Introduction

Early studies of power and leadership in the United States focused not only on electoral politics but on the influence of community leaders who were not elected officials. Prominent among these were the works of C. Wright Mills, Floyd Hunter, Delbert Miller, and others who purported that the structure of power in the United States and its varied communities is derived largely from the institutional structure of the society. Mills, particularly, argues that power is invested principally in economic, military, and political organizations and that the structure of the "power elite" is a major determinant of the nature and rate of social change in a society and/or community over time.[1]

Although Mills's work quickly achieved international prominence, it was Hunter's 1953 examination of Atlanta that has become the classic model for power elite studies.[2] In *Community Power Structure,* Hunter defines power as "the acts of men going about the business of moving other men . . . in relation to themselves or in relation to organic or inorganic things." He found that power in Atlanta (which he called the mythological "Regional City") was generally inherited and that "the establishment of changes in the old order" fell "to the lot of a relatively few." These "relatively few" were mainly male heads of major corporations, including banks and utilities in the city. Less than a handful of them held elective office, yet elected officials generally implemented their policy initiatives.[3]

Because of Atlanta's large African American middle class and the political influence that it had exerted, particularly since 1949, Hunter also studied what he called "the Negro sub-community." In black Atlanta, he found a group of influentials who mirrored, to a substantial degree, the white power structure. The black group differed, however, in its inclusion of more women and more professionals, particularly educators and ministers. It undertook to speak for the larger African American community in the way that the white power structure did for all of Atlanta, but it did not often fight vigorously for the interests of the masses of blacks. In the end, Hunter concluded that the black leadership class was only a conduit to black Atlanta for the policies of

the white power structure and was, in itself, powerless in determining and implementing community policies.[4]

In the early 1970s, Hunter returned to Atlanta and revisited some of the influentials he had interviewed in his 1953 study and sought out new persons who were deemed influentials since *Community Power Structure* first appeared. He published his later findings in *Community Power Succession*. Hunter concluded that, although changes in personnel were "apparent in the Atlanta power structure and in the observable new structures such as those concerned with downtown renewal, the basic pattern of circular, self-selected leadership remains." Citywide policies continued "to be determined by a handful of men in the larger private corporate groups who prod a smaller handful of public and private bureaucrats . . . and who are in accord, generally, on what is wanted or needed by the corporate powers." And, as in *Community Power Structure*, Hunter criticized this process as undemocratic.[5]

By 1970, race relations had changed markedly in Atlanta as a result of direct-action demonstrations and civil suits during the civil rights movement, as well as the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965. Blacks had also achieved near parity on the voter rolls of the city and had significantly increased their numbers in the city's elective offices. Some of these elected officials had replaced or joined older members of the black influentials group that Hunter had identified in the early 1950s. These developments had led to increased consultations by the white power structure with the identified leaders of the black subcommunity. Yet, the black leadership, still largely drawn from the middle class, continued to acquiesce in the policy initiatives of the white leaders.[6]

Following Hunter's original study, other scholars, principally political scientists and sociologists, tested Hunter's general thesis as well as his study of the black subcommunity in the Far West and New England, especially. These included John Dean and Alex Rosen; Robert Dahl; Nelson Polsby; H. W. Pflautz; A. T. Barth and Baha Abu-Laban; and James B. McKee. While Dean and Rosen found evidence to support Hunter, the findings of most of the others suggested that Hunter's "reputational method"—identifying power elites by interviewing those perceived to have influence and counting the times their names appear on a cumulated list—could not assure that these persons were actually the major determinants of community decisions.[7]

In *Regime Politics* (1989), Clarence Stone added a new twist to the power elite model. While at first glance, he conceded, his model might appear to be a refutation of the Hunter approach, it was not. Indeed, his model was largely derived from Hunter's, and he defined power similarly, but he chose the term

"urban regime" as a better description of the influentials who governed Atlanta. They were a "powerful business sector" that placed "sharp limitations" on city hall. More specifically, Stone defined the "urban regime" as those informal arrangements "that surround and complement the formal workings of governmental authority." In postwar Atlanta, he found an excellent case study of "the formation and maintenance of a governing coalition capable of promoting far reaching change, even in the face of substantial resistance," and concluded that "Atlanta's regime has been extraordinarily effective."[8]

Although acknowledging a kinship to Hunter's *Community Power Structure*, Stone focuses on bargaining, negotiations, and coalition-building. In Atlanta's governing coalition, he sees a pivotal role for the leadership of the black subcommunity. However, he agrees with Hunter and others that policy formation is essentially controlled by the white power elite and that the structure of governance is undemocratic.[9]

While Stone did grant that the Hunter model influenced his study of Atlanta's "urban regime," it was M. Kent Jennings, in *Community Influentials: The Elites of Atlanta*, who sought to test Hunter's thesis on his own turf. Jennings rejected Hunter's notion of a rather cohesive, exclusive power structure and identified a larger group of "economic dominants" who consisted of local manufacturers as well as the branch plant managers of national corporations. However, in defense of Hunter, G. William Domhoff, a leading proponent of the ruling elite thesis, contends that what "Jennings actually found in Atlanta is a complete vindication of Hunter and his 'reputational method,' not to mention a boost for the ideas of growth-coalition theory." And he argues that "even though most of the 'perceived influentials' were not 'economic dominants' by Jennings's perceived and tortured definition, the majority turned out to be businesspeople who came by and large from the downtown business interests."[10]

In the power elite model, community leadership is invested in a small group of corporate executives and professionals. This model has also been used to identify influentials in African American subcommunities. However, differences in personnel and function are often seen in black leadership that are not present in the larger community. Many of these differences emanate from historical forces and actions, including bondage and racial discrimination and oppression.

Focusing on the African American experience up to 1860, Vincent Baptheka Thompson developed a theory of black leadership. He defined leadership as those qualities "that sustain individuals, groups, or peoples during times of tribulations and acute crises, enabling them not only to endure their existing

situations—often of hardship—but to challenge them sufficiently to tran-
scend them."[11]

W.E.B. Du Bois proposed a theory of leadership based upon the education
of a small black elite (the "talented tenth"). Charles V. Willie, in "A Theory of
Liberation Leadership," challenged Du Bois' concept. Willie offered a new
model of "liberation leadership." While agreeing with Du Bois that the lead-
ership class is characterized by education, he suggested that the education
must result "in a *double culture* so that one becomes a marginal person who
knows and understands the way of life of the minority and majority or the
dominant and subordinate power groups" (emphasis in original).[12]

Using Hunter's *Community Power Structure* as a model for a study of black
leadership in New Orleans in 1963, Daniel C. Thompson regarded "as leaders
those individuals who by their efforts are able to initiate, stimulate, consoli-
date and direct the activities of others in the solution of common problems or
the achievement of specific social goals." More specifically, leaders are "those
who have manifested the ability *to get things done* or to achieve goals generally
regarded as valuable and beneficial to the Negro community" (emphasis in
original). Thompson also distinguishes between African American "intraracial
leaders" and "interracial leaders." The former are those "whose social activities
are largely directed toward the solution of problems and the achievement of
goals that are a primary concern to members of their own racial group." Their
positions do not require "substantial contact, communication or negotiations
with persons of another race." Thus, in this view, most white and black leaders
would be intraracial. Occupationally, Thompson's leadership cadre includes
the same business and professional persons identified in Hunter's and other
studies, but, unlike in Hunter's study, ministers, particularly, constitute a large
percentage of the group.[13]

Gunnar Myrdal and Manning Marable assess African American lead-
ership in the context of the "principles and practices of liberal democracy."
Myrdal found antipathy for black leadership among the black masses because
the elite group acted out a prescribed role in democratic society. The cen-
tral problem that has confronted black America over the past centuries, in
Marable's view, is how "liberal democracy" can be "extended and guaranteed
to black people." He sees leaders as those "individuals who have the ability
to understand their own times, who express or articulate programs or poli-
cies that reflect the perceived interests and desires of particular groups, and
who devise instruments or political vehicles that enhance effective change."
The greatest challenge to African American leadership, Marable argues, is to
abandon the "charismatic authoritarian leadership style and paternalistic or-

ganizations" and move toward the goal of "group centered leaders" and grass-roots empowerment. In short, instead of leadership from above, "democracy from below." Myrdal agrees with Marable that African American leadership tends to be conservative and that there are constant tensions between the traditional leaders and younger, more liberal ones. But Elaine Burgess sees more fluidity in African American leadership. Neither ideology, institutional position, personal characteristics, nor wealth constitute the basis for leadership, but rather "a combination of these factors." Everett C. Ladd echoed these views, suggesting that "leadership styles vary from time to time and place to place."[14]

While several scholars have suggested that an ideological framework and practical applications for African American leadership based upon promotion of insular community interests and control of community institutions—black power—had their origins in the period of antebellum slavery, and still others contend that the modern use of the phrase originated with Congressman Adam Clayton Powell in the 1950s, there is a general consensus that contemporary use of the phrase "black power" originated in the Meredith March of 1966.[15] In early June 1966, James Meredith, the first-known black student to enroll at the University of Mississippi, began a proposed two-hundred-mile walk from Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, to inspire Mississippi blacks to vote. Despite the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, many southern blacks, particularly in such areas as rural Mississippi, still were afraid to register and cast their votes. Meredith's proposed march was to be a demonstration against fear. The Meredith March had barely begun when, on June 6, he was struck, but not seriously wounded, by a shotgun blast. The first news reports did not clearly describe Meredith's condition, and many blacks assumed that he was mortally wounded—another civil rights advocate felled by an assassin's bullet. Civil rights leaders from throughout the nation denounced what was feared to be a slaying and vowed to carry on where their fallen comrade had left off. Several of these, including Martin Luther King Jr. of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC); Stokely Carmichael of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); and Floyd McKissick of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), sped to Memphis to continue the march against fear.[16]

As the new marchers, black and white, gathered on U.S. Highway 51, undercurrents of disunion surfaced. At least since 1963, younger elements in the civil rights movement had begun to question two major tenets of the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr.—nonviolence and white participation. During the Meredith March, leaders of CORE and, more particularly, of SNCC

questioned the presence of whites in the Mississippi protests. As violence against the demonstrators continued and as Mississippi law-enforcement officers arrested some of them, the tenets of King fell into further disfavor with the Meredith Marchers.[17]

Among the "young Turks" who dared openly challenge the tenets of King, the most articulate was the SNCC's Stokely Carmichael. After emerging from a Mississippi jail, the fiery, West Indian–born youth told a crowd of blacks: "I ain't going to jail no more. I ain't going to jail no more. . . . Every courthouse in Mississippi ought to be burned down to get rid of the dirt." Then Carmichael shouted a phrase previously used by the SNCC's Willie Ricks and others, "black power." "Black power," the younger blacks responded. "Black power," Carmichael roared four additional times. "Black power," the young blacks replied each time. When Martin Luther King Jr. heard the chanting of the slogan, he expressed disapproval. His closest followers urged the slogan "freedom now" upon the marchers. But Martin Luther King Jr. was not in control of the Meredith March; Stokely Carmichael was. And his cry was "black power."[18]

What did it all mean? The media, white politicians, black leaders, almost everyone, reacted with a definition. Many saw it as an ill omen. It was, in their view, a verbal justification of the black violence of the Harlem and Watts explosions of the previous two years. It was black racism, black retaliation for the long years of white oppression. It was rage, ungodly, un-American.

It was almost a year after the Meredith March that Carmichael collaborated with the political scientist Charles Hamilton to articulate a definition of "black power." They saw the concept principally in political terms. Accepting the reality of two American societies, one white and one black, they argued that the black community must be developed, reconstructed, and controlled in the interest of and by blacks. Separate black political organizations should run and elect black candidates in black communities. The institutions of black America, particularly the economic and educational ones, should be responsive to a black constituency. Only by organization and control of their own communities, they argued, could blacks ever expect to achieve social and political integration into the mainstream of American society. A powerful black political base and powerful black-controlled social and economic institutions, Carmichael and Hamilton seemed to say, would win respect and acceptance from white America and achieve black liberation.[19]

After Carmichael and Hamilton gave their philosophical position on the questions and issues surrounding the controversial slogan "black power," politicians, journalists, civil rights leaders, scholars, and even schoolchildren

continued to debate the meaning of the now-famous slogan. When scholars in the civil rights era weighed in on the concept of black power, many, including Harold Cruse and Martin Duberman, agreed with Carmichael and Hamilton that political control of organizations and institutions in the black community are at the core of the concept, but the further ramifications have led to a myriad of positions. Some, like Maulena Karenga and Alvin Pouissant, characterized it as a positive, creative concept that bolstered black self-esteem. Others, including Adelaide Cromwell Hill, Lawrence Neal, and Akinyele Umoja, connected it to black nationalism, including a nationalistic black religion and Pan-Africanism. Still others, led by Komazi Woodward, found a cultural dimension in it as expressed, for example, in the relationship between the black arts movement and black politics. Some, including Harold Cruse, Hasan Jeffries, and Nathan Wright, suggested that politically, black power resulted from the failure of the civil rights movement.[20]

As the scholars emptied their pens on the question of "black power," black activists of various persuasions debated the issue in the media, in public forums, and often behind closed doors. Robert F. Williams, of North Carolina, for example, an advocate of black self-defense, identified black progress and black power with "violence and upheaval." The black nationalist Maulena Karenga deemphasized the economic and political aspects of "black power" and extolled the virtues of "color culture and consciousness." Money, he said, "is not the answer to the problem unless we have a value for spending it." To "Think Black, Talk Black, Act Black, Create Black" and "Live Black" were as important to him as buying and voting black.[21]

One of the first of the older black leaders to embrace the concept of "black power" was Floyd McKissick, then head of CORE. CORE, like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), had been founded as a biracial group dedicated to racial integration and equality, but during and after the Meredith March, McKissick pulled the organization away from a dominant white influence and toward an embrace of "black power." McKissick seemed to have had some early difficulties in defining the term. After considerable criticism from white supporters of CORE, McKissick declared in July 1966 that: "Black power is not black supremacy, does not mean the exclusion of white Americans from the Negro revolution, does not advocate violence and will not start riots." Sometime later he said that the black power movement attempted to "achieve power for Black People" in six different areas: political, economical, improved self-image, development of leadership, federal law enforcement, and consumer mobilization.[22]

Malcolm X, the most articulate philosopher of the Nation of Islam, like