Title: Race Relations & Class Conflict as Factors in South African History in the 20th Century.

by: N G Garson

No. 018
The use in this paper of the terms race and class has proceeded on the assumption that the historian is absolved from the obligation to contribute anything noteworthy about their meanings as concepts. To do that is the province of the sociologist or the economist. No doubt some social scientists would object to a particular historian's method of testing the usefulness of these concepts as techniques of historical explanation. To the historian that is quite acceptable as fair criticism, provided that he is not saddled with the duty of redefining them as concepts. Another difficulty lies in the fact that many historians, including myself, in terms of our temperament and approach, do not find historical explanation involving the use of large categories of this kind very satisfying. We are more interested in the particular, in specific events and in the actions of specific people. At the same time historians must accept that the social scientists are correct to stress the dimension of the impersonal in attempting to explain social change. When the role of impersonal categories in the past is at issue, the historian has a claim to be heard. For if the historian's grasp of the models and concepts of the social sciences is shaky, perhaps as imperfect is the concrete historical knowledge of many social scientists.

The historian's characteristic approach would require him to embark on the basis of a precise definition or a firm theory of race and class. Presumably it can be accepted that race has a scientific basis in genetics, as a means of classifying mankind according to certain physical differences of a hereditary nature. The main controversies about race arise from attempts to explain certain culturally based behaviour patterns in terms of these racial differences, and as a consequence of this to rank races on a superior-inferior scale. The validity of race as a category of explanation does not require the adoption/...
adoption of a particular position in these controversies. Obviously 'racism', in the sense of racial consciousness, is and has been a factor in many societies, and as such it forms a legitimate object of study. Admittedly this does not validate race as a category of explanation. At the same time the potential validity of race as such a category should not simply be rejected a priori. To insist that race must always be explained away in terms of something else is to indulge in 'the counter fallacy of anti-racism' which may be just as wrong-headed as racism itself. It is a contention of this paper that some of the analyses of recent South African history in social terms reflect a tendency to reject out of hand explanations in terms of race, on the mistaken ground that such explanations are themselves instances of the racist fallacy.

As far as class is concerned, the historian's problem lies in the bewildering variety of senses in which the concept is used by social scientists. On the criterion of classifying individuals on the basis of their occupations, it might be possible to delineate social classes in a more or less objective way. Alternatively the criterion might be invoked of class consciousness on the part of the individuals, which would call for evidence of their own subjective assessment of their class affiliation. In both these cases class is used as a more or less permanent attribute applying to a collection of individuals. Newer insights in sociology and social anthropology are evidently leading to quite a different conception of class, not as a grouping of individuals but as a network of social relations that are constantly subject to change. Presumably the classification in social anthropological studies of Africans in dual roles, as townsmen as well as tribemen, is an instance of this tendency. Stimulating as these rival concepts of class/...
class may be, their very variety must create a doubt in the historian's mind as to the claims of analysis in terms of social class to override all other categories of explanation.

The reference to the 20th century in the title of this paper does not mean that the analysis is meant to be applicable to the present situation in South Africa. It is in fact a historical analysis beginning with Union in 1910 and ending for the most part in 1948. It does not seek to enter the controversy as to whether the differences between pre-1948 segregation and post-1948 apartheid are qualitative or not. On the other hand it does assume certain continuities between the present and the recent past, and the prevalence of features fundamental to South African society both then and now. What follows next is an analysis of race relations in South Africa in terms of a power balance between the ruling whites and the subject races. The paper then proceeds to a discussion of class formation and class conflicts in early industrial South Africa, but reaches the conclusion that race has been a more decisive factor. Finally it seeks to assess some recent attempts to reassert the claim that class conflict is, after all, the decisive consideration, and that race relations themselves are properly to be explained in class terms.

The/...
The racial basis of the modern South African state is a truism. There was white supremacy everywhere in South Africa before 1910 but Union formalised and intensified it. Lord Selborne, the British high commissioner at the time, had warned that 'the worst form of government for natives is direct government by a Parliament of white men.' Yet this is what Union entailed. It made possible the exercise by the white electorate, through the institutions of parliamentary democracy, of the right of self-determination. It also meant, in a way that was not fully recognised at the time, the grasp by the white minority of political domination over all other groups in a plural society. If we think of this arrangement as a form of colonial rule, there was nothing very remarkable about it. Nearly all Africa was under colonial rule. The only difference in the South African case was that the ruling whites lived in the same country as their black 'subjects', instead of being based in a metropolitan or colonising country in Europe. It was almost universally assumed that all the colonial powers in Africa, including the Union, were committed to the task of trusteeship. This approach implied a paternalist policy, conceivably in perpetuity, for it was still widely accepted that the wards, the black people who were being ruled, were racially inferior. Even a paternalist policy was meant to show progress of a kind, though not necessarily political advancement. In the South African case the vague ideal was that the ruling white minority should raise the backward African majority in the scale of civilisation. There were no immediate pressures on the whites as to what course they should embark on in fulfilling this obligation.

Since it was the whites who made up the political nation, enjoying the effective power, the tone of South African politics was initially set in terms of issues dividing the white community. There were elements of a revival of the old Anglo-Boer 'racial' conflict but politics was mainly 'a debate among Afrikaners about what to do about the British.' The issues were the familiar ones: 'South Africa first' against imperial interests, language equality, the move towards Dominion autonomy and the demand for a republic. It was in this context that Afrikaner nationalism...
nationalism emerged as the political pacemaker and, after assuming full and long term power in 1948, finally achieved its republican goal in 1961.

The dominance of issues in white politics in the generation after Union was underlined by the impression among politicians that black-white questions were simply less pressing. This is not to imply that issues in white politics operated on an independent plane, without reference to the other set of questions relating to multi-racial South Africa. Many issues in white politics had their plural side. About immigration, for example, the Afrikaner fear and the English hope was that it would one day give the English section an electoral majority. But from a white standpoint immigration could also mean an improvement in the ratio of white to black. Until 1961 it was the Afrikaner fear that prevailed. (3) Issues of race relations were capable of breaking more directly into the preserve of white politics. Frequently the political parties made a straightforward appeal to the racial interests and fears of the white electorate. This first happened in the 1924 general election when the Nationalist-Labour pact exploited the issue of the industrial colour bar. In the 'black Manifesto' election of 1929, when Smuts was accused of endangering white interests by his defence of the Cape franchise for Africans and his suggestion that the Union form part of a British-created black federation to the north, the Nationalists made the racial issue the key one. The exercise was repeated in the apartheid campaign of 1948. On each occasion the device of exploiting racial susceptibilities produced handsome electoral gains.

At other times, instead of outbidding each other, the white parties appeared to be seeking consensus on racial issues. Both the administrative experts in 'Native Affairs' and the politicians preached the wisdom of keeping such matters outside party politics. In part this was a function of the avowed objective of building a united white nation which, strong in its unity, would deal justly and generously with other groups. Nowhere, it seemed, could the need for united action on the part of whites be stressed more/...
more than in the central area of their relations with other races.

It is hard to say whether it was division among the whites or consensus that proved more disadvantageous for the non-whites. Smuts, under attack from both opposition parties for not taking segregation far enough in his Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, surrendered to their insistence that there should be no guaranteed freehold or other security of tenure for Africans in the towns. On the other hand consensus was at a peak, during the fusion government, when the Cape Africans lost their voting rights in 1936.

The fact of white dominance in the Union did not mean political quiescence on the part of non-whites. The most obvious resource open to Africans and Coloureds was provided by the survival of the non-racial Cape franchise after Union. In the Cape the importance of the Coloured and African vote to the two parties in competition for it, as much as the liberal tradition, had served to safeguard the franchise. Under Union a drastic dilution of the strength of non-white voters took place, through the addition of the white voters from the other provinces. Later the legislation of 1930-1931 took the dilution further, through the enfranchisement of white women (thus excluding in the Cape women of other races) and the exemption for white men in the Cape from the need to meet the franchise qualifications. This political weakness of non-white voting power, as well as the inadequacy of the entrenchment given to the Cape franchise, facilitated the abolition first of the African common roll vote in 1936 and twenty years later that of the Coloureds.

It cannot be claimed for the Cape franchise that it was an effective weapon for the non-whites who obtained it. At no time was there co-operation between Coloured and African leaders over the use to which the votes of their followers were to be put. Neither Dr. Abdurahman's African Political Organisation nor the various African voters' associations of the Eastern Cape were able to co-ordinate Coloured and African voting behaviour, even on separate lines. For as long as the non-racial franchise survived/...
survived, both the African and the Coloured vote functioned as mere appendages to the white political parties.

The non-white political associations and pressure groups that emerged in the post-Union period were necessarily extra-parliamentary in their roles. They were weak and divided structures giving expression to African, Coloured and Indian 'voices' rather than political activity in pursuit of attainable ends. Their weakness owed something to general inertia, quiescence and a tendency to accept authority on the part of the communities concerned. Apart from this passive 'collaboration' on the part of the masses, there was more active collaboration by others, such as the officially recognised and salaried chiefs co-operating with white administrators in the reserves. On the other hand the political behaviour of the Africans, as reflected in these movements, showed a contrast to the standard 19th century pattern of tribal resistance against the encroaching and disrupting frontier of colonial rule. Relative also to the rest of Africa at least up to 1945, non-white political activity in South Africa reached a high level of sophistication and articulation. Despite the general failure to mobilise mass movements, there was, among the leaders and to some extent beyond them, a definite stirring of political consciousness. However ineffective they have proved, new forms of resistance to white rule were being tried.

The most significant of the African organisations to emerge soon after Union was the Industrial and Commercial Union. Created in Cape Town in 1919 by Clements Kadalie, from Nyasaland, the I.C.U. quickly spread and soon flourished as something of a mass movement in the eastern Cape. By 1927, following the move of its headquarters to Johannesburg and the emergence of the Natal branch, centred on Durban, under the Zulu, A.C.W. Champion, the I.C.U. claimed to have 100000 members. Then, at the very height of its influence it began to collapse. Internal dissension was evident in the expulsion of the Communists in 1926 and in the rivalry of Kadalie and Champion as leaders. Direct repression by the state also played a part in the downfall of the I.C.U.

Although/...
Although the African National Congress emerged in 1912 (when it was founded as the South African Native National Congress), its role was insignificant until the passive resistance campaign of the 1950's. In the thirties African political activity was at a lower ebb than in the twenties. For a time after 1936 the African nationalist leadership was prepared to give a try to separate representation and the Native Representative Council.

Just as there was no organisation that could claim to give unified expression to African views, so there was no prospect of a united non-white front, except for the congress movement of the 1950's. The Coloureds hoped in vain that Hertzog's promises to them would be kept and that they would be integrated politically with the whites. The Indians kept to the pattern set by Gandhi of calling in the mediating power of the imperial government (and later the United Nations) to achieve special treatment as a distinct community. Apart from the group consciousness of the Coloured and Indian communities, it is arguable that both shared a latent interest with the whites, in that all three were and are minority groups, when considered alongside the Africans.

Whatever the progress read into their efforts, or the value attached to their experience, the non-white organisations clearly failed as movements of protest against white rule. Any advances they made were more than matched by the dynamic power resources of the white state. Black disarmament was virtually complete before 1910, while the coercive agencies built up after Union, the police and defence forces, were kept firmly under white control. Even the undeniably modest goals of the early African nationalists, who as late as 1936 were demanding little more than the extension of the Cape franchise to the rest of the country, were capable of arousing fears and hardening attitudes among whites. This effect became more pronounced with the shift in the 1950's to anti-colonialist aims including majority rule. The result has been the repression of these movements under special legislation and coercive powers.
In the above survey race has been employed as a category for explaining the power relationships within the South African state. Recently a demand has grown up for the application of social class as an alternative technique of analysis. In part this has been an ideological development reflecting the interest of Marxist theorists in producing an explanation in terms of the 'class struggle'. More broadly the interest in class invites, in an open-minded way, greater utilisation of sociological and economic concepts particularly in the study of more recent history. (8)

Certainly the theme of economic change in 20th century South Africa implies spectacular developments in the composition of social classes. Even cursory attention to the twin processes of industrialisation and urbanisation serves to establish this. The first saw the rapid growth of secondary industry, especially in the period after the Second World War, to the point of challenging the primacy of goldmining and agriculture in the economy. The second, bringing to the towns the necessary labour force, had especially decisive effects for both Afrikaners (since most English-speaking South Africans were already urbanised) and Africans, as the following table shows: (9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1946</th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1960</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>51,6</td>
<td>55,8</td>
<td>65,2</td>
<td>74,5</td>
<td>78,4</td>
<td>83,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africans</td>
<td>12,6</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>17,3</td>
<td>23,7</td>
<td>27,2</td>
<td>31,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloureds</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>45,8</td>
<td>53,9</td>
<td>60,9</td>
<td>64,7</td>
<td>68,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>30,9</td>
<td>66,3</td>
<td>71,3</td>
<td>77,5</td>
<td>83,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24,7</td>
<td>25,1</td>
<td>38,4</td>
<td>42,6</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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In so far as this economic growth expanded the 'capitalist' classes it was the whites who were involved. The ranks of the goldmining magnates were joined by the entrepreneurs of commerce and secondary industry. The professional element in the middle class similarly grew. The establishment of Iscor in 1928 marked the emergence of a component of 'state capitalism', also controlled by/...
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban populations as percentages of the total population</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
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<tr>
<td>Africans</td>
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<td>Coloureds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
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</table>

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by whites. Finally the expanding opportunities of the urban market and the subsidies provided by the state encouraged more progressive methods on the part of many farmers, so agriculture as a white enterprise became more 'capitalist' in character.\(^{(10)}\)

The original component of the white working class consisted of the skilled workers, mainly British and Australian born, who made nearly all the early craft unions the preserve of whites. Next were the white mineworkers who sought to monopolise skilled and semi-skilled jobs on the mines in terms of the white labour principle (carried in the Mines and Works Act of 1911) that the relevant 'certificates of competency' should be issued only to whites.\(^{(11)}\) A further element was added by the urban migration of members of the depressed and unskilled white class of the countryside, the *bywoners* on farms owned by other whites. Some of these 'poor whites' who came to the Reef went to work on the mines, where by the time of the Rand Revolt of 1922 Afrikaners formed a majority of the white workers. Others were helped by the enforcement of the 'civilised labour' policy in the late 1920's. In one form this meant that certain jobs on state or utility undertakings, such as the railways, were reserved for them. In another it meant the pronouncement by a board appointed under the Wage Act of a particular occupation as one meriting a 'civilised' wage, in which case the white employer preferred to take on a white worker rather than anyone else.\(^{(12)}\) The economic growth of the late twenties and thirties also contributed to the solution of the 'poor white problem'. Especially in its recent phases this growth has also added to the stratification and complexity of the white working class, but without altering its peculiarly privileged character.

Turning to class formation among the other races, we may begin by noting that economic growth and education have promoted the emergence of a small middle class. Impressionistically one could assert that this process has gone further in the Indian and Coloured communities than among Africans, and that in the case of Africans and Coloureds the business component has been smaller/...
smaller than the professional one. That urbanisation entailed some move towards the emergence of an African middle class is evident in the ownership by some Africans of urban freehold property, although government policy since 1948 has halted this tendency.

On the reserves economic growth this century has entailed a decline in the tribal or communal peasantry which, it is now claimed, had actually improved its condition in the mid-19th century. The main reason for the decline was the growing demand, from mining, secondary industry and public undertakings such as the railways, for migratory labour. On the one hand this meant a dependence of agriculture in the reserves on remittances from migratory workers; on the other the low wages characteristic of such labour may be linked to the supplementary subsistence income drawn from that agriculture. Through soil-erosion, over-stocking and inadequate farming methods, this additional income has almost certainly fallen. The result has been an undermining of the stability of the migratory labour 'system' and the likelihood of increasing poverty in the reserves. The more recent demand, since 1945 especially, of secondary industry for a more stable and efficient work force has added a new and growing dimension to the African working class. These are the permanently urbanised, non-migratory workers living in the townships, a category recently described by Dr. Ellen Hellmann as 'second and third generation townsmen, ethnically inter-married and strangers to the homelands'. (13) Obviously the demand for labour of this kind has had the effect of further undermining the migratory system.

The political importance of these class divisions can readily be illustrated. In the case of the whites, there was a definite class conflict between capital and labour, the mineowners against the mineworkers, which culminated in the Rand Revolt of 1922. This conflict over the colour bar in mine labour was won in the short term by the Chamber of Mines through Smuts's suppression of the Revolt, but ultimately by the mineworkers through the victory of/...
of the Nationalist-Labour Pact in 1924. Apart from the reinstatement of the industrial colour bar through the passage of the Mines and Works Amendment Act in 1926, white labour secured further gains through the inception of the 'civilised labour' policy. The new security and privileges thus given to white labour may have contributed to the decline of the Labour party, whose rise had been linked to its exploitation of the grievances of white workers, skilled and unskilled.

It is possible that class analysis might illuminate aspects of the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism. If we take Afrikaner nationalist antipathy to the mineowners, condemned as 'imperialists' and the embodiment of the 'Hoggenheimer' monster, as directed against big business rather than capitalism as such, then a middle class component is readily identifiable. The cultural nationalists, lawyers, teachers and ministers of religion turned out by Stellenbosch can be seen as an Afrikaner middle class elite, to be joined in the twenties and thirties by the economic protectionists and the nucleus of Afrikaner entrepreneurs in business.

The difficulty lies in over-simplification. Insistence on a class analysis of this kind serves to underplay other factors, such as the survival of personal and regional loyalties. It also ignores the fact that Afrikaner nationalists sought to use the cement of a common language, culture, religion and social life to bind as many Afrikaners together as possible. Class differences could not be accentuated, for nationalism had to embrace wealthy farmers as well as byuoners, business and professional men as well as mineworkers and urban poor whites.

Class considerations can also be taken into account in an estimate of the African political associations. The Zululand branch of the I.C.U. included farm labourers and squatters, but the organisation was essentially a decentralised urban movement embracing African workers of every type except those on the mines. Given the small proportion of Africans who had been permanently urbanised by 1930, and the obvious obstacles to the organisation of/...
of migratory workers, the class basis of the I.C.U. was very precarious. In the case of the A.N.C. the social basis was middle class but the elements were similarly weak: excluding the chiefs, who may be regarded as a more conservative influence, there were teachers, ministers of religion, and rather fewer lawyers and doctors.

The class designation of Africans could operate in another way, that of making them the victims of special disabilities. In terms of the Stallard doctrine, which is often held to express the spirit behind the urban areas legislation affecting Africans, only those 'willing ... to minister to the needs of the white man' were welcome in the towns. Yet in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, which excluded them from the definition of 'employee', these African workers were denied the right to strike or, in effect, to form trade unions of their own.

In most analyses of the South African social system, it is conceded that race rather than class has been the decisive factor. The class allegiance of people has seldom been able to cut across or transcend racial barriers. This can best be shown in the failure particularly of any working class solidarity to develop across the colour line. From the outset, both in their trade unions and in the white labour policy of their party, the white workers defined their class consciousness in racial terms.

A similar line was followed in the thinking of the early South African socialists. Indeed the availability to employers of cheap African labour was regarded as a special local grievance, something over and above the standard grievances against the capitalist system which they held in common with members of the working class in other countries. Added to this was their firm belief, hardly questioned in early 20th century South Africa, that African workers were a breed apart, racial inferiors unworthy to be members of the working class.
The first notable challenge to this outlook came from the small knot of socialists who broke with orthodox labour on the issue of pacifism during the First World War. By the time they founded the South African Communist party in 1921, they had adopted a conception of the proletariat that included all non-white as well as white workers. They believed further that the class interests of white and black workers were fundamentally harmonious, and that the white workers were the only section of the working class capable at that stage of revolutionary action. Hence their support for the striking miners in 1922 and their subscription to the slogan (which one of them, S.P. Bunting, confessed to communists abroad was 'grotesque'): 'Workers of the World, Fight and Unite for a White South Africa.'(19)

In the event the Rand Revolt destroyed such illusions about working class solidarity. As a tribute to the political power they exercised through their votes, which helped bring the Pact to power, the white workers obtained special privileges. In effect they were subsidised into full membership of the ruling white race. Since no race barrier distinguished them from other whites, they enjoyed easy social mobility in the white community as a whole. If, as we have seen, organised labour declined as a political entity (outside the trade unions), this was partly because the party prop was no longer necessary.

As in the case of the working class, so was the small middle-class emerging in each non-white community unable to form part of a larger, non-racial middle class in which the whites would have been dominant. Nor was there one, self-conscious, non-white middle class, but only middle class members of each of the three distinct and internally divided non-white communities. As late as the forties, the chief aspiration of these middle class elements seems to have been to acquire for themselves some title to enter 'civilised' (white) society at certain levels. The characteristic reply was given by Smuts in his Rhodes Memorial Lecture in 1929: 'the proper place of the educated minority of the natives is with the rest of their people, of whom they are the natural leaders, and from whom they should not in any way be disassociated.'(20) In the twenties and thirties there emerged the joint council movement/...
movement, in which in several centres white liberals co-operated with educated Africans in defence of the Cape franchise, and also in the hope of curbing communist and other extremist influence on Africans. This might be seen as an attempt to build bridges on middle class supports, but if so, it was too small scale and cautious a venture to have much effect on the basic imbalance between race and class. (21)

Recently there has been some attempt to discard explanations of the South African situation in terms of racial domination as 'traditional', and to assert that after all the key is to be found in class conflict. (22) In some measure this tendency reflects the aim of demonstrating anew the relevance of Marxist categories of explanation, particularly the class struggle. In its simplified form the argument posits a rough identity between race and class. In industrialised South Africa the majority of Africans (including farm labourers and migratory workers), Indians and Coloureds are seen as having become members of the working class. This in turn is regarded as being made up almost exclusively of non-whites. In view of their privileged position, the white workers are included in the single white ruling class. This again includes all the other elements: 'capitalists' of every description (captains of mining, industry and commerce), farmers and landowners, the enterprises of 'state capitalism' and finally, the proponents of Afrikaner nationalism.

The South African state since Union is viewed as having served as an instrument of class rule, proffering subsidies to farmers and favours to industrialists while dispensing to the working class (including originally white as well as black workers) disabilities and ultimately repression. In terms of this sort of reasoning, racial ideology is regarded as part of the capitalist system itself, at least at a certain historical stage. It may be noted in passing that this view links up with those predictive analyses that attack the notion that economic growth is capable of undermining apartheid. Instead the contrary assertion is made that 'capitalism' thrives on apartheid. (23)
Clearly the line of argument outlined above is of little value as a technique of historical explanation. The identity suggested between class and race is simplistic, tautologous and question-begging: in the end one is thrown back on race anyway. Similarly the view of race as characteristic of a certain stage of capitalism rests on mere assertion and fails to take the task of explanation any further. A more sophisticated argument (that of the sociologist Adam) suggests that 'racialism is an expression of specific interests', in the sense that it must have a socio-economic base. It is obviously wise to be alert to the possibility of such a connection, but the implication must be resisted that it will always be found, or that where it is found it tells the whole story. Racialism can often be shown to have roots in a historical situation that has itself disappeared, as in the case of a slave-owning society, or to incorporate an irrational component as demonstrated by social psychologists.

As every schoolboy knows, from having to analyse French society on the eve of the Revolution, class is a familiar category in historical enquiry. The same is true of race. Awareness of the importance of race need not involve the historian in lengthy debate about its validity as a scientific concept or about the nature and limits of racial differences. But he must concern himself with the manifestations of race consciousness in the past, whether in the policies and practices of governments, or in the actions and attitudes of men, either as individuals or as typifying certain groups. In the case of recent South African history, valuable insights may be drawn from a consideration of both class and racial aspects. But the attempts to explain the racial aspects in terms of class are not convincing. The affinities of class operating across the colour line seem too weak. We always return to race as the determinant of the character of our society.

There has not been a great deal of work done by historians in the area suggested by the title of this paper. The problems have been discussed chiefly in the works of sociologists and economists. It is certain that no single conceptual scheme derived from these disciplines could do justice to the complexities of the historical process.

I / ...
I conclude with an example to illustrate these complexities. The historian would naturally be suspicious of any attempt to explain the course of conflict and division within the white community in terms of the other dimension, that of relations between black and white. In other words, he would question any assertion that the conflict between Afrikaner nationalists pursuing the republican goal and the defenders of the British connection had only a symbolic importance; the advocacy of two ideal systems for the pursuit of white interests and the desired exploitation of black. In fact the conflict between Afrikaner nationalism and its white opponents, having independent origins and an intrinsic importance, has been superimposed on a quite different set of issues — those arising from the challenge of the plural society.

As a result there has grown up the myth of the priorities, which argues that no solution to black-white questions was possible before the whites had resolved the fundamental differences among themselves. The priorities were mistaken and did not work out in practice because the nettle of race relations had anyway to be grasped at once. It has been in a context of continuing white division that the fumbling responses of the ruling race to this challenge have been made. We should not think of 'a debate among the whites about what to do about the blacks' as having replaced an earlier 'debate among Afrikaners about what to do about the British'. The two debates have been going on side by side all the time and this is also true of the period since 1948.
NOTES

17. For example, Adam, Modernizing Racial Domination, op. cit., p. 19; Van den Berghe, P.L., South Africa, a Study in Conflict (Middletown, 1965), pp. 266-7.


