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Title: "Comment on Austin's 'Culture and Ideology in the English-speaking Caribbean'."

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## critical commentary

### comment on Austin's "culture and ideology in the English-speaking Caribbean"

To balance Diane Austin's (*AE* 10:223-240, 1983) interesting account of my views of pluralism and Caribbean societies, I refer readers to some relevant passages in my work. For brevity, these consist mainly of page references; for convenience, they are grouped with relation to various statements by Austin.

On the charge that my "definition of society" excludes "the notion of a social structure and especially a class structure based on a particular form, or forms, of economy" (p. 226), consult Smith 1965a:49-60, 82-83, 92-115, 116-161, 163, 166-170, 262-303. Far from ignoring class and stratification, I have carefully considered the values of various definitions of these concepts for analysis of Caribbean and other plural societies, as may be seen in Smith 1962a:15-85; 1965b:8-17, 48-50, 106-153; 1974. An unpublished manuscript (Smith 1983) continues that discussion.

To complete the sentence cited above, Austin says that "culture becomes Smith's major concept. Cultures consist of sets of institutions forming a 'mutually supporting' complex. In fact, the import of Smith's analyses in the Caribbean area is that these complexes are *mutually exclusive*" (p. 226). On these points, see Smith 1962a: 87-163; 1965a:66-71, 81-82, 175; 1965b:188-204, 234-255; 1969a, 1969c, 1983.

Austin claims that "political domination is central to Smith's (1960:765) model, for he chooses to define societies simply in terms of territoriality and discrete governmental institutions" (p. 226). It should be noted that the remark to which she refers, namely that "only territorially distinct units having their own governmental institutions can be regarded as societies, or are in fact so regarded" occurs on p. 766 of Smith 1960, not on p. 765. Such a definition, however, does not imply political domination as a universal precondition of society, since there are many territorially distinct societies with genuinely democratic governmental institutions that respond to the people and represent them but cannot be said to dominate them. The United States and Canada are familiar examples. In contrast to those consensually integrated societies, later in the article cited I distinguish the political characteristics of plural societies as follows:

Given the fundamental differences of belief, value and organisation that connote pluralism, the monopoly of power by one cultural section is the essential precondition for the maintenance of the total society in its current form.

In short, the structural position and function of the regulative system differs sharply in plural and other societies. Institutionally homogeneous societies develop a variety of institutional motivations towards conformity with social norms; institutionally split societies lack these common motivations and tend to rely correspondingly on regulation. The dominant social section of these culturally split societies is simply the section that controls the apparatus of power and force, and this is the basis of the status hierarchies that characterise pluralism [Smith 1960:772].

A careful reading of this passage supports Austin's claim that "political domination is central" (p. 226) to my model of Caribbean plural society, but it does not support her statement that I assume "that domination can proceed over long periods of time simply through the use of force" (p. 227). Neither does that assumption follow necessarily from her preceding proposition, nor from the long quotation just cited, nor have I ever made it. The fact that in plural societies some sections monopolize political power and the apparatus of force does not mean that they rely exclusively and solely on such force to maintain the social order and their dominant position within it. Economic organization, educational institutions, religion, and a variety of other cultural factors are inevitably brought to bear in support of the particular political and social structure. Nonetheless, on the presumption that I have assumed that plural societies persist over long periods of time solely through the use of force, Austin says that I ignore "forms of cultural domination, as well as economic and political domination, extending from the elite group into the traditional sectors of society" (p. 226). For evidence to the contrary, see Smith 1965a:1-9, 10-17, 60-66, 162-175, 293-303, 307-309, 314-321. Had Austin looked at my three essays on pluralism published in 1969, she would have seen that the first begins with the statement that "pluralism may be defined with equal cogency and precision in institutional or in political terms" (1969a:27); and that all three investigate the relationships between these factors.

As for "forms of cultural domination," these are discussed in Smith 1965a:1-9, 24-37, 73, 92-109, 120-129, 164-166, 172-175, 185-195 and documented in detail in 1965a:196-220; but passages already cited from Smith 1962a and 1965b also illustrate my continual concern with the patterns, processes, and effects of cultural domination, as does my biography of Norman Paul (Smith 1963), my discussion of the African heritage (Smith 1957), and Smith, Augier, and Nettleford (1960), which documents the radical Rastafari rejection of such domination.

Although I have never employed the notion of dual economy, Austin asserts that this "stands at the root of Smith's ideas of separate cultural sections in society" and goes on to argue that "both notions . . . could only represent a brief period of colonial life beyond which we would expect to

find some forms of cultural domination" (p. 226). Thus, though in the passages already cited I have amply documented and discussed such "forms of cultural domination," not only would Austin have readers believe that I ignore them but that I have done so under the influence of dual economy notions.

Austin next asserts that "Smith is simply ambiguous concerning whether or not this political structure [of domination] transforms the lives of subordinate sectors. Certainly he does not see particular institutions as transforming the values of other cultural sections. Thus, his account of domination becomes simply an account of coercion" (p. 227). On that point, see Smith 1957; 1965a:vi-xiii, 1-9, 27-34, 98-111, 124-129, 131-139, 164-170, 185-195, 196-220, 312-318; 1962a, 1962b. It is historically the case, however, that small numbers of Britons retained unchallenged domination of several of these Caribbean colonies for more than 300 years, both during and after slavery, with periodic brutal repressions of protest movements.

According to Austin, "Smith implies that because there are divergent value systems in society they thereby compete on equal terms" (p. 227). To reduce political domination solely to coercion and the use of force, while simultaneously holding that the divergent value systems of the rulers and the ruled compete on equal terms, is an intellectual feat of which I am incapable, although others may find it no problem. Indeed, the passages cited in the last three paragraphs document and stress the historic and continuing inequality of the competition that characterizes sectional value systems in these societies. For an extended case study of the process and results of such cultural domination in the life of one individual, see the biography of Norman Paul (Smith 1963); for a society of West Indian peasants, see my study of Carriacou (Smith 1962a).

With regard to ideology, Austin (p. 226) correctly cites my statement that "the coexistence... of divergent value-systems within a single society involves continuous ideological conflict" (Smith 1965b:174); but on p. 227, when repeating this statement, she alters it to read that "Smith... speaks of 'divergent value-systems' constituting 'ideological conflict.'" Thus, by putting her words in my mouth, Austin seeks to score a spurious point. "Involve" and "constitute" have quite different meanings, and at least I should only be called to account for what I have actually said.

In an intriguingly ambiguous sentence, Austin writes as though I equate value divergence with cognitive independence. "M. G. Smith's position is rather too optimistic—value divergence does not mean cognitive independence" (p. 227). It is not clear what Austin means by "cognitive independence," but if the suggestion is that I equate it with value divergence, then the passages already cited from my studies of Carriacou (1962a), Grenada (1965b: 235-242), and Jamaica (1965a:24-37, 164-166, 172-175,

196-110) indicate otherwise. Neither do I equate divergent value systems with ideology or ideological conflict, as Austin (p. 227) suggests, though I frequently discuss their relations (Smith 1965a:1-9, 110-115, 119-139, 276-296, 300-303, 312-321; Smith et al 1960).

In concluding her dismissive summary of my work, Austin asserts that my view of pluralism "ultimately attributed variable behavior and belief to ethnicity rather than to class" (p. 228). However, from the beginning I have emphasized the ambiguous and ideological character of the concept of ethnicity, and thereafter have consistently avoided using this term as an analytic category. Two early quotations are pertinent here

Ethnicity has a number of overlapping but different references, namely, racial origin, nationality, language and culture. These references invest the idea of ethnic pluralism with an initial ambiguity. In contrast, the idea of cultural pluralism is quite clear [Smith 1965a: 14].

In discussing population composition, I think race and nationality are the appropriate terms. In discussing the cultural homogeneity or plurality of a given population, I think culture is the appropriate term. Where linguistic differences are under study, we can speak of linguistic groups. By isolating these variables, and by referring to them directly, we avoid the need for ambiguous concepts, such as ethnicity, and can study the processes and forms of acculturation and assimilation as they occur [Smith 1965a:15, 16].

As regards my later views on ethnicity and pluralism, Smith 1969a, 1969b, 1969c, 1974, 1982 and those in press are relevant.

In her critical summary of my work, on five occasions Austin cites pages or texts to support or illustrate her points. Of these, two involve the only sentence quoted, correctly on p. 226 and incorrectly on p. 227; as noted above, a third citation gives the wrong page for the point it seeks to make; and a fourth (p. 226) quotes a phrase—"three *distinctive* cultural sections"—from Smith 1965a:163, with Austin's italics, though no such phrase can be found on that page. Altogether, however convincing Austin's account of my work may seem to the casual or uninformed reader, it lacks any substantial basis or documentation. Notably, with only one exception, all the writings of mine she cites can be found in Smith 1965a. Yet even that work she seems neither to have read fully nor with care. She ignores my earlier and later work directly relevant to her argument and account of my views, including Smith 1957, 1962a, 1963, 1965b, 1969a, 1969b, 1969c, 1974, and Smith et al. 1960.

To discredit the work of an author may be easier if it is not studied intensively and with care; and, presumably, if the author thus caricatured is dead or does not himself reply, such "critical expositions" may pass unchallenged and

be accepted as irrefutable truth by other scholars. However, as Austin's text demonstrates, readers cannot even safely assume that references and/or quotations giving specific page references are necessarily correct. In these and other ways, some published pieces include inaccuracies and errors that may be seriously misleading, the more so, the more prestigious the journal or academic press that publishes them, the greater the prominence given their publication, and the more authoritative and categorical in manner their exposition. Such unfortunate publications put the onus on the targets of their "critical discussions" to respond; but inevitably, in many cases, the piece concerned may only come to the attention of its target too late for the response to be relevant or effective in removing the confusion already caused by its publication. In that event, not only does the reputation of the unfairly criticized individual suffer, but so does the integrity and quality of the journal, academic press, or other medium that publishes such un scholarly work.

Hitherto it has been my practice not to respond to individual critiques of my work, nor even to disown spurious quotations attributed to me, simply because I find ad hominem controversies sterile and distasteful and have better ways to spend my time. However, in this case the integrity of a major scholarly journal is also involved. Accordingly, given the journal's leading role in anthropological circles here and abroad, and having already had three inquiries concerning the validity of Austin's account of my work, I felt obliged to list, for the record and for those interested, certain passages that are relevant for its assessment in the light of Austin's critique.

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