Center for Research on Women

Class Perceptions in the Black Community

Lynn Weber Cannon
The University of Memphis

Reeve Vanneman
The University of Maryland, College Park
November, 1985

Research Paper 1

CLASS PERCEPTIONS IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

Lynn Weber Cannon
Department of Sociology
Center for Research on Women
Memphis State University
Memphis, TN 38152

Reeve Vanneman
Department of Sociology
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742

*An earlier version of this paper was prepared for presentation at the annual meeting of The Society for the Study of Social Problems, August 23-26, 1984, San Antonio, Texas. The authors appreciate the comments of Elizabeth Higginbotham.
CLASS PERCEPTIONS IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

ABSTRACT

This research investigates perceptions of class among Black Americans. Many scholars of Black life have suggested that the "middle class" should be defined differently in the Black community because it is perceived differently. Specifically, some suggest that the middle class is more broadly defined among Blacks (e.g., skilled manual laborers are sometimes considered middle class by Blacks even though they may be labelled working class by whites). Others argue that merely holding middle class values or engaging in middle class behaviors constitute class criteria in the Black community. This research employs a sample of over 1700 Black male and female respondents to 15 national CSS and SRC surveys since 1968 to explore the relationship between objective class and status factors and Blacks' perceptions of their positions in the class structure. A direct comparison of three objective class divisions and status factors such as occupational prestige, income, and education reveals that Blacks' class self-placements are based on their positions in the objective class structure. Status considerations may be important in other domains of Black life but they do not blur Blacks' images of class boundaries. Further, the division between mental and manual labor reflected in the professional-managerial class vs. working class dichotomy most closely reflects the class division perceived by Black men and women.
CLASS PERCEPTIONS IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

For most of the century, Black people have been oppressed into the lowest rungs of the social structure and segregated from the dominant culture. The caste-like nature of the racial barrier has frequently allowed white social science to ignore variations in social class, lifestyle, life chances, and social differentiations of any sort within the Black community. Even as the formal legal barriers between races began to erode with the Civil Rights Movement, social science research on Blacks in the 1950s and 1960s most often either ignored class differentiations or focused on lower class Blacks often generalizing their conditions to the entire population (Billingsley, 1968; Rainwater and Yancey, 1967). Furthermore, research on class perceptions has tended to exclude Blacks altogether or to identify differences whose theoretical significance gets lost in a broader study of whites' perceptions. Not surprisingly, the empirical results and theoretical generalizations about the relationship between the experience of racial oppression and perceptions of the class structure have frequently been inconsistent and contradictory.

The purpose of this paper is to address some of the gaps in our understanding of how class is perceived by Black Americans. Specifically, it seeks to identify the factors which differentiate between those Blacks who identify as "middle class" and those who identify as "working class" when presented with a dichotomous class choice. Several different operationalizations of objective class divisions as well as variables reflecting one's relative ranking in
status hierarchies such as income, occupational prestige, and education will be examined for their impact on Blacks' class identifications.

WHO IS MIDDLE CLASS?

Since the 1930's and 40's students of Black life have explored class in the Black community—from its structural sources to its social, economic, and psychological implications (Dollard, 1937; Frazier, 1939; Cox, 1948; and Drake and Cayton, 1945). Recently, there has been much research and popular attention placed on the Black middle class (e.g., Collins, 1983; Wilson, 1979; Willie, 1979). That work generally acknowledges the growth of the Black middle class since World War II (Wilson, 1979; Collins, 1983) even as a debate escalates over who is Black and middle class and what it means to be Black and middle class (e.g., Collins, 1983; Wilson, 1979; Higginbotham, 1981; Newby, 1981; Hare, 1973). Throughout this literature, there seems to be agreement on at least one issue: being Black and middle class is different from being white and middle class. For our purposes—to explore the subjective class identifications of Blacks—two important themes in this literature are especially relevant and are discussed below.

Middle Class as "Middle Mass". One thread in the literature is that the Black middle class is commonly defined very broadly. Specifically, Wilson (1979), like others before him (Frazier, 1957; Hare, 1983; and Billingsley, 1968) has employed a definition of the Black middle class which encompasses all white collar workers as well as skilled blue collar workers. It derives from
the Weberian notion that classes reflect shared economic "life chances" largely determined by market relations. According to Wilson's view of the Black community, life chances most sharply diverge between the white collar and skilled worker middle class and the semi-skilled and unskilled working class.

This inclusive "middle mass" view of the Black middle class is put forth at a time when even the more restrictive blue collar-white collar dichotomy (also frequently employed as an operationalization of Weber's notion of class) is generally dismissed as too broadly defined to represent the middle class among whites. Instead, the prominent images of the class structure in the literature today tend to have much more limited visions of what are middle class positions in the current social structure. For example, one popular view of the class structure is reflected in the work of Braverman (1974), Poulantazas (1975) and Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich (1979). This theoretical perspective emphasizes as class criteria the role of the work in the total reproduction of the capitalist class system. In this conception, the "middle class" is referred to as the "professional-managerial class" (i.e., PMC) or as "mental laborers" and consists of "... salaried mental workers whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations" (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1979: 12).

The professional-managerial class-working class division distinguishes those who design work for others (e.g., engineers are a classic example) from those who carry out those designs; and those whose role is to promote the ideology which supports capitalism (e.g.,
teachers, social workers) from their subordinates (e.g., students, clients). The division is represented roughly by a line separating the occupational categories of professionals, managers, and administrators from clerical, sales, technical and all blue collar workers. It is argued that this division represents opposing classes (i.e., conflict groups, Dahrendorf, 1959) in the social relations of production and not merely different status groups in the social hierarchy. Relations between the professional-managerial class and the working class are seen as objectively antagonistic and:

Real-life contacts between the two classes express directly, if sometimes benignly, the relation of control which is at the heart of the PMC—working class relation: teacher and student (or parent), manager and workers, social worker and client, etc. The subjective dimension of these contacts is a complex mixture of hostility and deference on the part of working-class people, contempt and paternalism on the part of the PMC (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1979:17).

Figure 1 highlights the key differences between Wilson's "middle mass" view of the Black class structure; a traditional Weberian "blue-collar white collar" dichotomy; and Braverman's "professional-managerial class-working class" dichotomy. With minor exceptions, these occupational groupings represent traditional operationalizations of the three different views of the class structure. It is apparent that Wilson's view of the Black middle class is the most inclusive, whereas the two versions of the class structure which have not focused specifically on the Black community view the middle class as a much more restricted group. One of the
purposes of this paper is to identify which—if any—of these visions of the middle class most closely corresponds to the ways that Blacks identify themselves when presented with the "middle" and "working" class alternatives.

---Figure 1 About Here---

Middle Class as "Respected Community Members". A second prominent theme in the post World War II scholarship on class in the Black community suggests that Black people see themselves and others as middle class based on criteria that are relatively independent of the material realities of their lives. That is, their view of the middle class is not viewed as dependent on objective position in the class structure or the prestige hierarchy of the society at large. Instead, class is primarily seen as a nonmaterial, ideological phenomenon. In the Black community, to see oneself, and to be seen by others, as middle class requires that one display middle class behaviors such as: maintaining stable family relationships, being active in community and church affairs, and spending money and dressing in particular ways (Frazier, 1957; Billingsley, 1968). In addition to displaying middle class behaviors, individuals must maintain middle class values like a concern with "front" and "respectability", a drive to "get ahead", and must place a high value on education as a mobility channel (Billingsley, 1968; Drake and Cayton, 1962).

According to this view, a retail sales clerk who values education highly, works hard, is a stable community member, and attends church might be viewed as middle class in the Black community. Her middle class position would be recognized despite her low
educational attainment, the low value placed on her work (with its related low earnings and prestige) by the wider (white) society, and despite the lack of authority, power, or control vested in her position. In this view, the Black middle class is substantially within the grasp of most individuals separate from their relationship to the system of production. Class is viewed as a function of attitudes, behaviors, and one's personal character, and is independent of power in the wider society or the character of one's work.

Views such as this focus attention on the alternate visions of the social system which are developed by superexploited groups. They illustrate how Black people validate themselves and their people in the face of racist assaults on their cultures. This is accomplished by setting internal community standards for evaluating one's worth. For example, recent research (Higginbotham, 1985) identifies two values explicitly taught in many Black homes: "there is no such thing as a lowly occupation" and "do the best you can, whatever you do". Such teachings clearly imply that a person should not be judged by the type of work he or she does (something over which one has little control in a racist society), but rather the quality of his or her performance in the role (something over which one has more control). In short, one's worth in the society should not be determined by one's place in the restricted occupational spheres to which Blacks are relegated in a racist society.

The presence of a different value system for judging self-worth and esteem does not necessarily mean that the material conditions of life are ignored when Blacks evaluate their position in the class structure. To return to the earlier example, the retail sales clerk
who attends church, strives to get ahead, works hard, and behaves appropriately, may have earned a level of respect and esteem in the Black community which would be unattainable for a similarly situated white woman. But the essential question here is whether the same criteria which seem to play a major role in the assignment of respect or esteem also determine perceptions of position in the objective class structure. If so, we would not expect that position in the objective class structure would predict Black's class identifications because middle class identification in the Black community would rest on internal community values and behaviors which are separate from one's class position in the broader society.

Middle Class as "Income Group": Class Identification Research. A long tradition of survey research on class identification began with the work of Richard Centers in 1949 (See Kluegel and Smith, 1981 for a review of the literature). Unfortunately that tradition has not given much attention to Blacks' perceptions of class. For the most part differences in class thinking resulting from racial oppression were neither expected nor explored. The few notable exceptions were studies by Hodge and Treiman (1968), Jackman and Jackman (1973, 1983), Evers (1976), and Shulman, et al. (1983), but unfortunately their conclusions are inconsistent. Evers (1976), and Shulman et al. (1983) reported that Blacks are more likely to identify as working class than whites of equivalent social position while Hodge and Treiman (1968) find no such difference.

Several of the studies (Jackman and Jackman, 1973, 1983; Evers, 1976) report that only income, but not education, occupational prestige, nor the blue collar–white collar dichotomy affect the class
self-placements of Black people. However, these studies did not directly examine the relationship between objective class position and class self-placement. Rather they focused on status factors as determinants of class identifications. In that regard, they are similar to some of the previous research on stratification in the Black community (e.g., Frazier, 1957; Willie, 1976). They provide some evidence of status consciousness (e.g., a concern with "front") but leave us without any understanding of class perceptions in the Black community.

This research proposes to examine several empirical questions regarding images of the class structure in the Black community. First, it addresses the question of whether material conditions impact on the class self-placements of Blacks (and by implication the argument that it is middle class values and beliefs which make one middle class in the Black community). Does occupying a professional-managerial position increase the likelihood of middle class identification among Blacks? Second, it addresses the question of status vs. class images of the class structure in the Black community by comparing the relative impact of objective class position with status hierarchies (especially income but also education and occupational prestige) on identification with the middle class. If classes representing opposing conflict groups are reflected in class images then objectively defined class categories should have a greater impact on class identification than income or other status factors. Lastly, it compares three popular conceptualizations of objective class to identify which, if any, most closely reflects the way class is perceived in the Black community. They are: the professional-
managerial class (also called mental-manual dichotomy), the blue collar-white collar dichotomy, and the "middle mass" dichotomy which includes skilled workers and white collar workers in the middle class.

RESEARCH METHOD

The data employed in this study were gathered by the University of Michigan Survey Research Center (SRC) in six pre- and post-election studies (from 1968-1978) and by the National Opinion Research Center in nine General Social Surveys from 1972-1980. Sample sizes differed across years, although the populations from which they were drawn were empirically almost constant and theoretically equivalent. To eliminate these extraneous differences in sample sizes, each year was weighted to the harmonic mean of the yearly sample sizes (Winer, 1971).

All analyses were confined to Black respondents who fell into one of the following three samples: employed men, employed women, and married women. The samples are not mutually exclusive since some employed women are also married women. The total sample size is 1,985 which after weighting yields an effective N of 1,748.4. Table 1 contains sample sizes for each of the subsamples.

Class and Status Measures. There has been a long tradition of this type of research beginning in 1949 with the research of Richard Centers who analyzed Americans responses to a Fortune magazine survey about class. Since that time, the primary strategy for studying class perceptions has been to examine answers to class questions that are contained in national surveys of the population. Most commonly, people are asked to choose an appropriate class category from among
several choices and the meaning of class is then inferred from the common patterns of selection. For example, the Centers (1949) class identification question was worded in the following way:

If you were asked to use one of these four names for your social class, which one would you say you belonged in: the middle class, lower class, working class, or upper class?

The General Social Surveys use this question. For purposes of this analysis, the middle and upper class responses were coded as middle class and the working and lower class responses were coded as working class. A separate analysis, not reported here, indicates that conclusions are not altered by collapsing these categories. The Survey Research Center Surveys provide only the middle and working class alternatives to respondents.

The family income variable was first recoded to the actual dollar value of the midpoint of the yearly survey categories, and the open-ended categories were assigned dollar values obtained from the Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980). Because the set of surveys spanned several years of high inflation, the income data were converted to real 1980 dollars ($1,000 units) by adjusting for the relevant consumer price index. The logarithms of these values were used in all analyses rather than the actual dollar values because it was assumed that income effects are likely to be proportional (e.g., the impact of an increase from $10,000 to $20,000 would be equivalent to the impact of doubling $20,000 to $40,000, not to the same $10,000 increase from $20,000 to $30,000).

Respondent's education was coded as the number of years of education. Measures of class and occupational prestige were obtained
from occupational data. Employed women were coded according to their own occupational characteristics while wives (whether employed or not) were assigned their husband's occupational characteristics. Occupational prestige was coded according to the rankings by Siegel (1971).

The professional-managerial class was operationalized according to Braverman's (1974) definition by separating professionals, managers, and officials (coded 1) from clerical and sales workers, service workers, technicians, craftsmen, operatives, and laborers (coded 0).

**Probit Analysis.** While multiple regression is commonly used, the difficulties involved in the use of a linear least-squares procedure with a dummy dependent variable such as middle-class identification are well recognized (Goldberger, 1964). More appropriate for the statistical analyses required here is a normal ogive model which fits the data to an s-shaped curve rather than a straight line (Finney, 1971; Hanushek and Jackson, 1977). In this way, increments at the lower and upper extremes of the independent variable do not predict as much change in the likelihood an individual will identify as middle-class as increments in the middle range of the variable. For example, probit analysis allows an increment from 0 to 6 years of education to produce a smaller increase in predicted likelihood of middle-class identification than an increase from 10 to 16 years (i.e., where the shift from high school to college occurs).

Unlike ordinary least squares, the probit coefficient does not directly represent an estimate of the amount of change in the dependent variable that results from a unit increase in the
independent variable. Rather, with probit analysis, the coefficient is an estimate of the amount of change on the cumulative standard normal distribution that would result from a change in one unit in the independent variable, with the other variables held constant (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). In the analyses which follow, when the percentage middle-class identification is reported, that percentage was obtained by evaluating the relevant coefficient (i.e., probit or constant) on the cumulative normal distribution at means of the control variables.

RESULTS

Professional-Managerial Class Division. The data indicate that the division between the professional-managerial class (mental labor) and the working class (manual labor) appears to represent a meaningful class distinction in the minds of Black Americans. Middle class self-placements are reported by 21.8% of the men, 23.9% of the wives, and 19.3% of the working women (See Table 1). Further, managers and workers differ greatly in their middle-class self-placements. Choosing the middle-class label among men, were 53% of the managers and only 18% of the workers; among working women 39% of the managers and 16% of the workers identified as middle class. The middle-class label was chosen by 46% of managers' wives and by only 21% of workers' wives. For Black men, wives and working women, these are differences of 36%, 26% and 24% respectively, in the middle-class self-placements of managers and workers.

--Table 1 about here--

These gross differences do not represent conclusive evidence that middle class identification is determined by one's position in an
objective class structure. Instead, the gaps could merely reflect the higher income, education, and prestige associated with mental labor. Table 2 displays the data after adjustments for these confounded status factors. Even in the one case where status is most important—for wives—all three status variables account for only one half of the total gap in middle-class self-placements between managers and workers reducing that difference from 26% to 13%. Among men, the 36% difference in middle class identifications between managers and workers remains a 25% gap even after controlling for income, education, and occupational prestige. For working women, 11 of the 24 percentage point difference between managers and workers in middle-class self-placements is due to status differences between the classes, while 13 percentage points of the mental-manual gap in middle-class self-placements reflect class perceptions.

---Table 2 about here---

The effect of mental labor on Blacks' choice of the middle-class label is twice as large for men as for Black women—either wives or working women. This finding is consistent with other research on white women: class divisions are not as sharply defined and perceived by women or by workers in female-dominated occupations (Vanneman and Cannon, 1982). Of course, the sex-segregated nature of occupations is even more pronounced for Black women. Racial oppression has historically placed them in a classic double bind situation. On the one hand, racist institutions devalued and exploited Black men's labor so that the survival of Black families—the woman's domain—would depend on Black women's employment outside
the home. Thus, during the first half of the twentieth century, labor force participation rates among Black women ranged from 37 to 50 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973). However, Black women were pushed into the same racially restricted labor market, so that paid employment options were limited to the least desirable, dirtiest of "women's jobs." Until 1960, approximately 60% of employed Black women worked in private household work (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1973). More recently, Black women have continued to enter jobs formerly held by white women just as those jobs are becoming proletarianized, routinized, deskillced, and devalued, as is the case with clerical work (Higginbotham, 1983; Braverman, 1974).

Despite the way that race and gender oppression have produced a uniquely restricted set of work and family options for Black women, these data indicate that the managerial class division appears to represent a distinction which meaningfully reflects how these women, as well as Black men, view themselves in the class system.

Perhaps equally as striking as the apparent strength of the mental/manual division is the undeniable weakness of the status factors for predicting Blacks' class self-placements. Neither education, income, nor occupational prestige affects the class identifications of men or wives. Among working women, only additional education produces more middle class self-placements (See Table 3).

--Table 3 about here--

As noted above, the literature on class identification typically ignored Blacks, but three studies (Jackman and Jackman, 1973, 1983; Evers, 1976) concluded that income alone has a significant impact on
Blacks' perceptions of class. However, those studies did not adequately control objective class position. In sum, it is the categorical division between mental and manual labor which more clearly reflects Blacks' images of their place in the class system. Additional increments in income, education or prestige: factors which may be important in the interpersonal realm (e.g., for self-esteem, respectability, etc.) do not significantly alter Black perceptions of their position in the broader social class system.

Other Class Divisions: Collar-Color, Middle Mass. While the managerial class division is an important class distinction among Blacks it may not be the only—or even the most meaningful—class system perceived by them. Below we will examine two alternative conceptions of class which have been preferred by some Black scholars such as Frazier (1957), Willie (1976), and Wilson (1979).

—Table 4 about here—

Table 4 summarizes results of the tests of the middle mass and manual-nonmanual class divisions. The "middle mass" division suggests that the critical class boundaries are those separating skilled manual laborers from unskilled and semi-skilled workers.

The data are presented so that we can evaluate the middle mass and "collar-color" divisions, and a close approximation to the "managerial" class division in the same model. This is done by identifying the increment in the percentage of middle class identifiers from semiskilled and unskilled workers to three other occupational groupings: (1) skilled workers (i.e., the "middle mass" dichotomy); (2) lower white collar, clerical and sales workers (i.e.,
the manual–nonmanual dichotomy); and (3) managers and professionals
(i.e., the professional–managerial dichotomy).

The "middle mass" class model is not supported by these data. There is no significant difference in the middle class identifications of skilled craftsmen and semi and unskilled workers. What differences do exist are attributable to the somewhat higher incomes and educational levels of skilled workers—and not to class factors such as greater control or power. The lifestyle and social rank differences between skilled workers and other blue collar workers that have been noted by Black scholars (e.g., Frazier, 1957; Hare, 1973; Billingsley, 1968) may affect one's esteem in the Black community but they are not interpreted as class boundaries.

The next occupational grouping—clerical and sales work—is also one which means little in the way of class identification. Other than the greater middle class self-placements produced by the higher education, income, and prestige of the work, clerical and sales workers are no more likely to identify as middle class than unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Among Black men, most of these clerical workers are postal clerks, file clerks, mail carriers and the like. However, one might expect this division to produce the greatest increment in middle class identification for the working women since the nature of race and gender segregation has meant that even today, a negligible number of Black women have been able to secure skilled craftsmen positions (Westcott, 1982). So clerical and sales work is the first sizeable group of Black women above such low status manual laborer positions as domestic and service workers, farm workers, clothing pressers and ironers and other operatives. But even for Black women, clerical work
does not appear to increase middle-class identifications beyond those of manual laborers. Black women clerical and sales workers clearly see themselves as working class and more closely aligned with domestic workers' standing than with the professionals and managers for whom they work.

For many areas of life—for example, occupational health and safety—being in a clerical or sales position rather than a manual laborer may mean facing different risks, stresses, opportunities, and challenges. But when Black women assess their standing in the class structure, the jobs are still created and controlled by others; people are still supervised; and power is still vested in the "bosses." Slightly higher incomes may mean more control over other aspects of one's life but it does not place those women in a position to fully shape their lives.

These data clearly reinforce other findings that the critical class division perceived is that between professionals, manager, administrators and workers. Even when we compare male clerical workers and managers with similar levels of education, income and prestige, managers are 26.4% more likely to identify as middle class (See Table 4). The differences are not as great for women, but 15.8% more working women and 9.8% more managerial wives identify as middle class than clerical workers at the same status levels. In short, the mental-manual dichotomy is by far the most meaningful dimension in determining who is seen as middle class in the Black community.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Some recent scholarship on the Black community has highlighted the growing importance of class as a significant factor differentiating the experiences and defining the problems of Black men and women (e.g., Wilson, 1979). This emphasis has even extended into the political realm to such organizations as the NAACP and the Urban League, which have broadened their focus to include institutionalized racism and other structural inequities. Today, primary foci among these groups are class and economic issues like low-income housing, single-parent families, health care, and jobs for the poor and working classes regardless of color.

Despite this recent thrust, we still know very little about the way that class is perceived in the Black Community. The small volume of previous research on the topic produced conflicting pictures of the phenomenon. Some conceptions of the Black middle class (e.g., Frazier, 1957; Wilson, 1979) held that it encompasses skilled workers and all white collar workers (i.e., "middle mass" models); some held that it includes only white collar workers (i.e., "collar-color" models). Still others emphasized status, respect, prestige, and esteem as critical evaluative dimensions in the Black community (e.g., Frazier, 1957; Billingsley, 1968; Drake and Cayton, 1962). They suggested that merely holding middle class values (e.g., valuing education) or engaging in certain public behaviors (e.g., attending cultural events) is what makes a person "middle class" (Drake and Cayton, 1962).
The data presented here do not support these more liberal definitions of the middle class in the Black community. Instead, they indicate that objective class divisions are indeed perceived in the Black community, and that it is the mental–manual dichotomy which best distinguishes those who see themselves as middle class from the remaining working class. While professional–managerial class position is key to the perception of middle class standing among Blacks, status rankings appear relatively unimportant to Blacks' class self-placements. A dichotomous class "them vs. us" or "mental vs. manual" division more closely reflects Blacks perceptions of the class system than a hierarchical ladder of prestige with many steps. Though "front", "respectability", and other status concerns may hold importance in some domains of Black life, status rankings do not blur Blacks' class perceptions. Thus, previous research which concluded that class is not perceived by Blacks (e.g., Jackman and Jackman, 1973, 1983; Evers, 1976) may have been strategically biased by omitting the mental–manual dichotomy as a measure of class.

This research highlights the importance of integrating race, gender, and class into our analyses of a wide range of behaviors and attitudes. When we do so, it becomes readily apparent that these dimensions of social inequality are integrally intertwined and that an analysis which ignores any one of them will leave us with a distorted view of social reality.
FOOTNOTES

1. It should be noted that this distinction between designing work and carrying out others' designs has received support in the popular culture images of the working class. One song on the popular album by Dolly Parton "9 to 5" is entitled "Sing for the Common Man" and was written by Freida Parton (Dolly's sister) and Mark Andersen. It is a song in praise of the "common man", the "working man", and contains the following lines:

   You know the working man
   He builds what others plan
   So everyone of us should sing his story


2. Eric Olin Wright (1982) puts forth another prominent Marxist view of the class structure that is consistent in most respects with that of Braverman. He identifies managers and supervisors as occupying a contradictory class location between the traditional bourgeoisie and proletariat. They occupy a class location in which they simultaneously dominate workers and are dominated by capital. Put simply, this class does not own the means of production but controls the labor of others through supervisory authority. Like Braverman's scheme, the proletariat in this view tends to include many white collar clerical and most blue collar workers. Due to variations in the data sources employed in this research it was not possible to develop a consistent operationalization of Wright's scheme for all
cases. Thus, Braverman's scheme was employed and comparison of the relative merits of Wright's and Braverman's schemes in the Black community was not possible in these data.

3. The primary difference between these broad occupational categories and the operationalization of the class categories involves the case of foremen who are blue collar (and thus working class) according to the Weberian dichotomy. Due to their role in managing and controlling the activities of workers, however, Braverman classifies foremen as in the professional-managerial class (i.e., the "middle class").

4. Contradictory conclusions about Blacks are understandable in light of the methodological limitations of those studies vis-a-vis the Black population. Both the Hodge and Treiman (1968) and Jackman and Jackman (1973) studies included only a small Black sample, were restricted to a single time period (i.e., 1964), and lacked conceptual clarity in distinguishing between social class and prestige. Evers (1976) overcame one of the limitations of Hodge and Treiman's and Jackman and Jackman's work by including data from 1950 and 1971 Detroit area surveys. But his small samples and log-linear research design prohibited examining the simultaneous effects of occupation, income, and education on Blacks' class identifications.

5. Major problems are: the assumption of linearity of the interval independent variable throughout the range of the dichotomous dependent variable; the assumption of homoscedasticity; and prediction of values less than 0 and greater than 1. Regression estimates are particularly unreliable when the dichotomous dependent variable is skewed beyond a
25-75 split. Thus, the conclusions of previous research on the class identification process among whites, whose class distribution approaches a 50-50 split, are much more reliable than those same studies' conclusions about Blacks, whose class distribution has always been more skewed than a 25-75 split. Furthermore, future research should employ more appropriate statistical techniques, particularly when examining Blacks' class identifications.
REFERENCES

Billingsley, Andrew

Braverman, Harry

Cannon, Lynn Weber

Center for Political Studies

Centers, Richard

Collins, Sharon

Cox, Oliver C.

Dahrendorf, Ralf

Dollard, John
1937 Caste and Class in a Southern Town. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Drake, St. Clair, and Horace R. Cayton

DuBois, W. E. B.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and John Ehrenreich
Evers, Mark

Finney, D. J.

Frazier, E. Franklin


Goldberger, Arthur S.

Hanushek, Eric A., and John E. Jackson

Hare, Nathan
1973 Quoted in "The black middle class defined." Ebony vol. 28, number 10, (August).

Higginbotham, Elizabeth


Hodge, Robert W., and Donald J. Treiman

Jackman, Mary R., and Robert W. Jackman

Jackman, Mary R., and Robert W. Jackman

Kluegel, James and Eliot Smith


Sampson, William 1980 "What is wrong with the debate over race and class?" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York.


Westcott, Diane N.  

Willie, Charles V.  
1979 The Caste and Class Controversy. New York: General Hall.


Wright, Erik Olin  
Figure 1. Three Operational Definitions of the Middle Class

| Professional-Managerial Class vs. Middle Mass vs. Working Class |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| White Collar vs. Blue Collar |
| Professionals, Managers, Administrators |
| Clerical, Sales, Technical Workers |
| Skilled Workers |
| Semiskilled, Unskilled Workers |

Operationalizations derived from:

- Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich; Braverman
- Traditional Weberian Conceptualization
- Weberian Conceptualizations of Wilson, Frazier, et al. (see text)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Working Women</th>
<th>Wives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N (unweighted)</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (weighted)</td>
<td>661.2</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>426.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Middle Class Total Sample</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Effect</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 2**

**Adjusted Percent Middle Class Placements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Working Women</th>
<th>Wives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Effect</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Effect</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These coefficients represent percent middle class placements after controls for education, income, and occupational prestige. Class effect = the effect of class net of all status variables Status effect = the effect of all status variables combined net of the class variable Education is years of schooling Income is log of constant $1980 Prestige is NORC score*
TABLE 3
Probit Analysis of Middle Class Placements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Working Women</th>
<th>Wives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional-Managerial Class</td>
<td>.8959**</td>
<td>.4941**</td>
<td>.4287**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prestige</td>
<td>.0015</td>
<td>.0025</td>
<td>.0109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.0226</td>
<td>.0592**</td>
<td>.0138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.0252</td>
<td>-.0523</td>
<td>.0214</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p < .05. All other coefficients are not statistically significant.
p > .10. All coefficients are unstandardized probit coefficients.
## TABLE 4

Probit Analysis of Three Class Variables on Middle Class Placements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Working Women</th>
<th>Wives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Probit Coefficient</td>
<td>% Middle Class***</td>
<td>Probit Coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof.-Managerial</td>
<td>.97**</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>.59***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical &amp; Sales</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi &amp; Unskilled</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Middle Class Increment from Clerical to Manager</th>
<th>26.4</th>
<th>15.8</th>
<th>9.8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N (unweighted)</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (weighted)</td>
<td>656.1</td>
<td>666.8</td>
<td>426.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All coefficients for class variables are unstandardized probit coefficients. Education, income, and prestige and controlled. Semi-skilled and unskilled was the excluded dummy variable.

** p < .05

*** These figures represent the predicted percent middle class for each occupational category controlling for education, income, and prestige.

It should also be noted that these analyses were also conducted separately for the GSS and SRC samples and the results are replicated within each subsample.