



The Velvet Glove: Paternalism and Conflict in Gender, Class, and Race Relations

Mary R. Jackman

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This landmark study analyzes and compares the ideologies that develop among unequal social groups. Mary Jackman employs a unique national survey to investigate all three of the most prominent relations of inequality in the United States: gender, class, and race. Where other scholars have emphasized conflict as the emblem of intergroup oppression, Jackman proposes a theory in which both dominant and subordinate groups maneuver to avoid open hostility as they strive to control resources within the confines of their mutual relationship.

Hostility, Jackman points out, creates resistance in a relationship. Dominant groups therefore try to preempt the use of force by following a velvet-glove strategy of "sweet persuasion." They are drawn especially to the ideological mold of paternalism, in which the coercion of subordinates is grounded in love rather than hate. Dominant-group members pronounce authoritatively on the needs and welfare of all and then profess to "provide" for those needs. Love, affection, and praise are offered to subordinates on strict condition that they comply with the terms of the unequal relationship. Whether in the home or in the arena of class or race relations, paternalism wraps control and authority in an ideological cocoon in which discriminatory actions are defined as benevolent and affection is made contingent on compliance.

Jackman's emphasis on the practice of coercive love in race, class, and gender relations is sure to generate controversy and further research. Sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, and anyone interested in group ideology will find here a provocative challenge to conventional views.

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