THE CONCEPT "JIM CROW"

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In any field of endeavor terminology is a necessary tool and the development of concepts is basic to the functioning and workability of that field. The social sciences have been rich in this regard, to such an extent that the development of concepts has on occasion led to confusion and hindered rather than helped in the clarification of problems. However, in this accumulation of terminology, particularly in sociology, a term of importance is sometimes overlooked and this apparently has been the case in regard to the concept "Jim Crow." Even a brief examination of the term reveals that by all standards for the acceptance of a term as a sociological concept, "Jim Crow" rightfully belongs as a permanent part of the language of the discipline.

Although the writer has been interested for some time in the sociological implications of "Jim Crow" and its concomitants, discrimination and segregation, particularly with reference to Negroes, recently legal proceedings in the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of New York impressed upon him not only the widespread use of this term but the sociological unawareness of it and the consequent need for "official" sociological recognition of the phrase. In a case involving the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company as defendants, the Railroad moved that the court strike from the plaintiff's amended complaint the phrase "Jim Crow," stating that the term was "scandalous, impertinent, and/or immaterial." The plaintiff, however, contended that the term was used in context properly and correctly and was a common and accepted part of standard American English, with a meaning generally understood and carrying a significant societal connotation, particularly associated with the separation of Negroes and whites within the framework of society in this country.1

While there is no absolute criterion as to the range of operation of sociology, sociologists are in basic agreement that this field relates particularly to the forms and activities of the associational life of mankind. Its concepts, therefore, are those which have emerged in the course of analyzing those associational forms and activities. The word or term may be, and frequently is, used in some other field. As Sapir says, "The birth of a new concept is invariably foreshadowed by a more or less strained or extended use of old linguistic material."2 Even a brief examination of the term "Jim Crow" indicates that it unquestionably relates to the associational life of human beings, and that its extension into the popular vocabulary is based upon old linguistic material.

The earliest public use of "Jim Crow" appears to have been in 1832, when a song and dance by that name, which apparently originated in Cincinnati, was introduced to New York.3 In 1841, the term was first used in Massachusetts to apply to a railroad car set apart for the use of Negroes. The phrase, then, has a somewhat more dignified origin than is ordinarily attributed to it by those who have considered it only as an opprobrious comparison of the color of the Negro with that of the crow.4

The term itself has become so inseparably affixed to the laws separating the races in public places that at least two states, North Carolina and Maryland, are known to have indexed the laws on that subject under "J" in some of their annual compilations of statutes.5 The Century Dictionary6 contains several definitions of "Jim Crow," and Krapp, in A Comprehensive Guide to Good English,7 points out that this phrase has been so frequently used that it is accepted as a part of standard American English and has been for many years.

Eubanks contends that the question, however, is not whether the concept is used elsewhere, but whether as used in sociology it signifies "an idea that is distinctive and essential to itself." Many a term used in popular parlance, when sociologically defined, has a meaning all its own, and which it

did not have until sociology gave it a unique content.

A review of the use made of the concept “Jim Crow” reveals that it has become so much a part of the social pattern of America that its ideational expression unconsciously connotes a distinctive situation. Thus, although this commonness of understanding makes it societary, the essential distinctiveness of applying it over a long period almost exclusively to social situations involving the Negro as a subordinate entity and whites as a superordinate factor, has given it a connotation, when used in the context of the American language, of a specific sociological circumstance or condition.

Sociologically, “Jim Crow” is a concept intelligently interpreted in connection with the concept “accommodation.” It refers specifically to a human group in the United States functioning on a basis of inequality in the social system which has resulted in social stratification and segregation. It infers that in the stratified societal pattern of the United States a caste-like group exists (in this instance the Negro) which has been assigned to a low position and for which the contacts with the group on a higher level are regulated; the term “Jim Crow” is thus used succinctly to describe this situation to which the Negro has become accommodated.

In substantiation of the above, one has but to consult the literature of sociology and other disciplines to assess the validity of and to recognize the specific meaning and general acceptance of the concept “Jim Crow.” It is found widely used in the works on ethnic research in sociology, especially those concerning race relations and pertaining to the segregation of Negroes or to the discrimination practiced against them in various aspects of society; e.g. the studies of Dollard, R. A. Warner, Fairchild, Powdemaker, DuBois, Drake and Cayton, Rose, and Cox. 9 In the series of studies


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Concerning Negro youth prepared for the American Youth Commission of the American Council on Education, reference is made freely to “Jim Crow.” Gunnar Myrdal, in his epic on the Negro problem in the United States, employs the term, and it is used in the series of studies on the Negro sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation and done under the direction of Dr. Myrdal, as well as in the symposium volume of Negro thought and opinion published by the University of North Carolina Press and edited by Rayford W. Logan. 13 It was used by Robert E. Park, and it is found in introductory textbooks in sociology. 16

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philosophy. As early as 1837 it is found in a biographical volume entitled Jim Crow, and more recently in an autobiography of W. E. B. DuBois. It is to be found in books, in the writings of foreign authors, in popularized versions of studies on race relations, and in official reports of the United States Army.

Many of the nation's newspapers, both general and specific, recognizing the accepted meaning and widespread usage of the term "Jim Crow" to describe the prescriptive social practices under which the Negro exists in the social milieu of the United States, have consistently used it in text material and in headlining articles; and this includes even the august New York Times. Publications other than newspapers, such as professional journals, popular magazines, liberal magazines, and organs devoted to intercultural relations make use of the term. One writer was so aware of the general understanding of the phrase that he used it as the title of one of his works.

The field of law has incorporated the concept in its writings; and legal scholars, writing on various phases of civil rights especially, employ the term "Jim Crow," as Konvitz, Mangum, Carr, Ming, and Stephenson demonstrate. Several legal digests refer to the concept, particularly as it applies to railroad cars set aside specifically for the

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26 Memorandum, November 10, 1943, Secretary of the Army. Report by Brigadier General B. O. Davis to the War Department on condition of Negro soldiers in U. S. camps.


29 *Common Ground*, Phylon.


use of Negro Americans.\textsuperscript{35} The term has most recently received national importance through its inclusion in the report of President Truman’s committee on civil rights.\textsuperscript{36}

Even this brief examination demonstrates that wherever the term is used it commonly applies to the social position of the Negro in American society. “Jim Crow” as used in a sociological context thus indicates for a specific social group the Negro’s awareness of his badge of inequality which he learns through the operation of a “Jim Crow” concept in his every day living. This pattern of existence has become so much a part of the nation’s social structure that it has become synonymous with the words “segregation” and “discrimination,” and at times when “Jim Crow” is indexed some authors have indexed it as a cross reference for these terms.\textsuperscript{37}

Considering the importance attached to ethnic research, which has been well illustrated and documented in a recent issue of the \textit{Review},\textsuperscript{38} it would seem to be sociologically significant and highly worth while that a precise interpretation and evaluation be made of the concept “Jim Crow.” The increasing significance of this general descriptive term, in the light of sociological analysis of ethnic groups, and of the Negro in particular, in connection with its use, undoubtedly calls for its inclusion in the permanent terminology of the discipline. Even from what has been set down here its worth as a conceptual tool in clarifying ethnical constructs applying to the Negro is evident.

Long ago “Jim Crow” should have been given recognition and a place as a concept in sociology pertaining to ethnic group relations, along with such other terms as class, caste, marginal man, cultural island, Negro, white, and the like. It is to be hoped that this brief examination will stimulate further research towards securing additional experiential evidence with which to validify the acceptance of the term “Jim Crow” as a concept in sociology.


\section*{DISTANCE AND DIRECTION AS VECTORS OF INTERNAL MIGRATION, 1935 TO 1940}

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Ravenstein put it down as one of his fundamental Laws of Migration that “the great body of our migrants only proceed a short distance.”\textsuperscript{1} Many studies indicate that, in general, this is a true hypothesis. It is frequently taken as a corollary of this hypothesis that the number of migrants decreases with the distance of migration. This, however, is a separate hypothesis and one that does not follow from the first. The hypothesis that the majority of migrants move only a short distance was true in the United States from 1935 to 1940. During this period 59 per cent of the migrants did not cross state lines, and 79 percent ended in their original state or in a contiguous state.\textsuperscript{2} It does not follow from this, however, that the number of migrants continues to decrease with increasing distance of migration.

If the number of migrants decreased with increasing distance of movement, the pattern of migration from any small area would resemble the random migration of mosquitoes on a level plain from a single point of infestation. The number of


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{2} Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940. Population, Internal Migration, 1935 to 1940. Color and Sex of Migrants, Table III, p. 4.}