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## NEGRO STEREOTYPED CONCEPTIONS OF THE WHITE LIBERAL<sup>1</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an investigation of Negro conceptions of the white liberal. It is designed (1) to determine empirically the Negro's conception of the white liberal, and (2) to ascertain the relationship existing between these conceptions and certain social factors. Much research on Negro-white relationships in the field of race relations treats white stereotyped conceptions and attitudes of the Negro, but there are some areas of Negro-white interaction where the stereotypes of the subordinate group become important. Especially is this true in the area of inter-racial cooperation with its many facets.

Two presuppositions seem to underlie the study. Firstly, the nature of inter-personal behavior is largely determined by the interpretation of the behavior of others in social contact situations. Secondly, a penetrating understanding of Negro behavior, under subordinate conditions, cannot be completely secured through studies of overt behavior forms and patterns alone. The psycho-social aspects in terms of stereotyped conceptions rank equally as important as the patterns, forms and structures of social behavior. In other words, in order to understand actions and reactions of a minority group, a thorough knowledge of the schemes of representation by means of which the group or certain individual members interpret the meaning of significant symbols and anticipate the kind of response called for is essential. This orientation grows out of the position taken by such social psychologists as George H. Mead, Charles H. Cooley and John Dewey.<sup>2</sup>

*Hypothesis.* Our major hypothesis may be stated as follows. Categorizations of white people according to social groups tend to reveal the manner in which Negroes approach members of the dominant group. Thus, knowledge of Negro stereotyped conceptions of white people furnishes insight into the meaning of the subjective nature of race relations for this minority group. It reveals the kinds of definitions they are making of situations.

*Method and Definition.* The open-ended interviewing technique was the method by which these data were secured. The sample consisted of 341 cases randomly selected from a stratified sample which included the range of Negro socio-economic groups in New Orleans, Louisiana.

<sup>1</sup>This paper is a section of Chapter VI of "Negro Stereotyped Conceptions of White People" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 1949).

<sup>2</sup>George H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934; Charles H. Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, New York: Charles Scribner's, 1902; and John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1922 (Modern Library Edition).

We shall mean by stereotyped conceptions the general "pictures in the head" of persons or groups in inter-racial contact situations. The major features may be as follows: Conceptions may be held by two or more persons or a group of persons; they are rigid and collective in nature; they contain falsifications of social reality, or at least a lack of sufficient knowledge to support the beliefs involved; and they are not necessarily pejorative, but some stereotyped conceptions may be flattering. The approach in this research is operational. The "little pictures in the head" which Negroes hold of white people, as revealed through the research techniques employed, are treated as Negro stereotyped conceptions of white people.

#### NEGRO CONCEPTIONS OF THE WHITE LIBERAL

Because of the role which the southern white liberal plays in race relations, it is important to secure the Negro's conception of the white liberal as a social type. Since the southern liberal is in a minority, he is placed in an extremely uncomfortable position, both in the eyes of the Negro and the white masses. The place of the Negro on the southern scene is part and parcel of most of the important problems facing the South today. In his effort to ameliorate conditions, often the southern liberal finds it expedient to de-emphasize the Negro's relationship to his plans for a better society. The Negro masses may not always understand the position of white liberals in the South; thus, they become quite suspicious of their intentions and will frequently withhold their approval and support until that time when the white liberal has taken a positive public stand either in deeds or in public statements seeking Negro civil rights. In the following four sub-sections, we shall analyze Negro stereotyped conceptions of white liberals.

*Age and conceptions of the white liberal.* Many Negroes expressed the belief that "white liberals have an ulterior motive" (Table 1). Both young and old Negroes showed a greater tendency toward holding this conception than those 25-34 years of age. The proportions of young and old Negroes holding this belief are 23 and 22 per cent, respectively. These are some of the conceptions of white liberals held by Negroes over 35 years of age:

I am of the opinion that the white liberals have an ulterior motive. There are a very few, I believe, who are wholly sincere about the Negro and his problems. (Interview No. 41)

Most white people, when they speak out for Negroes, usually don't have too much to lose and there is something in sight for them to gain. Those who are sympathetic with Negroes for no monetary gain do it for self-satisfaction and they only get this satisfaction when the Negro is completely dependent upon them. When the Negro becomes independent, the liberal white drops him. (Interview No. 186)

The young Negro will more frequently qualify his statements on the sincerity of the white liberal than will the old Negro. Twenty per cent of the young age group and 13 per cent of the old age group said "some white liberals are sincere; others are seeking personal gains." The following are typical remarks from young Negroes concerning the white liberal:

In my opinion some white liberals may be sincere; while others may not be able to gain leadership in their own group and tend to drift to the Negro in trying to seek the lead. (Interview No. 36)

Some are really sincere and others are fire pushers who stir up strife to gain some political end. It is hard to separate the chaff from the wheat. Deeds are better than words. (Interview No. 92)

I think the majority of them are sincere in their aims and purposes but in public change them so much to fit the attitude of the masses that some of the good things are overthrown and the weaker ones start gaining prestige for themselves and forget about the Negro. (Interview No. 95)

It is not unusual for Negroes of all age categories to express their belief in the sincerity of white liberals with reservation.

Forty-nine per cent of the respondents 15-24 years of age and 37 per cent of those 35 years of age and over stated "white liberals are really trying to help—they are sincere." There is a moderately significant variation in responses between these two groups; "P" = .0394. The young Negro shows greater acceptance of white liberals than does the old Negro, yet on several occasions we have seen that they are more critical of whites than is the case with old Negroes.

TABLE 1  
NEGRO STEREOTYPED CONCEPTIONS OF THE WHITE LIBERAL BY AGE

Conceptions	15-24 Yrs.		25-34 Yrs.		35 and over	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
No comment .....	3	2	3	4	5	4
Has an ulterior motive .....	34	23	15	19	26	22
They are really trying to help—sincere .....	71	49	32	42	44	37
No such person .....	2	1	3	4	2	2
Christian and sympathetic ....	1	1	3	4	19	16
They are tricky, false gods ..	1	1	1	1	6	5
Some sincere; others seeking personal gains .....	29	20	17	22	16	13
Other .....	4	3	3	4	1	1
Totals.....	145	100	77	100	119	100

The adult members of our sample 35 years and over stereotyped the white liberal as being "Christian and sympathetic." Sixteen per cent of this age group to only 1 per cent of the age group 15-24 years of age expressed the conception. The difference is extremely significant—"P" = .0002. A 55-year-old woman expressed her conception of white liberals in the following way:

I believe that the white liberal is just a "God-sent man" who helps the Negro out. This man has learned that there is a God and it is through this man that the Negro will continue to progress. (Interview No. 203)

A 45-year-old man informed the interviewer that:

The white liberal is a religious person who wants to help people who have been mistreated. They is for the right thing. (Interview No. 249)

It is not surprising to find that thinking in terms of Christian principles is more prevalent among old than among young Negroes. On the other hand, six persons in the 35 years of age and over age group felt that white liberals are "tricky and false gods." Only one person in the age group 15-24 years gave this statement.

Twenty per cent of the young people and 13 per cent of the old people wished to qualify their conceptions by stating that "some white liberals are sincere and others are seeking personal gains." The responses falling in this category were tabulated separately since there is a desire to make a distinction which does not exist in the first two conceptions of white liberals.

*Color and conceptions of the white liberal.* The stereotype that white liberals have "ulterior motives" received contrasting support when viewed along the color continuum (Table 2). Very light Negroes gave 28 per cent of their responses and very dark Negroes gave 52 per cent of their responses in support of this conception. On the other hand, 47 per cent of the mulattoes and 33 per cent of the dark brown Negroes were willing to give their support. It is clear that a majority of the very dark—52 per cent—, 47 per cent of the mulattoes, and 44 per cent of the light brown Negroes have very little faith in the white liberals.

TABLE 2  
NEGRO STEREOTYPED CONCEPTIONS OF THE WHITE LIBERAL BY COLOR

Conceptions	Very Light		Mulatto		Light Brown		Medium Brown		Dark Brown		Very Dark	
	Num-ber	Per Cent	Num-ber	Per Cent	Num-ber	Per Cent	Num-ber	Per Cent	Num-ber	Per Cent	Num-ber	Per Cent
No comment .....	2	9	....	....	2	2	2	2	4	7	1	6
Has an ulterior motive .....	6	28	17	47	39	44	43	37	20	33	9	52
They are really trying to help—sincere .....	13	59	17	47	42	47	54	47	26	41	3	18
No such person—Christian, sympathetic—God-sent man .....	1	4	1	3	3	3	5	5	7	11	3	18
They are tricky, false gods .....	....	....	....	....	1	1	4	3	....	....	....	....
Seeking publicity .....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	1	2	....	....
Other .....	....	....	1	3	2	2	3	3	2	3	....	....
Totals .....	22	100	36	100	90	100	114	100	62	100	17	100

The majority of very light persons—59 per cent—and only 18 per cent of the dark persons said "white liberals are really trying to help—they are sincere." The difference in percentages is highly significant—"P" = .0064. All of the color groups with the exception of the very dark Negro gave high proportions in support of their belief in the sincerity of white liberals.

*Education and conceptions of the white liberal.* What education can do in regard to Negro conceptions of white liberals is quite evident in Table 3. Twenty-eight per cent of the persons with a grammar school education or less and 7 per cent of those with some graduate education held the stereotype that "white liberals have ulterior motives." The difference is moderately significant; "P" = .0146. Sixty-one per cent of the graduate sample and 30 per cent of the grammar school sample felt that "white liberals are really trying to help—they are sincere."

TABLE 3  
NEGRO STEREOTYPED CONCEPTIONS OF THE WHITE LIBERAL BY EDUCATION

Conceptions	Grammar School		High School		College		Graduate Study	
	Num-ber	Per Cent	Num-ber	Per Cent	Num-ber	Per Cent	Num-ber	Per Cent
No comment .....	4	5	4	4	2	2	1	3
Has an ulterior motive .....	22	28	32	30	12	10	2	7
They are really trying to help—sincere .....	23	30	46	43	64	57	19	61
No such person .....	2	3	2	2	....	....	....	....
Christian and sympathetic—God-sent man .....	11	14	3	3	2	2	1	3
They are tricky, false gods ..	1	1	3	3	....	....	....	....
Some sincere; others seeking personal gains .....	12	15	13	12	31	27	8	26
Other .....	3	4	3	3	2	2	....	....
Totals .....	78	100	106	100	113	100	31	100

The variation here is highly significant according to test; "P" = .002. In view of the many improvements in race relations instigated by white liberals, education shows a significantly positive association with an understanding of the problems encountered by this group of white people. Also, the extent of education is associated with the desire to make a distinction between white liberals by giving the stereotype that "some are sincere and others are seeking personal gains."

*Social classes and conceptions of the white liberal.* There are extremely significant variations in the responses to the question viewed on the basis of social classes (Table 4). Nine per cent of the upper class and 30 per cent of the lower class stated that "white liberals have ulterior motives." This difference would occur by chance only twice in ten thousand times. That "white liberals are really trying to help and are sincere" was stated by 56 per cent of the upper class and 28 per cent of the lower class. Extreme significance must be accorded this variation, this "P" also equalling .0002. Thus, white liberals can expect greater support from the Negro upper class. Yet, a respectable portion of the upper class Negroes—27 per cent—hedges by stating that "some white liberals are sincere and others are seeking personal gains." Here are some representative responses from upper class Negroes who held this stereotyped conception:

Some are sincere. However, most of them seek select political positions or social prominence. Their aims are usually selfish. (Interview No. 42)

Most of them are sincere, but many of them just like to get themselves in the newspaper. (Interview No. 63)

As a result of these data, the writer cannot escape the conclusion that, although educated and upper class Negroes place more confidence in the white liberal, in general Negroes are a little skeptical of white liberals. The comments of one upper class woman add credence to this conclusion. She said:

... You know white people are so deceitful. They'll come to these meetings and pretend to be so sweet and friendly, but on the outside they won't speak to you. That's why I don't trust these liberal white people much. A friend of mine had an experience which proves the point. Last year he was connected with the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. There was a white woman there who took him to several meetings in Baton Rouge in her car. And do you know that when she saw him on Canal Street one day, she pretended not to know him?

That just goes to show you how false they can be. I'd really rather not be friendly with them at all because you never know how they are going to act. One day they will be oh so friendly, and the next day, they will meet you and won't speak.

*Interviewer*—How do you explain this kind of behavior on the part of white liberals?

*Interviewee*—White people fear losing status in their own group by being friendly toward Negroes. Being called a "nigger lover" is the thing that they fear most. (Interview No. 49)

TABLE 4  
NEGRO STEREOTYPED CONCEPTIONS OF THE WHITE LIBERAL BY SOCIAL CLASSES

Conceptions	Upper Class		Middle Class		Lower Class	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
No comment .....	3	3	3	3	2	2
Has an ulterior motive .....	8	9	19	22	32	30
They are sincere—really trying to help .....	53	56	43	47	30	28
No such person .....	....	....	....	....	6	6
Christian and sympathetic— God sent man .....	3	3	2	2	15	13
They are tricky, false gods ...	1	1	1	1	4	4
Some sincere; others seeking personal gains .....	25	27	22	24	13	12
Other .....	1	1	1	1	5	5
Totals .....	94	100	91	100	107	100

However, it must be pointed out that once this skepticism is overcome by action and words publicly uttered, the white liberal receives not only extensive support from the Negro masses, but it may verge on reverence.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the data seem to support the following generalizations:

1. The young Negro shows a greater acceptance of white liberals than does the old Negro.
2. As the Negro approaches the very dark end of the color continuum, he becomes less willing to believe that white liberals are sincere.
3. Education shows a significantly positive association with an understanding of the problems encountered by the white liberal on the southern scene.
4. While upper class Negroes are more favorable in their conceptions of white liberals, in general, Negroes are a little skeptical of the white liberal until they are able to develop confidence in the sincerity of this social type.



