

Anne Wortham. *The Other Side of Racism: A Philosophical Study of Black Race Consciousness*. (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1981) xxi, 353 pp., \$12.50.

The author, “a freelance writer, editor, and broadcast researcher . . . (presently) a doctoral candidate in sociology at Boston College,” proposes to study blacks who advocate black consciousness. Wortham condemns ethnic or racial consciousness, and therefore characterizes “the other side of racism” as “a dilemma of *individual* self-esteem as opposed to problems of group conflict in race relations.” Thus, public policy based on “ethnic polity,” such as that engendered by the civil rights movement is “retributive ‘reverse discrimination’ advocated *in favor* of ethno-racial minorities rather than the oppressive discrimination traditionally engaged in by the majority *against* such groups.” (p. x) (Emphasis in the original) The author believes that “achieving power or redressing grievances on the basis of race or ethnicity is clearly not in accord with the American tradition of giving no formal recognition to ethnic groups as political entities.” (p. xix) Rather, individualism is the key factor and it is the highest form of freedom; hence programs geared to redress groups’ grievances reduce individual freedom.

Wortham is “convinced that most Americans are so inundated with cries of freedom from Negro intellectuals and political leaders that they fail to recognize that, more often than not, these apostles of freedom are among its first violators.” (p. x) The author then constructs five “types” of individuals who possess different degrees of black consciousness and attempts to demonstrate how each violates individual freedom. Apparently, the most serious infraction is being out of tune with the author: “I harbor none of the trappings of race consciousness, neither in my own self-concept nor in my view of others. Thus, I have no reason to despise the fact that I am a Negro; the fact that I am simply is of no primary significance.” (p. xii) Fortunately, she has noted the existence of white racism but black consciousness and black collective action as counter-measures are regarded as individual problems.

One form of qualitative sociology concerns itself with seeking to understand the rules used to find meaning in others’ actions, expressions, and thoughts. This approach enhances the investigator’s ability to identify the processes geared to aid individuals (and groups) in their quest to make sense of the world, to create order where none is inherent. The product of this kind of qualitative investigation is a second-order construct, a framework which prohibits the investigation both from judging an individual’s ethnic consciousness

or choice of social action and from focusing on the inner mental processes of individuals. Wortham, in this book, provides no evidence of being aware of this construct but instead seems to use her own ideological perspective as a basis for attributing motives to actors and making value judgments which denigrate their “ethnic” consciousness and choice of social action.

An examination of “the other side of racism” requires first a clear understanding of the structural imperatives influencing ethnic collective action. The resurgence of ethnicity is one of the most baffling yet intriguing socio-political developments in recent times: baffling because it was assumed that the processes of modernization and development would result in a decrease in ethnic identification; intriguing because it has not happened. Ethnicity remains an important phenomenon in the international system, even in those developed societies characterized by “organic solidarity” e.g., the Quebecois (in Canada), blacks, Native Americans, and Chicanos (United States), the Basques (in Spain), the Bretons (in France), Scots and Welsh (in British Isles), to name only a few.

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