Ricans			Blacks			Whites		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
<u>White Collar Worker</u>	36.0%	49.2%	42.6%	24.3%	32.0%	28.2%	43.1%	60.0%	51.6%	40.7%	64.9%	52.8%
Professional and technicians	5.7	7.0	6.4	3.0	4.2	3.6	8.3	9.7	9.0	6.6	7.5	7.1
Managers, official & proprietors	4.0	1.7	2.9	2.3	.7	2.5	3.4	2.8	3.1	5.0	1.8	3.4
Clerical workers	21.8	36.4	29.1	15.8	25.0	20.4	28.6	44.7	36.7	23.5	50.3	36.9
Sales Workers	4.5	4.2	4.4	3.2	2.2	2.7	2.9	2.9	2.9	5.6	5.3	5.5
<u>Blue Collar Workers</u>	52.3	40.2	46.3	63.1	61.3	62.2	39.8	22.9	31.4	49.1	35.2	37.2
Craftmen and foremen	12.4	-	-	11.2	-	-	10.3	-	-	13.5	-	-
Operatives	35.0	37.4	36.2	47.5	57.5	52.5	25.6	20.7	23.2	30.4	32.7	31.6
Non-farm workers	4.0	-	-	4.5	-	-	4.5	-	-	5.2	-	-
Other blue collar	-	2.7	-	-	3.8	-	-	2.1	-	-	2.5	-
<u>Service Workers</u>	12.6	10.4	11.5	12.3	6.1	9.2	14.4	13.1	13.8	12.4	11.7	12.1
Private household	.4	1.0	.7	.1	-	-	2.1	.4	1.3	.2	1.6	.9
Other service	12.2	9.4	10.8	12.2	6.1	9.2	12.3	12.7	12.5	12.2	10.1	11.2

Table IV

and 55.6 percent of the white females were classified as such. On the other hand, only 19 percent of the Puerto Rican males and 27.2 percent of the females were classified in this category.

In the professional, technical, managerial, official and proprietary positions the differences are even greater. Surprisingly enough, 11.7 percent of the black males and 12.5 percent of the black females classified as such. They were followed by the whites with 11.6 percent of the males and 9.3 percent of the females holding these high paying and prestigious positions. Only 5.3 percent of the Puerto Rican males and 4.9 percent of the females had such occupations. In general, only 5.1 percent of the Puerto Rican labor force in Williamsburg belonged to these prestigious occupations.

While 62.2 percent of the Puerto Rican labor force in Williamsburg was blue collar only, 31.4 percent of the blacks and 37.2 percent of the whites were the same. Operatives made up 52.5 percent of the Puerto Rican labor force (23.2 percent for blacks and 31.6 percent for whites). If one considers the degree of automation being introduced, one would easily recognize the futureless position of the operative workers. These are the most unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. The jobs are the first to go during economic crises.

In 1969 the City Planning Commission estimated that there were 90,000 jobs in Williamsburg. According to this

source, "with 90,000 jobs, Williamsburg is the major manufacturing center in Brooklyn." (1969, 23) There were an estimated 47 firms with 125 or more employees in Williamsburg. Although the Puerto Ricans are living in the center of one of the most highly industrial sites in Brooklyn, and for that matter in New York, their overall economic situation is one of chaos, lack of mobility, and human despair. The Puerto Rican community is by far the poorest of all racial or ethnic clusters in Williamsburg.

If one begins to measure the degree of political power and social control by the amount of wealth possessed by a group, then the Puerto Ricans are powerless. In fact, the Puerto Ricans in Williamsburg are economically controlled by forces outside its boundaries. The only thing that they have is their labor. But again, as Alfredo Lopez claimed, Puerto Rican labor is extremely cheap labor. This economically exploited ghetto is the setting this study.

### 3. Method

At one level the methods employed in this study are straightforward. At another more personal level they are rather complex since they require a good deal of introspection and self-analysis.

The data for this thesis are based on four years of intensive participant observation in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The author has become an accepted member of a number of

adult peer groups in the neighborhood which contribute adherents to a particular spiritualist's following. Field notes from group interactions are systematically recorded and serve as the major source of data for further analysis. In addition to field observations and diary entries which are written each day, the author also conducts informal and structured interviews with all the actors who figure in the thesis. The content of the informal interviews is determined beforehand from questions which arise in analysis of field notes. These interviews are based on specific interview guides which the author prepares before the interviews.

In addition to the traditional methods of participant observation with neighborhood peer groups in social clubs, spiritualist meetings, homes and street interactions, the author has also worked in the community. As Assistant Manager of Community Board #1 in Brooklyn (1979), the author had an opportunity to learn about all the urban planning and social programming issues which affect the neighborhood of concern in this study. As the supervisor of the summer youth employment program during that period, a great many personal contacts were made with families in the neighborhood who also appear in the analysis of spiritism. Work for the Community Board also required collection and analysis of all relevant statistics and archival material, a good deal of which are used in this thesis.

As a trained social investigator I examine the

frustrations and pains of a working people. I try to understand and describe their destroyed lives objectively. But my subjectivity keeps bouncing against the walls of my thoughts. My inner emotions seem to be consumed by a great battle. My awareness of human misery and the rules of scientific detachment clash.

My goal is not to construct a completely unbiased picture of reality. I do not want to separate my objectively trained eyes from my subjective heart. It is my subjective world, my inner passions, and my experiences that inspire me to search for the truth. It is my scientific training that leads me to question and examine each side of a mysterious coin critically.

Traditional sociology, specifically, and the social sciences, in general, have been used to explain away or rationalize the status quo. (Blackburn, 1973, 10) Hiding behind the myth of pure objectivity, traditional sociology has failed to study the Puerto Rican experience critically.

The study of society is far more than gathering facts, investigating and presenting the arrived at conclusions. To me, it is the interpretation of events in light of material forces that shape and mold the social and political processes. In turn, history is defined by social processes. Within these social processes there are different antagonistic classes and a variety of contradictions that need defining. It is these processes that I wish to

understand, define, describe, and perhaps change. As an investigator, I must become aware not only of how each of the parts relate to each other but also of how each is part of the whole.

Given this conception, it is necessary to reevaluate the social processes that gave impetus to the Puerto Rican migration and the formation of the Puerto Rican ghettos in American cities.

A lot has been written about the Puerto Rican experience. But these analyses and interpretations have been polluted by an implicit colonialist orientation and by conservative and racist attitudes. Such orientations and attitudes have become obstacles in the understanding of the processes that shaped and developed the Puerto Rican experience.

The migration and the existing conditions of the Puerto Rican ghettos in the United States can be understood only if it is accepted that people alone are the agents of all historical processes. And they, with their actions, are able to retard or impel, depending on the circumstances and the conditions, these historical processes.

This is my own personal account of the sorrow, joys, deaths and struggles of a working people. I do not pretend to be completely objective. My love for them has grown to such an extent that complete scientific objectivity cannot be achieved. But this does not mean that I should not or cannot be critical of their actions, thoughts, failures and

and accomplishments -- or of my own.

I understand that in scientific inquiry total involvement with the subject under study can be an obstacle and not an advantage. In my case, the issue of objectivity and detachment lends itself to debate. I am convinced that in studying human behavior a completely unemotional approach can be less than fruitful. How can a social investigator study any group of people without invading their private lives? The mere presence of the investigator would affect the behavior of those observed. In fact, the investigator enters into a social relationship with his or her subject under study, one that many social scientists fail to consider seriously when interpreting their findings.

It appears that an effective way to observe human behavior is to become so integrated into the group under observation that its behavior is not affected by the presence of the investigator. This is my method in the present work.

I feel that total involvement in my study became more of an advantage than an obstacle. As an offspring of that group, I was already equipped with the Puerto Rican working people's language, customs, and philosophy. Furthermore, I have known many of the people under observation for many years. This made my task much simpler. I did not need the time and energy to familiarize myself with the people or with the essential cultural and social background.

I write from a working class Puerto Rican perspective. My experiences and those of my family and friends guide my method of inquiry. This is my point of departure. After all, I am not just an investigator. I am not and have never been an outsider. I am a working class Puerto Rican immigrant. And yet, I am not the "common" working class Puerto Rican. Unlike so many of us, I have a higher education. But, as a working class Puerto Rican, I have not escaped discrimination, prejudice, institutional racism, and the injustice of a well advanced technological society.

I first visited Williamsburg in 1969 when don Justo, a spiritualist, moved to the area. My family and I used to visit him often and take part in his spiritual gatherings.

In 1971 I left New York. I spent a year at the University of Puerto Rico. There I met another working class Puerto Rican, German Antonio Martinez. Immediately we became good friends. Ever since, we have been "hanging around" together.

When I came back to New York I lived in the Bronx. At the time I was still an undergraduate student with no interest in studying Williamsburg. It was through don Justo and German -- the two of them also became friends -- that I began to meet people. Since German had a car, it became easier for me to travel. Soon I realized that I was spending a lot of time in the area.

My first impressions of the community are now vague

memories. It was not until 1975 that I began to take notes. Since I did not realize or know exactly what I was searching for my notes were inconsistent and unsystematic.

As I became more systematic, German's interest also grew. In an informal manner he became my collaborator. His knowledge of the community and his working class background became an asset to my study. We spent many hours discussing and arguing about issues and events in the community. His insights of the world we observed are scattered throughout this work. But, of course, his insights have been reshaped here by my own understanding and interpretations.

I lived in Williamsburg for a short while but, due to a freezing apartment, despicable living conditions, and poor health, I was forced to move out. I searched for another apartment in the area but the conditions and high rent did not meet my subjective standards of decent living. Finally, I gave up my search and, with regret, I moved out. But I did not stop spending time around that neighborhood. I still find myself spending as much time there as I did before.

Many people knew I was a student. Once I decided to write about our lives I told some of them. There were different reactions. None of the reactions were negative. Victor was one of the first to say something about my work. Jokingly he commented:

Cofío (Damn) Jose, I don't know how you are going to write about all of us. Imagine, each one of us is a book. Mira (Look), chico, I'm a book. And in my book I'm the "muchacho" [the main character or

the good guy of a picture]. Ha, ha...

But, in general, the majority of the people were unaware of my work. Since I was considered a "panita" (a buddy) or part of the group, I did not have to account for my actions or my presence. The people who knew about my work never questioned it. People trusted me and did not see me as a threat.

Of course, the method of participant observation demands a series of on the spot decisions. Such decisions might contradict the existing norms of society and at times even the moral convictions of the researcher. Sometimes the researcher is unaware of the meaning and consequences of his/her acts. At times, although aware of the meaning and consequences, the researcher is almost obliged to participate in certain activities in order to be accepted and feel part of the group. I am not suggesting that a researcher should get involved in any activity that violates his/her moral convictions. For example, I am not suggesting that a researcher who is doing research on drug addiction should try heroin to be accepted, feel part of, or even understand the subject under study.

What I am stressing is what Whyte (1943), Liebow (1967) and others have shown -- the need to be accepted by the group under study. These researchers found out that better and more inside information is obtained once they gain the trust of the people under observation. If there is any doubt among the people being studied, they will limit

the amount of information given.

Naturally, during the course of this research I met people whom I did not know previously. In order to be accepted, I had to be trusted. Therefore, I participated in certain activities in order to be accepted. An example of this was when I smoked marijuana with a group of men.

Some of the working men are frequent smokers of marijuana. At the beginning I established a relationship which did not include smoking. I consider myself a non-smoker. As a matter of fact, I do not smoke cigarettes or even drink coffee. It is only on rare occasions that I will take a drink of alcohol. The men were aware of this. So they tried their best not to smoke marijuana in front of me. One day I realized that the men avoided smoking in front of me. Every time that they wanted to party, to play dice, or to participate in any activity that included smoking they intentionally kept me out of it.

It did not take me long to realize that my involvement with them was limited to a very few activities. It became evident that I needed somehow to penetrate the wall that kept me away from this particular group of men. If I was to become part of the group I had to let them know that they could smoke. Slowly I began to tell people that I was not against smoking marijuana. But that was not enough. They saw me as a non-smoker and I was still kept out of the group.

One day Papo, a seventeen year old youngster, explained:

Jose, you know bro? Don Roberto is a punk. Shit, he is always saying that he is hip. That he knows what's going on. That's bullshit! He just want to find out "pa vochinchar" [to gossip]. You dig what I mean? Ese maricon [that faggot] wants to know to talk about people. Shit, I ain't jiving anyone. I smoke. But bro, I have a part-time job and I'm getting A's and B's in school. Cono he would tell people that I'm a pot head and a "titors" [hoodlum]. Shit, I don't want people to see me like that just because I smoke. You dig?

I realized what Papo meant. I knew then that the men were not sure of me. I discovered that I needed to be trusted. In this case words were cheap.

So I began to smoke with the men. My smoking with them opened a whole new social world. It meant a new type of relationship. Their confidence and trust grew. I became part of the group.

At the beginning it was very hard to work under the influence of the drug. I discovered that I was unable to write and to think coherently. I found myself unable to take notes. I needed control. Slowly I began to train myself to take notes while under the influence of marijuana. After a while I was still dissatisfied with my work. I was unable to write all I wanted. It was evident that I needed a clear head. I began to reevaluate my involvement with this particular group of men, my use of marijuana, and my general work. My relationship with the men was good but I was discontented with my work and the frequent use of the drug.

How could I stop smoking without harming the relationship already established?

I spoke to some of the men about stopping. They seemed to agree that marijuana smoking could become a habit. It was Victor who first led me out of my predicament. He explained:

Chico, I know that smoking is a habit. It is like smoking cigarettes. But I don't see how it is harming me. If you think that it is harming you or your work don't even think about it. Si Jose, stop!

Slowly I began to smoke less and less. But I kept participating in all the activities. As usual, I contributed my share of the money to buy marijuana. After a few months the men began to see me as a moderate smoker. Finally, I announced my intention of not smoking. I was happy to find out that I did not need to smoke in order to be part of the group.

Unlike the group of men mentioned above, my involvement with the people who practiced spiritism has been longer. I did not need to be accepted. They all knew me and trusted me. Therefore, in the spiritualist setting I was more at home.

My parents have been involved with spiritism ever since they were children. Spiritism was as much a part of our daily life as rice and beans.

Although we were baptized in the Catholic church and on special occasions attended mass, we were also taken to

Protestant services and to spiritist seances. To my parents this did not constitute a contradiction. As a matter of fact, they were under the impression that we were receiving all sorts of healthy indoctrinations. They understood this to be an excellent way of raising us.

I do not reject or accept spiritism. Years of socialization and inexplicable events lead me to a contradictory position of "yo no creo pero puede ser cierto" [I do not believe but it can be true]. Rationally, and on the basis of a materialist conception I am willing and able to reject all sorts of idealism. On a philosophical (detached) level I am able to explore and even articulate arguments against spiritism. But on an emotional (subjective) level the rejection of spiritism (as idealism) is more difficult. I am not trying to present any argument pro or con spiritism. What I am stressing is a significant subjective problem that I confronted during this research. The following field notes of a spiritist seance will illustrate my point.

This was a cold winter Friday night. I arrived when the seance was well under way. My two sisters, my mother, my father, and one of my brothers-in-law were among the people present. I sat on the sofa next to my sister. Seven people were sitting around a round table. The table was covered by a white tablecloth. There was a bottle of Agua Florida, a bottle of rum, and a big crystal goblet full of water. People were praying: "Padre que esta en el cielo..."

A young woman, one of the mediums, who sat on the right side of the table, began to shake and mumble a few words. Don Justo, the main spiritist, addressed the young woman: "Identify yourself! Let that soul identify himself!" But the young lady

relaxed. People kept praying.

From the far end of the table came a loud cry. A middle aged woman, who I did not recognize, began to scream and cry: "Ay mami! Mami! Mami!!!" Don Justo turned to the woman demanding: "O.K. Let this suffering soul identify himself! Identify yourself!!!"

The middle aged woman shook violently. She faced the ceiling and her eyes were closed. Tears were rolling down her wrinkled but elegant cheeks. She kept screaming: "Oh mami! I didn't want to make you suffer. I'm sorry my dear mother. I didn't want to hear your advise. Oh mami, mami. Why? Why?" Crying and screaming, the possessed middle aged woman asked for forgiveness. Don Justo kept insisting: "O.K. O.K. but identify yourself! Identify yourself!!!"

The situation was very dramatic. I began to shake. I swallowed one, two, three times. I felt like crying. I heard my sister telling me: "Oh my God! Kique! It is Luis! It is Luis!" I felt the pressure and tension of her hands against my arm. We were both trembling. We seemed to have come to the same conclusion. We recognized the voice. Yes! Yes! Yes, it was the voice of our dead older brother.

At this point I was completely consumed by the situation. I did not know what was happening. I could not see or even observe the behavior of the people in the room. Although we were not seeing our brother's image we seem to be feeling his presence. We were convinced that he was speaking to our mother.

Finally, don Justo was able to control the lament of the soul. They prayed for him -- offering him spiritual light.

I was overcome by this experience. I felt a strange cold. I was not able to control my body. I spent the rest of the night trembling. Now, a few hours later, I cannot remember what happened the rest of the night. I cannot remember. Shit! Why? Why???

There were other experiences like the one described above. These experiences seemed to test my materialist conception of the world, my scientific training, and my sociological method of inquiring. I became aware of my deepest feelings and beliefs. I became very conscious of the separation between my rational-objective conceptions and my subjective-inner passions. In a Marxian sense, I became

conscious of how incompletely liberated I was from even some of the most basic religious beliefs. Although intellectually I was able to be critical of religious idealism, emotionally I was not.

All this became problematic since I, too, became the subject under critical study. This meant that I had to become very critical of my own actions and emotions so as to keep a healthy degree of objectivity. In retrospect, this helped me to understand not only my own inner emotions and actions but also the emotions and actions of the people under study. The more critical I became of myself, the more critical I was able to become of them and vice versa. By questioning them I was able to understand myself. And, of course, by questioning myself I was able to understand them better. This struggle of mine helped me greatly in dealing with the methodological problems inherent in participant observation. Just because my struggle was emotional as well as intellectual, affective no less than cognitive, it made me all the more an inside participant and less of an outside observer.

With this methodology, community, and problematic, I hope to contribute to the field of sociology. I use spiritism and its cultural dynamic to offer a critical approach to the larger problems of class, nationality, and religion.

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PART ONE

TOWARD A THEORY OF CULTURAL DYNAMIC

Chapter II

RACE RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, the social science field of ethnic and race relations developed for the most part from a specific perspective. This perspective takes as given the present social order. It fails to integrate in its argument a satisfactory examination of the nature of the present socio-economic order and how social structural changes can be accomplished. Given this, its methodological and theoretical development became questionable in the light of the upheavals that took place in the late 1960's and early 1970's both in the United States and in Puerto Rico.

Before I offer my own alternative as the framework for this study -- a dynamic culture of resistance and accommodation -- it seems essential to review some of the conceptions prevailing in U.S. sociology and generally in the established social sciences. Here I treat race relations first, and then the Puerto Rican migration.

In the field of race relations, there are three traditional academic models. These models are: (1) assimilation, (2) cultural reductionist, and (3) caste and class

theory. Some of these, to which I shall return, have been used to explain the Puerto Rican experience in the United States.

The assimilation model or theory, the one most acclaimed by American scholars, was first developed by Robert Park (1950). According to Park, when the minority group comes into contact with the dominant group, the two enter a series of relationships. Park characterized these relations in terms of stages -- competition, accommodation, and finally assimilation. How the changes from one stage to the other occur has not been satisfactorily explained. The assumption is that finally and inevitably assimilation would take place.

The Assimilation theory holds that the ethnic minority groups must integrate or assimilate into the mainstream of society. This means that upon the arrival of the immigrant, a process begins in which he/she is forced to forget everything related to the homeland. William M. Newman explains:

This theory of majority-minority relationships may be expressed in the formula  $A+B+C=A$ , where A, B, and C represent different social groups and A represents the dominant group...The basic contention is that, over time, all groups will conform to the mores, life-style, and values of the dominant group. (Newman, 1973, 53)

This ideological, status quo favoring model, assumes that assimilation is the final outcome. It is assumed that the incoming group must exorcise the past in order to assimilate successfully.

Gunnar Myrdal's An American Dilemma (1962) follows in the tradition of Park. According to Myrdal, race conflict in America is to be found in the contradiction between white prejudice and what he calls the American Creed. To him, the American Creed expresses the ideals of freedom and equality. In a word, it means "one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." But prejudice nurtures discrimination, segregation, and socio-economic inequalities. All these factors interact with each other: discrimination, segregation, and inequality clash with the American Creed.

To Myrdal, any attempt made to accomplish the American Creed will lessen and even eliminate inferiority. In the long run, the American Creed will become a reality. He believed that the race problem in the United States will be completely solved within the framework of the present social system. To Myrdal, once the American Creed is accomplished assimilation would take place.

We might agree that there is a unified value-normative framework for American society. There might be an abstract and stereotyped set of values. If such values do exist, can we deduce that each class interprets and deals with these values in the same manner? After all, there are many studies that show how classes interpret and view the world differently (Batzell, 1964; Berger, 1971; Mills, 1956 and 1951; Aronowitz, 1973). Myrdal puts much emphasis on the

role of value in society. But he does not penetrate into the roots of those values. Equality and justice for whom? Not necessarily, perhaps, for the working class, the social grouping studied here.

One of the most explicit expositions of the assimilation theory is articulated by Milton Gordon (1964). Gordon begins his presentation by listing the principal elements of folk societies. He explains:

First and foremost, we note that early man identified himself as a member of a group, his 'people', and that this 'peoplehood' was, roughly, coterminous with a given rural land space, political government, no matter how rudimentary, a common culture in which a principal element was a set of religious beliefs and values shared more or less uniformly by all members of the group, and a common racial background ensuring an absence of wide differences in physical type. (Gordon, 1964, 23)

But for the most part, the transformation of the world has destroyed this kind of society. Gordon continues:

The subsequent march of civilization, with its population increases, stimulation to social class formation, were, migrations, creation of cities, proliferation of religious variation, and grouping in progressively larger political units has, in accelerating tempo, shattered and fragmented this sense of peoplehood -- this ethnicity -- detaching one by one each of the elements which composed the once unified whole, and isolating each element from the other. (Gordon, 1964, 24)

In the modern world, people are thrown into a situation where it became necessary for them to adjust their ways to other peoples'. Our present era has created the conditions for assimilation to take place.

Gordon understands that in the United States the

host society is white, English speaking and Protestant.

If there is anything in American life which can be described as an over-all American culture which serves as a reference point for immigrants and their children, it can best be described, it seems to us, as the middle class cultural patterns of largely white Protestant, Anglo Saxon origins... (Gordon, 1964, 12)

It is to this way of life that the new immigrants assimilate.

He breaks down the concept of assimilation into seven constituent variables. These variables occur in the order given:

1. Cultural assimilation (acculturation)
2. Structural assimilation
3. Marital assimilation (amalgamation)
4. Identificational assimilation
5. Attitude receptional assimilation (no prejudice)
6. Behavioral receptional assimilation (discrimination)
7. Civic assimilation (absence of value and power conflict)

To the author the variable of cultural assimilation is the first element that occurs in the process of assimilation.

Acculturation might take place without the other elements.

It might continue indefinitely. Gordon reasons:

If we now examine the entries for the Negroes, one of America's oldest minorities, we find that assimilation has not taken place in most of the other variables, but with allowance for social class factors, has taken place culturally. These two facts in juxtaposition should give us a cue to the relation of the cultural assimilation variable to all others. This relationship may be stated as follows: 1) cultural assimilation, or acculturation, is likely to be first of the types of assimilation to occur when a minority group arrives on the scene; and 2) cultural assimilation, or acculturation, of the minority group may take place even when none of the other types of assimilation occurs simultaneously or later, and this condition of 'acculturation only' may continue indefinitely. (Gordon, 1964, 17)

The next step in the process of assimilation is structural assimilation. To Gordon, the key to complete assimilation is a structural type of assimilation. This is the step by which minority groups attain entrance into the major institutions of society. Thus, "...once structural assimilation has occurred, either simultaneously with or subsequent to acculturation, all the other types of assimilation will naturally follow." (Gordon, 1964, 81)

To him, marital assimilation is an inevitable by-product of structural assimilation. At this point the minority group loses its ethnic identity and the other variables come into play.

In general, the first three variables are very crucial to the process of assimilation. But Gordon is not clear on how the other four variables follow. It seems that once the first three variables take place, the other variables have already occurred. In this way, the minority group assumes the culture of the dominant white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant middle class.

The implicit assumption in this type of theorizing has been that the dominant group wants the minority group to assimilate. The assimilation model also assumes that the minority group will not resist.

Gordon's "ideal type" seems to take for granted -- treat as given -- the status quo. Although he is able to see some conflict among groups and among "ethclasses," at

the end such conflict will vanish. Speaking of Gordon's study, Newman concludes:

While Milton Gordon surely demonstrates that the process of assimilation is multifaceted, his concept of structural assimilation provides a turning point in the social process through which an end state, all forms of assimilation, will be attained. Again the theme is ordered end product. Even though it is achieved through a more complex set of social processes, complete assimilation, social consensus is the result. (Newman, 1973, 108)

Gordon's model does not allow room for any fundamental changes, changes of whole structure or major institutions. Assimilation and social harmony are the sole outcomes anticipated.

Other sociologists have developed the concept of assimilation more subtly. In Protestant, Catholic and Jew, Will Herberg (1960) modified the melting pot perspective. In this essay Herberg accepts the process by which the new immigrant groups assimilate to the American society. Herberg remarks:

Of the immigrant who came to this country it was expected that sooner or later, either in his own person or through his children, he would give up virtually everything he had brought with him from the 'old country' - his language, his nationality, his manner of life - and would adopt the ways of his new home. (Herberg, 1960, 27)

At the moment of arrival the immigrant family became involved in a double process: (1) the formation of an ethnic community, and (2) its dissolution at the periphery. The children of the immigrants began to assimilate. As the second generation became Americanized the ethnic community

began to disintegrate. The second generation began to escape their own group. Herberg notes:

First to go was the foreign language and the culture associated with it, for the foreign language was the manifest symbol of foreignness and a great impediment to advancement. Religion too was affected, though not so explicitly. The second generation developed an uneasy relation to the faith of their fathers: sometimes this meant simply indifference; in other cases, relatively few, a shift to denominations regarded as more 'American'. In most cases, however, the ties with the old religion were never entirely broken. (Herberg, 1960, 29)

With the end of immigration after World War I the trends changed. The ties between the immigrants and the second generation began to fade away. The third generation began another era. The third generation had no reason to feel inferior. Their way of life was the same as any average American. They were Americans. But to be American was not enough. They needed a sense of identity. To Herberg, the old family religion became the focal point of identity.

Religious association now became the primary context of self-identification and social location for the third generation, as well as for the bulk of the second generation of America's immigrants. and that meant, by and large, for the American people. (Herberg, 1960, 31)

Thus, a new social structure based on religion emerged in America. The immigrants have melted into the three distinct religious groups: Catholic, Protestant, and Jew. He concludes:

The religious community is fast becoming, if it has not already become, the over-all medium in terms of which remaining ethnic concerns are preserved, redefined, and given appropriate expression.

(Herberg, 1960, 33)

Therefore:

America is indeed...the land of the 'triple melting pot', for it is within these three religious communities that the process of ethnic and cultural integration so characteristic of American life takes place. (Herberg, 1960, 37)

In general, Herberg's thesis is another modification of the assimilationist perspective. All the groups become Americanized. To this, he adds a so-called triple melting pot. As such, he seems to do no more than modify the melting pot version of the assimilation model.

Americans identify themselves in terms of religious affiliations. This fact does not create conflict. Herberg, like Gordon, takes for granted the status quo. Assimilation and consensus stand as the sole outcomes.

In Beyond the Melting Pot, Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan (1963) were concerned with explaining the twists and turns that mark ethnic identity in the process of assimilation. Glazer and Moynihan deny that immigrants have assimilated by the time of the third generation. In fact they reject the notion of a melting pot. Instead, they argue that, in the process of assimilation, past identity tends to weaken. Hence it is not feasible for children of immigrants to identify with each other in terms of language, culture or customs. Rather, ethnic identification grows out of ties of group interest as much as from personal ties.

Ethnic groups then, even after distinctive language, customs, and culture are lost, as they largely were

in the second generation, and even more fully in the third generation, are continually recreated by new experiences in America...A man is connected to his group by ties of family and friendship. But he is also connected by ties of interest. The ethnic groups in New York are also interest groups. (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963, 17)

To the authors, specific events have developed specific patterns of ethnic differentiation. They distinguish four major events that structured the patterns of ethnic differentiation. To them, the formative events are as follows:

First, the shaping of the Jewish community under the impact of the Nazi persecution of the Jews in Europe and the establishment of the state of Israel; second, the parallel, if less marked, shaping of a Catholic community by the reemergence of a Catholic school controversy; third, the migration of Southern Negroes to New York following World War I and continuing through the fifties; fourth, the influx of Puerto Ricans during the fifteen years following World War II. (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963, 292)

These four experiences have developed patterns of loyalties, and resulted in the five main groups they studied: Black, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish.

According to Glazer and Moynihan, people of different cultural backgrounds have assimilated or integrated into a common American culture. The American people, as they explained, are coming closer to sharing a common culture, although significant (but not conflicting) group identity remains. At the base of this identity are group interests as well as religious. These interests have been shaped by the four events mentioned above. The problem in the future is

the division of interests of these various groups. Glazer and Moynihan see religion and race to be defining the next stage in the evolution of the American people. To them, the American nationality is still forming.

They are very eager to talk about the formation of a nation. But throughout their analysis we see the influence of Park and Myrdal: they feel that assimilation is inevitable; the fulfillment of the American Creed is the challenge. What the authors fail to show is how the four major events, so important to their thesis, are tied to the working and transformation of capitalist America. The solution to the immigrant's problem is to be found within the framework of the present social order.

For the most part these theoreticians assume that the potential for enjoying equal access to opportunities are present in the American society. Their descriptions and analysis are full of the prevailing ideological rhetoric of the status quo: the American Creed, democracy, private property, freedom, equality, justice, etc. They tend to seek solutions to the racial problems within the confines of the status quo.

Furthermore, as Robert Blauner (1971) explained, these theoreticians fail to seriously consider the possibility that a given group might prefer to build its own culture and community. This perspective does not address racial oppression as a fundamental feature of American

society.\*

In discussing the immigrant analogy, Oscar Handlin argues that there is a historical similarity in the patterns followed by immigrants from Europe and immigrants from elsewhere. The most recently arrived ethnic groups occupy the lowest status. With time they assimilate into society and lose their minority status. The next wave of immigrants assume the lower status. In The Newcomers, Oscar Handlin develops the "immigrant analogy":

Yet the problem of the marginal wage earner, of substandard housing, or juvenile delinquency are by no means novel in the history of New York. There are enough precedents for them in the early experience of the city and the more recent development of the region so that an understanding of the past may offer a useful guide to the expectation of the future. To that end it is necessary to recall rather than to push away the recollection of the past. The method of this effort to comprehend the situation of present day New York ethnic groups will therefore be largely historical. An examination of the population of the city in terms of its ethnic characteristics may isolate and define the problems of adjustment of immigrants to urban life...  
(Handlin, 1962, 3)

This perspective is an updated version of the assimilation theory. Like the assimilation theory itself, Handlin fails to consider racial oppression seriously. He seems to disregard the importance of both racism and racial oppression when he states:

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\*Blauner (1971) and Carmichael (1967) provide excellent discussions of racial oppression.

In historical perspective, the Negroes and the Puerto Ricans in the New York Metropolitan Region do not present the radically new problem they seem to pose in the columns of the daily newspaper. Rather, their adjustment, difficult as it is, is but the most recent of a long series. The hardships such people have created and suffered have been concomitants of the necessity for accommodating in the city a large unskilled, and poorly paid labor force needed for urban growth. These newest arrivals have thus but assumed the role formerly played by European immigrants. (Handlin, 1962, 120)

This theory views racism as a phenomenon from the past which slows down the integration of new groups only temporarily. Hence, authors like Handlin believe (or hope) that America will be able to solve its internal problems within the present social structure.

...The experience of the past offers a solid foundation for the belief that the newest immigrants to a great cosmopolitan city will come to play as useful a role in it as any of their predecessors. They themselves need only show the will and energy, and their neighbor the tolerance, to make it possible. (Handlin, 1962, 120)

Another important modification of the assimilationist model is the cultural pluralist theory. Gordon provides an interesting definition of cultural pluralism. It is

...a point of view which offers legitimization of the preservation of sub-national communal life and some cultural differences for the nation's various ethnic groups, and justifies the result as providing a more democratic, more interesting, and more dynamically fruitful culture for all Americans than one in which uniformity was the norm. (Gordon, 1964, 13)

The cultural pluralist perspective is a twentieth century ideology. It states that the United States should have and can afford different cultural groups. The implicit

notion is that such diversity does not necessarily mean conflict.

In line with pluralism, William M. Newman (1973) departs from the notion of social consensus. Although he argues that both intergroup conflict and intergroup consensus are equally important in studying the United States, he places more emphasis on social conflict.

Newman sees the struggle for rewards or resources of a society or over social values as social conflict. In social conflict the interacting groups attempt to neutralize or injure each other. To him, the presence of threatening groups creates conflict. Both contending groups must be subjectively aware of the threat. This awareness must be accompanied by certain social norms of society. Thus, competition and achievement are prerequisites for the frequency of social conflict among groups.

He described four types of social conflicts: (1) consensus bounded conflict, (2) consensus projecting conflict, (3) rigid means conflict, and (4) variable means conflict.

Newman explains the first two types as follows:

Any instance of social conflict may be viewed as consensus bounded when that conflict by and large remains within the prescribed institutional framework for conflict of the society and within the norms embodied in those institutions...In contrast, consensus projecting conflicts transcend the routine channels for conflict in the society... conflicts that transcend or disrupt the existing social order are more meaningfully viewed as attempts to reorder society. (Newman, 1973, 119)

Those groups that see themselves as having a stake in the

existing structure of society remain within the institutional boundaries. On the other hand, those groups who do not enjoy many of the rewards of society tend to step outside the channels of conflict. They seek social change. While consensus bounded conflicts reinforce the social order consensus projecting conflicts tend to produce rapid social changes.

Speaking of the last two types of conflict the author continues:

Rigid means conflict refers to situations in which groups do not vary the means or techniques of social conflict. Variables means conflict refers to instances where the means or techniques of conflict are varied. (Newman, 1973, 124)

To Newman the rigid means conflicts tend to polarize groups in society. Such conflicts create a high degree of ideological debate and at times a high degree of solidarity within the group involved. But Newman continues:

...rigid means conflict may emerge out of the failure of previously employed means of conflict. Rigid means conflicts may represent an act of desperation. To some degree, when groups are so positioned in society that they do not have access to a variety of institutional means, they are forced to employ rigid means conflict. (Newman, 1973, 125)

In general, Newman sees consensus and group conflict as twin aspects of the social structure. Social conflict can break apart or split two groups, but it may bring other groups closer. Here, we should note, pluralism and assimilation (as well as social change and social order) stand out as corresponding, mutually harmonious aspects of group

relationships:

...those societies that, for lack of a better label have here been called pluralistic, evidence a never ending 'web of group affiliations' and conflict. Groups that at one point in time may be allies, may later be antagonists. Every public issue, every new occasion for conflict, stimulates a rearrangement of group relationships. It is indeed rare that any one issue or conflict will completely bisect such a society. In this sense, pluralistic societies evidence a special kind of social order in which the multiple allegiances and conflicts between groups produce a kind of creative tension, a tension that is ordered and yet conflict ridden. (Newman, 1973, 182)

Newman rightly stresses the existence of conflict in the American society. But he is not critical of the status quo. Instead, he argues for the dual existence of conflict and consensus. It is only under extreme circumstances that such conflict might bring social structural changes. He accepts the existence of constant social changes. But unlike Marx, he does not analyze thoroughly the economic and political structures of society. As such, he seems to reject the notion that at the root of social conflicts one finds the struggle for economic and political power.

This cultural pluralist version of the assimilation model stresses the desirability of each ethnic group retaining its own cultural distinctiveness. Newman explains:

The meaning of the phrase 'cultural pluralism' may be expressed in the formula  $A+B+C=A+B+C$ , where A, B, and C represent different social groups that, over time maintain their own unique identities. (Newman, 1973, 67)

Implicit in this model is the belief that no social structural changes are necessary or likely. Although conflicts

exist there is no need to change the status quo. In fact, conflict brings social order; conflict adds strength to what already exists.

To summarize: the assimilationist perspective (in all its forms and interpretations) follows a specific political ideology. For the most part this perspective implicitly or explicitly justifies the status quo. The present socio-economic order is taken for granted, as given. With the exception of the pluralist version, conflict is rejected. But the pluralist version too, fails to examine the roots of social conflict. Hence this view, like the other assimilationist ones, seeks solutions to ethnic and racial problems within the confines of the status quo.

The second model, the economic reductionist one, is similar to the immigrant analogy of the assimilationist model: both see assimilation as the final outcome. Thomas Sowell (1975), one of the exponents of this theory, demonstrates this when he stated:

The immigrant groups have typically started at the bottom -- economically, socially, educationally and politically -- and have faced both spontaneous prejudice and organized discrimination in their attempt to rise. (Sowell, 1975, 39)

He continued:

Perhaps most important, all American ethnic minorities show unmistakable signs of economic progress and those minorities commonly thought of as 'disadvantaged' or 'problem' minorities have advanced not only absolutely but relative to the American population as a whole...Yet none of this progress occurred automatically and much of it was the result of painful uphill struggles. (Sowell,

1975, 206)

Like the exponents of the immigrant analogy, Sowell claimed that there are similarities and differences in the patterns of adjustment of most ethnic minorities in the United States. He strongly disregarded racial and genetic differences in these patterns.

The social and cultural past of the immigrants was then introduced as the key factor for social mobility. Economic progress then depends on whether or not the incoming group possesses certain cultural traits favorable to the American setting. The author disregards racism and racial oppression as fundamental features of the American society. He focuses his attention not on the structure of the society but on the values of the incoming group.

Centuries of experience gave each of these very different sets of attitudes great historical momentum, which carry them well into the modern world in a wholly different national and social setting. In the American economy these different attitudes will of course lead to very different results for the various ethnic minorities. (Sowell, 1975, 146)

In a sense, Sowell attributes the problems connected with immigration partly to the immigrants' difficulties in adjusting to the culture of the host society, and partly to the host population's distrust of the newcomers. The author abstracted the problems from the socio-economic structure and reduced them to the levels of attitudes and cultural traits. The solutions are to be sought not through political action but through changes of attitudes and cultural values.

Nevertheless, to the author, the integration of a group depends on its economic progress. Sowell then mentions a number of characteristics which can be associated with economic success. They are as follows:

1. Future orientation: the belief in sacrificing the present for the sake of the future; (e.g. saving to build up a business, many years of school in preparation for a future, etc.). To Sowell, Jews, Japanese Americans, and West Indians are future oriented groups.

In general, according to Sowell, groups with a peasant or slave past, such as the Irish and Black Americans, tend to emphasize fate and luck rather than control of one's future.

2. Family stability: broken homes and a highly unstable family can be obstacles in economic advancement. Black Americans and Irish who suffered a high percentage of broken homes became associated with a high rate of alcoholism and drug addiction.

If the family promotes economic success then it becomes an asset to social mobility.

3. Leadership: groups which are highly emotional, which give in to excitement, tend to produce charismatic leaders. These leaders give to their group grand designs as a way of advancing.

Furthermore, in determining the degree of economic progress, Sowell emphasized the period of history in which

each group went through its economic evolution and the extent that the group has been urban, industrial, and commercial.

The social problems of racial and ethnic minorities stem from poverty and economic class status. Therefore, economic advancement becomes the first step in the upward ladder of assimilation. The newcomers have to confront many obstacles imposed by previous immigrants. Their past attitudes and cultural values also become obstacles to their assimilation. But with time and economic mobility, the problems are eliminated. Therefore, exponents of this perspective believe (or hope) that the race problem can be solved within the framework of the present social order.

Let us turn now to the caste and class theory or model of race relations in the United States. Most of all, a group of American sociologists have applied the concept of caste to describe black-white relations in the Southern United States. W. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole (1945) were among the first to do so. But, on the whole, the authors followed the immigrant analogy of the assimilationists.

This book tells part of the magnificent history of the adjustment of the ethnic groups to American life. What has happened in Yankee City illustrates much of what has happened and is happening to the 'minority groups' all over America. Each group enters the city at the bottom of the social heap (lower-lower class) and through several generations makes its desperate climb upward. The early arrivals having had more time, have climbed farther up the ladder than the ethnic groups that followed them. It seems likely that oncoming generations of new ethnic groups will go through the same heights that generations of

earlier groups have achieved. Many of the children's children of the early arrivals ceased participating in the ethnic life of their ancestors and have disappeared in the larger American world. Others are on the way to assimilation. (Warner and Srole, 1945, 2)

Warner and Srole develop a conceptual scheme that they hope will predict how long each group will take to assimilate into American life. It is here that they introduce the caste concept of black-white relations. Their conceptual scheme is based on three propositions:

1. The greater the differences between the host and the immigrant cultures, the greater will be the subordination, the greater the strength of the ethnic social systems, and the longer the period necessary for the assimilation of the ethnic group.

Those ethnic groups with small differences are quickly assimilated.

2. The greater the racial differences between the immigrants and the host society the greater the subordination of the incoming group, the greater the strength of the social subsystem, and the longer the period of assimilation.

3. When the combined cultural and biological traits are highly divergent from those of the host society the subordination of the group will be very great, their subsystem strong, the period or process slow and usually painful. (Warner and Srole, 1945, 285-286)

According to their scheme, the degree of subordination for blacks is "very great." Since blacks are highly rejected by the host society they tend to form a strong racial subsystem. The subordinate position of blacks and other dark-skinned groups leave little or no space for assimilation within the prevailing social structure. Therefore, they concluded:

...the force of American equalitarianism, which attempts to make all men American and alike, and

the force of our class order which creates differences among ethnic people have combined to dissolve out ethnic groups. Until now these same forces have not been successful in solving the problem of race. The Negro and other dark skinned groups are still ranked as color caste. (Warner and Srole, 1945, 296)

These authors failed to explain adequately what they meant by caste. Furthermore, they did not describe in detail the American caste system based on color.

Following Warner and Srole there has been great debate on the nature of the Southern system. Can it be classified as a caste system? Among sociologists, the majority agree on the racist nature of the Southern system. But the definition of such a system constitutes the major point of disagreement.

According to Gerald D. Berreman,

...caste can be defined so that it is applicable only to India, just as it is possible to define narrowly almost any sociocultural phenomenon... caste can be accurately defined in broader terms. For many purposes similar social facts may be usefully categorized together...Caste is a concept which might well be applied cross culturally. For these purposes a caste system may be defined as a hierarchy of endogamous division in which membership is hereditary and permanent. (Berreman, 1968, 345)

This definition allowed Berreman to apply the concept without much difficulty. To him:

The essential similarity lies in the fact that the function of the rules in both cases is to maintain the caste system with institutionalized inequality as its fundamental feature...The crucial fact is that caste status is determined, and therefore the systems are perpetuated by birth; membership in them is ascribed and unalterable. Individuals in low castes are considered inherently inferior and

relegated to a disadvantaged position regardless of their behavior. (Berreman, 1968, 347)

According to this perspective, the system of caste grew gradually until it replaced the old and antiquated system of slavery. With slavery, blacks were forced into a system of racial stratification. Even after a hundred years of emancipation blacks are still treated as second class citizens. Whites enjoy certain social, political, and economic advantages, while maintaining blacks in a subordinate situation similar to that of an inferior caste.

In general, this theoretical approach challenged the assumption that racial oppression is a departure from the values of justice and equality of the American society. According to Blauner, this theoretical approach was useful for analyzing small communities over a limited period. The idea of color caste had the virtue of treating race and racial oppression as independent realities.

Ultimately, however, this approach lacks a critical view of the American socio-economic system. It is very weak in accounting for changes in race relations. It assumes that racism is a rural Southern phenomenon. Therefore, racial changes could and would be led by the North.

In The Declining Significance of Race, William Julius Wilson presents an impressive study of race and class in the United States. According to Wilson:

In this study I have traced the development of a black class structure and have related it to what I perceive to be the declining influence of race

in the economic sector. (Wilson, 1978, x)

To him race relations have undergone dramatic changes. These changes are related to the three economic periods of American development: preindustrial, industrial, and modern industrial. The different stages of race relations are structured by the economy and polity of the economic periods. Therefore, Wilson argues:

Thus, my central argument is that different systems of production and/or different arrangements of the polity have imposed different constraints on the way in which racial groups have interacted in the United States, constraints that have structured the relations between racial groups and that have produced dissimilar contexts not only for the manifestation of racial antagonisms but also for racial group access to rewards and privileges.  
(Wilson, 1978, 3)

Wilson argues that racial oppression "was a salient and important feature" during the first two periods of economic development. During the preindustrial period a small group of planters in the South had enormous power. The system of production required little mobility. Therefore, it could be managed without including free white labor. The economy of the slave system enabled the slaveholders to use the polity to legitimate their power. The nonslaveholding whites had virtually no economic and/or political power.

On the other hand, in the antebellum industrial North white workers became organized. After the abolition of slavery in the North, the white workers used their

superior resources to bring about legal and informal forms of segregation. White workers effectively stopped blacks from becoming economic competitors.

In the South, as it moved from a plantation to an industrial economy, the landless whites were able to do what white workers had done in the North. But, in addition, a white movement against blacks developed in the South.

Therefore, Wilson stressed:

Once again, however, the system of production was the major basis for this change in race relations, and once again the political system was used to reinforce patterns of race emanating from structural shifts in the economy. If the racial laws in the antebellum South protected the class interests of the planters and reflected their overwhelming power, the Jim Crow segregation laws of the late nineteenth century reflected the rising power of white laborers; and if the political power of the planters was grounded in the system of production in a plantation economy, the emerging political power of the workers grew out of the new division of labor that accompanied industrialization. (Wilson, 1978, 146)

What follows, according to Wilson, was an increase of black-white contact and conflict. As white and black laborers competed with each other for jobs, housing, neighborhoods, etc. racial tension escalated. But, unlike the preindustrial period,

...the political system did not intervene either to mediate the racial conflicts or to reinforce the pattern of labor-market racial interaction generated by the system. (Wilson, 1978, 148)

But the urban political machine was controlled by working class ethnics. They gerrymandered black neighborhoods. In this way blacks were kept out of important

municipal political gains -- government jobs, contracts, and services. But, Wilson adds, this political racial oppression had no influence on race relations in the private sector. To Wilson,

...nevertheless, and despite the prevalence of various forms of racial oppression the changes from a preindustrial to an industrial form of production did enable blacks to increase their political and economic resources. (Wilson, 1978, 149)

The industrial expansion helped generate the mass migration of blacks. With a larger black segregated community, institutions and organizations developed. But "...it was not until after World War II, that the black class structure started to take on some of the characteristics of the white class structure."

Differences in the relation between the economy and polity in the modern industrial period shifted the center of racial conflict from the economic order to the socio-political order. Therefore, Wilson emphasizes, class becomes more significant than race in the modern industrial period.

In the first two periods, the basis of structured inequality was economic. The state was merely the tool used to reinforce those patterns of racial inequality. Today, the state has been shaped to promote racial equality.

Wilson goes on to explain how access to the modern means of production is increasing. But this access is based on educational criteria. This tends to solidify the position of the black underclass. The labor market offers mobility

opportunities for only a segment of the black population. The poorly trained and educationally limited blacks in the inner city are restricted to low wage labor. But the talented blacks are experiencing job opportunities comparable to those of whites. Wilson noted:

In the economic realm, then, the black experience has moved historically from economic racial oppression experienced by virtually all blacks to economic subordination for the black underclass. (Wilson, 1978, 152)

Therefore, he concludes:

The traditional racial struggles for power and privilege have shifted away from the economic sector and are now concentrated in the socio-political order. Although poor blacks and poor whites are still the main actors in the present manifestations of racial strife, the immediate source of the tension has more to do with racial competition for public school, municipal; political systems, and residential area than with the competition for jobs. (Wilson, 1978, 152)

Finally, Wilson calls for a front whereby the challenge of economic dislocation should "go beyond the limits of ethnic and racial discrimination." He asks for policy programs that directly confront "the pervasive and destructive features of class subordination."

Wilson's thesis generated a lot of debate on race and class. (Willie, 1978; Pettigrew, 1979) In the light of statistical data -- on unemployment, political representation, income, control of business, social status, education, etc. -- Wilson's central arguments become questionable. After examining the distribution of goods between the two races, Edwin Dorn concludes:

(1) There is unqualified inequality between the races; we have examined no good whose distribution is in favor of blacks. (2) With respect to highly divisible goods such as income and wealth there exists a situation of strict dominance in favor of whites. (3) Changes over time in the distribution of these goods have generally been ambiguous. (4) With respect to those goods whose measurement is more problematic -- social status, political representation, law enforcement and criminal justice, and private enterprise -- we must conclude that considerable inequality persists. (Dorn, 1979, 56-57)

Edwin Dorn recognizes that in the last three decades this nation has made significant strides toward equality of the races. It is not rare to find some blacks in private firms or government agencies. Nevertheless, Dorn contends that there are few black executives and senior level professionals. Although blacks in these positions may be more visible than in the past, compared to the white population their increase is not significant.

If we accept Dorn's argument, then Wilson's claims have no foundation. How can we claim or accept a declining significance of race when in almost every measurement of social mobility and power blacks are consistently far behind whites?

To say or to claim that race is significant does not negate the fact that class is equally significant. The total black experience cannot be understood without analyzing the class structures of both the white and black populations. Neither can we understand the black experience without analyzing racial oppression and institutional racism.

Myole Benokraitis and Joe Fegin, coming from another perspective, argue for the development of institutional racism research. According to them:

Institutional racism refers to the structure of inequality: 1) reflected in the racially based differential allocation of status, privileges and material rewards in numerous institutional sectors; and 2) shaped by the historically precipitated and currently persisting process of subordination whose mechanisms primarily involve the routine imposition of conventional norms by often unprejudiced role players in the various institutional sectors in a way that, though covert and usually unintentional, produces racially relevant consequences. (Willie, 1977, 133)

Wilson never discusses the above notion of institutional racism as it related to his research. One is led to believe that in the modern industrial period of production, institutional racism in the economic sphere is irrelevant. In other words, Wilson prematurely abandons or rejects the notion of institutional racism, at least, in the economic order. But Wilson's data does not convincingly support his argument. To say, for example, that there is a mobile black middle class or even black upper class does not convincingly prove that racism or institutional racism has become insignificant in the economic sphere. More evidence is needed to support such a claim.

The institutional racism approach might invalidate or validate Wilson's claims. One thing we can be certain of: whether or not institutional racism or simply racism is an integral part of the American economy -- is in need of

serious reserach.

To summarize: most students of race and ethnic relations in the United States take for granted the present socio-economic order. For the most part, it is assumed that assimilation is the final outcome. Hence, they seek solutions to ethnic and racial problems within the confines of the status quo. Their uncritical views of the American socio-economic structure drive them to look to other factors (such as cultural past, rural history, family stability, discrimination and prejudices for newcomers) to explain why the new immigrants are or are not assimilating. It is assumed that the incoming group must exorcise its past in order to assimilate successfully.

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### Chapter III

#### PUERTO RICAN MIGRATION

Approaches such as the assimilation one, in its various forms, have been blindly applied to the study of the Puerto Rican migration and the conditions of the Puerto Rican communities in the United States. I will now critically review some of the most important social science literature on the Puerto Rican experience.

Turning from United States studies of race relations in general to those of Puerto Rican in particular, one finds that sociologists as well as anthropologists have written a great deal of descriptive material about migration from Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican ghettos in the United States. But these descriptions have not been incorporated into a satisfactory and critical analysis of the causes which gave impetus to the Puerto Rican migration and the formation of the Puerto Rican ghettos. Instead, most of the works follow the traditional assimilationist perspective.

In 1938 Lawrence R. Chenault wrote the first major study about the Puerto Rican migration. This outdated study is very important since it was the first to examine the Puerto Rican situation from an assimilationist perspective. Later on other students of the Puerto Rican migration, such

as Senior, Handlin, Glazer and Moynihan, and Fitzpatrick expanded this line of argument.

Chenault was the first to suggest that the Puerto Rican migration was following the general trends of past migrations. The author stated:

The migration of the Puerto Ricans to New York is another example of the old and never ceasing movement of people who hope to better their conditions ...He has, as have the people of other cultural groups come to New York to earn the high wages paid in this country and to take the place of European immigrant groups which are now restricted. (Chenault, 1938, 156)

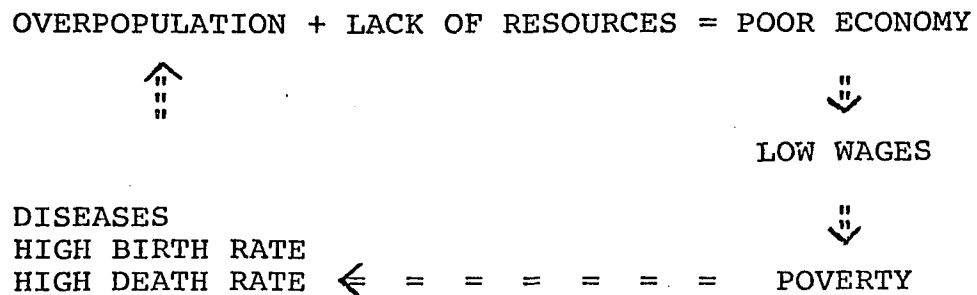
He continued:

They have for the most part come to do work which was formerly done by newly arrived European immigrants. (Chenault, 1938, 71)

Therefore, Chenault concluded:

The adjustment required of him in New York is in almost every way equivalent to that of a person who moves from a foreign country to the United States. (Chenault, 1938, 4)

Chenault claimed that overpopulation was the prime factor for the migration. The following diagram illustrates the author's line of argument:



In general, Chenault saw a vicious cycle. Following a Malthusian line of reasoning, the author believed that

poverty was caused by an overpopulated island with few or no resources. This in turn leads to high birth rates and death rates. Therefore, the only available solution, to break this inevitable cycle, was birth control and migration.

Since Chenault, this type of reasoning has been very popular. Clarence Senior, C. Wright Mills, and Rose Goldsen (1950) claimed:

Puerto Rico has few rivals and no equal in rate of population increase. In the past half century the difference between the death and birth rates -- the rate of natural increase -- has more than doubled, and as a result the population has more than doubled since the American occupation. (Senior, Mills, and Goldsen, 1950, 19)

They continued:

Acute disbalance of population and resources create downward pressure on levels of living which demands some safety valve. Resources can be increased or made productive; population, or at least rate of increase, can be reduced. Since land as a resource is automatically limited it must be used to the limit of its productivity. Industrialization is another possible technique; an industrial area can support greater numbers than an agricultural one. As noted, Puerto Rico has recently embarked upon a rather large-scale industrialization program. Yet despite this, as birth rate continues high, and the death rate declines the pressure levels of living continues. (Senior, Mills, and Goldsen, 1950, 20)

So, they inevitably concluded, "...there remain two civilized resources: to control the number of births, or to encourage substantial migration from the island." (Senior, Mills, and Goldsen, 1950, 20) Still, today many students of the Puerto Rican experience -- Fitzpatrick (1971), Hauberg (1974); and others -- are following the same logic.

The so-called overpopulation of the island is treated as an absolute notion. Following Malthus' theory, these scholars treat overpopulation as being universal and as being the same in all different stages of economic development. They follow an oversimplified formula, putting at one end of the picture the natural reproduction of humanity and at the opposite end the lack of resources to support the ever increasing population. This split formula means that a natural increase of humanity needs an "external stopper." In the case of Puerto Rico the "external stoppers" are birth control and migration.

This perspective rejects the notion that overpopulation is relative to the different stages of developing the means of production. What may be overpopulation at one historical phase of economic development may not be at another. Instead, they argue that overpopulation and lack of resources produce a poor economy. To them, it is inconceivable that the underdevelopment of the Island might be a product of historical, economic, social, and political relations with the metropolis (Spain and the United States). The so-called underdevelopment of Puerto Rico is understood as a product of mainly internal forces, such as overpopulation.

Migration is seen as a natural alternative for relieving overpopulation pressures and not as a historical product. The migrant moves as an isolated individual. He or

she is a daring individual who is trying to escape the poverty and underdevelopment of the Island. But migration by isolated individuals outside of society is as great an absurdity as the idea of the development of language without individuals living together and talking to one another. The notion is no less absurd than the related eighteenth century Robinsonade, a notion that Marx lampooned rightly.

All migrations have certain things in common that belong to all epochs. But the point of departure should be what is particular to a specific migration. It must be shown what is particular to a migration without losing sight of what is common to all migrations. All migrations are movements of people within and outside a definite form of society. Migration does not take place outside certain political, social, and economic structures. In this sense, to say that movement of people, people who live in a so-called overpopulated area, is a condition of migration constitutes a tautology.

Therefore, in studying the Puerto Rican migration, the point of departure should be dependency (colonialism) instead of overpopulation. With this alternative approach, it seems clear, the overpopulation and poverty (underdevelopment) of the Island are the historical effects of dependency.

Since Chenault left out the international scope of monopoly capital he was unable to relate migration to

colonialism. He failed to satisfactorily include in his analysis the political, social, and economic relations of the Island with the United States.

The author agreed that Puerto Rico was a colony. But what did it mean? How did it affect the Island? Furthermore, how was it that migration affected or benefited the working of capitalism?

Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack (1973), in Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe, pointed out that the domination of the working masses is based on a range of mechanisms.

The industrial reserve army, at least to Marx, an objective product of the economic process under capital, is one such mechanism. The authors explained that the industrial reserve army of labor is a necessity for the accumulation of capital. More workers in the production process mean more accumulated capital. With more capital the capitalist can extend production and apply new techniques. But these new techniques and other factors create unemployment. The workers are pushed into a reserve army of labor which is used as the "interest of the capitalist requires." A high rate of unemployment means long hours of work and poor conditions. If the reserve army contracts, workers are in a better position to demand more. But as the workers gain their demands, capital accumulation, profits and investment diminish. The economy falls into a period of crisis. The

workers are thrown out of their jobs. This leads to a growth in the reserve army, a fall in wages, and a growth in capital accumulation.

In order to grow and to survive the economic crisis, the capitalist system has to expand and aim for full employment. But full employment contradicts the basic principle of capital accumulation. At such a point, to cushion the effect of crisis, capitalism needs a substitute for the traditional reserve army.

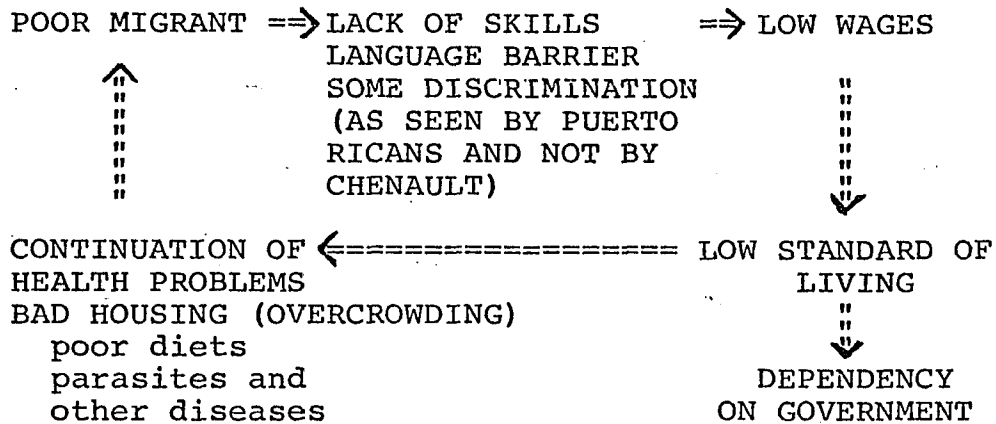
A migratory labor system has been created which perpetuates political, social, and economic backwardness in the countries from which the workers emigrate. Furthermore, the unemployed in these underdeveloped areas form a reserve army of labor that can be molded or transported to developed areas.

I am suggesting that the underdevelopment and sub-standard living conditions of Puerto Rico must be studied as historical products of colonialism. The so-called economic push and pull factors of migration can be examined as products of capitalist expansion. In order to have an available cheap labor force, American capitalism needs a large and pliable reserve labor force. More Puerto Ricans means more available cheap workers. More cheap workers in the production process means lower wages and a larger reserve labor force.

Although Chenault saw that Puerto Ricans came to New

York to "...do work which was formerly done by newly arrived immigrants," he was unable to put this fact into a larger framework. An examination of the world capitalist economy would have given him a better understanding of the social processes taking place.

The picture painted by Chenault looked bad. The conditions of Puerto Ricans in the City were very poor. The following diagram illustrates his argument:



According to him the lack of skills and the language barrier were the causes of the migrant's problems. The solutions given by him were (1) more skills and (2) knowledge of the language. He emphasized that the goal of the Puerto Rican immigrant must be adjustment. This is another word for assimilation.

It was not until 1950 that Senior, Mills, and Goldsen published the second major work on the Puerto Rican migration. They began their presentation by accepting that Puerto Rico was (in 1950) a colony of the United States. The writers explained:

Today, the political relation of Puerto Rico to the United States is a controlling fact of the society. As a colony of the United States on which it is dependent economically and militarily, it is in the anomolous position of being one of the few territories owned by the democratic United States, and is subject to the vagaries of the shifting policies of changing national administrators. (Senior, Mills, and Goldsen, 1950, 13)

But this key fact was not further developed. Like Chenault they considered this fact unimportant to the migration. Instead they adopted a simplistic approach. They echoed Chenalut's understanding: "Puerto Rico has few rivals and no equals in rate of population increase." (Senior, Mills, and Goldsen, 1950, 19) Therefore, their alternatives were birth control and migration.

Since they did not have a critical understanding of the United States, they were unable to understand the economic processes that led to the migration. Instead, they blindly repeated the Malthusian view.

In trying to explain further why the Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States, the authors stated:

A Puerto Rican of the present generation, therefore, finds himself caught in a situation which strongly encourages him to leave the island. His Spanish cultural ties might be expected to draw him to Latin American countries. But he is not a Latin American; he has soaked up continental United States Culture -- from a distance of 1,000 miles; he has become a Puerto Rican American. If he is to leave the island, his standard of living, his way of life, his mannerisms, his values makes the pull of the states specially strong. These general cultural and specific economic pulls, along with the unrestrained migration which the Puerto Rican enjoys as a citizen of the United States, have operated so that the migration from Puerto Rico has meant, by and large, migration to the United States mainland.

(Senior, Mills, and Goldsen, 1950, 20)

One might notice how a particularly uncritical perspective can blind the power of observation and scientific understanding. Puerto Ricans do not migrate to Latin America because the material conditions for such movement do not exist. Latin American countries have -- and still have -- similar or worse economic conditions. They have an overabundance of cheap labor. It was not Latin America but the United States that needed cheap labor. Clara Rodriguez supports this view:

The historical role of immigrants in the United States has been that of low-wage laborers whose exploitation has tended to increase the surplus value of capitalists while maintaining general wage levels in depressed conditions. Immigrants have become members of the industrial reserve army, intermittently employed, underemployed, and unemployed -- as economic fluctuations allow. These conditions of low wage levels and surplus labor have tended to favor extensive and rapid capitalist development in the United States. The presence of large numbers of immigrants, arriving successively, has contributed to the persistence of these conditions.

Puerto Ricans have, to a large extent, assumed the role of previous immigrant groups -- that of depressing wage levels and increasing the ranks of the industrial reserve army. (Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 1979, 197-198)

Senior, Mills, and Goldsen saw three reasons for the migration of Puerto Ricans to New York City. According to them, the reasons were "...the push from the homeland, the pull of the new country, and the sources of information about the new." (Senior, Mills, and Goldsen, 1950, 43)

But what created the material conditions for the

so-called push and pull factors? Who controls the means of communication and production?

To the authors the push factor is a condition of underdevelopment. Underdevelopment is attributed to lack of resources and to overpopulation. They assume that the underdevelopment of the Island has been a product of its own internal forces. The present stage of Puerto Rico's underdevelopment is seen as an early stage of modern history, identical to the past of Western developed nations. They fail to consider that

...contemporary underdevelopment is the historical product of past and continuing economic and other relations between the satellite undeveloped and the now developed metropolitan countries. Furthermore, these relations are an essential part of the structure and development of the capitalist system on a world scale as a whole. (Frank, 1972, 3)

We cannot exclude Puerto Rico's underdevelopment from this critique. At the root of the Island's underdevelopment one finds the external, international expansion of capital.

These authors saw assimilation as the only viable solution to the problems faced by the newly arrived immigrants. In their arguments they constantly drove towards adaptation or assimilation. They never considered that perhaps the Puerto Ricans did not want to adapt to the extent that it means assimilation. Seeing that Puerto Ricans were not assimilating at the rate of previous immigrant groups, the authors claimed:

At the present New York City is not a homogeneous social world, nor, from the Puerto Rican standpoint,

does it offer a set of consistent and available norms to which to adapt. (Senior, Mills, and Goldsen, 1950, 139)

They continued:

In discussing the Puerto Rican world we indicated that it was a fragmented, disunited sphere for social living; that it was without a wide net of organizations, without effective Puerto Rican leadership, and that there were evidences of internal class splits within it. (Senior, Mills, and Goldsen, 1950, 32)

But under what standards did they measure Puerto Rican fragmentation? Were they judged according to white American (colonizer) standards?

The authors were aware of discrimination. But discrimination was seen as part of the process that all migrants must go through before becoming assimilated. Following Warner and Srole, they explained that white Puerto Ricans were able to assimilate faster than non-white Puerto Ricans. To them, the darker Puerto Ricans were the ones to express their Puerto Ricaness.

They noticed the "...absence of any strong conscious desire to become like any one acceptable and available type." They explained this not as a rebellious act but instead as a lack "... of a model, the absence of a motive." But how can they understand any rebellious attitudes when they are unable to understand the dynamics of dependency, racial and class oppression, and resistance (nationalist and class)?

To summarize: Twelve years later Senior, Mills, and

Goldsen echoed Chenault's understanding; lack of resources and overpopulation gave impetus to the migration. Blinded by their assimilationist biases and pro-status quo approach, they were unable to deal with the resistance of Puerto Ricans. Instead, they explained it as a lack of a model and a motive. In this way they blamed the victims, the Puerto Ricans, for their own problems.

After Senior, Mills, and Goldsen's work, many other studies came out. For the most part they follow the same assimilationist framework. In 1961 Clarence Senior wrote Strange - Then Neighbors. This work was an expansion of the 1950 study. Senior begins by disregarding his previous notion that Puerto Rico was a colony. Instead the author bragged:

First let's look at the island itself. Recently it has become a 'showcase of democracy' - an accomplishment of which both we and Puerto Rico should be proud. (Senior, 1961, 77)

He continued:

Step by step the best of the Anglo-American tradition of democratic institutions, efficient and honest public administration, and advanced technology applied to the production of more wealth are also being incorporated into the Puerto Rican culture. (Senior, 1961, 84)

Therefore, he concluded:

The transition from dependence to democracy was accomplished without damage to economic or social patterns. (Senior, 1961, 79)

We might begin to question Senior's claims by asking:  
How can a people enjoy democracy when they do not control

their own institutions? Since the North American occupation of the Island, the United States has had complete control of foreign relations, customs, immigration, post office system, communication, radio, television, commerce, transportation, maritime laws, military service, social security, banks, currency, defense, etc. According to Michael Myerson:

Real political powers reside in the U.S. House Committee on Insular Affairs and the Senate Committee on Territorial and Insular Affairs, both of which meet in Washington D.C. some 15,000 miles from San Juan. Appeals from Puerto Rican courts are decided in Boston and final jurisdiction rests with the U.S. Supreme Court. (Myerson, 1973, 115)

Citizenship is exclusively by the United States.

Although Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States they do not have the right to vote in U.S. federal elections. But they have to accept the decisions of the Congress of the United States and its agencies. Even many defenders of the colonial system have been led to refer to United States citizenship for Puerto Ricans as "second class."

The military control of the Island is extensive.

Thirteen percent of all land is occupied by the Pentagon.

Michael Myerson wrote:

The Pentagon controls 13 percent of Puerto Rico's land and has five atomic bases, including Ramey Air Base. A major base for the Strategic Air Command, Ramey includes in its confines everything from guide missiles to radio jamming stations which prevent Radio Havana from reaching Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo. In addition to the major bases there are about 100 medium and small military installations training camps, and radar and radio stations. (Myerson, 1973, 115)

During the early 1970's the fishermen of Culebra, an

island to the east of Puerto Rico, made claims in view of the destruction of equipment during military maneuvers by the U.S. Navy. In the spring of 1971 the government jailed Ruben Berrios Martinez, president of the Puerto Rican Independence Party, along with twelve associates for participating in a patriotic invasion of Culebra's firing zone. Today a similar struggle is taking place on the island of Vieques. The fishermen of the island are struggling against the military maneuvers of the U.S. Marine Corps. At the end of 1979 twenty-one people were jailed in federal prisons. At least one of them died while in jail.

The economy of Puerto Rico is almost absolutely controlled by the United States. With the tax exemption granted to all North American industrial investments for a period of 12 to 17 years, the Island has become a paradise for these monopolies. Manuel Maldonado Denis estimated that "...seventy-eight percent of all industry were American owned." (Maldonado Denis, 1980, 83)

When one examines Puerto Rico's economic reality the argument of the so-called democratization of the Island falls apart. The fact is that Puerto Rico is a dependent nation. The benefactors of such relations are not, although there has been some progress, the Puerto Rican worker. On the contrary, all the available data indicate that Puerto Ricans are creating great wealth for the United States. What these industries produce does not stay in the Island. On the

contrary, as Campos and Bonilla show:

More than 80 percent of all shares in industry belong to U.S. capital, and 90 percent of the industrial products exported are produced by U.S. firms. In 1975 total foreign investment reached the sum of \$14,000 million, and in the previous year 91 percent of the total profits from industrial investment originated in foreign capital. These profits have grown rapidly, increasing by 106 percent between 1971-72 and 1973-74.

In the sphere of the market, Puerto Rico constitutes the fifth largest buyer of U.S. products in terms of volume and the largest in per capita terms. (Campos and Bonilla, 1976, 68)

The combination of low wages, the imposition of federal tariffs, and the forced use of expensive American commercial ships and goods scale the cost of living from 20 to 25 percent higher than in New York. But the picture looks still darker when one examines the unemployment rate. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce:

A high rate of unemployment persists as a long term problem in Puerto Rico. Minimum rates of unemployment even in years of good economic conditions have fluctuated in the 10 to 12 percent range. In the years of recent recession the unemployment rate soared to over 20 percent. Several serious questions can be raised about the accuracy of the unemployment estimates and their relationship to the estimation of the labor force and household survey techniques and responses. Nonetheless, if the data are assumed to be reasonably accurate, the unemployment problem is serious. Structural unemployment appears to be as significant an element of the total unemployment as is the demand-responsive component. In April 1979 the level of unemployment still remained slightly above 16 percent. (Department of Commerce, 1979, 4)

Manuel Maldonado Denis, repeating the North American economist, Hugh Barton's estimates, believes that even without a slump, the unemployment rate goes as high as 30

percent. (Maldonado Denis, 1969, 65)

Today "more than sixty percent of Puerto Rican families qualify" for food stamps. Around 800 million dollars in funds are transferred by the United States government to Puerto Rico for the food stamp program. (Maldonado Denis, 1980, 15)

After praising the so-called progress of the Island, Senior asked: Why are the Puerto Ricans still leaving the Island? His answer is simple. The Puerto Ricans leave because they want to progress faster than they can at home. Here Senior is caught in his own world. His perspective does not allow him to go further. For him, migration becomes the movement of isolated individuals. The individual moves because he is searching for progress. The social factors which give impetus to the migration become invisible. The underlying assumption is that with the movement there will be progress. Thus he emphasized: "Such mobility is now widely recognized as beneficial to the workers, to employers and to the entire national economy. (Senior, 1961, 29)

But to whom is the movement really beneficial? The author is right when he observes that migration varies with the needs of business. But this does not mean that migration is to the benefit of the workers. On the contrary, migration is a very painful and sometimes destructive process.

In speaking of the problems confronted by the Puerto

Rican immigrant, Senior followed the immigrant analogy. To him, "...most newcomers from Puerto Rico are in almost exactly the position occupied by the majority of our ancestors." (Senior, 1961, 46) The author was aware of discrimination. But discrimination and racism were seen as part of the process that all groups must go through. He believes that discrimination and racism will disappear as Puerto Ricans assimilate.

Such blind acceptance of assimilation as the final outcome fails to consider what Castler and Kosack called the labor aristocracy. This sector of labor is given certain privileges, in this way securing a non-revolutionary leadership and undermining class consciousness. According to these critics,

...the ruling class gains both through the possibility of utilizing cheap labour, and through giving privileges to indigenous workers in order to encourage the development of false consciousness...Immigration helps to give large sections of the indigenous working class the consciousness of a "labour aristocracy" which supports or acquiesces in the exploitation of another section of the working class. In this way immigration helps to stabilize the capitalist order, not only economically, but also politically. (Castler and Kosack, 1973, 481)

In the developed nations (such as the United States) certain privileges are granted to the white workers. (Glenn, 1966; Thurow, 1969; Hernalin and Failey, 1973) These privileges create an illusion of better conditions and status resulting in a split between workers along ethnic and racial lines. (Comer, 1969; Glenn, 1965) In this way a large sector

of the American working class gets the consciousness of labor aristocracy.

Racism is essential to this mechanism of subjugation. Racism is "...the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race (in our case nationality) for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group." (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967, 3) In the capitalist setting institutions are built with the purpose of maintaining this inferior/superior dichotomy. To generate privileges certain people have to be exploited. But to be exploited they must be directly or indirectly controlled.

Puerto Rican workers come from a colonial setting. Hence the inferior/superior dichotomy has been already established: they migrate as colonized and inferior subjects. Even to their fellow white American workers, Puerto Ricans are inferior and as such they should be treated. Ironically, objective poor conditions and lack of upward movement seem to verify the inferiority of the new immigrant group.

Nevertheless, in order to analyze the upward movement of any given group of migrants, one must examine the historical period of its arrival. One must be aware of the state of economic development. During the early development of American capitalism, some opportunities existed to move up the ladder of economic success. There were opportunities for

some European immigrants to become the owners of their own labor. Hence more migrants were needed to replace those leaving industrial employment for self employment. Today such opportunities do not exist. Therefore, according to Clara Rodriguez:

...despite the assumption of a similar role in the workforce by Puerto Ricans, the outcome of the dialectic between Puerto Ricans and the economic system in the United States will be different by virtue of the differences in material conditions. In short, there is no place to go and no one to queue up after the Puerto Ricans. Instead, there is a scramble for the bottom rungs by blacks and Puerto Ricans. (Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 1979, 198)

In general, Clarence Senior also followed an assimilationist line of argument. His views led him to seek solutions to the Puerto Rican plight within the confines of the status quo.

Like Clarence Senior, other writers such as Fitzpatrick (1971), Glazer and Moynihan (1968), Handlin (1962), Sowell (1975), Hauberg (1974) adopted a similar assimilationist perspective. Explicitly or implicitly they assume that integration into mainstream society is the final logical consequence. Therefore they tend to argue that Puerto Ricans should not be -- or are not -- interested in preserving their own distinctive cultural values and institutions. It is not surprising, as Stapels noted, that

...this particular theory could be used to sanction the existing social order. Whatever state of race relations exists is acceptable because it is a part of a natural process that is inevitable whenever two different cultures come into contact. Change

is expected, but it will come according to its historically determined pace. (Staples, 1976, 7)

The literature on Puerto Rican migration reflects these biases of American social science. For the most part, the American social scientists accept without question the relationship between the Island and the United States. The underlying assumption is that the Island's progress depends on the existing Commonwealth association with the United states.

At times, social scientists thus make sophisticated but value-laden judgments. So it is in the case of Glazer and Moynihan who state:

Puerto Rico finally found a major virtue in its connection with America -- the American market, and access to American investment capital and economic skills...this was done by a freely elected Puerto Rican government. In 1948 Puerto Rico elected its first native governor, and in 1952, under a constitution it had itself drawn up, it was granted as much of independence as it wanted, and remained part of the United States as a commonwealth. (Glazer and Moynihan, 1968, 95-96, My emphasis.)

The authors are passing a value judgment about the political status of the Island which seems to be inconsistent with the claim that an objective scientific methodology is being applied to the understanding of the Puerto Rican experience. Their main implicit assumption is that the American way, applicable to different conditions, is the guiding principle of civilization that all people must strive for.

The Puerto Rican society -- its political, economic, and social structures, the migration to the United States,

and the problems confronted by the immigrants -- have been studied as separate but interrelated parts. But no work has yet put all the interrelated parts together into a comprehensive, critical analysis of the whole Puerto Rican experience.

A work by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies of the City University of New York pointed out that most of the studies done about the Puerto Rican migration

...reflect a willful interpretation that is given concrete expression in both U.S. and Puerto Rican official policy and in a distinctly North American vision of society that is expounded and upheld by academics of both countries. (Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 1979, 16)

The Center for Puerto Rican Studies went on to differentiate three types of work written about the migration:

1. The works done by the Puerto Rican Planning Board and the Migration Division of the Department of Labor of Puerto Rico represent an attempt to rationalize and convert the migration into an instrument of policy in planning the economic development of Puerto Rico. Dr. Clarence Senior plays the leading role in this enterprise.

2. The second type presents those works which mainly deal with the experience of Puerto Ricans in the United States. This type of author has used an assimilation perspective to examine the Puerto Rican experience, seeing them as undergoing processes similar to those experienced by the European immigrants who came to the United States in the

19th and early 20th century. These social scientists have used the assimilation perspective to describe and explain the changes which occurred to the Puerto Rican migrants since their arrival. As noted already, this very popular perspective argues that the Puerto Ricans, like previous groups, are assimilating.

3. A last type of work comes from Puerto Rican scholars who have been questioning U.S. works such as those just outlined. This native group has not yet developed a full alternative.

The Center then concludes:

...both official and academic studies have systematically excluded a historical and structural understanding of the economic reality that gives impulse to the geographic and political dismemberment of nationalities like the Puerto Rican. Unfolding events have in themselves borne out the integral character of the exploitation that sustains migration. On the Island, the Puerto Rican worker is offered up as a prize to expanding multinational capitalism ...On the continent, the Puerto Rican worker is offered to declining small-scale industries and services...We will never come to understand these contradictions with the analytical tools offered to us by the very architects of the situation.  
(Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 1979, 26)

Uncritical descriptions can only lead to a misinterpretation of the Puerto Rican migration. In order to understand the Puerto Rican migration (and perhaps other migrations as well), a critical theoretical understanding of the United States -- and the world's -- mode of production is needed. Today's poverty in the Third World (including Puerto Rico) must be examined not simply as historical,

demographic, or geographic artifact, but as the result of the expansion of a multinational economic system. Most Third World nations are integrated into an international economy which creates tremendous wealth for some sectors and enormous poverty for others. It is in this global context, of worldwide capitalism, that the Puerto Rican experience must be understood. Ignoring this context, much of the literature fails to explain convincingly the economic, the political, and the social ties between the United States and Puerto Ricans.

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## Chapter IV

### CULTURAL DYNAMIC: ACCOMMODATION AND RESISTANCE

In the current anthropological sense, at least, culture is a given group's or society's whole way of life. In Primitive Culture, published in 1871, Edward Burnett Tylor articulated the most famous definition of culture. He observed that

...culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and many other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

Since Tylor, the concept has been modified many times.

Following Tylor's definition, Milton Gordon explained:

Culture, in other words, is the way of life of a society, and if analyzed further is seen to consist of prescribed ways of behaving or norms of conduct, beliefs, values, and skills, along with the behavioral patterns and uniformities based on these categories -- all this we call 'non-material culture' -- plus, in an extension of the term, the artifacts created by these skills and values, which we call 'material culture'.  
(Gordon, 1964, 32-33)

Culture is learned and shared through formal and informal education, through socialization and acculturation. Through it people are able to give meaning to and to shape objective reality. Culture in this broad sense makes us human beings and as such it permits us to survive by mastering and understanding the physical and social worlds.

Colonialism not only imposes foreign domination, replaces the old forms of production by new ones, or creates new markets, colonialism also violently attacks a whole culture. For colonialism to work effectively, it must either eliminate a great part of the population (genocide), or it must penetrate the culture of the colonized. Or colonialism must do both. In the first instance, genocide implies the destruction of the conquered people. This action is not advantageous to the colonizer since it means the loss of a market and the elimination of a cheap labor force. For colonialism to be effective, it must exploit the resources, raw materials and the subordinated population to the fullest. In the second instance, the colonizer makes use of the doctrine of racism, of domination and subordination via superiority and inferiority based on racial traits and cultural differences. In some sense, racism is the child of colonialism. It serves as the ideological rationalization for the exploitation of the colonized.

In general, colonialism can only be maintained through the organized repression of the economic, political, and cultural life of a dependent people. Colonial penetration profoundly transforms social structures, economic relations, and cultural customs. New powerful institutions are imposed as being innately superior. Domination in general can be maintained through institutional (covert) as

well as physical (overt) force. The use of force is only one of the many ways of destroying or least neutralizing the cultural life of the colonized. Thus this cultural destruction or neutralization is necessary for domination. (Car-michael and Hamilton, 1967)

According to Frantz Fanon (1968), to be dominated is to be denied a historical development. Since culture is a product of a historical development, a product of people's history, colonized people are denied their own cultural development. The dependent's history, culture, institutions, and myths are systematically destroyed or distorted. To the colonized it comes to appear that civilization began at the moment they came in contact with the colonizer. Maldonado Denis describes this same colonial experience in Puerto Rico as follows:

At the same time that our people have been a victim of an intellectual colonization process, they have lost contact with their historical and cultural roots to a point that they suffer from an amnesia of their past. A people who does not know from where or how they came to be. Here is the most ominous consequence of colonialism in its Puerto Rican version: the historical and cultural emptiness that threatens to leave our culture in a mere carapace, in a mere empty substance. (Maldonado Denis, 1969, 219)

In colonized culture there exists a dialectical conflict, a clash of intertwined but opposing forces. That holds very much in the case of Puerto Rico, as the whole thesis argues. While the colonized culture accepts the norms and values of the dominant society (cultural accommodation),

it also rejects them (cultural resistance). Two opposite forces are always conflicting in the colonial culture:

(1) a force working towards assimilating the colonizer's way of life; and (2) a force working toward the liberation of the colonized. Time and again, and in a wide range of forms, these forces clash with each other, bringing about a lot of conflict in the cultural life of the colonized people.

In the case of Puerto Rico, the change from Spanish to American domination is very important. It constitutes a determinate factor in its history. According to Eugenio Fernandez Mendez, "...the year of 1898 indicates in the cultural history of Puerto Rico a new cultural period." (Fernandez, 1971, 335)

With the American invasion, a transculturation period was started that we can clearly see even today. Maldonado Denis, looking at these changes from a Puerto Rican perspective, writes:

In this manner commenced (in 1898) a social process that will define the path of the future. This is the process by which the island becomes the object of an economic, political, military, and intellectual colonization... (Maldonado Denis, 1971, 69)

Today we find two main contradictory foces in the Puerto Rican culture:

(1) The blind acceptance of American norms and values. This means of course rejecting Puerto Rican norms and values. Perhaps this is the assimilation that Fitzpatrick, Glazer and Moynihan, Senior, Handlin and others are

articulating; and

(2) The rejection of American norms and values in favor of maintaining and further developing Puerto Rican ones.

The clash of these two forces constitutes the main contradiction that we face here, of course, in dealing with each part of our topic. In this study, the reader should note, we attempt to conceptualize one side of this clash, often ignored, as against the usually emphasized other side.

It is in the whole way of life of the colonized, then, that we begin to find the seeds of opposition, the struggle for liberation. In response to imperial cultural penetration, many colonized peoples have developed strategies centered around new cultural expressions. Hence the creation of a whole dynamic culture is one of the necessary factors in the liberation process of a colonized people. As history shows, the struggle for liberation becomes more intense as the cultural expressions of opposition grow. It is in the dynamic culture of the colonized that we find the attempt to affirm their own ways, their own cultural personality. Such a cultural dynamic means resistance to the colonizer's whole way of life.

In terms of such a cultural dynamic, often made light of by outside public figures and scholars, I treat awareness of Puerto Rican nationality as a state of mind, as a form of consciousness. In becoming aware of nationality, a group or

an individual goes through a process. Throughout this process we find present the clash between the contradictory forces mentioned above. While we find a tendency towards assimilation we also find a tendency towards reinforcing one's own norms and values. The clash of these forces and the process, itself, produces many psychological as well as social problems. Examples include the identity problem, the breakup of the family and drugs.

The overall cultural conflict is, in sum, a manifestation of the economic, political, social subjugation, and the resulting struggle for people's own politico-economic independence or at least cultural autonomy.

Strong relationships exist in human society between culture and politics and between culture and economics. Since culture is the collective creation of people's history it becomes very important in the evolution of the collectivity. In order to give meaning and to shape the social and physical worlds people need a mediator. The mediator is culture. It is in the process of interacting with the world and themselves that people create culture and history. As people act upon the world, interpreting and shaping it through the cultural tools available to them, they create their history and at the same time recreate and shape their own culture. One finds at the base of culture the tangible resources and techniques of a people, the material forces producing their way of life. Thus, in order to be liberated

from foreign cultural domination, the colonized productive forces must be completely free from foreign capital. The converse holds true as well, as I try to show in this work.

In Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism, Lenin already stressed that in every colonized nation one finds the elements of a socialist culture (in the sense of an anti-capitalist and anti-individualist communalism) as well as the elements of a bourgeois culture. One finds in colonized people, however, that acculturation, in the anthropological sense, takes place mainly in the more privileged sectors of the colonial population. Their interests are directly tied to the metropolis. For the most part these sectors serve as links between the colonized masses and the colonizer. They communicate and reinforce the colonizer's norms, values, culture, and interests to the colonized.

The Puerto Rican national bourgeoisie constitutes a good example of this colonial arrangement. It has taken the historical role of becoming the link between the dominant and subordinated groups.

With the American invasion a change takes place in the Puerto Rican economy. There is a change from a semi-feudal economy of coffee haciendas (estates) to an economy of capitalist sugar plantations. This transformation started at the end of the 19th century but it took on impetus with the American invasion in 1898.

The invasion started a change in the economy of the

Island thus making Puerto Rico dependent on the United States.

Two years later, in the fiscal year 1899-1900, when the Island was under United States sovereignty, the United States had assumed undisputed first place in the export and import trade of the Island. Out of a total value of \$16,602,004 in commerce with the outside world, trade with the United States amounted to \$10,302,691 or 62.1 percent. The proportion of trade with the United States has increased almost without interruption from the beginning of the century to the present. (Fernandez, 1971, 333)

A few years after the invasion sugar cane became the prime product of the island. The market for coffee fell off almost completely when Puerto Rico became part of the United States tariff. An American writer, speaking of this, explains:

Puerto Rico became an economic dependency of the United States through its incorporation within the federal tariff structure, through the use of United States currency, through the extension of massive amounts of credits from the mainland for investment in sugar refining, through federal financing of some public service on the island and so on. On the one hand this new set of relationships led to an unprecedented growth of the sugar industry and the development of tobacco growing and needlework as insular activities of greater importance, on the other hand, the coffee industry declined... (Steward, 1956, 62)

It is quite clear that the economic policies of the United States government were directed toward the production of sugar. Once the American companies were established on the Island, two or three of them monopolized the sugar and tobacco industries. In a matter of two or three decades these monopolies became the controllers not only of the economy but of the whole society. As a matter of fact,

...the first four decades of imperialist domination in Puerto Rico (1898-1940) indicate a process by which the Island fell piece by piece into the hands of United States industrial and financial capital. (Maldonado Denis, 1971, 69)

Once the coffee haciendas (estates) were no longer profitable, the agricultural workers began to move from them to the sugar mills. The landowners began to sell their lands and moved to the city.

It is at this point that the jornaleros (peasants) commenced a life completely different from that of the coffee haciendas. The peasants for the first time in Puerto Rican history became salaried workers. The group of small farmers that existed before the invasion also became salaried workers under the new system of agrarian capitalism. (It is interesting to note, at this point in time, the beginning of the Puerto Rican mass migration, first to the cities and later to the United States.)

The old landowners lost their political power with the American occupation. They lost their political and economic power to the American monopolies. This group of hacendos (estate owners), as a means of defense, assumed independence ideas and created the Unionist Party.

The old landowners were able to educate their children. They became the lawyers, doctors, and professionals. Since this class did not have any type of power, they developed a radical ideology oriented toward change. This new generation was strongly supported by the growing

proletariat and the peasants since they also wanted changes. That situation permitted an alliance between the second generation of the old landowning class and the most oppressed sector of the population. From this alliance came the foundation of the Popular Party.

With some political changes, the main positions of power in the insular government were filled by children of the old landowning class. But still this new class of technocrats needed an economic base on which to rest their power. Once industrialization began to take place this class found a new base for their political power in the economic planning by the government. This second generation of the landowning class became the technocrats of the new capitalist industrialization process. This second generation (under the leadership of Luis Munoz Marin, ex-socialist, ex-independentist, and founder of the Popular Party) adopted an economic policy which was and still is destined to attract American capital to the industrialization of the Island. It is at this time in history, after World War II, that we find the creation of Operation Bootstrap. This program brings to the Island an enormous number of American industries, tax exempted for a period of ten to seventeen years.

Once in power this class of technocrats betrayed the proletariat and the peasants. They used all possible means (including the Taft-Hartley Act) to stop and crush the workers' movement. In this manner, the technocratic class

manifested itself in favor of American business interests and against the interests of the Puerto Rican working people.

In objective social terms, the members of this class, men and women, are a bourgeois class economically dependent on the metropolis. They tend to be one of the most receptive classes to the influence of American society. (Lopez, 1973, 68)

On the other hand, among the working masses new cultural, political, and institutional forms of expression are shaped. These new forms of expression are in part drawn from the older culture and in part created in adaptation and in resistance to foreign assault. The nationalist movement headed by Pedro Albizu Campos and the Young Lords in the United States represented political confrontation with American intervention.

As we mentioned above, in becoming aware of nationality and class a group of people or an individual goes through a process of change. Throughout this process the contradiction of accommodation and resistance are always present. There are, of course, different levels of social awareness. The description of these levels of awareness might confuse the reader into thinking that they are static -- mechanical -- stages. But these levels of consciousness, let me emphasize, are not static or mechanical stages. On the contrary, they are very dynamic levels of national and class consciousness. These dynamic levels of consciousness do not necessarily follow one after the other. An individual

or group might move forward or backward depending on the material (historical) conditions of their everyday life experiences. In a sense, these levels of consciousness are products of both historical events as well as everyday experiences.

I have found a process of rising awareness in the Puerto Rican community in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. This example serves to display, to show the possibilities, of a theory of cultural dynamic in a community like the one I single out. The process of change might be briefly conceived of as follows:

#### ACCEPTANCE

The racist dichotomy of inferior/superior is a reality for the colonized Puerto Rican. The Puerto Ricans are constantly bombarded by such remarks as the one made by

...Governor Aurthur Yager before the House Committee on Insular Affairs in 1916 that the Puerto Ricans were a "tropical" people lacking the "stamina" and "initiative" to adjust to conditions of American life. (Lewis, 1968, 3)

The colonized Puerto Rican is a believer in such dichotomies. Inferiority is the guiding principle of life. Self-hatred and self-destruction constitute parts of everyday existence. Violence is very much part of daily life. Drugs, alcohol, bullets, and knives are only a few of the many weapons used to destroy each other. Substandard and inhuman living conditions are seen as God-given. In general, their perception of the world is guided by self-destructive and self-hating standards. Having a distorted view of their

own culture and history, everything Puerto Rican is seen as inferior and to some extent despicable. Everything American is seen as superior and at times fetishized. There is an almost desperate need to possess and be that which is believed to be most American. In Fanon's words:

The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy: It expresses his dreams of possession -- all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible. The Colonized man is an envious man...or there is not a native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place. (Fanon, 1968, 39)

Everything around the immediate surroundings (drugs, slums, crime) seems to indicate the Puerto Rican misfortune and the stigma of being a member of an "inferior" group. The only path to reach humanity, the only alternative that seems to be present is ASSIMILATION. Violently and blindly the colonized Puerto Rican rejects his own norms, values, culture, and even history. His objective is to become like his master. And the only possible way is by assimilating and imitating his master's history, norms, values, and culture. This creates a lot of frustration, identity problems, and psychological problems.

#### QUESTIONING

Yet acceptance is only half the picture. Any of the many everyday Puerto Rican experiences can become the catalyst for the individual, or sometimes a group, to begin to question one's old assumptions. The killing of a boy on a

hot summer afternoon by a policeman, an injustice committed by the court or by the welfare department, and injustices suffered at the hands of the employer and other such common experiences can be enough to move the group or individual into questioning their economic, political, social and cultural assumptions. The individual begins the search for identity. The individual begins to reinterpret the world and the conditions of Puerto Ricans. It is a moment of despair and fear but, nevertheless, a moment of questioning.

#### NATIONAL ZEAL

National Zeal means a full, all out bond with things Native or Puerto Rican. Here is a case of National Zeal.

Somebody says I'm Puerto Rican, I say I'm very proud about being Puerto Rican and I was always proud. I was proud because of the way I looked. I knew how to handle myself, I wasn't intelligent, but I wouldn't let anybody dare and pull anything over on me. I tried to make the best of things. And I could be proud of my parents. They gave me so much love. I was proud to be a Puerto Rican because that's my race and I have to live with it. I don't know what the message about being Puerto Rican is because I never was anything else. It's hard to say why is good to be Puerto Rican. I'm sort of accepting it because I am one, and not because there's anything good about it. I'm not saying that, if I was white, I wouldn't be better off. But if I could be born over, I would be Puerto Rican again because of the things I learned. I grew up in a bad neighborhood and it made me experience a lot of things. But if I could go and do the same things over again, I'd do it exactly step by step even though I may have suffered a lot and had trouble. Because I've experience so much and if I hadn't, I don't think my mind would be that wide (Carmelita -- the proud one). (Cooper, 1972, 94)

These whites think they've got everything. They think we can't get up to their class. If I had them all lined up in front of me I'd get a Tommy gun and

shoot them all down, because of the way they're running the world. The Constitution says all the people are equal, right? Why don't they treat each other as equal then? They don't go by the Constitution. Carlos -- the gang member. (Cooper, 1972, 107)

At this point the person seems completely consumed by Puertoricaness. Everything good and sacred is Puerto Rican. Everything evil and profane is American. The person is overtaken by an almost religious feeling of love toward Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican people and the Puerto Rican culture. He/she wants to capture the Puerto Rican past as if we were still living in it.

All values of individualism begin to be replaced by collectivism, dedication and selflessness. The person is ready for discussing plans and organization of a liberation struggle in the Puerto Rican community. In general, according to Fanon,

Individualism is the first to disappear. The native... had learned from his masters that the individual ought to express himself fully. The colonialist bourgeoisie had hammered into the native's mind the idea of a society of individuals, and whose only wealth is individual thought. Now the native who has the opportunity to return to the people during the struggle for freedom will discover the falseness of this theory. The very forms of organization of the struggle will suggest to him a different vocabulary. Brother, sister, friends -- these are words outlawed by the colonialist bourgeoisie, because for them my brother is my purse, my friend is part of my scheme for getting on. (Fanon, 1968, 47)

#### NATIONALISM COMBINED WITH CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

This is one of the harder levels of consciousness to reach. Nationalism combined with class consciousness

can be frustrated or delayed by the experiences that an individual went through in his/her earlier life.

If and when individuals move into this level of consciousness, they begin to question their new simplistic world view. They question their new glorifications, their national zeal. They begin to search for new ways of explaining the world around them. They experience the fact that the present situation does not reflect the glorified past. They learn that there is a new Puerto Rican culture that reflects a new Puerto Rican experience. The traditional modes of expression have undergone radical changes or have been transformed. The great change reflects the transformation of first, the island -- from a semi-feudal to an industrialized colony -- and second, the migration of millions of Puerto Ricans to the most advanced capitalist nation in the world with its multinational working class.

Increasingly, throughout the process of rising Puerto Rican awareness, the person may thus also develop a sense of class identity or consciousness. The potential finally exists that such a person becomes aware of being exploited not only as a Puerto Rican but also as a worker.

How does a working class consciousness develop, here and now, among urban Puerto Ricans in the United States?

The Puerto Rican community in Williamsburg, and in New York as a whole, is composed mainly of working class

people. Within the United States working class, the Puerto Ricans make up a most exploited sector and a significant component of the reserve army of labor. Such is the case in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Being Puerto Rican almost automatically leads them to the lower paying jobs, high levels of unemployment, the experience of discrimination at the hands of both employers and unions, life in the worst housing conditions, and their children receiving substandard education.

The Puerto Rican migration, except during the beginning of this century when a handful of merchants migrated, has been a migration of colonized working class people. Puerto Ricans come to these shores from a position of colonized working class people and remain colonized working people. The migration does not change their position of dependent, subjugated working class people.

The Puerto Ricans in the United States come in contact with other sectors of the working class. As they come in contact, new ways of expression are learned. Increasingly, other working class people's expressions are integrated into the Puerto Rican forms. Furthermore, the Puerto Ricans have not lost contact with the Island and its working class. Many new forms of expression on the Island are transported to the United States and vice versa.

All these interactions are very significant to the dynamic of a proletarian culture among Puerto Ricans and

the rest of the working class in the United States.

In his book about the shaping of the American working class consciousness, Stanley Aronowitz wrote:

If the working class is to make a break with the past this break cannot result from its militancy alone; or simply from the left to capture a large working class constituency for its ideas. It will arise out of new conditions, rooted equally in new social relations and in the development of a conscious opposition culture generated by the workers themselves. This culture is here defined as the matrix of language, art, and political sensibility that constitutes the world outlook for an entire class. The fundamental condition for its emergence must be located among the sinews of society not outside of it. (Aronowitz, 1973, 14-15)

In general, Aronowitz meant that the workers have to create a proletarian culture and ideology. It is through ideology, in the sense of a political doctrine or world view, that people are able most concretely to interpret and explain their experiences. In society all members are supposed to share a common ideology, an articulated consciousness. It is when contradictions in the process of production emerge that a dominant ideology turns problematic.

As an ideology linked to ongoing activity, consciousness of the oppressed -- national as well as class -- inevitably plays a very important role in revolutionary movements. It is by means of a growing consciousness, an emergent ideology, that the Third World workers recognize their oppression as colonized people. Trying to overcome their subservient conditions, trying to become human, they give this national and working class consciousness the form of

political action.

A theory of cultural dynamic shows how national and working class consciousness might take shape and fuse in a case like the present one, of colonial working class immigrants trying to survive in an urban ethnic community in the world's center of capital and Western empire. On the plane of theory, this work aims to contribute to the conception of a whole way of life that resists as well as accommodates a dominant culture.

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PART TWO

SPIRITISM IN THE PUERTO RICAN COMMUNITY

IN WILLIAMSBURG, BROOKLYN

INTRODUCTION

This part of our work attempts to show how spiritism might help the process of Puerto Rican national awareness and working class consciousness. Just how does spiritism enhance or diminish Puerto Rican working class culture, a culture of resistance to the dominant culture?

Part Two of our presentation will be divided into four chapters. The first of these, Chapter V, deals with four case studies of consciousness -- furthering spiritism among Puerto Ricans in Williamsburg. Our overall conclusions are based on a great number of cases. But we chose, for simplification, to single out a few cases that illustrate our claim: for those studied, spiritism (and specifically spiritual seances) serves as a tool for cultural dynamic. In terms of method, to repeat, these cases rest on participant observation, prior familiarity and special attention to an emergent ideology of the oppressed. Throughout the case studies, we look for a cultural dynamic among Puerto Rican workers in Williamsburg. We ask at each step: how does spiritism contribute to that culture and to its

political doctrine or ideology?

In Chapter VI I deal with the dynamic personality of a spiritualist and his leadership role. What type of leader is he? What are his qualities as an individual? How do people see him? Why do people respect him? How does the spiritualist, as an internal leader, move his followers in solving a particular mundane problem?

In Chapter VII, Part Two turns to a collective action as spiritism may affect it. How does a group of workers under the leadership of one of their own fight against an insensitive landlord?

Chapter V

SPIRITUAL SEANCES AND CULTURAL DYNAMIC,  
FOUR CASE STUDIES

FELIPE

The first of our four case studies, Felipe, is a twenty-nine year old man who came to New York when he was sixteen years old. At seventeen he dropped out of high school to go to work. After eleven years in the same job he was fired.

After begin fired, he went to the union where he was told that nothing could be done. Seeing himself out of a job and without unemployment benefits, he went to the spiritist to see if something could be done to stop his "bad luck."

That night the living room was crowded with people. The air was full of tobacco and incense smoke. While drinking coffee and waiting for the seance to begin, a few people gathered in a corner of the living room to hold a conversation. In the course of the conversation a young woman, Isabel, asked:

Listen, Felipe, did you get any unemployment checks yet?

Very serious, Felip replied:

No, Isabel. I'm not eligible for unemployment since I was fired.

Full of curiosity, Isabel asked:

And how do you manage? Chico, after all, you have a wife and two kids to support. You must be going through hell. Have you tried looking for a job in a factory?

After taking a sip of coffee, Felipe answered:

Sí, I tried a few factories. Damn, I've been to so many places!

He paused for a moment, took another drink of coffee and then burst out:

Experience! They are always asking for experience. Shit! It seems that you cannot get a job unless you already have experience. But how do they expect you to get experience if they never give you a chance?

A middle aged man, don Carlos commented:

Sí señor [Yes sir]! That is why our youth are into drugs and crime. Do you think that the rich and the government care? No señor! They don't care about us humble people. What unemployment gives is a misery. No señor! They don't care about us humble people. What unemployment gives is a misery. No señor! What the rich want is to be even richer. Yes, to live out of the sweat of the working man.

Lucia, who was sitting in a corner of the room listening to the conversation, added:

Eso es verdad [That is true]! We, the Puerto Ricans have a hard time finding decent jobs. Go to a factory and you will find the Puerto Ricans working for miserable wages. Coño [Damn], in the best jobs you only find white Americans, never a Puerto Rican or a black person.

Manuel, a twenty-five year old man, commented:

Chica, you know that the white Americans are more intelligent than us Puerto Ricans. Besides you know that our people are so bruto [morons] -- they cannot learn good English.

A middle aged woman, doña Lola, added:

Yes sir. Besides our people are a bunch of

vagos [lazy] and bochincheros [gossipers]. The Americans don't want to give us the good jobs because they don't want their place destroyed. Our people are a bunch of pigs. They take a nice clean neighborhood and in a matter of a few months it looks like a city dump.

Angry, don Carlos disagreed:

Ave María [Oh holy Mary]! How can you people repeat what those racist Americans are always saying about our people?

Manuel and doña Lola were about to say something when don Carlos demanded:

Wait! Wait a minute! Let me speak. I did not interrupt any of you, so I want the same respect.

Trying once again, Manuel mumbled:

But, don Carlos...

Raising his right hand, don Carlos insisted:

Listen to me, Manuel. Listen!

For a moment the room was very quiet. Manuel gave don Carlos a silly smile. In a calm but serious tone of voice don Carlos continued:

Like I was saying. You were repeating what some Americans think of us. But let us take a look at ourselves. How many of us are vagos and bochincheros? How many of us are pigs? How many?

Don Carlos paused for a moment. There was complete silence.

Pointing at Manuel don Carlos asked:

You, Manuel. I've known your father ever since we were kids. Didn't you know that you come from a hard working and decent family?

Manuel was about to say something when don Carlos continued:

As a matter of fact, everyone here is a hard working person. Sure there are a lot of people receiving welfare. And a lot of our youth are into

drugs and crime. We all know that. But the question should be why. Don't tell me that people like to be poor and in trouble. Come on! Let us not blame the victims for the evils of this world.

The room was consumed by silence. Not even Manuel or doña Lola whispered a word. Finally, breaking the silence, the spiritualist, don Justo asked:

Felipe, did you go to the welfare?

Scratching his head, Felipe answered:

Oh yes, I went to the welfare. But you know how it is with welfare. Well, this fat Americano [American man] told me: "Mr. Gonzalez, you look healthy. You should get a job. Right now we can't do anything for you. But come back later on, if you still need help." You know? I was so mad that I felt like crying.

Disgusted, don Justo said:

Those son of a...Well, I guess that meanwhile he has to starve. Coño [Damn]!

Doña Lola asked:

Why don't you go to Badillo or Olmedo? You know? Probably one of those politicians might help you out.

Felipe didn't know what to say. He mumbled a few words.

Don Justo, who was sitting next to him, explained while laughing:

Mire [Look], doña Lola, you know how those politicians are. When they want your vote they even give you their behind. But after the election they easily forget about you.

In complete agreement with don Justo, Lucia added:

Yes sir! That's how come I don't give my vote to anyone. I don't believe in any politicians or any party. They are all the same. All I know is that no matter who is in power, if I don't work I don't eat. So, the hell with them all!

Doña Lola shook her head in disagreement but did not say anything.

The conversation was stopped with the announcement that the seance was about to begin. During the seance Felipe's case came into the open. After getting into an argument with his boss, Felipe was fired. His argument came as a result of not being promoted to foreman. According to Felipe, a white man who had been working there for as little as two years got the promotion.

During the seance it was explained by a "spirit" that the cause of his problems was due to an "evil spell." He was "dispossessed" (despojado) and was told that soon his luck was bound to change.

After the seance Felipe had the opportunity to further explain to some of the people his experiences with the boss and the union. He explained:

Man, you don't know how unfair I was treated. You know that after working with that son of a bitch for eleven years I was fired. And I thought that I was living in a just society. That's shit! Now I know that in this country the rich have all the rights. We Puerto Ricans don't have any rights. No wonder we have had so many riots.

Sarcastically, don Carlos commented:

Man, it took you this long to find that out? Remember what happened in Newark a few years back? The police arrested a lot of people who were celebrating some type of "fiesta." I don't remember the occasion but I sure remember that the people were Puerto Ricans. I'm sure that many of them are hard working people like us. In the future we'll have to do something about it.

Felipe continued:

You know? After the other man got the promotion I went to the boss to ask him for an explanation. After all, I had worked there much longer. Besides, I knew the job better than anyone in the factory. You know what that bastard told me? He told me that I didn't get the promotion because of my Spanish accent. He needed a man without an accent. I told him that I did the job for eleven months without any complaint from him and without getting paid for it. He told me that he knew and next time he would give me the job. I told him to go to hell. That's when he fired me.

Felipe paused for a moment, took a sip of coffee and then continued:

A lot of the other guys working with me wanted to stop working but I told them not to do so since I was going to the union. Man, I really thought that the union was going to help me. You know what they told me? They said that I was fired for misconduct. In that case the boss was right and not me. They told me to wait for another job opening in another factory. A lot of the guys wanted to strike without the union. But the union told us that it was illegal. Since I did not want to get them in trouble I decided to leave. After all they are all family men. If they lose their jobs who is going to support their families.

Don Carolos interrupted:

What a good opportunity for a strike. And you just walked out?

Felipe continued:

You know? For the first time in my life I really understand what it means to be a Puerto Rican in this country. That shit of equal rights is not true. And who said that this is better than communism? I don't understand why but there is no such thing as a union for working people. The unions are always selling themselves. The only thing they do is to collect dues.

With a negative tone of voice, doña Lola commented:

Listen, Felipe, if you don't like this country you can always go back to the Island. I know that the government is not in favor of the poor, that

we suffer a lot of discrimination, and things are not as good as they could be. But let me tell you, I have it better here than I ever had it in Puerto Rico.

Immediately Lucia replied:

Damn sure, you have it better here than in Puerto Rico. But why? Still, you don't have a decent job. You are receiving welfare checks. And you clearly know all the hassles in order to get those damn checks. You know that in the welfare they treat us like shit.

Don Justo interfered. He told the people that the conversation was getting out of control. He pointed out that it was late and people were tired. Very politely he told them to continue the conversation next time. To don Justo, Felipe's problems were not going to be solved by fighting each other. To him, the (the people) should have faith in God and in the spirits of light. With great respect don Justo concluded:

Faith in God and in the spirits of light can help us fight against the injustices in the material world.

### CELIA

Celia is a twenty-four year old woman. She was partly raised in Puerto Rico and partly in New York. Although she did not graduate from high school she has a good command of both Spanish and English.

Celia married when she was seventeen years old. At twenty-two her husband left her with two small children. Finding herself with two daughters to support and no job,

she decided to go to the welfare department for some type of aid.

The following is an account of her welfare experience as told during a spiritual gathering. Celia first started the discussion with a man who was in the process of trying to receive financial assistance from welfare. Celia explained:

...well, I got up around five o'clock in the morning. I left my girls in my mother's house the night before. You know? I got to the welfare around seven o'clock in the morning. By that time there was a line of around ten people. I was lucky that the day was not cold. You know? It was the beginning of spring. But anyway I went prepared for cold weather. You know? Thinking about it now I did not mind much about having to wait. I don't know why but people who are waiting become very friendly with each other. Well, probably that is because they have something in common. They talk to you about their problems. Oh boy! They even tell you how much they hate the damn welfare.

At this moment someone was possessed by a spirit and the seance took its course, stopping Celia from continuing. At the end of the spiritual seance a few people who were drinking coffee began the conversation again. With discontent, Celia told a woman:

You know? The shit is that after waiting for a few hours in the cold they let you go in. But then you have to wait a few more hours.

A fat, middle aged woman, doña Carmen, interrupted:

Damn, I know. They make you wait, sometimes two to three hours. And when you go in, they make you wait two or three more hours. Honey, sometimes you spend the whole day.

Doña Carmen, after a small pause, continued:

Since I always used to wait for so long, one day I decided to go five minutes before my appointment. I got there around fifteen minutes after. You know what the bitch told me? She told me that I was not supposed to come late. Damn, I was so mad! I told her that if Rockefeller or the president came they would lick their asses. But since I was a poor Puerto Rican, and we ain't worth shit, I had to wait. Well, she told me to come back another day. You know? I felt like burning down the whole damn place.

But Manuel, a twenty-five year old man, insisted:

Doña Carmen, you have to understand. The welfare is always dealing with people who don't want to work. Our people come from Puerto Rico to collect welfare checks. I bet that more than ninety percent of the Puerto Ricans are on welfare.

Juan (see below, next case) burst out laughing. Trying to control his laughter, he asked:

Ave María (Oh holy Mary), Manuel! How can you say that? You mean to say that around nine hundred thousand out of a million are on welfare? Wow! Ha, ha, ha...

Very serious, doña Lola commented:

Listen, Juan, don't laugh. This is very serious.

With respect, the young man answered:

Pardon me, doña Lola. I didn't mean anything wrong. But what he said sounded ridiculous.

Doña Lola emphasized:

To you it sounds ridiculous. But the truth of the matter is that the majority of us come to this country to receive welfare. After all, we cannot live in Puerto Rico because the island is too small and very poor. We should thank the Americans for everything that they have given us. If it was not for them we will be a bunch of savages eating each other.

Manuel added:

Yeah, thanks to the Americans and to Muñoz Marín

things in Puerto Rico are getting better. Thanks to the federal government people are getting food stamps. Although the food stamps are creating a bunch of lazy people.

Don Carlos, who had been unusually quiet, became very excited. Scratching his head, he commented:

Wow, this is incredible! Look, the Americans are business-oriented people. And they are excellent business people. They don't give you something for nothing in return. That is going against the law of profit making. When they give something it is because they are going to get three or four times as much. You know?

Doña Lola interrupted:

O my God! Carlos don't start with your crazy politics. We are not talking about politics.

Don Carlos insisted:

Listen, Lola, I'm not talking about politics. I'm describing reality. Our people don't want to be poor. And our people are not lazy. It is not our fault that some people have a lot of money while others practically don't have enough to eat. Celia's story is another example of the things working people have to confront.

Trying to intimidate don Carlos, Manuel asked:

Coño (Damn), Carlos! What do you want? do you want the government to support a bunch of good for nothing lazy people? Shit! You want Puerto Rico to fall in the hands of the communists? Don't you know that Puerto Rico without the United States will be destroyed? Hell, what do you want?

Seeing that the discussion had become too emotional, don Justo intervened. Very politely, don Justo reminded:

O.K. Let us not forget that we are among neighbors and family. Let us try not to insult each other.

His words were followed by a complete silence.

The telephone rang. Lucia picked up the telephone. It

was someone named George. Don Justo rushed to the telephone.

In a very feminine tone of voice don Justo said:

Hello, my love. How are you?

He listened for a few seconds. Then he apologized:

Listen, love, I have the house full of people.  
I'll see you later on tonight. O.K.?

After a kiss, he hung up the telephone. Smiling, Manuel  
inquired:

That must be one of don Justo's great lovers.  
Right, don Justo?

Shaking his hips, don Justo responded:

Yes, sir, my lovely Georgito!

People laughed and clapped.

After a few minutes don Justo asked Celia to continue  
her story. Celia responded:

Yes, that damn welfare. Man, we the poor always  
have to go through shits like that. You should  
see those poor mothers waiting outside with their  
babies. You think they care? No, they don't give  
a shit. Well, after waiting almost a whole day,  
they told me that I was not accepted since my  
husband's family owns a bodega (grocery store).

Don Justo interrupted, asking Celia:

Well, if they own a bodega, don't you think that  
they have enough money to support your children?

Smiling, Celia answered:

People think that a bodega makes so much money.  
Let me tell you, I used to help my husband. And  
you know? Most of the time they did not make more  
than \$500 per week. Besides part of the money  
belongs to my husband's two brothers.

Expressing his understanding, don Justo replied:

Oh, I see.

Celia continued:

You know? They gave me another appointment for the following week. They sent my husband a few letters which he did not answer. Then one day I saw him and I told him about the welfare. He gave me his telephone number. The welfare spoke to him. He told them that he did not have enough money to support me. Then I was told by the welfare to go to family court. You know? Those bastards then gave me another appointment for two months later.

Lucia asked Celia:

What did you do all that time? I mean, you and your children had to eat and pay rent.

After lighting up a cigarette, Celia responded:

Well, my mother and father used to give me the little they could. I explained my case to the landlord and he agreed to wait for a little while. You know? While I was waiting I received a letter from welfare saying that I was not approved. I was not accepted due to insufficient information. The landlord then was unable to wait anymore and he gave me a dispossess.

People mumbled different statements. A man repeated a few times:

This is worse than communism. Damn bastards...

Lucia kept saying:

Shit, that only happens to us Puerto Ricans, to us Puerto Rican women. Yeah, if we were white and rich that would not happen.

After a few minute of silence, Celia explained:

You know? When I got the dispossess I was really in bad shape. I went back to the welfare and I told them that I have given all the information that they asked for. But still they told me that they were waiting for information from the family court. Damn. I used to be in the welfare office from seven in the morning to five in the afternoon practically every day.

Don Justo interrupted Celia. He pointed out:

At that moment you came to me, right?

Smiling, Celia agreed.

Don Justo explained how a "soul that needed spiritual light" was doing harm to Celia. He explained the spiritual "trabajito" (ritual ceremony to give light to the spirits) that he did to Celia. He further indicated that he asked Celia's protector spirits to help her. Celia then followed don Justo:

Well, don Justo helped me a lot. I then had all the good spirits on my side. In don Justo's house I met and spoke to doña Maria. She told me to go to the legal aid. Since the landlord had given me the dispossess I went to live with my sister and her husband. Two or three days after doña Maria told me the address of the legal aid.

Don Justo interrupted:

If she had come to me sooner she would still be living in her old apartment. A good "trabajito" plus the help of the legal aid would have prevented the landlord from giving her the dispossess. You know how it is with rich people -- the more they have the more they want. Those people live out of the sweat and tears of the poor. God save them!

There was agreement with don Justo's words. After he spoke, a few minutes of silence followed. Then Celia spoke:

I told everything to the legal aid. They asked me for the rejection letter and I gave it to them. The lawyer told me that it would take a few months before the case came to court. But thanks to don Justo's trabajito it only took two weeks. After two weeks I went back to the legal aid. He explained that they did not accept my case because my husband told the welfare that he was giving me money. Furthermore, he told them that I was living with another man.

Don Carlos asked Celia:

Did he really do that?

Celia replied:

I don't know. But knowing my husband I don't think so. Well, according to the lawyer the welfare was giving two different stories. A few days later we went to a hearing. In court the lawyer explained the two different stories. The court taped everything that was being said and sent the tapes to Albany.

Don Justo interrupted and explained the second *trabajito* that he did to Celia. He explained:

Well, we can never tell what can happen in court. Man's justice can be blind, especially when the poor are involved.

After a month of waiting Celia finally received an acceptance letter from Albany. The whole process took around ten months. Although it was a hassle to struggle against the welfare bureaucracy she "made it." According to Celia, the moral of her story is:

Many, many Puerto Ricans never get to obtain what I through struggle was able to obtain. Damn, it is a bitch to deal with welfare. We the poor are treated like animals. I would like not having to depend on welfare. Someday people will be forced to change this world. I hope that it is for the better.

#### JUAN

Juan is almost eighteen years old. He dropped out of high school five months before graduating. Although he always had good grades, he considers school to be boring and a waste of time.

He was sitting next to Yolanda and Sonia. The young

women are graduating from high school. In Spanglish, an immigrant mix of Spanish and English, Juan asked one of the young women:

Oye (Listen) Yolanda, how is school? Tú te vas a (You are going to) graduate this semester. Right?

Smiling, Yolanda immediately answered:

Yeah bro, you know how it is. You dig?

She extended her beautiful hand and softly Juan gave her "five" (street handshake).

After taking a sip of coffee, Sonia asked:

Listen, how come you dropped out of school?

Don Carlos, who was standing next to the window, burst out in Spanish:

Sonia, you know why Juan dropped out? Because he is stupid and dumb! He doesn't realize that the Puerto Ricans need trained young men like him. He doesn't know that without an education he cannot obtain what he will need in the future -- a respectable job with influence.

Don Justo, who was fixing the table for tonight's seance commented:

That's right! You can say that again, Carlos!

Angry, Juan explained:

Ave María (Oh holy Mary), don Carlos! You don't understand. School is a drag. Besides, I don't like many of them white teachers. Them white teachers are a bunch of racists. They only like you if you get straight A's

Juan's mother, who was helping don Justo, interrupted:

Pero nene (But my boy), you had almost straight A's?

Juan agreed:

Sí mami, but I didn't like to get their attention only because I had good grades. You know? They were a bunch of hypocrites. Besides, who needs their damn whitewashed knowledge?

Juan's mother scolded her son for his language.

After accepting her son's apologies she continued:

Ay Dios mio, este muchacho (Oh my God, this kid)! I don't know wht I'm going to do with him. He is always saying bad things about white Americans. I don't know where he learned so much hate. That's how come he is now in trouble.

With respect, Juan tells his mother:

But, mami, you are confusing two different things. You cannot compare my problems to the way I feel about the gringos.

Curious, don Justo inquired:

And how do you feel?

Looking at his mother, the young man replied:

Sorry, don Justo. But my mother doesn't like it when I run off with my mouth.

Very serious, don Justo insisted:

Now you can run off with your mouth? Tell me! Your mother is not going to say anything.

After looking for his mother's approval, the young man explained:

Mire (Look), don Justo, them white people are something else. Them jive whiteys act as if they were superior. But they don't know that we have a beautiful culture. Them gringos are not hip to our beautiful ways. You know? Like we are a beautiful people. The high shcool that I went to was all "cocolos" (black) and "Boricuas" (Puerto Rican). You dig? the majority of the teachers were white. They had a few of those white American-oriented Puerto Ricans. But they are the worst. Yeah, they are worst than whitey. I hate them too. If I had an atomic bomb I'll kill them all. We should only stick to our Boricua

way. Forget about them white devils. Dig?

Don Justo and don Carlos laughed at the young man's colorful explanation. Meanwhile his mother asked God for her son's forgiveness. After a few minutes don Carlos explained to Juan's mother:

You don't have to worry about your son. He is a good boy going through a period in his life. I also went through the same period of rebellion. He'll learn. Don't worry.

But Felipe (see above case), who had just arrived, insisted:

I agree with the kid. It is true. Those damn Americans are a bunch of hypocrites. Before I used to believe that this country was the best in the world. So help me God! I even used to think that they were superior to us. But now I know better. Look at what they have done to me. Those bastards have no justice...

Manuel, who arrived with Felipe, interrupted:

You see? On our way here we were arguing about the same thing. I was telling him not to exaggerate so much. He doesn't want to understand that without the Americans there is no progress. Imagine this man, this man who was so pro-American, is even talking about such a ridiculous thing as independence for Puerto Rico.

Immediately, don Carlos challenged:

Listen, Manuel, what's wrong with that?

Scratching his head, Manuel responded:

Pardon me, don Carlos. I don't mean to offend you. But I hate "independentistas" and communists. I don't even like to talk to them. Imagine with all the crime, if Puerto Rico becomes independent, they will sink the Island. You know? The communists and Fidel Castro will take over the Island. Bendito (I feel sorry)! The people will starve to death. That would be the end of Puerto Rico.

Excited, Felipe complained:

Coño (damn), man, how can you be so stupid?

Angry, Manuel screamed:

Look, Felipe, have a little more respect!

At this point don Justo with a joke brought the conversation back to Juan's case. Shaking his whole body, he joked:

Oh my God, these men! I love them when they get so excited. But I like young ones better. They are more aggressive. Right, Juan?

People laughed.

After a few minutes Juan's mother explained that she was proud of her son. He had never known any problem. But in mid-September he was taken to court, accused of raping a fifteen year old girl.

According to him, he did not rape her. He explains that he took the girl to his mother's apartment. Juan insisted:

No, I did not rape the chick. Yeah I laid her. But I did not rape her. And she was no virgin either.

The young woman and her parents claim that she was a virgin before he raped her in the hallway of his mother's building. Because of him she is pregnant. Juan doesn't know whether or not it is his child.

Juan and his mother went to the spiritualist asking him to perform a trabajito that would help him in court. The spiritualist recommended that Juan attend one of the spiritualist seances.

In the spiritual seance Juan's case came into the open. Through one of the mediums the spirit told him that his troubles were caused by an evil spell. The spirit told him not to worry too much because he was not going to jail, that the spirit of his grandmother was protecting him.

During a break his mother began a conversation about her son with someone else. As the discussion developed Juan was "reganado" (scolded) for having done such a thing -- going to bed with a young girl. A middle aged woman, doña Lola, pointing her finger at Juan, said:

See what happened to you? That teaches you not to pay attention to those little crazy girls around here.

But according to them Juan was a man, "a man does not lose anything, it is the woman who always comes out losing." Juan was lucky since among the people in the neighborhood the girl did not have a good reputation. She was considered a "cabrita" or a "putita" (little whore).

Juan's problem, then, according to the people present, was not the girl's parents but the court. Maria, Pedro's sister who had some experience with the courts, was one of the first to express her feelings toward the courts. She complained:

Chica, I had to go with my brother to court. Let me tell you. That was some shit. There is a group of people sitting down there who have never seen you before. And they are supposed to determine whether or not you are guilty.

Don Carlos asked Juan's mother whether or not she had

a lawyer for the young man. Lucia noted:

Oh don Carlos! You know how those lawyers and judges are. They are a bunch of thieves. They fix up everything among themselves. They are always screwing the poor. I don't know why. But after they take a few hundred dollars from a poor client they make him plead guilty. I'm telling you they are a bunch of crooks.

It was clear that the legal system was seen as something foreign. They began to express how justice can be blind.

According to Juan's mother:

The police and the courts are something else. They let the criminals and the rich go out free. But they sure put the poor working people in jail for any little thing. Look at Nixon, he is alright. Free as a bird. If a poor man would have done something like that he would be in jail. Yes, sir, the criminals and the rich never go to jail. They can buy their freedom. That's the way justice is -- blind!

During the rest of the seance Juan was "despojado" (denuded) of all evil spirits. Don Justo prayed for him and recommended a spiritual "limpieza" (clean up). His mother had to light a candle every day until his court appearance.

Juan came out all right. They did not have sufficient evidence of rape. According to the spiritualist, "the spirits of light protected him from the courts." The girl had an abortion.

#### PEDRO

Pedro is a light skinned, short, slender man of thirty-three. He works in the garment district. Most people respect and admire Pedro's working habits.

He was accused of killing, with a kitchen knife, another man in front of a bar. As people were coming in for the usual Friday night seance, Pedro eloquently described the incident. He explained:

You know? Everything happened so fast. Wow! It seems like a nightmare. How much I wish it didn't happen. Coño (Damn), why did it have to happen to me? Why?

Lucia, who was helping don Justo to set up the table for the night's seance, insisted:

But Chico, tell us. How did it happen?

Pedro lowered his head, thought for a while, and after clearing his throat a few times he narrated:

Well, (coughed twice) well, I don't know. Well. You know? I wasn't going out. I was going to stay home watching the baseball game on TV. Around eight thirty Manuel came home. He invited me to watch the game in Junior's Bar. I told him that I didn't feel like going out. But he kept insisting. All the fellows were going to be there. Besides, the bar has a color TV. You know? I felt as if something was telling me not to go. Finally, I decided to go. And that was my mistake.

He paused for a moment. After lighting a cigarette,

Pedro continued:

We arrive around nine fifteen. All the fellows were there. The game finished around ten thirty-five. I decided to buy one more beer before leaving. You know? I don't drink that much. You know? Like I never get drunk. That night I only drank three beers. We were talking about baseball when these two guys walked into the bar. Immediately we noticed that they were drunk. They were cursing at each other. But I just smiled about it. Ricardo and Manuel were playing with the pin-ball machine. Although I hardly ever play I decided to play a game. So, while I was playing Ricardo and Manuel went to buy a few beers.

One of the drunken men came up to me. He told

me to stop playing with the machine. Well, I guess that he wanted to play with the machine. Anyway! Since the man was drunk I smiled and walked away. For some reason or another the man didn't like it. He screamed and cursed at me. The guys told me not to pay any mind to him. The man kept screaming and cursing.

Well, after a while I was getting upset. You know? So, I decided to leave. I didn't want to deal with his bullshit. As I was leaving the drunken man charged at me with a kitchen knife. I opened the door and ran outside. I tried to get a stick or something to defend myself. But you know? The man was practically on top of me. I don't know how I did it. But I took the man by the arm and forced him to the ground. I was so angry! For a moment I didn't realize what was happening...

Pedro took the last puff. The room was in complete silence. Lucia's children came into the living room playing and laughing. Lucia scolded her children. After putting out the cigarette, Pedro continued:

Then I realized that my friends were holding me. I heard Manuel telling me to calm down. He kept telling me, "Let's go home, Pedro. Let's go before the police come." The man was on the floor bleeding. I got close to him. Then I realized, "Oh my God, he is dead!" You know? I don't know how I killed him. All I remember is the knife coming at me. Oh, my God, it is like a nightmare!

Immediately Manuel commented:

You know? Everything happened so fast. I was drinking a beer when I saw the man running after Pedro. Two or three seconds later the man was dead. No one, and I mean no one, had a chance to prevent the incident. It happened like that [snapped his fingers].

Pedro complained of having frequent nightmares, lack of appetite, and headaches. He has "seen the spirit of the dead man running and screaming around his house." His wife explained:

Poor Pedro! Ever since the incident he is unable to do anything. He is going crazy! He only talks about the dead man and jail.

During the spiritual seance a spirit told Pedro "that he was told not to go to that place again." Pedro agreed that a spirit told him a few weeks before that his life was going to be in danger. He accepted as a fact that in spiritual seance a spirit recommended a "limpieza" (a spiritual clean up) to get rid of an "evil spell." Pedro did not take the limpieza.

Pedro asked don Justo to find out from the spirits whether or not he was going to jail. Don Justo responded:

Look, Pedro. Your case looks bad. You know? This is a mundane matter. It makes no sense to ask the spirits.

After ordering her children to sit still, Lucia asked:

Do you have a lawyer?

Pedro answered:

Yes, I do. I already spent one thousand dollars.

Don Carlos, who had just arrived, commented:

Yeah, that's the way things work. Everything is money. Nowadays, people can even buy their way to heaven...

Sarcastically, Lucia interrupted:

You know? Justice doesn't take into account whether or not you are a working man. Ha, ha...

Juan added:

And much less if you are a Puerto Rican. The only things that they understand are demonstrations and riots. Yes, sir, what we need is Rican unity. That they listen to or else.

Shaking the young man's hand, don Carlos complimented:

Vaya (Right on)! This kid is learning

Laughing, Manuel told don Carlos:

Ave María (Oh holy Mary), Carlos! You and your cheap politics.

Don Carlos became very serious. Immediately, Manuel became diplomatic. He walked up to don Carlos, grasped his arm, and said:

Mire mi viejo (Look, my old man)! I hope you don't take it the wrong way. I'm only joking. You know that although I might disagree with you I respect your opinion. So, remember, I'm only playing around. O.K.?

Don Carlos did not even smile.

Don Justo finished setting up the table. The room was ready for the rest of the seance. Don Justo sat on the sofa and, after lighting a cigar, asked:

Listen, Pedro, and what happened after the killing?

After taking a deep breath, Pedro answered:

Oh my God! I don't know. They took me to jail. I mean, the cops took me to jail. You know? That night I wasn't able to sleep at all. I kept thinking about the incident. Every time that I used to close my eyes...You know? I kept seeing... [Pedro begins to cry.]

At this point don Justo stopped the conversation. He decided to continue the seance. During the rest of the seance the spirits suggested to Pedro to take a limpieza. They recommended some baths and some prayers in order to bring the good spirits to his side.

A few days after the seance Pedro was fired from his

job. He was told to come back after the trial. After losing his job Pedro did not have any money for a lawyer. He was assigned a Legal Aid lawyer. He only saw the lawyer twice for a few minutes.

He was advised to plea bargain his case. Pedro did not understand what it meant. There was no trial. Since Pedro had no previous record, he was placed on probation for five years. But Pedro complained:

Coño, chico, the whole thing was unfair. Shit, the only wrong thing that I did was to defend myself. Now I'm not able to get a decent job. But since I didn't have money I was hung. That's the price people have to pay for being poor and Puerto Rican. Damn it!!!

#### ANALYSIS: SPIRITUAL SEANCES AND CULTURAL DYNAMIC

We start with the assumption that an objective world exists relatively independent of each individual. People must learn how to organize this objective world in their minds in order to understand their experiences in it. The way in which people get to organize the objective world in their minds, understanding their experiences in it, is through learned social categories. But people do not organize the objective world in their minds, or even learn the social categories, in a passive manner. On the contrary, people organize the objective world and even learn the social categories in the process of social activity. In fact, all knowledge of the objective as well as the subjective worlds are social constructs.

In order to perceive (to be conscious of) the objective world, people must learn how to order mentally the data in front of them. This learning to perceive (to be conscious of) the objective world is the basis of all social knowledge. The medium through which people learn how to perceive (to be conscious of) the world is language. Language is one of the most important social constructs. It provides the categories through which social norms, values, ideologies, and the like are formulated. As such, language and consciousness are inseparable. People cannot interpret the world without language, since it is the social medium of consciousness. Language came into being with the need to communicate, with human interaction. Therefore, consciousness (knowing the world), inseparable from language, is a social construct.

Spiritism is of interest as one such construct. In spiritual gatherings the Puerto Ricans, through language, express how they view the world. In their daily life, working class people come into contact with certain institutions that are supposed to help them. Their experiences with these institutions show quite the contrary. People are beginning to see these bureaucratic and authoritarian institutions with discontent and sometimes hatred. Their discontent and hatred are expressed in many ways and in many settings, including spiritism.

Our cases indicate that people constantly described

secular conditions as stemming from supernatural forces. Thus Felipe and Juan's problems were due to "evil spells." Celia's problems stemmed from a "spirit who needed light." Pedro failed to follow the instructions of the spirits -- he did not take a *limpieza*.

In order to transcend their problems, certain rituals are performed. Here we notice people's lack of understanding of social interaction. They view their problems as stemming from spiritual forces rather than from social interaction. Hence, these spiritual forces needed to be controlled. The *limpieza* and the *despojo* are two of the many ways of influencing or controlling the spirits. Once the spirits are under control an individual's problems can be solved. But this is not to say that people are completely blind to social forces that affect their lives.

In their everyday speech (or complaints) during spiritual gatherings, we find elements of protest against those institutions that do not represent them. The Puerto Rican worker comes into contact with institutions that have been created by the state. As O'Connor (1973) noted, modern capitalism has come to depend on governmental apparatus that intervenes more and more in all the social, political, and the economic orders. Each sector or class in our society is affected by the intervention of the government. The bourgeoisie stands in front of these institutions as almighty and the proletariat as a subjugated class.

Those that do not benefit from the social system are in a disadvantaged position. They cannot solve their problems within the rules created by the dominant class. Thus, in this sense, the solutions to their problems must be handed down to them. The point is not to implement those solutions that working people formulate but to implement those that the dominant class determines. The administrators are the instruments through which the dominant class hands down its solutions.

Modern capitalist institutions encourage the development of paternalistic attitudes on the part of the administrators. The sectors most affected by such paternalistic attitudes are those people who because of their lack of economic power are incapable of taking their destiny into their own hands. These sectors have no political power and as such suffer the oppression of those structures that do not represent them.

Institutional paternalistic attitudes are found where there is a group of people or an individual who claims to have the correct solutions to other people's problems. The dominant class supports and justifies with certain ideological rhetoric these institutions and their paternalistic attitudes. In fact, on many occasions they elevate to a universal the validity of these paternalistic institutions.

In the process of social oppression and conflict, working people tend to learn more about the purpose of these

institutions. Our case studies show how Puerto Rican workers in Williamsburg seem, in their day to day lives, to be learning that such institutions do not serve their interests as a class or even as a nationality. Listen again to the people quoted:

Still, you don't have a job. You are receiving welfare checks. And you clearly know all the hassles that you have to go through in order to get those damn welfare checks. You know that in welfare they treat us like shit.

The police and the courts are something else. They let the criminals go out free and they put the poor working class people in jail for any little thing...

People can express their discontent and hatred before, during, and after the spiritual seances. They also can express their feelings in private consultations with the spiritualist. Through spiritism, in one way or another, Puerto Rican working class people get to discuss in small groups their experiences with welfare, courts, offices, factories, etc. It is, in part, through these discussions that they begin to find their common interests. Of course, these discussions also take place in other settings. But we are limiting our analysis to the nature of such discussions in spiritual gatherings.

The Puerto Rican workers are beginning to hate and feel apart or far away from such institutions. Their experiences with such institutions can lead them into looking for alternative means of satisfying their needs. During the spiritual gatherings, as a small group, people condemn

or complain about such institutions time and time again.

Yes, that damn welfare. Man, we the poor always have to go through shits like that...

People are even losing faith in the political process.

Yes sir! That's how come I don't give my vote to anyone. I don't believe in any politicians or any party. They are all the same. All I know is that no matter who is in power, if I don't work I don't eat. So, the hell with them all!

This is not to say that the Puerto Rican worker has a clear understanding of the exploitation that he/she is experiencing. In fact these workers lack a clear understanding of the nature of the society which is exploiting them to the fullest. But the statements and actions of Puerto Rican workers indicate that they feel something is wrong. They experience the material world and see that it contradicts the common belief in a rich and free America for all.

Man, you don't know how unfair I was treated. You know that after working with that son of a bitch for eleven years I was fired. And I thought that I was living in a free society. That's shit! Now I know that in this country the rich have all the rights. We Puerto Ricans don't have any rights. No wonder we have had so many riots.

Sarcastically don Carlos commented:

Man it took you this long to find that out? Remember what happened in Newark a few years back? The police arrested a lot of people who were celebrating some type of "fiesta." I don't remember the occasion but I sure remember that the people were Puerto Ricans. I'm sure that many of them are hard working people like us. In the future we will have to do something about it.

As they complain and begin to recognize their common conditions of oppression, they begin to offer to themselves

(consciously or not) the possibility of a different social world. They begin to make available to themselves the possibility of a new world in which to conduct their lives. Then, the world begins to appear differently because they begin to experience it as consisting of different relations expressing different meanings from those they perceived yesterday.

In their everyday talk or complaints they are beginning to formulate a working class world view. Contrary to the self-serving rhetoric and world view of the bourgeoisie, this type of language and world view reflects a Puerto Rican working class reality. The Puerto Rican confronts an objective world that acts as if it believes in the existence of an American Creed. It is in the process of day to day troubles, debates, discussions, and finally struggles that the workers begin to shape a more concrete counter-rhetoric (ideology) that best expresses their understanding of reality. During the spiritual seances the Puerto Ricans, although still unaware, have the opportunity of discussing (and even debating) the contradictions in their emerging counter-world view.

Eso es verdad (That is true)! We, the Puerto Ricans have a hard time finding decent jobs. Go to a factory and you will find the Puerto Ricans working for miserable wages. Coño (Damn), in the best jobs you only find white Americans, never a Puerto Rican or a black person.

Manuel, a twenty-five year old man, commented:

Chica, you know that the white Americans are more

intelligent than us Puerto Ricans. Besides you know that our people are so "bruto" (morons) who cannot learn good English.

Angry, don Carlos disagreed:

Ave María (Oh holy Mary)! How can you people repeat what those racist Americans are always saying about our people?

In a very simplistic or at least simple way, the Puerto Rican workers are finding out who is benefiting from their miseries.

Wow, this is incredible! Look the Americans are business-oriented people. And they are excellent business people. They don't give you something for nothing in return. That is going against the law of profit making. When they give something it is because they are going to get three or four times as much. You know?

Listen Lola, I'm not talking about politics. I'm describing reality. Our people don't want to be poor. And our people are not lazy. It is not our fault that some people have a lot of money while others practically don't have enough to eat. Celia's story is another example of the things we poor have to confront.

For a particular world view or ideology to be effective it has to lead to some type of social action. For a working class counter-ideology to do that, the social action must represent their interests. During spiritual seances we find the Puerto Rican workers posing to themselves the question of class action. Such a class action that deals with certain problems that, as workers, they confront.

Sarcastically, Lucia interrupted:

You know? Justice doesn't take into account whether or not you are a hard working man. Ha, ha...

Juan added:

And much less if you are a Puerto Rican. The only things that they understand are demonstrations and riots. Yes, sir, what we need is Rican unity. That -- they listen to.

Shaking the young man's hand, don Carlos complimented:

Vaya (Right on)! This kid is learning.

Behind this understanding of future action we find hidden the need of breaking away from the present social structure. Although not yet clear to Puerto Rican workers, in such discussions, they seem to be finding out that the only way to solve their problems is by changing the social system.

Damn, it is a bitch to deal with the welfare department, We, the poor are treated like animals. I would like not having to depend on welfare. Someday people will be forced to change this world. I hope that it is for the better.

We find present throughout the cases of Felipe, Celia, Juan, and Pedro the shaping of Puerto Rican awareness of nationality. Individuals come to the spiritual gatherings with different experiences and degrees of awareness. In their conversations and complaints we can notice the formation of a different type of language than that which is handed down to them by different institutions in our society. They are talking about what it means to be Puerto Rican in a society which treats them unfairly. The spiritual gatherings are giving them the opportunity to develop a different type of ideology that articulates their interests as a nationality within the United States working class.

The experiences with such institutions and the place of work are catalysts to the individual's development of Puerto Rican awareness of nationality. Felipe is an example of a person moving from one level of awareness to another in the process of Puerto Rican awareness. Felipe was a man who believed very much in the American Creed. His experience leads him into questioning many of his social, political, and even economic assumptions. He, in fact, was moving into another level of Puerto Rican consciousness.

Before such experience Felipe was like Manuel and doña Lola. He very much believed in assimilation and the supremacy of the white Americans. He saw the riots of the early seventies as being caused by delinquents or by communists who deserve to be put in jail. But with his new experience a new type of explanation came to him. Now the riots were caused by frustrated people just like himself, people who have been treated unfairly.

Felipe was able to transcend a level of awareness that Manuel and doña Lola seem to be in. These individuals did not see their problems stemming from social injustices. To these people, conditions in the United States are much better than in Puerto Rico. Conformity is a way of repaying or thanking those who "hand down" the welfare checks. They strongly believe in becoming true blooded Americans. This means not to resist but, on the contrary, to accommodate the dominant culture.

Unlike Felipe we find another person, Juan, who was at the third level of Puerto Rican awareness: National Zeal. This person was already posing to himself and others the question of future action. Juan seems to have a better understanding of the nature of the American way of life. While Felipe seems to be questioning some of his old assumptions, Juan has gone through this a while back. His hate towards everything American was intense. And his love for everything Puerto Rican overwhelmed him.

In our study we found two individuals who were in at a most advanced level of Puerto Rican working class consciousness. These individuals, don Carlos and an individual not reported on so far, believed in Puerto Rican independence and were at the same time very conscious of their class. In fact, these individuals believed in socialism or a worker's state. It was interesting to notice that these individuals did not participate much in spiritual gatherings. It is our hypothesis that at the fourth level of consciousness individuals have very little or no need for spiritism. Still, more research is needed to confirm or negate this hypothesis.

Our four case studies of spiritual seances bring out the key contradiction stressed by this study: between a passive, alienating acceptance of the status quo and a turn to cultural dynamic based on the dual shaping of consciousness (national and class) opposed to that same status quo. In other words, our case studies show confusion and

passivity alongside the role of spiritism in changing (or raising) consciousness. In terms of cultural dynamic, our four case studies show spiritual seances contributing to resistance a good deal more than to accommodation.

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## Chapter VI

### THE SPIRITUALIST AS INTERNAL LEADER

In this chapter I examine the role of the spiritualist in the shaping of a dynamic Puerto Rican working class culture. According to the psychotherapeutic perspective the spiritualist (the President of the Table) performs the same role that the psychoanalyst or therapist performs in the psychotherapeutic session: the spiritualist controls and directs the spiritual seances. But, as I suggested before, this perspective does not take into consideration other situations that the spiritualist confronts.

Spiritualists are very special people in the community. They are well informed on what is going on in the community. In general, they are well respected and trusted by people. Since people find a need to have the services of the spiritualist they tend to support him financially. Although a "good" spiritualist does not charge for his services, people always give him contributions. Thus, a spiritualist can be considered a leader because the people perceive him to be one.

A leader is a member of a group or organization who exercises decisive influences on the activities of the members. The leader by virtue of his or her control position within the group plays a major part in determining

the objectives and the ideology of the collective structure. The structure, the situation, and the objectives of the group determine a reciprocal relationship between the group and the leader.

Within the Puerto Rican community in Williamsburg, we can find three types of leaders. These leaders are defined according to how they obtained their legitimacy. Those leaders whose legitimacy comes from within the community may be called "internal leaders." Those whose legitimization comes from the larger society, from the outside, may be called "external leaders." Those who gain acceptance from both the larger society and the community are called "bi-legitimized" or dual leaders.

The main task of the leader is to remind the group of its symbols and to channel the resulting behavior through the most convenient paths in order to reach or accomplish the desired goals. From the three types of leads mentioned above, the "internal leader" is the one who has the most contact with the culture of the group, is less involved on the outside than any other leader, and the one able to manipulate and distinguish those cultureal symbols most convenient to the situation at hand. The degree of deliberation whereupon the mission is accomplished depends on the individual. But the "internal leader" acts mainly from intuition, sincerely believing in the symbols that he/she is manipulating. These leaders share the emotions of the group.

They also have a clear insight into the main goals.

In light of a dynamic Puerto Rican working class culture, the internal leader can direct the collectivity's behavior that opposes or, at least, rejects conventional norms. The collectivity's behavior, in this case, is outside of the traditional customs. In this context, the collectivity's behavior is in evolution and change. The new form of behavior implies controversy and provokes value judgments by those affected by it. Conservatives and liberals consider such behavior an undesirable deviation from the status quo while radicals may applaud and support it.

Since the internal leader shares the same experiences as the masses, he/she understands their sentiments. The internal leader suggests to the masses the actions that they do not know how to articulate. This leader only proposes actions that are part of the imagination of the masses.

The external leaders are mainly appointed professionals. They may come from the ranks of the group but it is the larger society which grants them their power by giving them legitimacy. We can suppose that they largely represent the interests of those legitimating them.

Unlike the internal leader, the external leader may or may not know or understand the sentiments and goals of the group. Since their interests are significantly outside the community, such leaders might cynically exploit the symbols of the community without much faith or belief in them.

On the one hand, the internal leader must be recognized by the larger society in order to become a "bi-legitimized" leader. The bi-legitimized leader becomes the main link between the community and the larger society.

The bi-legitimized leaders find themselves in a peculiar situation. They must represent the two sets of interests, the interests of the larger society and the interests of the community. In order not to lose their power they must play an interest game between both groups.

The dual leader understands that he/she may lose recognition of both the larger society and the community represented. If the recognition of both the larger society and the community is lost that leader loses his/her status. On certain issues, depending on whose interests the bi-legitimized leader supports, the leader may lose the bi-legitimized status. Then he/she becomes either an internal leader, external leader or neither.

The internal and external leaders do not have to play the interest game since it is clear whose interests they represent. This suggests several things. First, the internal leader can play a major role in shaping a dynamic Puerto Rican working class culture. Second, due to the nature of their base of power, the external and bi-legitimized leaders can play a major role in retarding or destroying the shaping of such a cultural dynamic.

The spiritualist in the Puerto Rican community is in

a position of at least influencing people in their views of the world. At the same time, the spiritualist is also a member of the working class. This makes his/her influence and power much more important. We are considering a case where a spiritualist, although homosexual, is very much accepted and respected by people as a leader. The questions that follow are: What will be (or might be) the role of the spiritualist as the process of Puerto Rican awareness and class struggle rises to higher levels? Can the spiritualist, an internal leader, become a powerful force in bringing about change? Or: Can the spiritualist lose his leadership status as the process of Puerto Rican awareness and class consciousness gains?

DON JUSTO: THE ACCEPTANCE OF A DYNAMIC PERSONALITY

Don Justo, a self-proclaimed homosexual, is around five feet six inches tall, forty years old, and weighs about 180 pounds. He has long, bleached blond hair, a young looking face with few facial hairs and completely plucked eyebrows. He has a "beer belly," no breasts, and according to male standards, medium-sized feet, hands, and shoulders.

Don Justo holds a full time job. He works 35 hours a week in a factory. During the workweek he dresses only as a male: men's shoes, regular men's pants and shirt. He wears no make-up. At other times, due to his spiritism, he dresses all in white: white shoes, white pants and a white shirt. His plucked eyebrows, bleached blond hair, and

rythmical body movement all bring into the open his homosexuality which he never tries to hide.

### A Ritual Transformation

During weekends (Friday and Saturday), don Justo dresses as a woman to go out partying. Dressing as a woman is a sign of femininity. He is also a transvestite or is "passing" as a transsexual.

The dressing takes place in a ritual-like ceremony. Some Fridays he gets home from work at four o'clock. On his way home, he stops at the liquor store and buys a quart of Puerto Rican rum. As he walks home, he announces among his mainly women friends that he is about to get dressed to go out. He invites a few of them to come and see his transformation.

As soon as he gets home, he cooks and eats. To rest, don Justo watches television for a few hours. Around seven-thirty, after the arrival of a few friends, he begins his transformation into Maria.

After taking a bath, the soon-to-become Maria begins to drink. She consumes great quantities of liquor while dancing to the rhythms of Latin music. After two hours she has consumed the whole quart of rum.

Usually she models to her audience a few of her many fancy dresses. She then asks for suggestions, looking for the most suitable dress for the night. After a short debate, she goes to her bedroom to change.

Maria wears extremely feminine and provocative dresses. Since she wants to be "hip," she always manages to buy the latest fashions. But, as a rule, she prefers very bright, colorful, and expensive dresses. According to her, brightly colored dresses "attract the attention of men." To slim down her "beer belly," she wears a very tight girdle. To add to her show of femininity, she uses plastic breasts.

During her transformation, she often looks at herself in the mirror. With admiration, she screams to the world her feelings of beauty: "Beautiful, beautiful, damn it!"

Maria wears a lot of make-up. She uses colorful eye mascara, thin and slanted eyebrows, very long eyelashes, red lipstick, and red blushed cheekbones. To hide the very few hairs on her upper lip and chin, she puts on a touch of foundation make-up.

In front of her companions she tries a few of her many wigs. She tries the blond, the afro, the brunette, and so on. She searches and searches for the one that will satisfy her feelings of femininity that night. At last, she has found the one that satisfies her feelings of beauty. Her transformation has been completed and she feels that she is the most beautiful woman in this world. She is ready for the night. Now she is Maria. And like a free colorful peacock, Maria screams to the world: "Beautiful, beautiful! To see if I bring with me a man!!!"

### Don Justo's Definition of Sex Roles

In his everyday life, don Justo considers himself to be a very feminine homosexual who prefers to date and have sexual intercourse with a "straight man," "puro macho." He often explains:

Me go to bed with another faggot? No bet! Never! Damn, for a faggot? Me! I love a "pure macho."

To don Justo, there are three types of male: "pure macho," "bumarron" (bisexual), and "loca" (homosexual). He defines a "puro macho" as a man who only has sexual relations with females. The "puro macho," according to him, would never have relations with another male.

The "bumarron" is defined as a man who enjoys having sexual intercourse with homosexuals as well as with females. The bumarron is not a homosexual since he takes the role of the male at all times. According to don Justo: "The bumarron loves homosexuals, always goes on top, and never lets anyone touch his ass."

Unlike his definitions of puro macho and bumarron, his definition of "loca" is more complicated. He sees locas in terms of femininity, with the most feminine being the one who approximates what don Justo understands to be the role of a woman.

Since don Justo defines homosexuals in terms of degrees of femininity, in terms of how the loca approximates the role of a woman, it was very important for him to express his traditional definition of femininity. To him,

women are very delicate, submissive, and docile people. He emphasized that the man must be good to the woman. After all a woman is not a slave but a human being. To him:

A man who hits or maltreats a woman is not a real man, Chico, any woman who is maltreated by a man has the right to pick up a bat and crack his head. Coño (Damn), I hate to see such abuses.

Don Justo, on the contrary, feels that the man belongs in the street. While a man can have as many women as he pleases, a decent woman can have only one man, her husband. He makes it clear that a good man must be able to provide everything that the wife needs.

For the most part, the real "feminine" male homosexual will only try to have relations with pure machos. This seems to constitute a contradiction. But he explains that a puro macho can fall into having a sexual experience with a homosexual. All the same, to him, "one experience doesn't make a puro macho into either a loca or a bumarron."

Don Justo made it clear that if the puro macho keeps having such sexual experiences with homosexuals then he will become a bumarron. Furthermore, if the puro macho gets "fucked in the ass," then he becomes a loca. It is possible that his men are bumarrones but he wants to enhance his status as the most feminine of locas by boasting that a puro macho sees him as desirable.

As we mentioned above, in his everyday life don Justo considers himself to be a very feminine homosexual. To him, the preference of puro macho over homosexuals is a sign of

his femininity. He even takes great pride in his dealing with men when dressed as a woman. He emphasized his dislike for buying drinks for any man. It is the man who takes the initiative in approaching her. Maria's role is to flirt and wait for the man. According to her, "there are many fish in the sea."

#### The Acceptance of Homosexuality

A good spiritualist is defined in terms of how much he/she is able to help with "spiritual problems." Although don Justo is a homosexual, he is highly respected by the community. This respect is due to a very powerful tool that he possesses -- his knowledge of spiritism. The acceptance of his homosexuality is a product of people's belief in his knowledge of spiritism. Don Justo is considered by people to be a good spiritualist, a person "que trabaja bien la obra" (who really knows about spiritism).

To find out how people feel about don Justo's homosexuality, I informally interviewed twenty people. Among the people interviewed were three members of the Fernandez family. The Fernandez family is very much respected by people in the community. Mr. Fernandez works in a hospital and his wife is a housewife. The only trouble that the family ever had is with the youngest of three children.

Rosa is a seventeen year old woman who has had a lot of emotional problems. According to her, "my problems were driving me crazy." On one occasion she tried to commit

suicide.

After coming back from the hospital she was taken to see don Justo. He attributed her problems to an "evil spell." Now she visits don Justo frequently. According to her parents, "don Justo has done wonders with Rosa." Rosa explained:

Before I went to don Justo I had lots of problems. You know, evil spirits can do you in. They can make you miserable. But now, thanks to don Justo, thanks to the spirits of light, everything is under control.

The Fernandez family agrees that don Justo is different from other homosexuals that they have seen or known. They made a distinction between his personal life and spiritism. To them, his homosexuality is "something material" that is transcended by spiritism.

We also interviewed Pedro, a thirty-two year old man, who was accused of killing a man in front of a bar with a kitchen knife (see the last case study in Chapter V). To show his appreciation for all the support and help that don Justo gave him, he gave don Justo a flower bouquet and a gift of ten dollars.

Pedro's belief and respect for don Justo is due to his belief in don Justo's powers. To Pedro, don Justo is different from other homosexuals. He sees homosexuals as loud and despicable people. But:

Don Justo is a good spiritualist. Although he is a homosexual, everybody in the neighborhood respects him. He goes out of his way to help people.

There might be an element of fear involved in the respect towards a spiritualist. People believe that he has certain spiritual powers beyond their understanding and control. Don Justo can protect himself by means of spiritism. If an individual tries to do harm to him, don Justo can cast a spell on that person. However, although people agree that don Justo has such powers, they know of no occasion that he has used them. Because of this they do not fear him. On the contrary, they trust him.

Don Justo also views his homosexuality apart from his spiritism. In speaking about a spiritual seance, he expressed this separation very clearly: "there were six women -- except me. I mean, there were six women and I." I asked him to explain. He looked at me and explained very seriously:

When I'm dealing with spiritual matters I have to be a man. If not, the spirits can do me in like that [snapped fingers].

When dressed as a woman, he does not like to be called by his real name. He loves to be treated as a woman. Even in his everyday life, he does not mind being treated as a homosexual or as a woman. But when doing spiritism he is very offended if treated as either a homosexual or a woman. He must be treated as a man. To him: "the material and spiritual lives should be maintained separately. It is a lack of respect to the spirits to bring my private material life to the spiritual table."

Don Justo always participates in the spiritual as a male. He dresses in white and carries on in a "man-like" manner. Yet he overemphasizes certain "female" sounds and body movements, and prays in an extremely delicate manner to the spirits. Pouring the "agua de florida" on his very delicate hands and mumbling a few words, don Justo thus purifies the people in the room. Still, to my surprise, people were not aware of these natural, feminine-like gestures. As a person explained: "Our attention is not on don Justo but on contacting the spirits." It seems that the feminine-like movements become secondary and unimportant as people get involved with the ritual. All their energies are concentrated on "contacting the spirits." If his feminine-like gestures help don Justo's spiritism, then the people are not much aware of it. When I pointed out to don Justo that I was able to notice some feminine-like movements, he smiled and commented:

Wow, José, I can see that you were not trying to get in contact with the spirits. Besides, when I'm possessed by a spirit I lose my senses.

A limpieza (spiritual clean up) is a ritual-like ceremony done to protect a person from evil. The person going through the ceremony takes off all his/her clothes. Then the spiritualist (male or female) proceeds to give the person a bath with a special preparation. The spiritualist must perform the ritual without any sexually inspired thoughts. According to don Justo, "it cannot be done with

any sexual thoughts." To do so would bring a great punishment by the spirits.

Don Justo admits having given limpiezas to men to whom he felt attracted. But while involved with the spiritual work his thoughts are clear of such feelings. He respects not only his religion but also the people who come to him for help.

I asked Pedro, who took a limpieza, how he felt taking his clothes off in front of don Justo. Pedro answered: "Well, it was like going to a woman doctor. You know? I felt a little uncomfortable but after a while I paid no attention." Pedro agreed that don Justo's homosexuality becomes irrelevant when involved with spiritism. In general, a spiritual seance and any other ritual demands too great a concentration from all those participating to be paying attention to don Justo's homosexual side.

Although don Justo knows many homosexuals, he does not socialize much with them. He is very much aware of how "straight people" view homosexuality. He also knows that to be accepted and respected he has to stay away from other, non-spiritualist homosexuals. Don Justo noted:

Chico, people don't like homosexuals. If my home were frequented by homosexuals a lot of people would stay away from me. In terms of my religion it is of no convenience to me.

The only time that he seems to socialize with other homosexuals is when he goes out partying. But he always makes sure to keep them away from his home.

To summarize: I have shown how spiritism can lead people into accepting a behavior which is considered deviant. This case shows that the acceptance of don Justo, a self-proclaimed homosexual, came as a result of people's agreement about his powers. Don Justo is a good spiritualist. To be a good spiritualist is to be able to help people with their problems. The more people a spiritualist helps the more he/she is respected and trusted. Since don Justo serves a very important function as a spiritual adviser and healer, he is very much accepted, respected, and trusted.

Don Justo is an individual who possesses the power to define situations for other people. He understands the people's ways and conditions of existence. He is able to analyze the present and as an internal leader he can present a picture of the future.

Given all of the above -- his spiritism, his knowledge of the people's social needs and situations, his Puerto Rican and working class background, and his position as an internal leader -- can such an individual become an active, visible agent for radical social change? To answer this question, we must proceed from his role as a passive, symbolic leader to a conflict situation where he actually leads people in a group action. Actively as well as passively, we will see, in the next chapter, how the spiritualist can serve well as an internal leader who is bound little to the powers that be.

## Chapter VII

### CASE STUDY OF A COLLECTIVE ACTION

#### Before the Action

It was a cruel winter night. I tried to run but the freezing winds and the icy sidewalks did not let me. As I walked I fantasized: "Oh, the crowded and warm streets of old San Juan!"

I took a quick glance at my watch. It was six o'clock. It was still early. The spiritual seance did not begin until eight o'clock. But today I was not early enough, since I promised don Justo to meet him at five o'clock. Finally, I reached my destination. I was standing in front of a huge gray building. The broken-down entrance covered the elegance of a decaying fortress.

The rusty door knob was very cold. Struggling, I pushed the door open. For the first time in years I realized the heavy weight of the door.

Once Inside I quickly slammed the door closed. Shivering, I ran to the radiator. Amazingly, a graffito on the wall seemed to jump out at me:

John was here  
Now I'm gone  
Dig bro  
This steam is cold.

I read the graffito twice and I smiled.

Trying to warm myself, I ran up the dirty stairs to

the fourth floor. I knocked on the door. A very feminine yet male voice asked: "Who?" Immediately I replied: "Soy yo (It is I), don Justo!"

Don Justo opened the door and greeted me with a lazy smile. Cleaning my shoes on the mat, I politely inquired: "How are you today don Justo?" With sarcasm he snapped: "Well, I see that you are staying outside. Coño (damn) José, it is cold. Avanza (Hurry up)! Avanza!" His tone of voice gave me the impression that something was bothering him.

Don Justo asked me to join him and doña Maria for dinner. Doña María, a middle aged elegant woman, is another well respected spiritualist. I greeted her with a smile. She pulled out one of the chairs next to her and asked me to sit down. I did. Whispering, I asked her why don Justo was so upset. Gently she touched my shoulder and very affectionately she replied:

Mi'jo no te spures. (My son do not worry.) He is just upset because of the cold. Don't you know that the landlord has not given us heat for more than two weeks?

Don Justo finished serving my food. Gently he placed the plate of food on the table. With the serving spoon pointing at me he complained:

Coño carajo! Ese Maricon (Damn hell! That faggot) don't want to give us any heat. I don't know what I'm doing in this damn cold country. I should be in my isla del encanto (enchanted island).

I had never seen don Justo this angry. It is unusual to hear

him curse. He proceeded:

Coño carajo (Damn Hell)! We are going to get even.  
We are going to take that son of a bitch to court.

Don Justo's serious and colorful language had some humor. Although I felt like laughing I didn't dare. Doña María noticed my feelings and burst out laughing. She laughed until tears were rolling down her beautiful but wrinkled cheeks. Don Justo, not understanding doña María's motivations, demanded:

Coño mujer (Damn woman), how come you are hysterical.  
What's so funny?

Unable to answer, she pointed at me. She kept laughing. I felt somewhat embarrassed.

Don Justo looked at me. It seemed that he finally noticed my discomfort. He burst into vigorous laughter. Both of them were full of laughter. Before I knew it, I was also consumed by their united hysteria.

The doorbell rang. Still laughing, don Justo dragged himself to the door. It was little Carmen. In a sweet and humble tone of voice she began to deliver her mother's message:

Don Justo, Mami wants you to send her...

Don Justo interrupted:

O.K. girl! Speak to me in Spanish. Don't speak to me in jeringosa (mumble jumble). Speak to me in our beautiful language.

The girl lowered her head and continued in Spanish:

Mami wants you to send her some aspirin, alcohol, and Vicks. Carlito has a cold and a fever.

Don Justo delicately held the little girl's hand and brought her to the kitchen. He opened the cabinet and took a bottle of aspirin, ginger, a bottle of alcohol, and a bottle of Vicks. Don Justo placed all the items in a brown paper bag and gave it to the little girl. As the girl was about to leave, don Justo stopped her. He told us:

Let me go upstairs to see what I can do. O.K.?  
Listen José, you are in your house. If you want  
some more food, just serve yourself.

Doña María smiled and gently noted:

Go ahead, Justo. Don't worry about us. I take care  
of José.

Before I was able to say anything, don Justo was running out of the apartment. Hurriedly, I excused myself to doña María and ran after him.

I saw him running up the stairs. His femininity seemed gone. Finally, he reached the door. Delicately he pushed the door open and waited for me and the girl.

Lucia, the girl's mother, greeted us with a nervous smile. Lucia is in her mid-twenties. She has long black hair, a light complexion, high cheek bones, big brown eyes, a slender body, and a radiantly beautiful smile. She lives alone with little Carmen and Carlitos. Although she receives public assistance at times, she works in a dry cleaning store.

Her apartment is very colorful and well decorated. Although her furniture is old, it seems to be in fairly good condition. With the exception of the cold, the

apartment seemed to be very comfortable and well organized.

Don Justo went into the bedroom. I politely asked Lucia if I was allowed to go into the bedroom. She was so preoccupied with her son's health that she seemed not to mind.

Taking full control of the situation, don Justo instructed her to place the ginger in boiling water. Carefully he placed the other items on the night table. Shivering, don Justo complained: "Dios mio (My God) this room is ice cold!" Without hesitation, don Justo sent me to get his electric heaters.

I ran downstairs. Dona Maria had finished eating. I asked her for the heaters. She told me to take the big one. She took the small electric heater and ran up the stairs. For the first time I noticed her agility. I was surprised that she was so fast.

We gave don Justo the heaters. He asked Lucia for an electric extension cord. He placed both heaters at a very short distance from the bed.

After the room was a little warmer don Justo proceeded to undress the ten year old boy. Carlito was trembling. His beautiful big brown eyes seemed tired and his face was very pale. Don Justo took the alcohol and gave the boy a bath. The alcohol seemed to feel very cold. Carlitos complained about it and tried to get up. Holding the boy by one arm don Justo scolded: "Don't you dare!" The boy

looked at don Justo and then at his mother. Lucia caressed his head and then gave him a kiss.

Don Justo took a piece of paper, folded it and smashed the aspirin in between. Lucia brought some sugar and the ginger tea. Don Justo mixed the aspirin with a little bit of sugar. After tasting the ginger tea, he asked Lucia to put some honey in it.

Carlitos was shivering. When the boy realized that the aspirin and the tea were for him, he began to cry. Don Justo gently told the boy:

Come on Carlitos! Are you a boy or a girl? Are you a mamao (sucker)? Are you going to be a loca like me? No, I think you are a macho.

Not liking much what don Justo said, the boy replied:

No, I'm not a mamao and I'm not a loca either. I'm a boy.

Don Justo challenged:

So, why don't you show us that you are a man? Come on. Show me that you are not a chicken.

The boy looked at us. I smiled. Then he drank the cup of tea. Don Justo asked him to open his mouth. Very gently don Justo placed the sweetened aspirin powder in his mouth. Carlitos took a sip of tea and wrinkled his face with dislike. Slowly he drank all the tea. Meanwhile don Justo kept encouraging:

Good, Carlitos. You see, José? Carlitos is a man. Verdad (Right), Lucia?

Don Justo gave the child another bath of alcohol and then rubbed some Vicks on the boy's chest. After dressing

the boy don Justo covered him with a few blankets. Finally, touching the boy's head:

O.K. Carlitos, go to sleep! You have been a good boy. The boy gave don Justo a sweet smile and turned around. Lucia, who was sitting next to him, gave him a motherly kiss.

We all went to the living room. Lucia was worried about her boy. It was very cold in her apartment. Don Justo was quiet for a long time. Finally he exploded:

Coño, this shit has to stop. And is going to stop. Puzzled by don Justo's outburst, Lucia asked:

What can you do? What can we do? If that is God's will, then let it be.

Don Justo shook his head:

No Lucia, no te resigne. (Do not give up.) It is not God's will. That boy has a cold because it is too damn cold. What we need is heat. We should make the landlord give us heat. After all, God helps only those who help themselves!

Doña María, agreeing shook her head. Amazed by don Justo's words, she asked:

How are we going to do that?

Lucia followed:

Yeah, you know that we have called the City a few times and they have not done much. How are we going to make the landlord give us heat?

Don Justo thought for a while and then explained:

I really don't know. But do not worry, woman! Just come to the spiritual seance tonight. Maybe our protector guardians will show us the way. I'm going to send my niece Carmencita to baby-sit for a while. O.K.?

Lucia agreed. We went down to don Justo's apartment.

### The Tenants Association

Don Justo went into his living room. He looked at the clock on the wall:

My God, it's already 7:15. I have to get ready.

Doña María was heating our food. Don Justo asked me to help him bring the dining table to the living room. He needed it for tonight's seance.

We took the table and placed it in the middle of the room. Don Justo's living room is the largest room in the three room apartment. The living room is very bright and well organized. The first object that catches the attention of any visitor is the five feet tall statue of Santa Barbara. She wears a colorful long dress and a very expensive long black wig.

The furniture looks very elegant. He has a big television set and an old record player. The walls are painted white. There is a large mirror hanging on the wall. Next to the mirror are two wooden African faces. On the opposite wall hangs the clock and a picture of Jesus Christ (El Sagrado Corazon).

After placing the dinner table in the living room, don Justo covered it with a large white tablecloth. He then went to the kitchen and brought a big beautiful goblet of water. Without measuring much he placed the goblet in the

center of the table. Next to it he placed a quart of rum, some cigars, a few candles, and a bottle of Agua Florida. Finally, he brought two books and placed them on one side of the table. One book was the Bible and the other, Allan Kardec's The Gospel According to Spiritualism.

He asked me to bring the chairs from the dining room. He brought from his bedroom five folding chairs. While placing the chairs around the table, don Justo asked me:

José, what do you think we should do?

I was surprised by his question. I replied:

I don't know. You see, I really don't understand what you mean.

Don Justo placed the last chair where he wanted it. Then he insisted that we should eat before it was too late. We took our plates of food and sat on the sofa. Moving his food with the fork and without looking at me, don Justo explained:

You see, José, everyone in the building knows that the landlord is not going to give us much heat. From experience we all know that the City's authorities are not going to do much either. Now, I want your opinion. What do you think we can do?"

I swallowed the food in my mouth and replied:

Well, don Justo, it all depends on how far the tenants want to go.

Immediately he replied:

As far as it is necessary.

I suggested:

Well, I think that first you must organize.

Don Justo was chewing his food. He looked at me. With his head and his fork moving, he encouraged me to continue. I continued:

You know? With a tenant's association you can organize a rent strike.

Don Justo smiled and then asked:

Do you think that that would work?

For a second I hesitated to answer:

I sincerely don't know. But you'll never know until you try.

After eating, don Justo washed the plates and asked me to go to the store. He instructed me to buy a pound of cheese, a box of crackers, and a pound of coffee. Doña María asked me to get her a pack of cigarettes.

When I returned the apartment was full of people. Immediately, I noticed that people were complaining about the lack of heat and hot water. The first one that I heard complaining was the superintendent. He was a small but husky man. Although he looks older, he is thirty-two years old. He lives on the first floor with his wife and four children. He mumbled:

Bueno (Well), you know that I always give heat. You know? I cannot give heat. I'm tired of calling the landlord. But he always tells me the same thing. That he ordered the oil and that he doesn't know what happened. You know that I always clean. But with this cold and no hot water, I cannot clean.

Mrs. Williams, a black American woman and a strong believer, in broken Spanish asked:

When was the last time that you called the landlord?

The superintendent responded:

Two days back. Let's see...Tuesday.

Mrs. Williams noted:

Last year we spent the whole winter without heat or hot water. What was the excuse then?

The superintendent shrugged his shoulders. He did not know the answer. In fact, he knew that the landlord did not care about the tenants. He explained:

Look, last year I complained about the boiler. You know what he told me? He told me that if I did not like it to move out.

Don Justo interrupted:

Let me see. How many of you, those who live in this building, have called the City to give complaints?

Iris, who lives in another building, commented:

You can forget about the City. That agency gets so many complaints that they are unable to answer most of them.

Lucia immediately added:

I called three or four times. They always tell me to wait. Last time they told me that they were going to send an inspector. But I don't know what happened.

Pedro burst out laughing. Everyone looked at him. A little embarrassed, he said:

Excuse me, people. I do not mean to be rude. But you see, we cannot depend on the government. They are always willing to collect taxes but when it comes to help poor working people like us they don't give a damn.

People moved their heads and smiled. There seemed to be a air of pessimism and a lack of confidence in the authorities. It was Juan, an eighteen year old, who first

articulated the pessimism. Asking his mother's approval in spanglish:

Verdad (Right), mami, que llamé (I called) a few times? Well, I know that they are not going to do anything. Them white people never do anything for us poor Puerto Ricans.

His mother immediately added:

Yes, it is true,. El nene (my son) called yesterday and they said that they were coming today.

She was quiet for a moment and with sarcasm concluded:

But it seems that they got lost in the subway.  
Ha, Ha,...

People were complaining and shivering at the same time. I, too, felt uncomfortable. My toes and my fingers were frozen. To warm themselves, people moved from side to side. Don Justo got up and turned on the oven full blast. Although I don't drink coffee I decided to drink some. With the exception of the superintendent's children, who drank coke, everyone drank hot coffee.

Then don Justo posed the key question:

O.K. Everyone agrees that the landlord and the City are not going to do much about our lack of heat. So, then, what are we going to do about it?

Juan, with the energy of a youngster, blasted:

Well, let's burn the damn building.

Everyone looked at the young man and laughed. Juan's girl friend, who sat next to him jabbed him with her elbow. The young man smiled. Almost whispering, the girl responded:

Come on, Juan, don't be a fool.

Don Justo, who was watching the young couple, stood up and

in a very effeminate manner commented:

Come on, Juan. Save all that fire for your honeymoon. Moving his eyebrows up and down and his hips from side to side, don Justo continued:

You know how good it is. Don't you?

Manuel snapped back at don Justo:

Move it, Justo. Shake it. Um, um!

Don Justo moved his hips from side to side and laughed.

It was a moment of comedy. Everyone laughed. People were used to don Justo's jokes and effeminate gestures. No one felt offended by his actions or words. After everyone calmed down, don Justo became very serious and insisted on finding a remedy to the situation. He was interrupted by a knock on the door. Don Justo got up to answer. It was doña Milagros and don Carlos Irizarry. Very politely they greeted the people in the room and sat down. Don Justo explained to them that we were talking about the problems with the landlord. The couple listened attentively. Don Justo then asked the Irizarrys to relate their story to the people.

According to the Irizarrys, they moved into their apartment in March 1968. Against their wishes, they never received a lease. Time and time again the landlord refused to give them a lease with the excuse that it was not necessary. When they moved in, their rent was eighty dollars a month. They paid eighty dollars a month until 1975. In a letter dated October 6, 1975, the Irizarrys were informed of

an increase of twenty dollars. Starting November 1, 1975, they paid one hundred dollars a month.

In another letter dated February 7, 1977, the Irizarrys were informed of another increase of twenty dollars. In this way they were going to pay one hundred twenty dollars a month.

But on March 6, 1977, they were informed of the mistake made in the previous letter. Instead, the increase was twenty-five dollars. Effective March 11, 1977, they were paying one hundred twenty-five dollars per month.

Then, on February 11, 1978, they received still another letter informing them of yet another increase. They wrote a letter to the landlord, telling him that he was increasing the rent too much and too fast.

It was because of the implied threat of eviction in a letter dated March 6, 1978, that the Irizarrys were forced to go to the Department of Rent and Housing Maintenance. The Irizarrys went to the Department asking about the maximum collectible rent for their apartment.

On March 10, 1978 they received a letter from the Department of Rent and Housing Maintenance explaining that their records indicated the following:

1972-73 Maximum base rent	Mbr* denied
Rent on Dec. 31, 1973	\$59.66 per month
1974-75	Mbr denied
Adjusted 1974-75	
Jan. 1, 1974	\$69.66
Dec. 31, 1974	\$69.66
Jan. 1975	\$69.66

\*Mbr = Maximum collectible rent

According to the department, they were supposed to be paying, at least from December 1972 to January 1975, the Maximum Base Rent of \$69.66 per month.

To all this, they added that in those years the landlord had not painted or given money for paint. Although they had made a lot of complaints about cracked windows, falling plaster, a leak in the wall, and many other damages, they had never been repaired.

Everyone listened. Although many of them were familiar with the story, this was the first time that they heard every little detail. Lucia became very excited and wondered:

Probably I do not have to pay \$250.

Don Carlos looked at Lucia and with sadness explained:

Sorry Lucia, but you have been living in your apartment for only one year and a half. Your apartment is already decontrolled. You see if I move out of my apartment then it becomes decontrolled.

The happiness on Lucia's face vanished. In fact, with the exception of the apartments of Mrs. Williams, the Izarrays, doña María, and don Justo, all the other apartments were decontrolled.

I was sitting very quietly in a corner of the living room. Don Justo then turned around and surprised me:

O.K., José! You should know something about problems like this. What's your opinion? What should we do?

For a moment I did not know what to answer. I questioned my involvement; should I tell him my opinion? With the exception of the children, no one was talking. I tried to talk

but my voice cracked. I questioned once again my involvement; how was I affecting the group? I coughed once and then suggested:

Well, ah, ah, ah, the first thing that should be done is to create a tenant's association. And to make it more official open a bank account with five dollars.

I looked around to see if people understood what I was saying. Trying to encourage me, don Justo said:

Go on!

I continued:

Well, according to what you are saying, it seems that it is up to you people to take action.

Very seriously, Manuel asked me:

I hope that you are not suggesting what Juan suggested?

Before I was able to reply, doña María commented:

Coño (Damn), Manuel, he is not saying that. I think that José is about to suggest something else.

Looking at doña María, Manuel asked:

Yeah, but what?

Don Justo finished drinking a second cup of coffee and then explained:

José is suggesting that we should have a rent strike.

Everyone in the room looked at me. People made all sorts of comments. Smiling, I remarked:

Well, don Justo asked for my opinion.

For a few minutes the room was quiet. People were trying to decide. I only heard the children giggling. Don

Carlos, who was sitting by the entrance of the living room, scratched his head and said:

Está bién (O.K.)! Let us not talk anymore. I believe that don Justo should be the president.

To don Carlos, everything seemed clear. An action must be taken. To him, the tenants association was a good beginning. A few minutes later Lucia agreed.

But not everyone in the room agreed. Doña Lola and Manuel voiced their disagreements. According to Manuel:

We should not try to offend the landlord. After all, this is his property.

After an hour of debate (and in spite of doña Lola's and Manuel's disagreement), the people in the room voted. By majority vote the tenants association was created. In a matter of ten to twenty minutes they had elected their representatives:

President	don Justo
Vice President	Lucia
Treasurer	don Carlos
Secretary	Mrs. Williams

It was agreed that the chosen representatives were unable to act without the consent of the tenants. It was also agreed that any action needed the approval of a majority. For that reason, the chosen representatives planned to talk to those tenants who were not present.

At the moment they did not want to have a rent strike because of the fear voiced mainly by doña Lola and Manuel. But they decided to write a letter to the landlord. They agreed on four basic demands: (1) heat and hot water at all

times, (2) a locked front door with keys for all the tenants, (3) painted hallways, and (4) make all repairs in the apartments. The landlord was given a week to reply. Everyone agreed that the last action to be taken was a rent strike.

Finally, it was agreed that two people would call the City and the landlord to complain about the lack of heat. They also agreed that the association would help don Carlos Irizarry and the other overcharged tenants to solve their problems.

Around 9:15 there was a call for silence. The phonograph was turned on by don Justo. The polyrhythmical sounds announced the beginning of the seance. Don Justo walked around the house with a little incense burner. He passed the incense in the direction of the people. He walked to the door, walked back to the living room, the kitchen, the bathroom, and then got lost for a short while behind the curtains that cover the entrance to his bedroom. He was purifying all parts of the apartment.

The music stopped.

Don Justo Prayed:

Que los seres del bien nos guien. (Let us be guided by the sacred souls.)

The people followed:

Que así sea. (Let it be.)

Then he placed the incensory on the table and picked up the bottle of Agua Florida. He poured a little of it on his

hand. Gently don Justo rubbed his hands and face. He sprinkled some drops all around the room. A few cold drops hit my face. Then he poured some of the Agua Florida on the hands of each of the guests. Although the water felt cold it had an odor of a magical garden.

Don Justo then sat at the middle of the table with closed eyes. All the mediums sat to his right and to his left. One of the mediums began to breath deeply. She jerked a few times. Still, with his eyes closed, don Justo instructed:

Hermana, deje que ose ser entre (Sister, let that being come in)!

The medium jerked once, twice, and then fell in a "trance."

Don Justo screamed:

Que ésta alma se identifique (Identify yourself)!

And the seance was well on its way.

### The Rent Strike

The next week was one of organizing and information gathering. Don Justo, Lucia, Mrs. Williams, and don Carlos divided different tasks among themselves. Lucia's and don Carlos' responsibilities were to gather information pertaining to rent control and rent strikes. Don Justo's and Mrs. Williams' tasks were to get in touch with the landlord and to organize the tenants.

Lucia and don Carlos received information on the maximum collectible rent on each of the apartments still

under rent control. They found that there were more apartments under rent control than they had thought. Six families were paying over the limit. The total overcharged rent came to \$175 per month. Four of the families had paid excess rent for two years. The other two families had done so for over a year.

Lucia and don Carlos convinced the families to claim their overcharged money. The six families accepted the idea of processing their cases in Small Claims Court. Don Carlos initiated each of the claims.

Don Justo was very pleased with how well Lucia and don Carlos did their job. He explained:

Bien! Bien! (Good!) You two have done a beautiful job. Now we have another weapon against the landlord. Legally he is supposed to return all that overcharged money. Chevere! (Beautiful!)

But later on I learned that don Justo's understanding went beyond legal matters. He understood it to be an organizational tool. He explained:

Ustedes ven? (You see?) I'm glad that we have that information. Now with this information we have brought those families to our side. One of our most important demands is the return of all the overcharged money. Si señor (Yes sir), they will be glad to receive all that money back.

That night Mrs. Williams, don Justo and I drafted the letter. The letter read as follows:

Dear Mr. X:

We, the tenants of -----, are respectfully writing to you in a moment of desperation. As you might know, all your tenants are hard working people. People who are always trying

to do what is right and just. We always pay the rent on time and we try to bother you as little as possible. In short, we always comply with our obligations.

But we are sorry to point out that you are not complying with your obligations as a landlord. In the middle of a cruel winter you have refused to satisfy one of our basic necessities. Time and time again we have begged for heat and hot water. For some unknown reason you refused to listen.

Not only did you refuse to supply our basic necessities but breaking the laws of rent control you are overcharging rent to six families. Now we are demanding:

1. heat and hot water;
2. a private entrance;
3. painted halls;
4. fix all damages in the apartments;
5. return all the overcharged money.

We expect an immediate reply from you. All we want is a decent place for our families to live.

Thank You Very Much.  
Respectfully Yours

Don Justo took responsibility for typing and making copies of the letter. The next day he had copies for all the tenants. Don Justo and Mrs. Williams distributed the copies. Only two families and the superintendent refused to sign the letter. They were afraid of what the landlord might do to them. According to the superintendent,

You know that I have a family to support. This is my job. If I go against my boss I could lose my job and my apartment. Coño (Damn) I don't want my family to be on the streets.

As long as the landlord did not know of his role, the superintendent agreed to help the tenants association in any way possible.

A few days later the signed letter was mailed to the landlord. It was agreed to wait until the next regular

seance for the answer.

Friday night I went to don Justo's apartment. I wanted to learn what his impression of the situation was. I was greeted by doña María with a beautiful radiant smile. Right away I noticed that she looked thinner. Immediately, I inquired:

Hola, doña María. (How are you?)

In a motherly manner she answered:

Mi'jo (my son), not so bad. Didn't you know that I was in the hospital?

Surprised, I looked at don Justo. I realized that I had not seen her for a few days. As a matter of fact, the last time I saw her was the day that the tenants became organized. I asked her:

And what was wrong with you?

She touched my face. Her gentle hand felt warm and tender.

Smiling, she answered:

Well, mi'jo (my son), you know about old people. Don't you? I just found out that I have diabetes. Now I'm in a strict diet. I hate it. I also had a bad cold. You know? The apartment is too cold.

Don Justo interrupted:

Bueno chica (Well, woman), now you have to take better care of yourself. Always eat right and dress warm. Coño mujer (damn woman), see if you can find an old man to take care of you.

He paused for a moment. Laughing and shaking his body, he joked:

I know that you will love to do some cuchi-cuchi. Ha, Ha, Ha,...

Don Justo asked us to sit in the dining room. After serving us some hot chocolate, he asked:

You know, José, we haven't heard from the landlord yet? What do you think we should do next?

I did not know what to answer. I answered him with a question:

Well, have you called any City agency?

He replied:

Yes, Lucia and don Carlos called. An inspector came today. He told us that it will take some time before they fix the boiler.

He paused for a moment. After lighting up a cigarette, he continued:

But you know how the government works. It would take forever to see any result. Besides, the most that we can get out of it is heat and hot water. In reality we want more services.

Immediately, I inquired:

But I thought that your main concern was to get heat and hot water?

Don Justo jumped out of his chair. In one quick movement he stepped on a little roach. Then he noted:

You see, José? We even need an exterminator. Carajo, estas malditas cucarachas! (Hell, these damn roaches!)

He sat down again, took a drink of chocolate, and then continued:

It is true. At the beginning that was our purpose. But we also had other demands. I think that we should do something instead of waiting for the City. I've learned that if we -- working people -- want something done we have to make it happen.

Puzzled by don Justo's conclusions, doña María asked him:

So Justo, what are you suggesting?

Don Justo finished his cigarette and the hot chocolate.

While cleaning the cup he explained:

Well, I think that we should force the landlord to provide all the services for which we are paying. After all if we don't who...

Don Justo was interrupted by a knock on the door. He asked for the time. It was seven-twenty. Drying his hands, he commented:

Ay, Dios mio! (Oh, my God!) It is getting late.

He opened the door. It was Mrs. Williams and some neighbors. At that moment I found out that don Justo had invited every tenant to today's seance. I realized that he had prepared something special for tonight.

Don Justo sent me to the bodega. When I came back, the apartment was full of people. The living room was already prepared for the seance. It was almost eight o'clock. I gave the groceries to doña María.

At eight, don Justo told the people that he wanted to start. Praying, he walked all over the house. People made way for him. After purifying the apartment he came back to the table. He opened the bottle of Agua Florida. While still praying, he poured some of the Agua Florida on the back of his neck. After a while, he sprinkled the people. Some of the people prayed.

But unlike previous tiems, don Justo stopped. After clearing his throat, he explained:

Today we are going to discuss some mundane matters. I don't have to explain why I invited all of you to come tonight. I take it for granted that we all know why. Lucia is going to tell you a few things about the inspector that came today. So please listen to her very carefully. O.K.?

Lucia seemed nervous. Almost whispering, she asked don Justo to tell them the information. Laughing, don Justo told her:

Oye chica, no sea una jibara. (Listen woman, don't be a country girl.) Tell them yourself. No one is going to eat you up. Besides you know everyone here.

Lucia was blushing. People encouraged her to talk. Very nervously, she mumbled:

Well, ah, ah, You know? Wow, everyone is so quiet!

Her audience laughed. Don Justo commented:

Come on woman, don't be afraid. You are among neighbors.

Lucia looked at Jon Justo. Shaking his head, don Justo encouraged her to talk. Slowly she began:

Well, it is not much. You know? A city inspector came today. They checked the boiler and it needs to be repaired. They are unable to fix it right away. The boiler also needs oil. The inspector told me that maybe by the end of next week it will be fixed. He also told me that the tenants have to sign some forms in order to take the landlord to court. The court then might force the landlord to provide us with heat and hot water. He did not know how long it will take. His estimation was from one to three weeks.

People shook their heads. They seemed disappointed. In broken Spanish, Mrs. Williams noted:

Some hope!

A middle aged man, who lived on the fourth floor, added:

Si señor, that's how the City works. The poor don't have any rights. You know? They take years before helping the poor. Their excuse is that the City is broke.

There was a general concensus. People seemed to be discontented with the City. Noticing the discontent, don Justo asked:

So, what should we do?

There was a general silence. Don Justo repeated:

Well, what should we do? Should we wait for the City or should we do something about it?

Mrs. Williams questioned don Justo:

Listen, don Justo, what do you suggest?

Avoiding the question, don Justo asked doña Irizarry for her opinion. Very politely, she answered:

Well, my husband told me that the best thing is a rent strike. But I was under the impression that we were ready for it. Well, didn't you open a bank account under the name of the tenants association?

This came as a surprise. We did not know about the bank account. Smiling, don Justo explained:

Look, I opened a bank account in the name of the association. I deposited Carlos', Mrs. Williams', Lucia's, and my money for the rent. We were preparing ourselves just in case you wanted to have a rent strike. By next week we have to pay rent. Instead of paying it to the landlord we can deposit all the money in the bank. Everyone will get a receipt for the amount deposited in the bank.

Not understanding the purpose of the bank account, don Ayala asked:

But why should we put the money in the bank? Why can't we hold it?

Mrs. Williams answered:

You see, with the bank account we can show where the rent money is. We can show the court that we are willing to pay the rent.

A young woman who was holding a baby asked:

For how long are we willing to have the strike?

Immediately don Justo answered:

For as long as we want to. I mean, if we don't get what we want we should continue. As soon as we get what we want we pay the rent and everyone will be happy.

The superintendent, who was sitting in a corner, commented:

You know that after the strike the landlord might try to get even with some of you?

Very bravely, Lucia noted:

Yeah, that's true. But only if we let it happen. Now we have a tenants association.

Don Justo added:

Yes sir. Lucia is right. That is why we formed a tenants association: to protect ourselves! So, come on, people, let's have a vote. Well, are we going to have a rent strike?

All the tenants at the meeting with the exception of the superintendent voted in favor of the strike. Although the superintendent supported the strike, he decided not to vote. There were six families not present. But three of the families had told Mrs. Williams that they supported the strike. Doña Lola and Manuel refused to participate.

After it was clear that the majority of the tenants wanted the rent strike, don Justo brought two white sheets.

Then he explained:

Last night Lucia, Mrs. Williams, Carlos, and I made this. I hope that you'll like it. We are

planning to hang it outside of the building.

In big letters the bilingual sheets announced:

RENT STRIKE. HUELCA DE RENTA.

People clapped and screamed, "Huelca."

The "Limpieza" and the "Trabajito": Two Rituals

After people calmed down, don Justo told them about giving a "limpieza" (spiritual clean up) to the whole building. The purpose was to get the spirits of light on their side. People agreed. Lucia worried about doña Lola and Manuel. Maybe they did not want the limpieza. But don Justo emphasized:

Don't worry about them. Sooner or later they will come to their senses. Besides, they will not object to limpieza.

Don Justo asked the superintendent to get a few mops. He then went into his room and brought out a shopping bag. Out of the bag he took a bunch of roots and plants. He placed everything in the bathtub. He asked doña María to heat some water. Three big pots full of water were placed on the stove. After the water was warm enough, he poured it in the tub. He added some other ingredients. After a while the tub was full. The odor was very strong.

Don Justo gave instructions on how to proceed. With the help of everyone, don Justo performed the ritual. People followed him to every corner of the building. They prayed to the spirits of light.

The ritual took two hours. Everyone living in the building and a few outsiders participated. By eleven o'clock the building had a strong odor of plants and incense. Leaves and roots were all over the floor. Although exhausted, don Justo was happy with what they accomplished that night. According to him:

Now we have the spirits of light on our side.  
We are united. I'm sure that we will win. Yes,  
sir, we will...

Two days later Juan and his girl friend came to my home with a message from don Justo. According to the young man, don Justo wanted to see me immediately. He emphasized the urgency of the matter.

I got dressed and went to see don Justo. I arrived around 10:00 at night and found doña María and don Justo waiting for me. By the smell in the apartment I realized that "they had some contact with the spirits."

I was about to take off my coat when don Justo asked me about my car. I told him that the old jallopy was working all right. He asked doña María to get a note from his kitchen cabinet. A few minutes later dona Maria handed me the note. Written on the note was the address of Mr. X, the landlord. Don Justo asked me:

Do you know how to get there?

I read the note once again. Then I told him that I had a rough idea of how to get there, but no more than that. He looked at me. Very determinedly, he told me:

Well, if you have some idea we can get there.  
So, let's go.

He took out twenty dollars and told me that it was for gasoline. Since I did not bring any money I accepted it.

Don Justo was carrying a small brown bag. I kept wondering about the nature of our trip. All I knew was that we were going to an exclusive area of the City. As we drove, I became more curious. Finally, I burst out:

Listen, don Justo, can I know why are we going to see Mr. X?

Laughing, don Justo answered:

Wow Jose, I thought you'd never ask. Ha, ha, ha,...  
Tell him María.

Doña María, who seemed nervous, explained:

We, José, we are not going to see Mr. X. I mean, not today. Eventually we will.

I was more confused than ever. I did not understand why we were going to the landlord's home at eleven o'clock at night.

After an hour of driving we arrived in the area. It was a beautiful residential area. The streets were very clean. The houses were big and elegant. While we were looking for the landlord's house, I asked don Justo:

Can you tell me what are you going to do?

He took a deep breath and then replied:

Yes, sir! I'm going to "hacer un trabajito" (cast a spell) on the landlord.

I was shocked. I should have known. Everything became clear. The time, the bag, doña María's nervousness, and don Justo's

quietness should have given it away.

After driving for a short while we finally found our destination. The landlord's house was a beautiful white mansion. It had no fences and the lights were off.

Don Justo asked me to go around the block one more time. After going around the block twice, don Justo asked me to drop him a few houses before the landlord's. I stopped as he asked. Don Justo took the brown bag. While walking he took the things out of the bag. From where I stood I was able to see clearly what he was doing. It took him only a few minutes to cast the spell on the doorsteps of the landlord's house. As soon as I saw him walking away, I drove up to him. He got into the car immediately and nervously instructed:

Let's go José. Let's go!

Driving back, I asked don Justo what he meant to accomplish with the spell. He laughed. After a short silence, he told doña María:

Coño, María (Damn, María), have you noticed that Jose is always asking questions?

Doña María agreed:

Yeah, Justo, I've noticed. At times I even get angry with him. I think that he spends too much time questioning.

Don Justo and doña María laughed. Tapping me on the shoulder, he explained:

Listen Jose, you asked the wrong question. You should not be interested in what we are going to accomplish. But rather you should be interested

in what is going to happen to the landlord. I mean...

He paused for a moment. After commenting on how late it was getting, he continued:

You know? When the poor confront the rich, they should use all that is available. Besides you asked the question with some doubt.

Immediately, I interrupted:

What doubt?

Smiling, he noted:

Your doubts on the spiritual world. Yes, I know that you think that spiritism is an invention of people's minds. And I also know that sometimes you are unable to explain many things that you see. You even believe that what I have done is not going to affect the landlord. After all, the landlord might be a non-believer. To you spiritism works only if the person is a believer. Well, to us, the believers, spiritism is real. Everyone in the building knows what I have done tonight. Yes, as a matter of fact they asked me to do it. They all believe in what I have done. Even doña Lola and Manuel are strong believers. You see, to us, the landlord is going to be affected by the spell because the spirits of light are on our side. We are building a unity which is hard for a non-believer to understand.

I was not able to understand fully what he was telling me. I suspected that he was telling me less than what he had in mind. But something was clear. Don Justo had a very sophisticated way of analyzing the whole situation.

I was trying to digest what don Justo said when doña María interrupted my thoughts:

Listen, José, we are planning to have a demonstration.

Don Justo added:

Well, only if all the tenants agree. Tomorrow at

seven we are having a meeting to discuss the matter.

We arrived around one o'clock. I dropped don Justo and doña María off and went home.

### The Demonstration

Due to other responsibilities, I was unable to attend the meeting. It was Juan and two of his teenage friends who told me the news. The tenants decided to demonstrate. That same day don Carlos collected the rent and deposited the money in the bank. The only people who refused to go along were doña Lola and Manuel.

After complaining about doña Lola's and Manuel's attitudes, Juan told me that they needed my car to take people to the demonstration. According to the young man, he had around twenty people. I told him that at least five people could come with me.

I was surprised. They decided to have the demonstration the previous night. I thought that it was too soon for a successful demonstration. But according to the young man:

Dig, bro. We is tired of havin' no heat and hot water. You dig? We ain't getting no place by staying home. We have to act quick. Can you imagine the reaction of the Whiteys when they see a bunch of Ricans invading their neighborhood. Shit. They ain't going to dig it.

Immediately I got dressed and went to don Justo's apartment. The apartment was full of people. There was an unusual excitement. There were all sorts of handmade signs. Lucia showed me a sign. She asked:

Jose, what do you think?

I read the colorful sign: "We want heat and hot water."

Smiling, I told her:

It is beautiful. Beautiful!

I read every sign. The message was loud and clear: they wanted a decent place to live. Don Justo greeted me with a big but nervous smile. After answering the telephone, he told me:

I'm glad that you are here. I hope that you have gasoline.

He paused for a moment He was trying to read my thoughts. I assured him:

Don't worry, don Justo. I have enough gasoline to take you to China.

He laughed. Then he asked me to take five people. I agreed.

Around 5 o'clock there were more than 50 people outside the building. I was surprised to see so many people. Don Justo, don Carlos, Mrs. Williams, and doña María were in charge of the grownups. Don Justo asked me to help Lucia and Juan with the younger people. According to don Justo, it was very important and necessary to keep order and discipline.

A chartered bus was waiting. Don Justo and don Carlos were paying for the bus. The majority went in the bus. The rest were taken in cars.

Don Justo and don Carlos were in charge of all the signs. They did not want anyone to carry the signs until the

appropriate moment. Since they did not want to scare off the bus driver or the company, they told the bus company to leave them off two blocks before the landlord's house.

Everything was well thought out beforehand. Two rows of people were organized. On the outside marched the adults and on the inside the youngsters. After walking for a block the signs were distributed. People began to chant their demands: "We want heat! We want hot water!" Don Carlos, Juan, Lucia, doña María, Mrs. Williams, and don Justo kept walking back and forth, screaming each of the slogans while at the same time keeping order. Juan's teenage friends were the most strenuous. The energy of the emotional youth, mixed with the discipline of the courageous adults, suffused the landlord's neighborhood.

At seven we were demonstrating in front of the landlord's home. Shortly after that, there were more policemen than demonstrators. Don Justo and the others kept emphasizing the need for order and discipline. People followed their advice.

The landlord, escorted by a policeman, came to see what the people wanted. Lucia and don Justo told the landlord that they wanted to speak to him. The landlord agreed. Lucia and don Justo went into the landlord's home. Around twenty minutes later don Justo and Lucia came out. People began to scream. Don Justo and Lucia raised their hands. It was a moment of victory.

### The Aftermath

By ten we were back. The tenants had a meeting in a storefront church. Since it was getting late, don Justo wanted to be brief. He explained that the landlord agreed with almost all their demands. The only demand that needed to be agreed upon was the return of the overcharged money. The landlord asked tenants to drop the charges pending in Small Claims Court. He wanted to negotiate the matter out of court. Don Justo explained that this was a matter to be settled by those people directly affected. The landlord also agreed that they could hold the rent money until the demands were satisfied.

The boiler was fixed the day after the demonstration. In less than twenty-four hours the tenants had heat and hot water. Three weeks after that, the hallways were painted and the front door fixed. The landlord gave paint and plaster to almost all the tenants. Finally, after three more weeks, the landlord received all the rent money.

The matter of the overcharged money was settled out of court. The tenants agreed to accept half of the overcharged money with the condition that they were to continue paying just the maximum base rent. Since the landlord was giving better services and doing needed repairs, they did not mind losing the rest of the money. According to don Carlos:

I know that I'm not getting all my money back. But the important part of all this is that we forced the landlord to satisfy our basic agreement. And we, the tenants, without the help of the

government or the courts did it.

Don Justo added:

Your are right, Carlos! With the help of God and the spirits of light we did it.

In conclusion, the next and last chapter deals at length with a question posed here: Can spiritualism further radical social change? With its background and aftermath, the rent strike gives us more than one clue.

## Chapter VIII

### CONCLUSION: MARX, PUERTO RICAN SPIRITISM, AND CULTURAL DYNAMIC

#### Marx and Religion

As we proposed at the beginning of this work, we see the need to modify in part, or at least to slightly stretch Marx's views on religion as they relate to spiritism. Before attempting to stretch them, we start with a short account of Marx's conception of religion.

In Capital, Marx explained his views of social reality:

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea', he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Ideal'. With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought. (Marx, 1974, 19)

We can see that Marx developed his own theory of the existing relations between the social world and social conscience -- after his death structured and labeled historical materialism -- in opposition as well as adherence to the idealist conception developed by Hegel. Since Marx grounded himself in a historically materialistic conception, he was able to oppose the idealist side of Hegel and his

students critically.

Around 1842-43 a young Hegelian, Bruno Bauer, wrote two essays which Marx used as a foil in explaining his particular type of materialist position. Bauer argued that the Jews should transcend their religious prejudices and abandon their Judaism as a prerequisite to their political and social emancipation. Furthermore, he proposed that the Jews should "embrace Christianity in dissolution" in order to become emancipated. Thus, according to Marx, Bauer transformed the Jewish emancipation into a purely theological question.

Marx answered that religion was the manifestation and not the basis of secular conditions. Marx accused Bauer of staying in the bounds of "pure thought." This prevented him from seeing the relationship between religious consciousness and material conditions. Marx stated:

It is not only, therefore, in the Pentateuch and the Talmud, but also in contemporary society, that we find the essence of the present-day Jew; not as an abstract essence, but as one which is supremely empirical, not only as a limitation of the Jew, but as the Jewish narrowness of society. (Marx, 1964, 40)

Marx concluded that the driving force of capitalism was the market; such a system measures human existence by the value of commodities. In the first part of Capital, Marx explained how a product assumes, under certain historical conditions, the form of a commodity. To Marx commodities have a twofold character: they possess a use value and an

exchange value. According to him, the commodity possesses the peculiar capacity of concealing its origin and essence from human beings. To the human eye, it appears to be a supernatural thing full of boundless powers. It is fetishized. That supernatural thing, which human beings have created, begins to take on a life of its own and turns human beings into its thingified object, thus disguising its origin. In this way, the fetishized form seems to become autonomous from human action and obscures the real relationships.

In essence, what Marx was explaining was the separation between object and subject. To Marx, the subject is Social Man, the individual in active relationship with nature and with society as a whole. The object is the product of nature and of all productions of people (including art, ideologies, and culture). In their producing, human beings are able to realize themselves and at the same time they might (as under capitalism) lose themselves in their work.

In the first instance, outside of capitalism, all activities that give form to an object have some result which people enjoy directly or indirectly. In the second instance, under capitalism, people get lost in the product of their own effort. As the product which human beings have created turns against them and weighs them down, it becomes a burden. So does their own alienated existence as a commodity. Now the inventions of human relationships turn

against them, making them objects to be bought and sold. It was evident to Marx that the task of humanity is to liberate itself from capitalism, as the source of such alienation. In essence, "the social emancipation of the Jews is the emancipation of society from Judaism (meaning capitalism)." (Marx, 1964, 40)

In order to bring about unity of subject and object, Marx stressed that human beings must change the social order. They must change the organization of the productive forces, the social relationships which bring about such disunity. This will mean the end of the fetishism of commodities and the end of capitalism.

In the "Contribtuion to the Critique of Helgel's Philosophy of Right," Marx dealt with religion as a form of social, collective alienation. He begins by saying:

The basis of irreligious criticism is this: Man makes religion; religion does not make Man. Religion is indeed Man's self-consciousness and self-awareness so long as he has not found himself or has lost himself again. But Man is not an abstract being, squatting outside the world. Man is the human world, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion which is an inverted world consciousness, because they are an inverted world.  
(Marx, 1964, 43)

The foundation of Marx's conception of the world is Man, the human being as a distinct species. People are organisms with material needs. In order to satisfy their physical as well as psychological needs, they interact with nature and themselves. Religion developed in this process of interaction.

To Marx, religion is a social phenomenon. Social

"Man" makes religion to explain the world. But then these explanations, these abstract ideas, begin to take on a life of their own. Religious ideas (or religion) then becomes the "opium of the people" as they tend to provide a rationalization and justification of the established order. Or, at the very least, they offer escapism or the illusion of escaping the mundane ills of the world. Because of religious ideas, social conditions are seen as a result of forces outside of the social world. Religion becomes "illusory happiness," as it treats social conditions being out of people's control as a given.

Taking a historical stand, Marx goes on to explain that

"...the criticism of religion disillusion man so that he will think, act and fashion his reality as a man who has lost his illusions and regained his reason; so that he will revolve about himself as his true sun. Religion is only the illusory sun about which man revolves so long as he does not revolve about himself. (Marx, 1964, 44)

This enables Marx to conclude that human beings are blindfolded by religious ideas. As such, they are unable to understand the material basis of their oppression. Human oppression is explained "as concession from heaven": this is the way it is because God made it this way!

People do not experience themselves as active agents and hence the material world (nature and themselves as well) remains alien to them. Everything, even those things that people produced, stand above them. In essence, people

experience themselves and the world passively.

How will change (liberation) come about?

Marx saw the struggle between contending classes as the principal force in the development of human society. The historical changes from one type of society to another are brought about by class struggles and by the victory of one class over others. But Marx always emphasized that the division into classes and the rise of new classes depend on the stage of development of the material means of production. As the means of such production develop to a higher stage, new forms of relations appear. Marx saw that the reorganization of society rests on the emergence of a new and superior mode of production.

The victory of the rising class depends upon its awareness of its situation and aims, and upon the effectiveness of its political organization as well as its economic position. It follows, therefore, that when the forms of production change, the institutions and ideas also change. The ideas of an epoch, as a rule, are class ideas. The ideas of the dominant class in society are imposed on the rest of society through its ownership of the machinery of propaganda, its control of education and its control of other cultural institutions.

To Marx, the ruling class resists increasingly the attempts to change the social and economic organization of society which would allow a full measure of the progress

that has become socially and technically possible. Such changes would endanger the privileged position of the ruling class. Hence, tensions and conflicts are created. Eventually they lead to a revolutionary reorganization of society.

Marx stressed several objective conditions as being essential for the development of a social class. But he stressed, too, the importance of subjective awareness as a precondition of organization for the successful ascendance to power. For the proletariat to organize itself it must develop class consciousness. This consciousness, according to Marx, would arise with the growing contradictions of the capitalist form of production. In this context, establishing an unalienated, humane social order free of self-alienating religion. Marx concluded:

Every emancipation is a restoration of the human world and of human relationships to man himself. Political emancipation is a reduction of man, on the one hand to a member of a civil society, an independent and egoistic individual, and on the other hand, to a citizen, to a moral person. Human emancipation will only be completed when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a species being; and when he has recognized and organized this social power from himself as political power. (Marx, 1964, 31)

To Marx, to repeat, religion gives people a false illusion about social conditions. By seeming to stand not only outside of but above what people themselves do, religion tends to provide a rationalization and justification of the established order. As such, people are unable to

understand the material, human-made basis of their oppression. In terms of our specific topic, spiritism, much of Marx's argument can be considered correct. However, as noted, it seems necessary here to modify his argument in part.

#### Puerto Rican Spiritism and Marx

Spiritism is defined by Julian H. Steward as "a belief in the causation of many occurrences by spirits and attempt to control or discover such causation through the mediation of medium." (Steward, 1956, 88) As we can see, spiritism, like other religious beliefs, explains social conditions as stemming from supernatural forces. In the terms used by Marx, spiritism, too, sees the supernatural world as the basis of secular conditions.

Unlike others, however, spiritualists believe that they can shape and use these supernatural forces in practical ways from day to day. There seems to be a dialectical, reciprocal, relationship: the supernatural world can affect and shape the material world as much as the material world can affect and shape the supernatural world. This is very important in terms of how people are going to interact with each other. Followers of spiritism "know" that by means of spiritual as well as material forces they can shape each other's life.

How does such spiritism fit into Puerto Rico?

To answer this larger question, let us first examine the development of the different religions on the Island.

Historically, when the conquistadores came to the New World, they brought with them not only their swords to enslave the natives but also their religion, customs, and institutions. The Christian (Catholic) faith was brought to Puerto Rico as part of the conquest. Not only did Spanish Catholicism help in the conquest of the native population, it also helped in the enslavement of the African. Speaking of this, Diaz Soler (1969) indicates:

The conversion of Blacks to the Spanish faith was a necessity, since in it we find a creative sense of obedience, conformity, humbleness and sacrifice, making easier the lives of the slaves. The government and the Catholic Church imposed upon themselves the obligation of developing the mutual understanding between master and slave, factors indispensable to tranquility and order. (167)

Other than being a major administrative and military center for Spain's colonies, Puerto Rico was the administrative center for the Catholic Church in the New World. The administrators of the Church in Puerto Rico operated under the conditions created by the Spanish monarch. The Church received large portions of land and the right to collect fees for the use of the land. In exchange, the Spanish monarch had a major voice in assigning the bishops to the dioceses.

The administrators of the Church were mostly Spaniards. In a report to the United States Treasury Department

in 1899, Henry K. Carroll wrote:

The clergy were almost entirely Spaniards. Very few natives were in the priesthood. Reared and educated in Spain they did not, for the most part, command the sympathy of the municipal officers who were chiefly Porto Ricans, and as there was more or less friction between Porto Ricans and Spaniards, and the priests were paid by the government and were understood to be in entire sympathy with it, they did not really come in close touch with many of the natives in their parishes. At the close of the war a number of the priests, including the bishop, went back to Spain. (1975, 28)

Until 1898, only one Puerto Rican, Juan Alejo Arizmendi, had ever been named bishop in San Juan. This and other such facts meant that the Church lacked effective contact with the most of the Puerto Rican people. Wagenheim (1975) explains:

The Catholic church had a long, checkered history since its establishment on the island in the early sixteenth century. On the positive side, it was a pioneer in opening new territories. Many pueblos were founded by priests, whose small, thatched roof missions in remote zones served scattered rural settlers. In a few years, a town plaza was marked off, with a permanent church building at one end and the municipal hall at the other forming the nucleus for a new community.

The Church also maintains medical services and schools, including Catholic University in Ponce and a number of good primary and secondary schools. Its religious festivals and activities, often the only recreational outlet in isolated communities, help foster a sense of community. On the other hand, the Church preached loyalty to Spain, even under the tyranny of military rule. Despite early Church resistance to enslavement of the pre-Columbian Indians, the Church opposed the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century. (166)

Although there was (and still is) this lack of effective contact with the Catholic Church, many Puerto

Ricans see themselves as Catholics. To the Puerto Ricans, to be a Catholic does not necessarily mean that the individual has to attempt to be, or actually is, a member of the Church. In large part, their Catholicism is based on personal relationships outside of the organized church.

Although the Spanish rulers (including the Church) tried to force the natives into a Spanish colonial culture, they were not completely successful. Pre-Columbian and African religious rites were mixed by the colonized people with the forced Catholicism.

Catholicism in the Puerto Rico of the nineteenth century became very much a tool of domination. As such, the people were, as a rule, alienated from the organized Catholic Church since it seldom transcended colonial oppression.

With the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Spanish-American War in 1898, Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States. This change in sovereignty was very important since it constituted a determinate factor in the cultural history of the Island.

With the American invasion came also the mainland priests, religious personnel and expenditure of funds for developing the Church on the Island. Religious instructions and practices, true to the American Way, have increased considerably. The Catholic Church on the Island has become very much Americanized. Among other developments,

the parochial and Catholic High Schools have been developed following the American model. However, since the Catholic Church in Puerto Rico is following the traditions of American religious customs, it is still quite distant, as in the nineteenth century, from the masses. (Lewis, 1963)

After 1898, for example, it was not until 1964 that a Puerto Rican, Luis Aponte Martinez, was named bishop. It is interesting to note that even today all bishops are named from outside of Puerto Rico.

With the creation of the Partido Accion Cristiana (Christian Action Party) in 1960, which brought the Catholic Church into the political arena, the conservative character of the church came into the open. The Church, at a time of rapid bourgeois development, took strong conservative positions in terms of such development. It was disastrously defeated in the election and became all the more distant from the masses. (Lopez Tamos, 1970, 82)

But this does not mean that there is no progressive element working within the Catholic Church. The Church is not immune to colonial and class contradictions. As in Latin America, there is also an anti-conservative element. Father Antulio Parrilla confronts the problems of the Catholic Church in a progressive manner when he states:

We have to come face to face, for example with the reality of the total alienation of the church from a great portion of our people, the religious ignorance and the problematic material progress of spiritual values. (Parrilla, 1971, 19)

As a progressive, Father Parrilla suggests:

The problematic colonial reality of Puerto Rico is grave and sinful, and Christianity has the obligation to denounce it. Silence...is cowardly. It is useless to try to establish Christianity in a colonial or capitalist climate. (Ibid., 97-98)

In some sense, Father Parrilla follows the same revolutionary ideas articulated by the late Colombian priest, Father Camilo Torres. To this group within the Latin American Catholic Church "...love thy neighbor is the very center of Christian ethics...[and] any serious application of the Christian ethic could only mean revolution." (Smith, 1971, 129)

Protestantism came to the Island with the United States invasion.

After 1898, American religious groups looked southward to the Caribbean and saw over a million potential converts. To avoid needless rivalry, the U.S. Methodists, Baptists, and Episcopalians "divided up the cake" beforehand and created exclusive territories for proselytizing. (Wegenheim, 1975, 167)

Protestant churches attracted many workers. This attraction to the Protestant religion can be explained in terms of the need to replace the old personal social relations that broke up rapidly with the American invasion. Protestantism provides a sense of modern community and purpose that replaced the traditional lifestyle. But this penetration by the Protestant Churches was not as smooth as it may sound.

By 1942 the American Protestant hierarchy reported with chagrin that its ministry was "middle class... alien to Puerto Rican society and to the economic structure and life of the community." Sunday

collections were so scanty that the American parent body was obliged to pay large subsidies. (Wagenheim, 1975, 1975)

In this way, Protestantism created what Gordon Lewis calls a system of religious colonialism.

The American Protestants did what the Catholic Church was unable to manage. They trained Puerto Rican ministers. In this way, a Puerto Ricanization process was started. The working class Puerto Ricans began to develop their own storefront churches with their own ministers. Often these ministers came from their own ranks. In 1940 a Puerto Rican woman named Mita, who died in 1970, began a sect.

The poor found it easy to identify with Mita, a woman whose thoughts may have been in the heavens, but whose words and methods were down to earth... The poor also identify with Pentecostal lay pastors, who have usually emerged from their own ranks. (Ibid., 168)

Still, Protestantism is also a religion of the oppressor. Unlike spiritism, both Catholicism and Protestantism have been brought to the Island by the conquerors. The population has been bombarded in a very political manner by both religions. Both religions have served the needs of the colonizer. And both condemned spiritism in one way or another. Here I am not negating the fact that within the established Protestant and Catholic religions there are progressive elements. On the contrary, I believe that the progressive elements within these religions in Latin America are growing. But at the moment these progressive elements are too small and powerless in Puerto Rico. For the

most part, the hierarchies of the Protestant and Catholic Churches are dominated by very traditional and conservative men. Therefore, given the colonizing and conservative character of both Catholicism and Protestantism, we suggest that historically, socially and perhaps even theologically, only spiritism can be seen as a significant form of social protest on the Island. It alone stands out as a counter-religion, a plebian underground institution far from the wealth and official standing of the established mainland denominations.

To examine spiritism in its totality we have to modify Marx's argument. At this point, I will be arguing that, in such a case as Puerto Rican spiritism, religion plays a much more positive role -- more liberating and even revolutionary -- than Marx allowed for.

Marx stressed almost exclusively the alienating side of religion. The four case studies (Chapter V) do indicate a degree of alienation. Sometimes during spiritual seances people explained mundane conditions as out of their control and power. To some degree, they see supernatural forces as the causes of human despair.

But there is another side -- a potentially liberating side that at times even negates the alienating side so much stressed by Marx. The case studies show that both the structure of spiritism and how Puerto Rican working people use it in Williamsburg sets it off from the "opium of the people"

-- the escapism and rationalization that Marx stressed.

It is very difficult to determine how and when spiritism first came to Puerto Rico. Although some writers (Rosario, 1975; Salgado, 1974; and Garcia, 1979) see some relation of spiritism to the beliefs of the Taino indians and the African slaves, they suggest that it was smuggled onto the Island in the nineteenth century. Salgado specifies that in Puerto Rico itself the spiritist movement originated in Mayaguez in 1871. Garcia (1979) writes that spiritism was clandestinely introduced on the Island. According to Garcia, among the books introduced on the Island on spiritism,

Hippolyte Rivail of Lyons, France, known as Allen Kardec (1803-1869), proved particularly popular in Spanish speaking countries, especially Puerto Rico. His numerous works on spiritism continue to provide the cornerstone upon which most Puerto Ricans base their belief. (Garcia, 1979, 10)

This question of how and when spiritism was first introduced still needs a lot of research. There is strong evidence to indicate that spiritism -- a la Allen Kardec -- was a middle and upper class phenomenon in the nineteenth century. But at the same time, there is strong evidence that a form of spiritism, as practiced by working people, could be found two centuries before Allen Kardec's works arrived on the Island. Deolindo Amorin (1958) studied the question of the origin of spiritism in Brazil. Amorin found that the practice of spiritism was widespread long before Allen Kardec's work arrived. Amorin finally concluded that the

ritual practices are a combination of African and Catholic beliefs.

In Puerto Rico, the historian Luis Diaz Soler seems to support Amarin's thesis when he states:

The primitive faith succumbed to the more vigorous faith, fusing a number of spiritual elements in the mind of the African. At the same time that they submitted to the God of the occident, to the Virgin and the Saints, they continued their beliefs in the pagan gods, in witchcraft and magic. Father Nicolas de Ramos, bishop of the Island in 1591, ...in a letter to the king explains... "I discovered a group of black witches..." (Diaz Soler, 1969, 171)

Here Diaz Soler is talking about spiritism as it was practised in 1591. But once again the question of the origin of spiritism as practiced by working people is in need of serious historical research.

To see spiritism in its totality, we have to modify Marx's argument. To start with, Seda Bonilla (1973, Rogler (1961), Garrison (1972), and Morales (1976) have shown that spiritism can "function as a therapeutic outlet for mental illness." The spiritual seance is a form of psychotherapy developed not only for but by the poor. The spiritual seances serve the mentally ill working class person without branding him/her as "locco" (crazy) and without having to use a psychiatric clinic. According to Seda Bonilla, "spiritism is the psychiatry of the poor."

But the studies cited examine spiritism almost entirely from a psychotherapeutic perspective. True, Seda Bonilla noted that

...spirits communication represent a disguised form of protest against an oppressive system of interpersonal relations in which any suspicion, opportunism, distrust, and self belittlement have replaced the outdated authentic mutualistios patterned after the dignity, respect, and hospitality of the traditional culture... (Seda Bonilla, 1973, 148)

But he did not show how this protest manifests itself. In his case, too, the psychotherapeutic approach fails to examine the whole spiritual social activity. Since their intention was to deal with the "psychotherapeutic function" of spiritism, the cited authors were unable to analyze many other social situations that spiritualists confront.

In a study done in the South Bronx, Salgado (1974), went beyond this approach.

The data obtained in the study revealed that the spiritist functions in the role of family counselor in a wide range of family problems which relate to spouses, children, parents, and the extended family. (200)

Furthermore, she explains:

In addition to problems related to the family the spiritist service was also sought for problems related to health, employment, law, schools and others. The spiritist also acted as a bridge between the population sample and community resources by giving information and making referrals. (201)

But Salgado's main concern was the role of spiritism in helping Puerto Ricans with family relation problems. Therefore, she was either unconcerned with or unable to appreciate the rebellious potential of spiritism.

Looking at the impact of spiritism in the colonial Puerto Rico of the last century, Koss suggested "...it is possible that spiritualism satisfied a growing need having

ideas that went beyond the limited colonial content."

(Koss, 1972, 68) According to Koss, there were many well-known separatists (independentistes) who were also spiritualistic.

In a sense, then, spiritual gatherings served as a form of protest against Spanish colonialism. Although colonial authorities prohibited all spiritual gatherings, the people rebelled against such rules. They practiced spiritism in extreme secrecy. (Wakefield, 1960, 62-63)

Of course the situation today is much different from that of the nineteenth century. But in the popular folklore we still find traces of the experiences of the past. Although the practice of spiritism is not prohibited by law, people still practice the religion behind closed doors.

The secrecy, which was a necessity for 400 years of Spanish domination, has been converted by habit into a rule, and even today, in New York, there are great numbers of Puerto Ricans who are parishioners of the Catholic and Protestant Churches but practice behind closed doors the cult of the spirits.  
(Tower, 1970, 144)

Spiritual seances are occasions where people with different problems, and with a lot of despair, come together to "complain about," "talk about," or "find out" a solution to their problems. Sometimes these problems are seen as spiritual problems and sometimes as material problems. But no matter what type of problem, the spiritual activity transcends all spiritual explanations, for it includes the discussion of mundane, everyday, social

problems as well.

The spiritist employed a variety of techniques in which the involvement of individuals and families seemed to be the most important aspect. The techniques used and the advice given were action directed, thus mobilizing and motivating the participants to become part of the whole process. The aim of the helping process was the restoration of function and/or the relationship and the resolution of conflict. The process was accomplished by a definite plan of action that required commitment and effort on the part of the client with the support and encouragement of the spiritist. In helping families she taught them how to work with their problems rather than working out solutions for them. The knowledge acquired in dealing with a problematic situation can be applied to other similar ones in the future. Families that had been helped also helped other families with similar problems. (Salgado, 1974, 203)

Our data showed that it is through the conversations in such spiritual gatherings that Puerto Rican workers begin to find out that, as Puerto Ricans and as workers, they share certain things in common. Through such discussion and debates -- behind closed doors -- identification, solidarity, and unity begin to take place.

In their everyday speech (or complaints) during spiritual gatherings we find elements of protest. The case studies show how Puerto Ricans use the spiritual setting to articulate their discontent with the world that exploits them. Through spiritism, in one way or another, Puerto Rican working people get to discuss and even debate in small groups their common experiences. It is, in part, through these discussions that they begin to find their common interests.

As they complain and begin to recognize their common conditions of oppression, they begin to offer to themselves (consciously or not) the possibility of a different social world. In fact, they are beginning to formulate a working class world view. This type of language and world view reflects a Puerto Rican working class reality. It is in the process of day to day troubles, debates, discussions, and finally, struggles, that the workers begin to shape a more concrete counter-rhetoric (ideology) that best expresses their understanding of reality.

The group legitimacy and sacred aspects of the spiritual gatherings offer the opportunity for Puerto Rican workers to come together to discuss (and even debate) the contradictions in their emerging counter-world view. Of course, these discussions and debates are not limited to the spiritual setting. They take place in other social settings as well. The point here is that spiritism is one of the settings that offers such an opportunity. More than that, its grassroots legitimacy and sacred aspects do put it in a class by itself.

Our four case studies of spiritual seances bring out the key contradiction stressed by this study: it is between a passive, alienating acceptance of the status quo and a turn to a cultural dynamic based on the shaping of consciousness which is opposed to the same status quo. In other words, our case studies show confusion and passivity

alongside the role of spiritism in changing (or raising) consciousness. In terms of cultural dynamics, our case studies show spiritual seances contributing to resistance a good deal more than to accommodation (or alienation) as stressed by Marx.

### The Lesson of a Collective Action

For a particular world view or ideology to be effective, it has to lead to some type of social action. For a working class counter-ideology to do that, the social action must represent their interests. The four case studies showed that during spiritual seances the Puerto Rican workers were posing to themselves the question of social action. Behind their understanding of future action we find hidden the need of breaking away from the present social structure.

Chapter VII offered a case study of a collective action led by a spiritualist. The field notes in that chapter, edited and annotated, describe a rent strike, a confrontation between a group of tenants and a landlord. What does the final case study suggest for our overall conclusion? What might it add to our grasp of the role spiritism can play in Puerto Rican awareness of nationality and class which is the focus of this whole work? What might it add to Marx's view of religion?

The spiritualist's awareness of the group the spiritualist led became very important to the collective action

studied. He had a basic understanding not only of the situation but also of the people around him. He believed and respected the people he led. As an internal leader don Justo represented only the interests of his followers. He was convinced of his actions and motives. People trusted and were inspired by him.

Don Justo is a practical individual. Although he does not have a sophisticated understanding of socialism he believes that no person should possess more than others. According to him, "it is an injustice that workers receive much less than the bosses." Don Justo understands the injustices suffered by working people because he is a worker. He is able to explain in simple terms the need for social change.

In the light of past experience, don Justo and most of the others believed that the government was unable to solve their immediate problem. This lack of faith became even more accentuated when they saw the City unable to handle their problem expeditiously. It became just another of the many bad experiences with the institutions of their society.

Their previous experiences were merely individual ones. This time they were all going through a collective experience. People tried to solve this problem individually. As their individual attempts failed they became convinced of the need for a collective action. There was much debate and

discussion. The whole decision became very painful. People were afraid of the consequences. But the intolerable situation forced them to act. Their backs were to the wall.

Along with don Justo, there was a small group of people who worked in organizing the strike. This was the most progressive and advanced element. This small group was at least ready to deal with the problem in front of them. They were the first to indicate to the others the urgent need to do something collectively.

At the beginning, Juan, the youngest organizer, was not involved with the tenants. It was not until he understood the seriousness of the matter that he became interested. Once he became interested the young man began to work hard. Juan began to assume different responsibilities. He organized a group of teenagers. Under his instruction these teenagers made all the signs for the demonstration.

His overemotional hatred for "whities" and his overemphasized love for everything Puerto Rican coincided with the tenants' action. The landlord was white and most of the tenants were Puerto Ricans. Juan had a romanticized view of the whole situation.

The young man was respected by his peer group because of his great dancing and athletic skills. He used this respect to bring them in contact with the tenants association. In order to make the signs for the demonstration Juan gave a party. According to him, "this was a party to celebrate

Rican unity." During the trip to the demonstration Juan took a big radio and danced with some of his teenage friends. Once they arrived, he managed to show by example the seriousness of the demonstration.

But Juan wanted more. He was not satisfied with just having the demonstration and obtaining an immediate victory: he wanted the tenants association to become a political organization. His idealism, emotionalism, and extreme nationalism scared those tenants who were at a lower level of consciousness. He was not able to see that what he wanted was too abstract for many of the tenants to understand. When don Carlos tried to explain this to the youngster, he became very emotional and upset. Juan was ready and desperate for more action but at the same time he was too idealistic.

Consumed by his emotional fervor, Juan was unable to understand that people took action because the need for it became real. To them it was not an abstract understanding of the world that brought the group to take action but a real problem close to home. A problem that slowly, step by step, brought them into a collective action. It was after all individual acts had failed that they were forced to unite. Unlike don Justo and don Carlos, Juan was unable to examine how the struggle developed. His emotionalism clouded his understanding of the whole process.

Throughout the entire action people did not say much about social change. The only people who constantly

mentioned such matters were Don Carlos and Juan. But each saw the world differently. Don Carlos tended to be more sophisticated in outlook than Juan.

Don Carlos is a self-proclaimed socialist. He believes in the independence of Puerto Rico and constantly talks about workers' rights. He emphasizes that in order for independence to work, Puerto Rico must become socialist. Otherwise, we will create another banana republic.

Mrs. Williams was one of the most interesting leaders and individuals involved with the tenants association. She was the only black American. There was another black family living in the building. Although that black family supported the strike they never became active.

Mrs. Williams was born and raised in New York City. When she was about five years old she lived with a Spanish family. She lived with this family for five years. She learned the language from them.

During the strike she was collecting unemployment compensation. She usually collected unemployment checks for three to five weeks at this time of the year.

She supported the equal rights movement of the early sixties. Although later on she sympathized with the teachings of Malcom X, she was never involved.

She was always talking with Juan. She like the youngster a lot. She sees in him her late husband. Her husband always used to talk against white people, like Juan does.

According to her, he was always reading about Garvey and was a strong admirer of Malcolm X. He died of cancer a few weeks after Malcolm was assassinated.

Mrs. Williams was accepted by the Puerto Ricans because she showed great respect for them. She spoke Spanish and participated in almost every spiritual ceremony. She was developing her spiritual faculties. Her goal was to become a good medium.

Lucia was a young woman who for the first time participated in this sort of organization. Her experiences with the Welfare Department showed her the need to struggle. According to her, "poor people must fight to obtain what we need." Although insecure at first, she discovered her leadership potentials with the help of the others.

She helped Juan lead the younger people. The youngsters were able to identify with Lucia. Lucia, a young and attractive woman, was able to communicate not only with the younger but also the older people. She became the natural link between the different generations.

The superintendent, not recognized as a leader, worked in such an extremely different manner that he is worth mentioning. Due to his job, the superintendent decided to work as an underground striker. He was never mentioned to the landlord or signed any document. But still he worked hard throughout the whole struggle. He helped the strikers in every possible way. He managed to charter the

bus. Using his contact with a supervisor of a bus company he got a bus without previous notice. He had some difficulty getting a bus driver. After talking to a few drivers he finally convinced one of them. He paid some extra cash to the driver.

He painted all the hallways. The landlord paid him for the job. Some of the tenants paid him to paint their apartments. He did not charge any money for painting don Justo's apartment. According to him, "don Justo deserves my services and more. It was his persistent work that helped us get all this."

In general, people seemed to be at different levels of awareness. Don Justo and the rest of the leadership tried to find other interests in common in order to get everyone involved. But they were unsuccessful with two families. These were unwilling to participate because the heads of the families did not believe in the action. People at lower levels of awareness tended to participate less. Doña Lola and Manuel, great believers in Americanization and assimilation, went to the extreme of not participating at all.

Manuel believed in the status quo. He wanted to wait for the City authorities. He expected their problems to be solved by the City. Doña Lola thought that such subversive actions could not bring anything constructive. In a sense, to doña Lola and Manuel, the rest of the tenants were acting like crazy communists. According to doña Lola,

"the people should wait for the respected people in government to do what is good for them."

At the end doña Lola and Manuel also learned a lesson. They saw for the first time what people like themselves could obtain by means of struggle and confrontation.

They felt guilty for not participating. Although they needed and wanted the material to fix their apartments, they were afraid to take it. They knew how some people felt about them. Juan and others made it clear that "since they did not support the strike they should not benefit from it." But don Justo knew the conditions of their apartments. He explained that he and others had struggled for every tenant in the building. Although Manuel and doña Lola did not participate they were also tenants. As tenants they had the right to receive what was due to them. According to don Justo:

They did not participate because they saw things differently. But they pay rent too. They deserve everything that they could get from the landlord. Believe me, next time they will not be so hard-headed. They have learned their lesson.

Therefore, they also enjoyed the success of the rent strike.

What general, overall lesson does this collective action teach?

One might argue that any particular action like it does not lead to major social changes. Indeed, was this not an action isolated from the rest of the tenants, from other workers? One might also argue that the belief in spiritism seems to lead to a false understanding of the social

processes taking place in our society.

I cannot completely argue against such objections. In fact this was an isolated action taken by a small group of tenants. And the philosophy of spiritism can of course lead us to a distorted view of reality. But we must realize that such objections come from a particular view of the world. These tenants or workers used the tools closest to them. They fought as they knew how. Spiritism was a tool that they knew how to use. People's hope and expectations were raised with every spiritual ritual. Spiritism was part of their social reality. It was their inspiration.

This is not to say that they were blinded -- as Marx might say -- by their religious ideas. They did not explain their problem as stemming from supernatural forces. Therefore, they understood it to be a mundane, material problem. Their religion did not become "illusory happiness." They did not take the situation as God-given. In other words, their faith induced here neither passivity nor escapism.

People came to the logical conclusion that in order to solve their problem they needed to act. The social problem was confronted with the belief or hope that there were other forces beyond the material (mundane) world. They believe not only in the forces of the social world but also in the powers of the spiritual world. Their task was to bring the forces of the spiritual world to their side as well as to act upon the forces of the material world.

Rituals such as the *limpieza* and *trabajito* became organizing tools. These rituals became integral parts of the whole process. But the rituals never became substitutes for collective action. Rather they became part of it. To this group of people the rituals served as instrumental tools and forms of collective expression. The rituals were, in fact, a technique for dealing with the situation in conflict. At the same time, the rituals served as a way of bringing out their feelings. It would be a mistake to separate the rituals from the cultural experiences of the people involved. The rituals were a set of symbolic procedures which involved a code of social communication and cultural views of the world. This group of people believed that by means of such symbolic action they were able to affect social conditions, or at least begin to.

Don Justo performed the rituals with the consent of the people. His job was to fulfill people's expectations and beliefs. At no point did he perform a ritual that people rejected.

The *limpieza* became a collective ceremony to drive away from their surroundings all evil tendencies that prevented their unity. Once this was accomplished they were ready for mundane action. At no time did people explain their misfortunes as the consequence of evil spirits. The *limpieza* helped in "giving light" to those forces, mundane and otherwise, that people believed could help them struggle

against the evils of the social world.

The trabajito was one of the ways of dealing with the evil doer -- in our case the landlord. Don Justo and others believed in exercising control over spiritual forces. But in order to control one had to satisfy their "needs." All spiritual forces "need light." Spiritual "light" is believed to be the road to the sacred: the union of the spirit with God. By giving or by refusing to give "light" to the spirits one can obtain certain control over the spirits.

Don Justo explained that the spell cast on the landlord was not in order to kill him but rather to throw his spiritual faculties or guardian spirits off balance. According to the spiritualist, each person has certain faculties that protect the individual. But these faculties must be in tune with the individual. Implicit was the understanding that the spirit and the material world are always in close contact with each other. Each world depends and feeds on this unity.

In the case of the landlord, the purpose of the trabajito was to weaken this unity for a short while. The spell, then, works as a means of harming the balance of the spiritual world and the mundane world. Put off balance, the landlord will of course suffer a great deal. He is at the mercy of his enemies. The rent strike then becomes another of the numerous problems confronted by an "unprotected," "off balanced" landlord.

The tenants believed that they were doing everything possible to win a battle against an evil doer. They were bombarding the evil doer from all possible angles. They believed that it was a matter of time before they gained a victory. Since they did not believe in the separation of the spiritual from the mundane world they acted according to the rules of both.

The tenants were not trying to change the whole social order or even understand the workings of this society. Instead, they were trying to satisfy their immediate needs. It was their own everyday needs that forced them to organize. They created a tenants association. All sorts of decisions were made, using a democratic process. After some discussions and at times heated debates they always managed to come to a collective decision.

At times the leadership took the initiative. But the leaders always managed to act with the consent of the group. The leadership seemed to know and understand the sentiments of their followers. They knew because they were in close contact with their peers and with the situation.

Finally, as the tenants took action they were learning a great lesson. Not only were they transcending their constant complaining but they were also learning the need for collective unity and action. Through everyday resistance, they added another essential ingredient to their cultural dynamic, to the emergent ideology of a colonized

working people

Cultural Dynamic and Spiritism

This study shows that the Puerto Rican workers are not only becoming aware of their interests as an ethnic group but also of their interests as a class. As individuals and as a group these workers are in the midst of a dynamic process or course of changing, of a rising self and class awareness. The data seem to contradict or at least question the widespread radical or orthodox socialist view.

According to this position, workers by themselves could never achieve revolutionary consciousness since socialism was a science usually brought to the working class by intellectuals from the outside. It was the role of the intellectuals to organize a revolutionary political party that could systematically agitate and organize among the industrial working class and other exploited sections of the people. (Aronowitz, 1973, 3)

In the case studied here, the awareness or the action was not "brought" to this group of people by a revolutionary vanguard or Party, or by any enlightened outsiders. Rather, a heightened consciousness -- or progressive culture -- is being developed in the process, or course of dealing with everyday problems and struggles.

The data indicate that everyday contradictions can force workers to act, at least when they feel backed against the wall. As they are forced to act they are equally forced to use the cultural tools available to them. Spiritism, then, becomes one of the tools by which the Puerto Rican

worker deals with everyday contradictions. This, of course, does not mean that spiritism serves only as a force for social change. There are opposite tendencies working within the spiritual setting. In some instances spiritism becomes an escapist or an accommodating activity and at others it becomes a creative or progressive force. But for this group of people spiritism became more of a creative force than an accommodating force. The need to solve their immediate problems broke the usual balance of creativity and accommodation.

There is very little homogeneity in the perception of the world among Puerto Rican workers. As they talk, argue, and even fight with each other, the workers begin to realize that there are similar problems that they must confront and even interests that they share. After all, no matter how they view the world as individuals, all of them share the same nationality and the same working class background.

Three main perspectives have been developed to explain the personality and culture of the Puerto Rican masses. The first, a biological and geographical determinism, sees the Puerto Ricans as docile, dependent, and fatalistic. (Marques, 1967; Pedreira, 1969) The second, a romantic approach, sees the Puerto Ricans as valiant warriors, defenders of their country, and daring people. (Silen, 1971) Both of these perspectives assume that these traits are natural, given to them by nature, of the Puerto

Rican personality.

The third perspective is more systematic and materialistic in its approach. It examines the Puerto Rican culture and personality in terms of colonial relations.

Riestra explains:

...the popular Puerto Rican masses have been dehumanized and alienated. Its conduct reflects a state of oppressed consciousness. Nevertheless, it is indispensable to recognize that this functional reality of the Puerto Rican is not a product of an inherent and natural docility. It is the economic, political, military, cultural and psychological colonial situation that has created this state of oppressed consciousness in our people. (1978, 162)

But Riestra is only able to perceive a negative side of the Puerto Rican masses. To him, the masses are alienated. Only a very small vanguard has been able to overcome this alienation. Therefore, if this small vanguard was eliminated there would be a complete state of oppressed consciousness.

The present work indicates that it is an error to conclude that the masses are completely alienated. There are opposite and dynamic tendencies in the Puerto Rican culture and personality. True, there are alienating and alienated elements. These opposite tendencies or forces are always clashing, bringing about a great number of cultural and social changes. These dynamic tendencies in the Puerto Rican culture turn into Cultural Dynamic whenever the clashing contradictions tip from a balance between accommodation and resistance toward resistance, a movement for change with a strong new dynamic of its own.

Spiritism is one of the many tools the oppressed might and, as we saw, at times do use to deal with such contradictions. Spiritism is used to deal with and articulate everyday experiences and struggles. The explanations and modes of actions are arranged into "theoretical or ideological constructs" of the world. Definitely, some of these "constructs" are handed down by the dominant class to the workers. But at the same time, the Puerto Rican workers are forced by their everyday experiences to create some of their own "theoretical or ideological constructs." It is in these opposite "constructs" that one finds the ideological polarities that nurture the seeds of dissatisfaction, conflict and struggle.

This study shows that there are working people who conceive "the structural reality of oppression...as an absolute and necessary, totalizing and indistructible reality... also, they conceive themselves as being without future... and they are only involved in their immediate situation." (Riestra, 1978, 167) But not all the Puerto Rican workers in this study seem to be at this particular level of social consciousness. The four case studies show different levels of national and class awareness. Only a very small number of workers were on the middle levels.

The problem of despicable living conditions, plus spiritism, brought these people together. The mundane problem and spiritism both acted as catalysts for unity and

action. It is at moments of greatly felt need that this "spectrum of consciousness" comes together. Spiritism served as a tool to talk, discuss, argue, examine, and finally act. Once their situation became intolerable it became problematic. Once it became problematic the need to act became a reality.

There were fatalistic as well as materialistic explanations. Some of these people explained their problems in terms of the fatalistic side of spiritism. Although they complained about their conditions, they saw them as God given. But others were able to transcend the fatalistic side. Instead, they saw it as a mundane problem. Through the course of the collective action these tendencies were always present. But these people never thought of abandoning spiritism. Rather, they dealt with its contradictions and used it as a tool to struggle against their common enemy.

The most advanced sector tended to be less afraid and more ready for action. Since they were less afraid they took the initiative. In this way, of course, they became the leaders. At no moment did they or the group need an outside "Party or an intellectual" organizer. By means of discussions and sometimes heated debates the group was able to articulate the experience on its own. To be sure, what outside activists did and said had earlier helped to shape their minds, most of all of the more conscious. Still, the nature and timing of action grew very much out of the group

itself.

The decisions carried out were not easy. For the majority, the decision to act was a major step in their lives. Those who were willing to act found themselves trying to convince those who were not. It took time and a lot of debate. But as they debated and argued the situation kept getting worse. Finally, human necessity and common sense were greater than all fears and opposition. The need to act became a reality.

Once the group decided to act, the most progressive element was in full control of the situation. Some of the less conscious individuals dropped out. It is interesting to note, however, that although they did not support the action they did not try to prevent it. They just retreated into their freezing apartments.

In sum: the action taken by this group of working people was based on necessity very close to home. Although at different levels of consciousness, immediate human needs forced them to unite and act. Locally legitimate and touched by the sacred, spiritism became a key tool to deal with the problem. The spiritual contradictions of fatalism and an active unalienated self were always present. So were the social contradictions of accommodation and resistance. But finally, this group of working people achieved a moderate goal and victory. They won a small but important battle. To their national and class consciousness or cultural dynamic,

victory added a new sense -- a sense of possible unity, action, and justice.

As opposed to the alienating aspects of religion that Marx tied to accommodation, here a liberating aspect of religion tipped the scale toward resistance. Religion, in our case spiritism, can also become a tool that challenges, urges, initiates, and perhaps achieves changes within the structure of everyday life.

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