NORMAN L. FRIEDMAN

University of Southern California

Cultural Deprivation: A Commentary in the Sociology of Knowledge

"Culturally deprived" children and "cultural deprivation" are terms that have been extensively used and heard in recent years. Perhaps enough time has now passed to warrant an examination of and reflection upon the idea of cultural deprivation in the tradition of the sociology of knowledge—looking into its nature, social and cultural context, development, impact, and interest group support and opposition.[1] The years from about 1955 through early 1967 will be surveyed, with emphasis upon the 1960's.[2]

Development

In 1955, the presidential address at the School Psychology division of the annual meetings of the American Psychological Association dealt with "Cultural Deprivation and Child Development." The president, a psychologist with the Bureau of Educational Research of the Board of Education of New York City, attempted to discuss those aspects of the anthropological and sociological literature about cultural and social class differences that would be of greatest relevance to school psychologists. References were made to "deprived homes," "deprived areas," and the "emotional deprivation" of some children. Describing an experimental study of a group of lower-class New York City school children, she reported that an attitude syndrome of "cultural deprivation," based upon environmental limitations and handicaps, could be identified: low self conceptions, guilt and shame feelings, distrust, and family problems. Such experiences adversely affected a child's motivation and functioning in school and even impaired school adjustment before entry. The address was subsequently published in *High Points,* the journal of the New York City Board of Education.[3]

---

[1]Louis Wirth's "Preface" to Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949), pp. xxix-xxx.

[2]For a brief summary of the major facets of the pre-1955 literature dealing with the education of lower-class children, see Howard S. Becker, "Education and the Lower-Class Child," in *Modern Sociology* by A. W. Gouldner and H. P. Gouldner (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), pp. 244-250.

[3]Judith L. Krugman, "Cultural Deprivation and Child Development," *High Points* 38 (November, 1956), pp. 5-20.

The notions of "cultural deprivation" and "culturally deprived" children and youth caught on, particularly within the mammoth New York City school system. By 1958, another psychologist with the Board's Bureau of Educational Research, in an article which contrasted homes of "cultural deprivation" with "culturally privileged" homes, could use these terms as a matter of course, in an almost self-evident fashion.[4]

New York City became a pioneer in experimental efforts to improve the education of so-called culturally deprived learners through the Demonstration Guidance Project and Higher Horizons Program, 1956-1962. The orientations toward "compensatory" practices designed to alleviate cultural deprivation — special guidance, "cultural enrichment," smaller classes, additional services — became models for similar improvement projects subsequently launched in other cities and states.

While experimental and demonstration projects increased, a cumulative body of literature about cultural deprivation developed. It emphasized the cognitive and linguistic problems of the children, and indicated that deprivation deficits caused them to fall more and more behind as they proceeded through school. A new classification of "cultural deprivation" was added to *The Education Index,* beginning with 21 entries in volume 13, July 1961-June 1963;[5] by volume 15, July 1964-June 1965, the number had grown to 122 entries.[6]

The following is a fairly typical illustration of the widespread portrait of the culturally deprived child that had emerged by the first third of the 1960's:

> . . . he is essentially the child who has been isolated from those rich experiences that should be his. This isolation may be brought about by poverty, by meagerness of intellectual resources in his home and surroundings, by the incapacity, illiteracy, or indifference of his elders or of the entire community. He may have come to school without ever having had his mother sing him the traditional lullabies, and with no knowledge of nursery rhymes, fairy stories, or the folklore of his country. He may have taken few trips—perhaps his only one the cramped, uncomfortable trip from the lonely shack on the tenant farm to the teeming, filthy slum dwelling—and he probably knows nothing of poetry, music, painting, or even indoor plumbing.[7]

Meanwhile, an important new twist was added to thought and experimentation about cultural deprivation in the 1960's: the pre-school emphasis. Psychologists postulated that the "critical" pre-school years, especially ages 3 and 4, were the most effective and strategic stage of life to admin-

---

[4]J. W. Wrightstone, "Discovering and Stimulating Culturally Deprived Talented Youth," *Teachers College Record* 60 (October, 1958), pp. 23-27.

[5]M. A. Seng, editor, *The Education Index* (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1963), Volume 13, p. 233.

[6]M. A. Seng, editor, *The Education Index* (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company), 1965, Volume 15, pp. 165-167.

[7]Charlotte K. Brooks, "Some Approaches to Teaching English as a Second Language," in *The Disadvantaged Learner,* edited by S. W. Webster (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 516-517.

ister a diet of compensatory "planned enrichment."[8] This would function as a counteractive "antidote" for the "experiential inadequacies" of cultural deprivation, and afford lower-class children some familiarity with pre-school experiences and objects common in the lives of middle-class children:

> . . . cultural deprivation may be seen as a failure to provide an opportunity for infants and young children to have the experiences required for adequate development of those semi-autonomous central processes demanded for acquiring skill in the use of linguistic and mathematical symbols and for the analysis of casual relationships. The difference between the culturally deprived and the culturally privileged is, for children, analogous to the difference between cage-reared and pet-reared rats and dogs.[9]

Pre-school programs designed to teach about objects, concepts, shapes, colors, and animals, such as Baltimore's Early School Admissions Project (begun in 1963), followed.

By 1964, the cultural deprivation concept had become recognized by many as an important addition to educational knowledge; "gross and undifferentiated . . ., however, . . . the concept points in a very promising direction."[10] In a broad way it offered a theoretical explanation for the fact that the lower-class student tended to perform inadequately in schools, a description of this type of child's environmental circumstances and personal style, and an initial prescription for pre-and regular school remedies. A group of prominent scholars, mainly psychologists and educationists, met that year at the University of Chicago for a Research Conference on Education and Cultural Deprivation. The published results of the conference, *Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation,*[11] set forth a consensus position on the nature, causes, characteristics of, and remedial measures designed for culturally deprived students. By 1964, then, the cultural deprivation idea had decidedly emerged as a theoretical concept fashioned by numerous psychological and educational researchers. But it was also potentially something more: a popular image.

Public Response

In the growing public concern in the 1950's and 1960's for the education of lower-class children, three books (or at least their titles), stimulated and influenced the popular imagination: the novel (and film) *The Blackboard Jungle*[12] in the 1950's, Conant's *Slums and Suburbs*[13] in the early 1960's,

---

[8]Martin Deutsch, "Facilitating Development in the Pre-School Child: Social and Psychological Perspectives," *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 10 (April, 1964), p. 256.

[9]J. McVicker Hunt, "The Psychological Basis for Using Pre-School Enrichment as an Antidote for Cultural Deprivation," *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 10 (July, 1964), p. 236.

[10]*Ibid.*, p. 236.

[11]Benjamin S. Bloom, Allison Davis and Robert Hess, *Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), 1965.

[12]Evan Hunter, *The Blackboard Jungle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954).

[13]James B. Conant, *Slums and Suburbs: A Commentary on Schools in Metropolitan Areas* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961).

and (probably third in impact) psychologist Frank Riessman's *The Culturally Deprived Child,*[14] published in 1962.

As to its societal impact, *The Culturally Deprived Child* was probably less important for its specific contents than for its title, which reinforced and broadened the use of the term. After some initial reservations, *culturally deprived* was employed throughout the book, "because it is the term in current usage."[15] This no doubt added greatly to the wide popularization of the concept and image. The book became one of those few volumes that is written for a smaller, specialized audience but for one reason or another attracts the interest and attention of a much wider audience of intelligent laymen. In this regard, *The Culturally Deprived Child* was selected as one of the "notable books of 1962" by the American Library Association.

Popular interest in culturally deprived children was stimulated after 1963 by the federal government's "war on poverty" and the increased drive of the civil rights movement. Education became viewed by many as a major means of improving the plight of poor people and minority groups. In the Kennedy-Johnson era of the 1960's, the poverty program's Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 sought to aid the education of the poor through the pre-school Operation Head Start program, Project Upward Bound, and the Job Corps. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 authorized over $1 billion expressly to strengthen elementary and secondary school programs for culturally deprived students. The winds of policy making and implementation had obviously picked up the cultural deprivation theme.

What seems to have happened was that the idea of culturally deprived children was successful as a trigger for legislative action because it possessed an extensive and flexible image appeal to a broad spectrum of persons and publics of various ideological persuasions. To the social and political liberals of the Kennedy-Johnson era, cultural deprivation as explanatory theory and popular image seemed to be a valid and reasonable interpretation of the scholastic retardation of lower-class children in slum schools, and pre- and regular school compensatory programs presented hopeful possible solutions for this condition. A dynamic educational program also seemed to liberals to be an important way to advance the progress of minority groups.

Even to political and social conservatives, nationally supported educational programs held out the hope of "straightening out" and "keeping straight" lower class children, of helping to make and keep them good, respectable, solid citizens, and of preventing the "social dynamite" in the slums from exploding or re-exploding. Such an orientation was not new in American history. Education has frequently served as America's

---

[14]Frank Riessman, *The Culturally Deprived Child* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

[15]*Ibid.*, p. 3.

major and most popular instrument of social reform and as a presumed cure-all for social and political ills. In the 19th century, support from conservatives for the establishment of universal public education was sought on the grounds that an educated citizenry would not run wild or foment revolutions, but would be taught to maintain and preserve the status quo.[16] Christopher Jencks has suggested that the War on Poverty in the 1960's has also been basically conservative in this same sense that it primarily aims not only to make over the poor by educating them, but also by changing their "wrong" skills, places of residence, personality traits, and fertility patterns, and to provide "character building" in the lower-middle-class virtues:[17] " . . . this approach has met with enthusiastic support from those middle-class Americans who feel that if 'they' were just more like 'us,' everything would be all right."[18]

An example of the above tendencies was the official response to the riots by Los Angeles Negroes in the summer of 1965. The subsequent report on the riots by the governor's moderate/conservative McCone Commission turned to cultural deprivation theory and image as its major explanation for the lower achievement of students in "disadvantaged areas" and proposed extensive pre-school education as an antidote:

> Children in disadvantaged areas are often deprived in their pre-school years of the necessary foundations for learning. They have not had the full range of experiences so necessary to the development of language in the pre-school years, and hence they are poorly prepared to learn when they enter school. Their behavior, their vocabulary, their verbal abilities, their experience with ideas, their view of adults, of society, of books, of learning, of schools, and of teachers are such as to have a negative impact on their school experience. Thus, the disadvantaged child enters school with a serious educational handicap, and because he gets a poor start in school, he drops further behind as he continues through the grades. His course toward academic failure is already set before he enters school, it is rooted in his earliest childhood experiences. The Commission concludes that this is the basic reason for low achievement in the disadvantaged areas.[19]

Opposing Views

In recent years, several writers have expressed opposition to the cultural deprivation idea. It has been criticized on the grounds of being conceptually inaccurate and theoretically inadequate, of being an incor-

---

[16]These views are convincingly developed in Rush Welter, *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962); also see chapter 3 of Merle Curti, *The Social Ideas of American Educators* (Patterson, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams and Company, 1959).

[17]Christopher Jencks, "Johnson vs. Poverty," *New Republic* 150 (March 28, 1964), pp. 15-18.

[18]Christopher Jencks, "The Moynihan Report," *The New York Review of Books* 5 (October 14, 1965), p. 39. By 1967, the least criticized program in the War on Poverty was the pre-school Operation Head Start, probably because even the most rigid and financially-cautious conservative was reluctant to violate the "American Spirit of Fair Play" by depriving cute little four-year old tots of a little better chance in life.

[19]Report by the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, *Violence in the City — An End or a Beginning?* (Los Angeles: College Book Store, 1965), pp. 57-58.

rect explanation of massive scholastic retardation, of being an obstacle to active civil rights progress, and of being a device to force a questionable middle-class culture on lower-class students.

Riessman early pointed out that *culturally* deprived was an inappropriate usage, since lower-class children do possess a culture of their own, however different from middle-class culture.[20] Obviously many who originally used the designation must have conceived of "culture" in the popular sense of "high culture," rather than in the broader anthropological sense. This is seen in the frequent use made of the educationist's concept of "cultural enrichment" as a response to those who allegedly are deprived of (high) clulture.

Bernard Mackler and M. G. Giddings, researchers with New York City's Center for Urban Education, observed that the cultural deprivation idea is theoretically inadequate, because it assumes that a certain kind of deprivation leads to a certain universal reaction, without explaining away the variety of different reactions and adaptations: "an adequate theory of deprivation must eventually explain why certain pupils succeed and others do not, given the same social background."[21]

As discussed previously, the cultural deprivation idea has been the most widely used and accepted explanation for the comparative scholastic retardation (as measured in I.Q. and achievement tests) of slum school students. Such explanations, like that quoted earlier from the McCone Commission Report, have stressed the devastating impact of community and neighborhood environmental conditions upon the slum child. Kenneth B. Clark, former head of Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, contended to the contrary that there is no overwhelming evidence that cultural deprivation is the major reason for this retardation. He reported that studies in Harlem showed that the attitude of teachers toward their students emerged as the crucial explanatory factor:

> The evidence . . . seems to indicate that a child who is expected by the school to learn does so; the child of whom little is expected produces little. Stimulation and teaching based upon positive expectation seem to play an even more important role in a child's performance in school than does the community environment from which he comes.[22]

Clark also asserted that the *culturally deprived* label too often is used as an "alibi" to cover up the educational ineffectiveness of teachers and schools.[23]

The cultural deprivation idea has also been criticized as an obstacle to active civil rights progress, in that it has helped to promote a negative stereotype of Negroes and has conservatively directed attention away

---

[20]Riessman, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[21]Bernard Mackler and M. G. Giddings, "Cultural Deprivation: A Study in Mythology," *Teachers College Record* 66 (April, 1965), p. 610.

[22]Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 132.

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 131.

from the more basic problem of *de facto* segregation. Mackler and Giddings suggested that the term persists because it implies that Negroes have an inferior and deprived culture and thereby pepetuates the "myth" that Negro and lower-class children are of inherent, inferior ability in comparison with middle-class children.[24]

Cultural deprivation has therefore been accused of being a notion that focuses all attention upon the alleged failings of minority members, rather than the shortcomings and cruelties of the dominant society.[25] A psychologist presented this argument quite emphatically:

> The new ideology, accepted now even by some liberals would make it seem that unemployment, poor education and slum conditions result from family breakdown, *"cultural deprivation,"* and lack of *"acculturation"* of Southern rural migrants.
>
> To sustain this ideology, it is necessary to engage in the popular new sport of Savage Discovery and, to fit the theory, savages are being discovered in great profusion in the Northern ghetto. The all-time favorite "Savage" is the promiscuous mother who produces a litter of illegitimate brats in order to profit from AFDC. Other triumphs of savage discovery are *the child who cannot read because, it is said, his parents never talk to him,* and the "untenantable" Negro family (apparently a neologism for "unbearable") that is reputed to throw garbage out the window.
>
> . . . we are told the Negro's condition is due to his "pathology," his values, the way he lives, the kind of family life he leads . . . It is all rather painful as well as fallacious. For the fact is that *the Negro child learns less not because his mother doesn't subscribe to The Reader's Digest and doesn't give him colored crayons for his third birthday, but because he is miseducated in segregated slum schools.* . . . The Negro is more often unemployed because he is last hired and first fired . . . the condition of housing is more easily explained by the neglect of slum landlords, and the crowding caused by the criminal shortage of decent low-income housing.[26] (author's italics)

By the same token, it has been argued that cultural deprivation, with its emphasis on change in individual life-styles, detracts from the need for large-scale structural changes in education, such as an end to *de facto* segregation. The McCone Commission Report has been critized for ignoring the problem of *de facto* segregation, while highlighting cultural depri-

---

[24]Mackler and Giddings, *op. cit.*, p. 611.

[25]An indignant Puerto Rican, probably equating "culture" with "civilization," has asked just whose civilization is more deprived: "Is a culture that has for four centuries been able to maintain the individual dignity, value and worth of all its members (despite differences in race and class) a deprived or disadvantaged culture when compared with one that has been striving to achieve these values and has as yet not been able to do so?" Quoted in Patricia Cayo Sexton, *Spanish Harlem* (New York: Harper and Row), 1965, p. 61.

[26]William Ryan, "Savage Discovery: The Moynihan Report," *Nation* 201 (November 22, 1965), p. 383. This article was written in reaction to a controversial government report on the Negro family written by Daniel P. Moynihan. For further exchanges in the Moynihan/Ryan controversy, see Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, "Black Families and the White House," *Trans-action* 3 (July/August, 1966), pp. 6-11, 48-53; replies by William Ryan and Daniel P. Moynihan in *Trans-action* 4 (January/February, 1967), pp. 62-63; and Daniel P. Moynihan, "The President and the Negro: The Moment Lost," *Commentary* 43 (February, 1967), pp. 31-45.

vation and pre-school enrichment, and thus playing up Negro cultural backgrounds rather than the educational inequalities and imbalances maintained by the white power groups.[27]

A final source of opposition to the cultural deprivation idea, perhaps still more potential than actual, is the view that programs designed to upgrade and "enrich" the lives of culturally deprived students are unfortunate in the sense that they attempt to impose the sickness, inadequacy, inhumanity, and hyprocrisy of the dominant middle-class society upon lower-class youngsters. A full-blown view along these lines still awaits elaboration, possibly in conjunction with some more specific future application of the New Left's critique of contemporary American society to the educational problems of lower-class children. One glimpse of the possible shape of things to come in this respect, however, is in the writings of educational sociologist Edgar Friedenberg. He has generally taken the position that public education all too successfully moulds American youth into the stultification, evil, and absurdity of the dominant middle-class adult culture. Thus lower-class dropouts, who are genuinely sincere and loyal human beings, are driven out because of "moral revulsion from the middle-class life of the school."[28]

School Practitioners

What about the influence upon and reactions of school practitioners, especially the teachers who deal daily with so-called culturally deprived students? As a result of transmission of knowledge from researchers to practitioner, the *NEA Journal,* publication of the National Education Association and received by all its members, carried its first article with the term "culturally deprived child" specifically in the title in April, 1961.[29] It was written by a New York City school administrator. The April 1963 issue of the *NEA Journal* devoted 15 pages and 7 articles to discussions of approaches to and programs for culturally deprived students. Riessman's *The Culturally Deprived Child* was written ". . . to provide teachers . . with a picture of the deprived individual, including his psychology and culture, that will enable them to work with this individual in a fruitful, non-patronizing manner."[30] Other writings[31] have subse-

---

[27]Robert Blauner, "Whitewash over Watts," *Trans-Action* 3 (March/April, 1966), p. 5; Bayard Rustin, "The Watts 'Manifesto' and the McCone Report," *Commentary* 41 (March, 1966), pp. 33-34. For an exchange between Rustin and an author of the education section of the McCone Commission report, see Commentary 42 (August, 1966), pp. 6-14.

[28]Edgar Z. Friedenberg, "An Ideology of School Withdrawal," in *The School Dropout,* edited by Daniel Schreiber (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1964), p. 36.

[29]Morris Krugman, "The Culturally Deprived Child in School," *NEA Journal* 50 (April, 1961), pp. 23-24.

[30]Riessman, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

[31]L. D. Crow, W. I. Murray and H. H. Smythe, *Educating the Culturally Disadvantaged Child.* (New York: David McKay Company, 1966), J. L. Frost and G. R. Hawkes, editors, *The Disadvantaged Child: Issues and Innovations* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966); S. W. Webster, editor, *The Disadvantaged Learner* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1966).

quently also intended to inform, aid, and advise practitioners concerning strategies by which they can more effectively "reach" and communicate with lower-class students.[32] Moreover, numerous large city school systems, in addition to participating in experimental programs, have sponsored special faculty sessions or formal communications concerning urban educational problems and cultural deprivation. Some schools of education have recently initiated special courses about culturally deprived learners.

The kind and extent of influence that such writings and activities have had on teachers is not precisely known. One survey found that 294 elementary school teachers in a California city "agreed a good deal more than they disagreed" with Riessman's observations in *The Culturally Deprived Child,* but the procedures employed prevented much real depth-of-insight into the matter.[33] In the absence of more precise information, the writer will offer some speculative suggestions, based upon personal experiences as an interviewer of public school teachers in social research and as an instructor of pre-service and in-service school teachers.

His first personal contact with the cultural deprivation idea came in early 1963. At that time, he was interviewing teachers in a central city public junior college located in a border state metropolitan area. Alarmed at the growing number of Negro students in their college since the desegregation decision in 1954, and the increase in remedial English sections and students on probation, a number of teachers, without being asked, stressed to the interviewer that many of their students, particularly the Negros, were, as they put it, "culturally deprived." The idea of cultural deprivation, which had been formally diffused throughout that larger public school system during the 1962-63 academic year, seemed to many of these junior college teachers to be a satisfactory and logical conceptualization that explained what they felt was lacking in their troublesome low achievement, lower-class students.

The writer has had subsequent experiences at a California university, transmitting some of the cultural deprivation literature to education students through readings and the classroom. It seems that many of the in-service teachers with some experience in slum schools have seriously questioned and often rejected what they have read, particularly when it seemed to contradict their own experiences, to "over-romanticize" culturally deprived students, or to be highly critical of the effectiveness of slum school teachers.

---

[32]Edgar Z. Friedenberg has commented that he views such writings as "offensive" because they are designed to aid in a more expert manipulation and exploitation of student clientele, based upon assumptions and goals that are questionable at best. See his *Coming of Age in America: Growth and Acquiescence* (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. 195-196.

[33]Patrick J. Groff, "Culturally Deprived Children: Opinions of Teachers on the Views of Riessman," *Exceptional Children,* 31 (October 1964), pp. 61-65.

One student, for example, reacting in a written critique to Riessman's emphasis upon the "positive strengths" of the culturally deprived child's extended family life and sense of humor,[34] responded (according to Riessman) that:

> There is more equalitarianism, informality, warm humor and security found in the extended family. . . . it is in this area that I question his theory. For several years I worked in Harlem, New York and was not aware of these strengths which Riessman speaks of. It is true that in most of the cases the families were large and had an assortment of relatives living in the apartment. However, rather than noticing a strong feeling of cooperation and security it seemed to me that there was very little of this and the individuals went their separate ways, without too much concern for the other members of the family. If the social worker wanted to do something for the child, that was O.K. but nobody seemed to care too much and there seemed to be a general feeling of apathy. I do not doubt that there was informality in the family but the warm humor and friendly give and take which Riessman stresses were not qualities that I noticed.

In similar vein, in a published article a New York City high school teacher wrote that: " . . . the college professor who reads . . . Riessman's *The Culturally Deprived Child* is mistaken if he thinks he can tell us why our schools have failed."[35] The teacher then argued that the environmental problems of students are so enormous that they make even the most devoted and energetic teacher's effectiveness low in the face of bad discipline, poor reading, and sordid self-images:

> As a teacher in a ghetto school, it is not surprising that I have dared voice the foregoing opinions. I feel, in fact, that I am saying things that many teachers believe though few find it expedient to say.[36]

The above illustrations have been used to formulate the following speculative suggestions: teachers have tended to find cultural deprivation a suitable explanation and conceptualization for what they feel is either troubling or lacking in their lower-class students; by the same token, they are somewhat skeptical of those aspects of the cultural deprivation literature that view such students in a more favorable and positive light or that indicate that the primary responsibility for the ineffectiveness of slum school education rests upon the shoulders of teachers.

Concluding Observations

The cultural deprivation idea began to be developed in the mid-1950's by various psychologists and educators, particularly in the New York City area. Most of the researchers and scholars centrally involved in both the development of and opposition to the idea have been psychologists (school, educational, developmental, and social). As an explanatory theory, it was largely psychological in its (a) emphasis upon the technical problems of learning; (b) use of such terms as "deprivation," "cage-

---

[34]Riessman, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-48.

[35]Allan C. Ornstein, "Effective Schools for Disadvantaged Children," *Journal of Secondary Education* 40 (March, 1965), p. 105.

[36]*Ibid.*, p. 108.

reared and pet-reared rats and dogs," "cognitive deficit;" (c) great stress upon the life-long importance of experiences during the first four years of life; (d) sometimes amateurish and erroneous misuse of sociological and anthropological concepts as they were grafted on to psychological assumptions and pre-conceptions in education. (Of course at the time the idea originated, the New York City school system employed more than one hundred psychologists but no sociologists).[37] Consequently, when a sociologist has been called in to participate in interdisciplinary research on the "sociological aspects" of cultural deprivation, he often has found the central core of the topic so permeated with psychological suppositions that his own efforts have of necessity been at the periphery of the problem as defined.

The pattern of knowledge diffusion in this case was that of origination and early growth in New York City and a later fanning out to other parts of the country. Is this typical? Does this reflect the concentration of a larger quantity and higher quality of intellectual resources in New York City, or perhaps an inevitably earlier response to the greater intensity and pathology of problems associated with lower-class students in New York City, or some other factor?

School practitioners who deal with culturally deprived students have probably tended to agree with the idea as an explanation of their students' scholastic retardation, but have resented assertions that the ineffectiveness of slum school practitioners is largely responsible for this lack of achievement.

The idea, particularly as a popular image, eventually attracted widespread public interest and support in connection with the issues of poverty and civil rights. It turned out to be one of those rare societally important ideas that, for various reasons, possessed an image appeal to a broad spectrum of persons and publics of various ideological persuasions—conservative, moderate, and liberal. Bennett Berger has described a similar occurence in regard to the idea of "suburbia" in the 1950's:

> . . . the myth of suburbia conveniently suited the ideological purposes of several influential groups . . . Realtor-Chamber-of-Commerce interests and the range of opinion represented by the Luce magazines could use the myth of suburbia to affirm the American Way of Life; city planners, architects, urban design people and so on could use the myth of suburbia to warn that those agglomerations of standardized, vulgarized, mass-produced cheerfulness which masqueraded as homes would be the slums of tomorrow. Liberal and left-wing culture-critics could (and did) use the myth of suburbia to launch an attack on complacency, conformity, and mass culture . . . the *descriptive* accuracy of the myth of suburbia went largely unchallenged because it suited the *prescriptive* desires of such a wide variety of opinion . . .[38]

Cultural deprivation was a popular image that was able to rally the support of varied interests in order to produce needed legislation and ex-

---

[37]Orville G. Brim, Jr., *Sociology and the Field of Education* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1958), pp. 77-78.

[38]Bennett M. Berger, "Suburbia and the American Dream," *The Public Interest* 1 (Winter, 1966), pp. 82-83.

perimental programs. Whether in the long run its alleged detrimental effect as a negative stereotype will outweigh its utility as an image that seems able to bring about worthwhile programs of action, remains to be seen. And "culturally disadvantaged," a similar label that appears to be displacing "culturally deprived" in academic (though not yet in popular) usage in 1967, and that is almost as technically inaccurate and descriptively derogatory, may or may not prove as successful as an action-producing popular image.

Along with recent criticisms on the grounds of theoretical inadequacy, explanatory inaccuracy, and negative stereotyping, the idea has been opposed as one based upon a piecemeal, patchwork, conservative-oriented approach to change. The bulk of writing and action in regard to cultural deprivation (and "cultural disadvantage," as well) does seem to have rested upon the following "self-evident" underlying assumptions: (a) our formal educational system, particularly in its success with middle-class students, and in its practices since Sputnik, is essentially sound; (b) the educational improvement of culturally deprived children in the large cities is a worthwhile effort that can succeed even within the existing situation of *de facto* segregation; and (c) much progress can come about by giving head starts and special attention to individual children and categories of children, so that they will be helped to overcome some of the adverse conditions of their daily lives. In a society that might have been occupied and concerned during the past several years, on the other hand, with a serious questioning of the direction of contemporary life and the related aims of education, with a frontal attack on *de facto* segregation, and with large-scale, far reaching change in the economic and social conditions of minorities and the poor (rather than in their individual behavior),[39] cultural deprivation would probably not have developed into the focal idea of recent educational thought.

---

[39]In the latter half of 1966, two events occurred which may affect future trends relating to these matters. A large-scale survey for the federal government, the "Coleman Report," empirically pointed not only to factors of family background and teacher characteristics, but especially to the social class mix of classroom peers as a critically important variable related to academic achievement. See James S. Coleman, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966). From a sociology of knowledge perspective, it will be interesting to observe the possible future impact of the Coleman report on official, academic, and popular thought and policy-making. The second event in late 1966 was the election of governors and United States congressmen, the results of which seemed to reflect a public desire for at least some temporary slow-down in the pace of domestic social change.