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Black Power and the Transformation from Protest to Politics

ROBERT C. SMITH

In a retrospective examination of black power in 1977, Dianne Pinderhughes analyzed a sample of the speeches and writings of individuals and organizations that had been prominent in the development and articulation of the concept. She found that there was only a narrow area of common agreement on the elements of black power and that on close examination even in this narrow area the common elements were so vague and general "as to be meaningless as far as giving specific direction to participants at the grassroots level."[1] Joel Aberbach and Jack Walker found similar evidence at the grassroots level. In their study of the attitudes of a sample of Detroit residents, black and white, they found that the overwhelming majority of whites evaluated black power negatively, while opinion among blacks was divided: 42.2 percent were favorable and 49.6 percent were unfavorable. Those who evaluated it favorably saw black power as a call for black unity and an expression of a desire for a fair share of society's opportunities; those who viewed it unfavorably saw it as meaningless.[2] And in the early scholarly commentaries on the meaning of black power, one finds similar disagreement.[3] Thus, at the elite level, at the

[1] Dianne Pinderhughes, "A Retrospective Examination: The Failure of Black Power," *Journal of Afro-American Issues* 5 (Summer 1977): 256.

[2] Joel Aberbach and Jack Walker, "The Meaning of Black Power: A Comparison of White and Black Interpretations of a Political Slogan," *American Political Science Review* 64 (June 1970): 370.

[3] See Harold Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution* (New York: William Morrow Co., 1968), pp. 193–258; idem, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), p. 225; Bayard Rustin, *Down the Line* (Chicago, Ill.: Quadrangle Books, 1971), pp. 154–65; Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), pp.

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grassroots, and at the level of scholarly analysis the black power symbol was a source of confusion.

I have argued elsewhere that this ambiguity and the confusion surrounding the black power symbol was in large part by design; that is, Stokeley Carmichael and his colleagues deliberately elected to use the vague, ambiguous, emotional, and provocative phrase black power because of its propaganda value.[4] And as Donald McCormack argues, in its formative years (1966–1967) "the ambiguity of the slogan was very much a source of its vitality."[5] Thus, the confusion surrounding the early interpretations of black power was perhaps inevitable given the extraordinary controversy occasioned by the initial debate. Given the vantage point of a decade, the cooling of the rhetoric, and with the help of appropriate social-science conceptual apparatus, however, it is now possible to move beyond the ambiguity toward clarification of the structural significance of black power in United States politics, which is the purpose in this article. Using William Gamson's heuristic model of the operations of the American polity, this article is an attempt to specify the relationship between black power and the often spoke of transformation from protest to politics that occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[6] It is as a factor in this transformation that one can discern the most important political consequence of black power.

Stable Unrepresentation in American Politics

In an important essay William Gamson renders a critique of the theory of pluralist democracy in the United States and offers an alternative model of the operation of the American political system.[7] Gamson's essay is important because, unlike most critics of pluralism, he attempts to construct an alternative that provides a more accurate and valid description of the operation of the polity. And he provides a mechanism that allows one to treat a central problem in contemporary pluralist interest-group theory—the transformation of "potential groups" into formally organized "interest groups."[8] It is for these reasons that

117–68; Robert Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1969) and Donald McCormack, "Stokeley Carmichael and Pan Africanism: Back to Black Power," *Journal of Politics* 35 (May 1973): 386–409.

[4] Propaganda is used here in the Lasswellian sense as "political symbols manipulated for control of public opinion" (see Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan, *Power and Society* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1950], pp. 111–13). For a detailed explication of black power using the Lasswell and Kaplan framework see my "The Impact of the Black Power Symbol on American Politics" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists, 3–6 March 1980, Atlanta, Georgia).

[5] McCormack, "Stokeley Carmichael and Pan Africanism," p. 390.

[6] Bayard Rustin, "From Protest to Politics," *Commentary* 39 (February 1965): 25–31.

[7] William A. Gamson, "Stable Unrepresentation in American Society," *The American Behavioral Scientists* 12 (November-December 1968): 15–21.

[8] David Truman developed this theoretically useful distinction between "potential groups" and

Gamson's model of this conversion process is especially useful in understanding the emergence of interest-group formations among oppressed strata in the United States.

Gamson presents his model as a "heuristic device" designed to explore the conditions under which unrepresented groups achieve (or fail to achieve) representation in the competitive interest-group establishment. That is, the model accepts the existence of a high degree of pluralism in the polity but postulates that certain groups are systemically denied entry into the process and only gain entry "through the breakdown of the normal operation of the system or through demonstration on the part of challenging groups of a willingness to violate the 'rules-of-the-game' by resorting to illegitimate means for carrying on political conflict."[9] It is the central argument of this article that the propagandistic symbol black power and the ghetto rebellions of the 1960s constitute a contemporary case of the demonstration on the part of a challenging group, in this case the blacks, of a willingness to violate the "rules of the game" by resorting to unconventional methods of political conflict.

In the explication of the model, Gamson distinguishes two types of societal groups—solidary groups and interest groups. Solidary groups are defined as "collections of individuals who think in terms of the effect of political decisions on the aggregate and feel that they are in some way personally affected by what happens to the aggregate." Interest groups are defined as the "formally organized manifestations of solidary groups."[10]

Given these definitions, Gamson's model can be summarized in three propositions: the American political system normally functions to keep unrepresented groups from developing solidarity and from organizing in political groups; the American political system discourages the effective entry of unrepresented groups into the competitive establishment if and as they become organized; and such unrepresented groups achieve entry only by use of illegitimate means of political struggle.

Gamson's model of the American political system enables scholars to assay more fully the role and function of black power in recent American politics. To state the central thesis of this article in terms of the Gamson model, it argues that black power: contributed to the development of racial solidarity; stimulated the formation of black interest organization; and in conjunction with the ghetto riots facilitated entry by blacks into the pluralist political arena.

"interest groups," but as Balbus points out he failed to use the distinction to develop an explanation of the conversion of potential groups to interest groups. See Truman's *The Governmental Process* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1951), and Isaac Balbus, "The Concept of Interest in Pluralist and Marxian Analysis," *Politics and Society* 1 (February 1971): 151–77.

[9] Gamson, "Stable Unrepresentation," p. 18.

[10] Ibid., p. 19.

The Development of Race Solidarity

Historically, blacks in the United States, unlike most European ethnic groups, have lacked a strong sense of communal solidarity.[11] Writing of the black community of the late fifties and early sixties, Singer observed that blacks were not an ethnic group, but rather were a collection of individuals "without the community of tradition, sentiment and so forth that has marked and given rise to ethnic groups such as Italian immigrants."[12] Singer's observation is an overstatement. Blacks were in this period more than a mere collection of individuals. The problem was that the black ethnic tradition in politics was not as highly developed as that of other ethnic groups in the United States.

More specific evidence in this regard is offered by Edward Banfield and James Q. Wilson. In their effort to explain the weakness of the Negro subcommunity in urban politics observed in the 1950s, Banfield and Wilson focused on two interrelated factors: the class structure of Negro society and the character of urban political systems.[13] Aside from the problems posed by the very existence of a large lower class and a small, underemployed middle class, they argued that urban black communities were handicapped in city politics by the relative inability or unwillingness of the middle class to identify with the lower class and provide leadership for it: "The relatively small Negro middle class is separated from the lower class by differences of ethos and interest."[14] Banfield and Wilson argued that the major cleavage between the lower class and the middle class was in terms of "status" and "welfare." Lower-class blacks were said to favor welfare goals (for example, concrete benefits in terms of housing and welfare) while the middle class favored status goals (destruction of the principle of discrimination and vindication of equal rights and integration). As a result, blacks in city politics were disadvantaged vis-à-vis other groups in the city, in part, by the absence of racial solidarity and a viable ethnic political tradition.

The civil-rights revolution, by facilitating the growth, development, and diversification of the black middle class and by removing the legal basis of status inferiority, contributed to the development of a black ethnic tradition in politics; the movement also encouraged the emergence of new leadership and muted the status-welfare dichotomy in urban black politics.[15] The central contribution of black power was to make race-specific this emergent communal

[11] Gamson lists eight examples of forces that discourage solidarity and initial political organization. Studies of the urban ghetto have shown that all, save one, of these (rates of interaction and organizational participation) are characteristic of urban black ghetto life. See Gamson, "Stable Unrepresentation," p. 20, and Kenneth Clark, *Dark Ghetto* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

[12] L. Singer, "Ethnogenesis and Negro-Americans Today," *Social Research* 29 (Winter 1962): 429.

[13] Edward Banfield and James Q. Wilson, *City Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 294.

[14] Ibid., p. 298.

[15] See the report on Charles Hamilton's in progress research on class politics in urban black communities in Alex Poinsett, "Class Patterns in Black Politics," *Ebony* (August 1973): 35–42, and Robert C. Smith, "The Changing Shape of Urban Black Politics: 1969–70," *The Annals* 39 (September 1978): 22–24.

solidarity and thereby to contribute directly to the incipient representation of blacks in the polity. Aberbach and Walker present evidence that suggests that black power contributed to the development of a specifically black political culture, a culture cutting across the divisions in ethos and interests observed by Banfield and Wilson in the 1950s.

> Upper status blacks who have broken free from traditional moorings have become part of a *black political community* which includes persons from all social classes. The responses of these upper status blacks to questions about the interpretations of significant events and the evaluation of leaders are more strongly affected by their sense of empathy and identification with their racial community than by their feelings of achievement or even their personal expectations about the future. They share a set of beliefs and a mood of protest about racial issues with those lower status segments of the black community who have also assimilated the secular culture typical of the urban north.[16]

There is also evidence that black power contributed to an increase in personal efficacy and psychological security among segments of the black community.[17] Thus by providing a symbolic basis for the crystallization of racial solidarity among United States blacks, black power laid the foundation for the initial effort at organizing independent black political organizations. It did more than merely lay the foundation, however; it was directly related to the formation of a number of important black interest organizations and to their eventual incorporation into the policy process.

The Development of Race Organization

Although as a propagandistic symbol black power was by design characterized by a high level of generality and ambiguity, substantively from the beginning it was related to the formation of black interest organization. For example, in their initial effort to conceptualize the black power idea, an effort that was characterized by considerable analytic confusion, Carmichael and Hamilton nevertheless presented the following as the "fundamental premise" of black power: "Before a group can enter the open society, it must close ranks. . . . black power is a call for black people to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations."[18] While this as a fundamental premise of the book was betrayed by other parts of the analysis and was by and large repudiated by Carmichael before the book was even published, it continued, in terms of its major substantive consequence, to be the prevailing interpretation of black power, an interpretation that gained increasing support among black and white elites as time passed.

Hamilton, in particular, became a vigorous and articulate advocate of this in-

[16] Aberbach and Walker, "The Meaning of Black Power," p. 380. See also Smith, "The Impact of the Black Power Symbol.

[17] See A.P. MacDonald, "Black Power," *Journal of Negro Education* 44 (Fall 1975): 547-54.

[18] Stokeley Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 44.

terpretation in his lectures, articles, and essays, while his colleague was moving toward a more revolutionary interpretation of the symbol. In a 1968 lecture at the Justice Department, Hamilton defined black power as the formation of political organizations by blacks independent of the "white power structure." He argued further that black power provided a mechanism to mobilize the black population and that this was both democratic and a clear alternative to violence. In an essay published later that year in the *New York Times Magazine,* Hamilton further developed this interpretation.[19] Increasingly, then, as the sixties progressed middle-class blacks began to see the formation of independent political organizations as the essential structural way to give meaning to black power.

This view of the initial definition of black power as it relates to its structural, as opposed to symbolic, meaning finds support in one of the few systematic social-science treatments of the concept and symbol. Donald J. McCormack writes: "Between May 1966 and January 1967 the inscrutable slogan 'black power,' particularly as it was being defined by Stokeley Carmichael, stood essentially for the employment of conventional group-theory tactics to attain greater political and economic benefits."[20]

Empirical support for this interpretation can be seen in the veritable explosion of new black interest organizations between 1966 and 1972. Afram, in its *Directory of National Black Organizations,* lists 350 organizations. Of this number, the dates of formation are provided for 166. Of this 166, 73 (44 percent) were founded after the emergence of black power (1966), most between 1967 and 1969. These new organizations cover a broad range of concerns and interests—business and economic, educational, cultural, professional and occupational, and political.[21]

These new black power organizations, however, posit a variety of rationales for their formation. Charles Sanders, a co-compiler of the Afram directory, observes that these groups were heavily influenced by the new "ideologies" of black power and black nationalism.[22] Unlike the traditional black trade and professional organizations formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these groups were formed not because blacks were excluded from the majority-dominated, established associations.[23] Rather, they broke away either

[19] Charles V. Hamilton, "An Advocate of Black Power Defines It," *New York Times Magazine,* 14 April 1968.

[20] McCormack, "Stokeley Carmichael and Pan Africanism," p. 390.

[21] *Directory: National Black Organizations* (New York: Afram Associates, 1972).

[22] From a paper presented by Charles Sanders at a meeting of the National Association of Black Social Workers, cited in C. Gerald Fraser, "Decade's Change in Blacks Studied," *New York Times,* 16 April 1972.

[23] The formation of separate black interest associations in this period is evidence of one parallel between black power and the philosophy and program of Booker T. Washington. Between 1880 and 1915, the age of Booker T. Washington, there was again a veritable explosion of "separatists" black interest and self-help organizations. For a discussion of the origins and purposes of these organizations, see August Meier, *Negro Thought in America 1880–1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), pp. 121–38.

as separate entities or as black caucuses within these associations because of what they saw as the "white nationalism" of the established groups and their consequent failure to speak to the needs of blacks in the society. For example, speaking of the formation of the black social workers organization, Jay Chunn, its president and the dean of the Howard University School of Social Work, stated, "we formed at the 1969 national social welfare conference first as a separate caucus and later as a separate association because we did not feel the conference was addressing the needs of blacks in the social welfare field."[24]

In general, these organizations are more explicitly political than the traditional "Negro" organizations.[25] That is, rather than defining their goals narrowly in terms of particularistic economic or professional concerns, these organizations have a much broader focus, viewing themselves, in Sanders words, as "technical support groups for the black liberation movement."[26]

In addition, a number of such caucus-type organizations have been formed among black elected and appointed officials: the National Black Legislative Clearinghouse, an organization of black state legislators formed in 1969 to increase the effectiveness of minority state legislators; the National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials, organized in 1970 by black delegates to the annual meeting of the National League of Cities to serve as a vehicle to increase black influence in the League and in the United States Conference of Mayors; the Judicial Council of the National Bar Association, an organization of black elected and appointed judges formed in 1971; the National Caucus of Black School Board Members (1971); the Southern Conference of Black Mayors (1972); the National Association of Black County Officials (1975); the Council of Black Appointees, the organization of forty to fifty high-level, "supergrade" officials in the federal government formed during the Nixon administration; and finally the best-known nationally of such organizations, the Congressional Black Caucus, the organization of the black members of the United States House of Representatives formed in 1969.[27]

Thus by the end of the 1960s black power had fostered two remarkable developments in black politics in the United States: It had contributed to the development of a black ethnic tradition and to the development of an emergent independent black organizational structure. These developments, however, constitute only the first steps in the process of the achievement of stable representation by a previously unrepresented group. Gamson's model forewarns of the probability that such a group will fail to achieve effective entry into the system even if it develops solidarity and organization, unless it demonstrates to the authorities a willingness to go beyond the normal routines of politics. Black

[24] Personal interview, 16 July 1974, Washington, D.C.

[25] Robert C. Smith, "Black Elites and Black Groups in the Federal Policy Process: A Study in Interest Articulation" (Ph.D. diss., Howard University, 1976), pp. 43–127.

[26] Quoted in Fraser, "Decade's Change in Blacks Studied."

[27] In addition, a number of black state legislators have formed caucuses along lines similar to that of the Congressional Black Caucus. See Paul Delaney, "Increasing Numbers of Black Legislators Beginning to Have Impact on Issues Throughout the Nation," *New York Times*, 19 March 1972.

power as it was articulated by Carmichael and some of his colleagues after 1967 and the several summers of ghetto revolt provided this demonstration and thus was the final link in the progression of blacks from stable unrepresentation to incipient representation.

Black Power, Ghetto Revolt, and Black Incorporation

Considering first the role and function of the riots, there is some dispute in the literature concerning the proper interpretation of the political significance of the ghetto disturbances. Edward Banfield, among others, argues that the riots (and especially the rioters) had no political import. Rather, he suggests that they were simply rampages conducted by young ghetto men largely for fun and profit.[28] This view has been challenged by more serious students of the phenomena. For example, David Sears and John McConahay in their careful study of the Watts riot argue that the riots were indeed political events, representing a revolt of the urban black lower class.[29]

For purposes of this analysis, it is not necessary to determine whether the ghetto riots were mere aimless youthful rampages or purposeful political events for in the minds of the authorities they were demonstrably the latter. Indeed, the burden of Banfield's polemic is precisely that government officials, academics, civil-rights leaders, and the media misinterpreted the riots as political events and thereby made them so. More recently, James Button in a detailed investigation of the policy effects of the riots at the national level shows that federal executive officials interpreted the riots as politically purposeful behavior intended to make demands upon those in the authority structure.[30]

The riots were of course not viewed in isolation. They were intimately linked in the minds of many authorities with the threat of black rebellion, or in J. Edgar Hoover's words, a "real mau mau in America, the beginning of a true black revolution."[31] Black power, especially as articulated by Carmichael and Brown after 1967, seemed to many to symbolize this threat of revolution. Carmichael increasingly began to move away from the conventional interest-group interpretation of black power toward a stance that saw the slogan as symbolizing the beginnings of violent revolt against "white western imperialist" America.[32]

[28] Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Co., 1968), pp. 185–209.

[29] David Sears and John B. McConahay, *The Politics of Violence: The New Urban Blacks and the Watts Riot* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1970).

[30] James W. Button, *Black Violence: Political Impact of the 1960s Riots* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978).

[31] From a memorandum from J. Edgar Hoover to FBI field offices relative to the COINTEL PRO (Counter Intelligence Program). The memorandum was cited in Susanna McBee, "Hoover Ordered FBI to Plant Spies, Forge Papers against Extremists," *Washington Post*, 8 March 1974.

[32] The ghetto riots almost certainly affected this shift in Carmichael's interpretation of black power. Matthew Holden, Jr.'s observation on the relationship between black power and violence illustrates this point: "SNCC was soon charged with, or praised for, advocating violence. But this

This threatening symbolism of black power, this clear break with the normal rhetoric of American politics was made emphatic for the authorities by Carmichael's attendance as guest of honor at the Organization of Latin American Solidarity which took place at Havana in August 1967. At this meeting of Communists, socialists, and revolutionaries from throughout the hemisphere, Carmichael declared, "America is going to fall and I only hope to live long enough to see it."[33] This type of rhetoric and the behavior of Carmichael, and the emerging national prominence of the Black Panther party, during this period was a clear demonstration to national elites of a willingness on the part of some sectors of the black community to go beyond the accepted routines of American politics in their pursuit of power.[34] And the riots of course appeared to give a degree of reality to the rhetoric. By 1968, then, most federal policy elites, black elected officials, civil-rights leaders, and influential media had come to accept Hamilton's interpretation of black power as both reasonable and well within the framework of traditional American ethnic interest politics.

For example, in 1967 the *New York Times* published a survey that showed "significant support" for black power among white liberals "because they feel integration is impossible in the immediate future and favor instead building up Negro institutions."[35] As an example of changing elite perceptions, in early 1968 the Ford Foundation, a central support institution in the civil-rights movement and a symbol of liberal corporate power, announced that it would support black leaders and groups of "good will" whether they believed in integration or separate black power.[36] And, at its 1968 convention, Whitney Young, one of the more vocal critics of black power, announced that the Urban League had changed its position and would now support the concept "where it emphasizes self-determination, self respect and participation and control of one's community affairs."[37]

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charge or praise seems to have been, at first, overreaction by both whites and blacks. . . .The wave of near-panic is related less to what SNCC did than to the *imagery* of incipient black revolt. . . .Instead, it seems much more likely that SNCC fell accidentally into the posture of appearing to advocate aggressive violence. . . .Having done so, it found political benefits in never discouraging the idea that this was its policy (*The Politics of the Black 'Nation'* [New York: Chandler, 1973], p. 76).

[33] Quoted in John Gerassi, "Havana: A New International is Born," in *Latin American Radicalism: A Documentary Report on Left and Nationalists Movements*, eds. Irving L. Horowitz, Josue de Castro, and John Gerassi (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 532. Later in the year Carmichael took a tour of Third World socialist and Communist countries (including North Vietnam) where he made similar declarations. Upon his return he wrote an article in which he argued that black power had moved beyond the politics of pluralism in the United States to the revolutionary ideology of Pan Africanism. See his "Pan Africanism—Land and Power," *Black Scholar* 1 (November 1969): 36–54. And the following year H. "Rap" Brown, Carmichael's successor as SNCC chairman, called on blacks to arm themselves for the coming revolution.

[34] At this time the Black Panther party was moving from its initial reformist orientation toward an ideology of revolutionary Marxism-Leninism. See Gene Marine, *Black Panthers* (New York: New American Library, 1969).

[35] Gene Roberts, "A White Liberal Shift on Integration," *New York Times*, 17 December 1967.

[36] Fred Hechinger, "Ford Fund Pledges Drive against Racial Prejudice," *New York Times*, 18 February 1968.

[37] Earl Caldwell, "Young Embraces Black Power Idea," *New York Times*, 7 July 1968.

Evidence of the polity's willingness to include blacks in the ongoing, competitive, pluralist interest-group structure include the appointment of blacks to highly visible positions in the national government, the election of black mayors in several large cities, the acceptance of a black power organization—the racially exclusive Congressional Black Caucus—in the Congress of the nation, the use of the Community Action and Model Cities agencies as mechanisms to organize the urban black poor, and in some instances the direct financing of black interest organizations by the federal government.[38] Taken together these acts represent the beginnings of the incorporation of blacks as constituent elements of the national polity.[39]

Conclusion

The most important consequence of the developments assayed in this article is the entrance of black interest organizations into the competitive, pluralist interest-group system characteristic of the "middle level" of power in the United States.[40] This is particularly evident at the federal level. As late as 1968, studies of the process of formulating federal policy found an absence of access by blacks.[41] Very few blacks were found among the policymaking elites, and blacks did not on the whole possess access to centers of decision making in the federal policy process. A principal reason for this lack of access was the relative absence of effective black interest organizations and elites at the federal level. Since the

[38] Of the poverty programs, Theodore Lowi observes: "To the interest group liberal poverty is becoming just another status around which power centers ought to organize. If a group hasn't organized then organize it. . . . This does not eliminate poverty but it helps legitimize the interest group liberal's preference for dealing only with organized claims" (*The End of Liberalism* [New York: W.W. Norton, 1969], pp. 83–84). Lowi's point is addressed to the problem of poverty but it can be extended without difficulty to black power as an ethnic variant of the interest-group liberal's philosophy. See David Greenstone and Paul Peterson, *Race and Authority in Urban Politics: Community Participation and the War on Poverty* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1973), p. 7, and Frances Fox Piven, "The Great Society as Political Strategy," *Columbia Forum* 13 (Summer 1970): 271–77. Concerning the direct financing of black interest organizations, see Smith, "Black Elites and Black Groups," pp. 62–65.

[39] It should be clear that while there were elite efforts to facilitate the entry of black organizations into the competitive establishment, there were also as Gamson's model suggests efforts to undermine, discredit and harass certain black elites and organizations. Detailed evidence of this is available in the Senate's investigation of the FBI's COINTEL PRO program. See U.S., Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans*, Book III, *Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976).

[40] C. Wright Mills, "The Structure of Power in American Society," in *Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, ed. Irving L. Horowitz (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974), p. 30.

[41] Harold Wolman and Norman Thomas, "Black Interests, Black Groups, and Black Influence in the Federal Policy Process: The Cases of Housing and Education," *Journal of Politics* 32 (November 1970): 875–97. The Wolman and Thomas findings are in a strict sense limited to the education and housing policy areas; however, they imply the findings are valid across the range of policy areas at the federal level.

late 1960s, however, blacks have made significant progress toward the development of a political voice of their own in Washington, that is, political organizations and leaders actively involved in the articulation of black interests.

Prior to this development there was, with the exception of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP) and the Urban League and to a lesser degree the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the National Council of Negro Women, little sustained organized black input in the federal policy process. Further, these organizations were engaged primarily in traditional civil-rights, antidiscrimination activities rather than in broad public-policy concerns. As Wolman and Thomas observe, "The policy goals blacks have pursued have been short-run, direct and highly visible; primarily to attack overt racial discrimination and promote integration." Thus, with the exception of civil rights, but on broader questions of public policy affecting blacks, black interests in the federal policy process were represented, to the extent they were, through what Wolman and Thomas call virtual and indirect representation.[42]

Today, there is evidence this is not the case.[43] The black power symbol, with its emphasis on racial solidarity and independent black organization, has operated over the years to stimulate the formation of black interest organizations and to increase the interest-articulation activities of the older, more established "Negro" organizations. Indeed, there has emerged a wide variety of black organizations active in the articulation of black interests in the federal policy process. These organizations cover a broad range of policy or issue areas and black community concerns ranging from general civil-rights organizations such as the NAACP to broad policy organizations such as the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the National Association of Black Manufacturers, or until recently the National Welfare Rights Organization.[44] Further, there is evidence that black elites and organizations possess nominal access to major decision points in the federal policy process.[45]

[42] Ibid. By virtual representation Wolman and Thomas mean "certain units within the executive branch were institutionally structured and certain officials took it upon themselves to represent the interests of the black community—or at least some of the interests of some parts of the black community." By indirect representation it is argued that black interests are represented by such groups as the AFL-CIO and the National Council of Churches. Ibid., p. 881.

[43] Smith, "Black Elites and Black Groups," pp. 43–127.

[44] As a result of a cutback in government and foundation support, the militant National Welfare Rights Organization was forced to close its Washington office. This is indicative of a more general problem of the Washington black lobby—its dependence on external sources of financial support. Indeed, in my study, 50 percent of black interest organizations derived their major source of financial support from corporations, foundations, the federal government, or labor unions. Ibid., pp. 62–65. For an illuminating discussion of this as an aspect of the problem of clientage in black politics, see Holden, *The Politics of the Black "Nation,"* pp. 43–52.

[45] Smith, "Black Elites and Black Groups," pp. 73–78. The concept of nominal access indicates the extent to which a group has the ability to be heard in the strict sense by decision makers. It is contrasted with effective access which is the ability of groups not only to be heard but to get results. See Harold V. Savitch, "Powerlessness in an Urban Ghetto: The Case of Political Bias and Differential Access in New York City," *Polity* 5 (1972): 19–56.

This development of black interest organization is a new and undoubtedly important departure in black political life. Studies on interest groups have shown that organization is highly advantageous in the successful advancement of a group's interest, particularly in the United States where competition from numerous organized groups to influence public policy is so great. As Wilson has written: "If the causes represented by . . . mass efforts are to continue to be espoused, they will continue through organizational efforts or not at all. Passions can be aroused and for the moment directed, they cannot be sustained. Organization provides continuity and predictability to social processes that would otherwise be episodic and uncertain."[46]

Although organization is perhaps indispensable in the articulation of a group's interests in the United States, it does involve certain costs. First, there is a marked tendency for middle- to upper-income persons to form and participate in organizations at a greater rate than poor or low-income persons. Second, as Theodore Lowi writes, "a permanent association is a distortion of its own interests, no matter how creative or effective the distortion."[47] These costs may weigh most heavily on blacks in the United States, given their high percentage of low-income persons and the relatively small stratum of those who are politically active. As a consequence, black organizations may, wittingly or not, distort or misrepresent black interests. Related to this problem, a substantial number of black organizations are dependent on whites for financial support and this may exert a subtle (and on occasion not so subtle) influence on the groups' articulation of black interests, and there is also the possibility that black organizational elites may in the course of the bargaining characteristic of the federal policy process become more willing to compromise black interests as the price of continued access and interaction in the system. Finally, a relatively resource-poor group (in terms of social status, economic power, and votes) such as American blacks finds it difficult to compete with the more privileged financial and ideological business and labor groups. Pinderhughes's research shows that "the subordinate, dependent status of the black population limits the capacity of black interests to create well funded and supported groups capable of the consistent monitoring required in administration and implementation of law. This same status multiplies the number of potential issue areas of importance to black constituencies, but their resource difficulties limit the number of issues they can address, and weaken their likelihood of being taken seriously within any of those areas."[48] Yet, in a polity in which interest groups exert enormous influence, all groups, small and weak, are generally accorded equal and indiscriminate legitimacy that, as Lowi argues, ends up in the system being representative of privileged and conservative interests.[49]

[46] James Q. Wilson, *Political Organization* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 7.

[47] Theodore Lowi, "Interest Groups and the Consent to Govern: Getting the People Out for What?" *The Annals* 413 (May 1974): 95.

[48] Dianne Pinderhughes, "Racial Interest Groups and Incremental Politics" (manuscript, Dartmouth College, 1980), p. 36.

[49] Lowi, *The End of Liberalism.*

Nevertheless, these inchoate organizations constitute a developing national black lobby that, in spite of the calls of some black leaders for a return to the streets, is part of an irreversible process akin to the transformation from the agrarian crusade of the 1890s to the farm lobby of the 1920s or from the labor movement of the thirties to the labor lobby of today.[50] The question, then, is can the black lobby—representing the gradual incorporation of blacks at the middle level of power—fundamentally alter the terrible conditions of the black underclass. If not, we can be certain that black power will be succeeded by a more radical movement because the transformation from protest to politics will be but the precondition for a yet higher stage in the historic struggle of blacks for their liberation in the Americas.*

[50] This is not to say there will not be street protests in the future but rather that they will never again constitute a central mode of black politics as they did in the 1960s and in all probability will be subordinate to and manipulated by the black lobby. Nor do I discount future ghetto riots; on the contrary I believe they are inevitable and their shape and relationship to the black lobby unpredictable.

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