

OVERCOMING DOMINATION:
GAINING INFLUENCE THROUGH STRATEGIC CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

Kathrine Moore: Overcoming Domination: Gaining Influence through Strategic Conflict
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My essay will consider what actions can be taken to combat the domination faced by Black citizens living in poverty. I will argue against the decision made by many political theorists to write unbiased citizens into their ideal theories of justice, and will suggest that moving toward a society with enhanced freedom requires a recognition that biased citizens make political decisions. For this reason, the second part of my essay will evaluate alternative approaches that have been taken by Blacks living in poverty to combat the power of their oppressors. I will suggest that this group of citizens might benefit from carefully navigating the tension between divergent collective action approaches. Doing so should give the group a greater chance of being able to keep its autonomy, keep the sympathy of bystanders, and gain the insider influence necessary for impacting the policymaking process.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BLM	Black Lives Matter
BPP	Black Panther Party

Introduction

While it is certainly not the case that the American polity as a whole has agreed upon how our laws can best protect the freedom of each person, many would agree that showing respect for autonomy requires that we ensure citizens have the ability to influence the decisions that impact them. It is clear, however, that some citizens do not have this ability. While most every adult citizen has a legal right to vote, politicians rarely feel pressure to speak to the issues that are important to members of marginalized groups. This lack of influence is clear, for instance, when one looks at how rates of Blacks living in poverty have consistently been over twice the rates of whites living in poverty and how these rates have reduced only slightly in the past fifty years.¹ Further, the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement highlights that this lack of influence means that Blacks continue to face discrimination in our nation's criminal justice systems.² While there have certainly been advances for Black citizens following the Civil Rights Movement, Blacks living in poverty seem to face unique challenges that have made them unable to make the same gains as others within the Black community. The stagnant poverty rates and the persistent discrimination toward Blacks in our criminal justice systems highlight that this

¹ 31.1% Black poverty rate in 1969 has only reduced to 25.2% in 2014. From US Census Bureau Reports: "24 MILLION AMERICANS—Poverty in the United States: 1969" and "Income and Poverty Rates: 2014"

² I argue that the Black Lives Matter movement is representing an interest of importance to Blacks living in poverty because Blacks who live in poor neighborhoods disproportionately endure police discrimination (the primary focus of the movement). While I recognize that discrimination is endured by Black persons of any class, Blacks who experience poverty are more likely to experience police interaction. Support for this claim can be found from studies that examine the relationship between race and the social disadvantage of neighborhoods (de Bodman & Bennet, 2011, Jargowsky, 1996). This is important because police interaction increases in neighborhoods with higher rates of social disadvantage (see literature on 'social disorganization theory'). However, poverty alone does not explain the higher rates of police interaction for Blacks: see Brunson and Weitzer's study (2009) comparing police relations with Black and white youths. When the authors control for neighborhood socioeconomic status of the neighborhood, they find that Black youths are still treated differently by police officers. For these reasons, being both Black and living in poverty increases the likelihood that one will face police discrimination.

group of citizens continues to face systemic domination in our society. Indeed, experiencing multiple forms of marginalization has made it difficult for members of this group to influence the decisions that impact their well-being.

My essay will consider what actions can be taken to combat this domination. I will begin by arguing against the decision made by many political theorists to write unbiased citizens into their ideal theories of justice, and will suggest that moving toward a society with freedom for all citizens actually requires that we accept that biased citizens will shape political decisions. This means that overcoming domination requires conflict between parties with competing interests. For this reason, the second part of my essay will examine and evaluate alternative approaches that have been taken by the members of dominated groups to combat the power of their oppressors. This will include an examination of three tactics: 1) the adoption of universal framing, 2) the adoption of institutional routes of influence, and 3) the adoption of disruptive actions. After noting the trade-offs that come with each of these approaches, I will suggest that a group who experiences multiple forms of marginalization will be hurt if they adopt just one of them. Instead, the final section of this essay will argue that movements representing the interests of groups who experience domination must carefully adopt and navigate the tension between all three approaches. Doing so should give the group a greater chance of being able to keep its autonomy, keep the sympathy of bystanders, and gain the insider influence necessary for impacting the policymaking process. Although this is by no means a rigorous empirical study, I hope my examination of Blacks living in poverty will highlight some of the obstacles faced by persons at the intersection of marginalized identities, and how these citizens engage in the strategic conflict that enables them to combat their domination.

Political Decisions without Bias?

As a liberal democracy, the United States seeks to navigate the pluralism found within its borders by respecting the free and equal nature of all citizens. However, determining the best way to provide this respect can prove difficult because there are many ways in which a person could define freedom. Does "liberty for all" merely require that all have equal formal rights or does it require that we try to ensure that everyone has a chance of exercising the freedoms protected by those formal rights? Following Iris Marion Young and Philip Pettit, I believe that respect for liberty requires the latter and, therefore, requires that all are able to influence political decisions. This section will begin by briefly explaining why the ideal of non-domination should be advanced as a way of protecting the freedom of each citizen. Second, I will present alternative reforms that political theorists have developed in order to ensure all are able to influence decisions: Young's 'city-life', Pettit's republican 'model of democracy', Benhabib's 'deliberative democracy', and Mouffe's 'agonistic democracy.' After arguing that agonistic democratic thinking best enables the possibility of moving toward the ideal of non-domination, I will suggest that if we want to learn how our society can move toward this ideal, we must also evaluate the political actions that have been and are currently being taken by dominated citizens within our imperfect democratic setting.

While there are some people who suggest that the formal political rights afforded all American citizens ensures that our society already respects the freedom and equality of all persons, this argument disregards the somewhat covert truth that minority group members often face unequal treatment. This unequal treatment, in turn, makes it more difficult for the members

of such groups to use their formally granted freedoms for their personal benefit (Young 79). Unfortunately, just by nature of living in a democracy, minority group members tend to be vulnerable to the power of majority group members. Indeed, majority decision-making translates to majority-rule and this means that citizens who are a part of a minority group are easily vulnerable to systemic domination. Although we may not be able to (and may not want to) stop all power imbalances, Philip Pettit explains that it is when power imbalances place a person under the “potentially harmful power of another” that justice requires those inequalities be combatted (5). It is no great leap to further conjecture that when citizens are unable to influence the political decisions that impact them, they are, indeed, in this vulnerable position. It is my contention that the inability of Blacks living in poverty to influence political decisions is one example of citizens living under the “harmful power of another”. Therefore, if we want to live up to our stated ideal of providing “liberty for all”, members of this group must be able to influence decisions, despite their lesser power. But, of course, the difficult question becomes: *how* can they do this? An examination of various political theories aimed at ensuring inclusive decision-making can help us find an answer to this seemingly intractable issue.

To begin, Young’s desire for a society that respects difference brings her to advocate for a beautiful conception of “city life” as a way of ensuring all persons gain influence in the decisions that impact their lives. “As a normative ideal,” she explains, “city life instantiates social relations of difference without exclusion” (227). She envisions cities where groups live side by side, without a desire to assimilate one another and with a desire to engage in democratic politics. This is because people are comfortable with the possibility of changing through their interactions with the ‘other’ and this comfort means that one group’s point of view will not dominate the view of any other. Young’s proposal would be lovely if realized, but I think she

misunderstands what it is that makes inclusion so difficult. The greatest issue negatively impacting the ability of dominated groups to gain power is not a fear of them changing who we are, but a fear of them taking our material privilege. If Black citizens living in poverty are able to influence political decisions, for instance, they will most certainly make demands that will impact the material advantage of whites. Vincent Hutchings's (2009) study examining the discrepancy between racial attitudes of whites and Blacks makes clear that this is true. White support for the government in Washington to ensure Blacks get fair treatment in jobs was just 44% compared to 90% percent of Blacks. The same disparity holds true for the proposition that the government in Washington should help ensure that the social and economic position of Blacks is improved (37% supported by whites versus 74% supported by Blacks) and the numbers who support the claim that there should be preferential treatment in hiring for Blacks (11% supported by whites versus 54% supported by Blacks). The belief that citizens will develop a willingness to ensure that others have influence in political decisions, fails to recognize an important source of exclusion. Even if citizens could get used to the idea of other cultural groups shaping policy, the recognition that they would put power in the hands of those who would make material demands on them is a far greater demand. This expectation anticipates citizens who are capable of putting the needs of others before their own material interests. The wide gap between whites and Blacks on support for racial policies, however, highlights that more powerful citizens have consistently put their own interests before those of their fellow citizens.³

Similar to Young, Pettit's theory also requires an ideal citizen that does not (and may not ever) exist. He explains that he wants his theory to be grounded in reality, stating that it should be read "to warrant a claim to institutional feasibility: it represents a regime we can see how to

³ Indeed, Hutchings undertook this study to show that attitudes on racial policy preferences had not changed in the Obama-era—he found that the statistics were almost identical to those of 1988.

establish and stabilize” (188). And yet, in order to see the successful implementation of such reforms, Pettit explains that there must be both institutional shifts and *a citizenry committed to equality*. He provides some good ideas for institutional reforms to protect minorities, such as independent advisories that check government decisions. Still, however, I’m left wondering how we can cultivate a citizenry to enact these reforms in the first place. I imagine Pettit’s answer must be the same as his answer to how we ensure the citizenry will uphold those institutions once they are in place; he requires that they must be “genuinely willing to live on equal terms with all others” (216). Again, however, it is important that we take seriously the proposition that it may not be possible for citizens, who covertly benefit from the domination of marginalized citizens, to develop this perfectly egalitarian approach to political decision-making.

A third strand of political theorizing that I aim to call into question is that proposed by deliberative democrats. While there is a wide range of deliberative theorists, they generally share the idea that better decisions are made when citizens come together to deliberate about political matters. Depending on who is writing, the deliberative theorist will argue that the decisions made under such a system will be ‘better’ because they will either be more reflective, more reasonable, or more rational than the result that would be achieved under another democratic decision-making procedure (Fishkin 1993, Rawls 1993, Habermas 1996). While there is diversity amongst what they think enhances the result, they all agree that the ability for citizens to influence the decisions that impact them is vital for democratic legitimacy. While deliberative democrats detail requirements that are meant to combat bias in the deliberative process, they seem to be overly confident in our ability to follow those requirements. For instance, Seyla Benhabib (1992) outlines what would seem a thorough ‘model of practical rationality and deliberative legitimacy’. She explains that:

...only those norms, i.e., general rules of action and institutional arrangements, can be said to be valid which would be agreed to by all those affected by their consequences, if such agreement were reached as a consequence of a process of deliberation which had the following features: a. participation in such deliberation is governed by norms of equality and symmetry; all have the same chances to initiate speech acts, to question, to interrogate and to open debate; b. all have the right to question the assigned topics of conversation; c. all have the right to initiate reflexive arguments about the very rules of the discourse procedure and the way in which they are applied or carried out. There are no *prima facie* rules limiting the agenda of the conversation, nor the identity of the participants as long as each excluded person or group can justifiably show that they are relevantly affected by the proposed norm under question. (31)

Benhabib's model clearly stipulates that all citizens must have equal influence in the deliberative process, but unfortunately it is still unable to ensure that all persons will be included or heard.

When she qualifies that excluded persons or groups must provide a justifiable reason for why they should have a say in the conversation, she requires that citizens who are members of more powerful groups in society be capable of incredible impartiality. This theory provides more powerful persons a simple way of casting aside the claims of less powerful—they need merely claim that the other's reasons are unjustifiable. Again, we see a theory that relies on the possibility of an unbiased citizenry in order to ensure all persons are included in political decisions.

My critique of deliberative democracy is not a new one, as the deliberative turn in democratic theory left many political theorists worried that we might be developing an ideal theory that further entrenches the power of the powerful. While deliberative democracy highlighted the importance of making decisions through an inclusive and reasonable dialogue, critics expressed fear at how these procedures could obscure power imbalances and ensure that hegemonic perspectives would be the only ones deemed reasonable. Put simply, rather than decisions being aimed at the common good, critics of deliberation suggested that decisions in such a system would be aimed at the good determined by the powerful. As I have been eluding,

this unfortunate result occurs because the assumption that people will be impartial when they enter deliberative arenas fails to account for the way biases impact our assessments of one another's way of giving reasons. Lynn Sanders (1997), for instance, explains the danger of developing a theory that is dependent upon unbiased citizens for its procedure to work, stating that it...

...paradoxically works undemocratically, discrediting on seemingly democratic grounds the views of those who are less likely to present their arguments in ways that we recognize as characteristically deliberative. In our political culture, these citizens are likely to be those who are already underrepresented in formal political institutions and who are systematically materially disadvantaged, namely women; racial minorities, especially Blacks; and poorer people. (349)

The failure of deliberative democracy to account for (and to only further obscure) entrenched biases, led many theorists to think about the need for open conflict if all persons were to gain influence in political decisions.

Rather than trying to develop a procedure that aims to erase our biases, critics of deliberative democracy have advocated that a theory of democracy must provide space for us to express our passions through conflictual interaction. Indeed, Chantal Mouffe (1999) argues that power and antagonism are ineradicable in democratic politics and she rejects the idea that we can determine the 'correct' answer through deliberation. This is why Mouffe argues that "the main question of democratic politics is not how to eliminate power but how to constitute forms of power that are compatible with democratic power" (753). For Mouffe, this means that we must accept that there will always be an 'us' versus 'them' distinction because unity is only possible by defining an "other", but that we also must ensure that this distinction not result in the desire to dominate those who are different from us. Mouffe (2013) believes that distinctions between groups can be compatible with liberal democratic politics if "others are not seen as enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries whose ideas must be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to

defend those ideas is not to be questioned” (7). While I’m not certain we can ensure this ‘adversary’ rather than ‘enemy’ sentiment in every single case of democratic conflict, I do believe it is fair to suggest that the majority of American citizens agree with the idea that their opponents ideas should be fought, but that their opponents also have the right to defend those ideas. If we understand democracy as one that allows for conflict between biased citizens, it seems that we needn’t wait for the cultivation of perfect citizens in order for dominated persons to gain influence. Rather, viewing democracy in this way means that the American citizenry is already prepared to engage in the kind of conflict that can enable dominated citizens to combat their domination.

Agonistic democracy is, therefore, the only theory I’ve detailed that allows us to combat domination, despite having a biased citizenry. As we’ve seen, each of the others assumes that the way to ensure all citizens are able to influence decisions is by cultivating citizens who are perfectly committed to ensuring this inclusivity. Indeed, Young presented us with perfectly open citizens who had no desire to dominate. Pettit presented citizens who were perfectly committed to equality and again had no desire to dominate. And Benhabib presented citizens who chose to be perfectly impartial so as not to dominate others. While such ideas are useful in helping us dream to be something we are not, the immense task of such a huge transformation seems impossible when we consider the way in which our biases make it difficult for us to be impartial even when we try to be.

Literature on motivated reasoning, for instance, supports the idea that cultivating unbiased citizens may be a difficult (if not impossible) goal to achieve and provides empirical support for the claim that bias undermines our ability to be as fair as we know we should be. A strong case for motivated reasoning was presented decades ago by Ziva Kunda (1990), who

argued that “when one wants to draw a particular conclusion, one feels obligated to construct a justification for that conclusion that would be plausible to a dispassionate observer. In doing so, one accesses only a biased subset of beliefs and rules” (493). The theory of motivated reasoning highlights that this is not a conscious decision. Rather, Westen and colleagues (2006) explain that “motivated reasoning can be viewed as a form of implicit affect regulation in which the brain converges on solutions that minimize negative and maximize positive affect states” (1947). Supporting the claim that we engage in motivated reasoning, the authors found that when committed partisans were confronted with threatening information about their party’s candidate the partisans found a way to arrive at conclusions that discounted the information. The theory of dual attitudes can help us make sense of how this happens. People will often try to override their prejudiced views with thinking that they believe to be impartial, but this can be made difficult by the fact that people are capable of holding implicit and explicit attitudes on a subject (Wilson et al 2001). The ability to hold two opposing perspectives explains how a person is unaware that they are being biased and unable to see that they may be reasoning in a way that enables them to neglect their explicit commitments.

The difficulty of upholding the explicit commitments that oppose our implicit biases can be seen in the racial attitudes held by white Americans. As the majority of American citizens benefit from the continued subjugation of Blacks in poverty, it is not shocking that they might be motivated to ignore the mistreatment of this group. Further, the negative stereotypes of Blacks that citizens internalize throughout a lifetime of socialization makes it likely that many white citizens will hold implicit bias toward Blacks. Indeed, Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) explain that

Because of current cultural values, most whites have strong convictions concerning fairness, justice, and racial equality. However, because of a range of normal cognitive, motivational, and sociocultural processes that promote intergroup biases, most whites also develop some negative feelings toward or beliefs about blacks, of which they are unaware or which they try to dissociate from their nonprejudiced self-images. (4)

While these biases will not tend to result in overt discriminatory practices, they will encourage whites to express their subconscious feelings through actions that can be rationalized within an egalitarian framework. Gilens's (1999) study examining the reasons Americans often reject welfare policies helps make sense of how a white person can be discriminatory, but still believe that they are being fair. He finds that the media was more likely to present poor blacks as undeserving of assistance than poor whites, and that the media disproportionately presented images of Blacks when they portrayed poverty. Gilens argues that the association of Blacks with poverty and with forms of assistance that the wider polity viewed less favorably resulted in reduced support for welfare policies—the very policies that might help to combat the stagnant poverty statistics mentioned above. Here, we see that negative stereotypes about Blacks made it more likely that citizens would reject welfare policies. Moreover, it is also clear that many whites would be motivated to reason in a way that leads them to reject support for out-group members. When the media primed the implicit biases of whites, it became more likely citizens would reason in a way that upheld the interests of their own group. Even if we can produce citizens who want to uphold egalitarian norms, it is often difficult for them to follow through on those expressed desires.

Our tendency to be biased means that Mouffe is correct to recognize that democratic decision-making will involve citizens who advocate for their own interests. Indeed, recognizing the role of bias and the necessity of conflict in decision-making is a necessary step for overcoming the domination that persists in our society. However, great power imbalances still

exist in our current political setting, making it difficult for dominated citizens to make gains. Therefore, we must also consider what actions enable members of dominated groups to benefit from this conflict. For instance, how can Blacks living in poverty advocate for their interests in a way that allows them to influence policies? The remainder of my project will examine different approaches that have been advocated as necessary for groups to gain influence and how groups at the intersection of multiple forms of marginalization might learn from these approaches in order to gain greater influence in the present and future. My general question, then, is: If we live in a society where people are biased and members of some groups face domination, what can the members of these groups do in this non-ideal setting to combat their domination?

Gaining Influence: Alternative Approaches of Marginalized Groups

What certainly cannot be denied is that, despite the continued domination of some persons, many marginalized groups have achieved gains throughout this nation's history. Consider the Women's Suffrage, the Civil Rights, and the Same-sex Marriage movements. These cases make clear that social movement organizing is one way for a marginalized group to gain influence in political decision-making. Yet, it also cannot be denied that it is incredibly difficult for a movement to impact the political process and that some are likely to have an easier road than others. Indeed, the vast majority of movements will come and go with little influence on or notice from the wider public. This section will examine social scientific research that helps to elucidate which goals and tactics have proved useful for advancing the interests of marginalized groups. Specifically, I will examine and evaluate the usefulness of three approaches to gaining influence: 1) the adoption of universal framing, 2) the adoption of institutional routes, and 3) the adoption of disruptive acts that threaten the status quo. While each of these approaches have proved useful in advancing the interests of some groups, I will suggest that each approach also comes with trade-offs that can negatively impact groups who experience multiple forms of marginalization. After surveying the negative ramifications of each approach, it should be clear that groups who experience multiple forms of marginalization, such as Blacks living in poverty, must carefully balance the tradeoffs that emerge from each of these approaches if they are to gain influence in the political arena.

Universal Framing & (Lack of) Influence

Some suggest that achieving policy goals for marginalized groups will best be realized through a frame that is universal, rather than particular to the needs of the identity group. This is because appeals for progressive policies are more likely to resonant with non-group members if those appeals address the needs of a broader audience. This would mean that a movement advocating the interests of Blacks living in poverty would do better if they advocated for the interests of all persons living in poverty, rather than focusing on the needs of the Black community specifically. As a white person, I can imagine many reasons why I might be more inclined to support a movement that presents me with a colorblind frame—perhaps it is easier for me to empathize with the needs of poor persons when I imagine those poor persons to be from my same racial group, perhaps I am more inclined to support the policy because I could see myself benefitting from it one day, or perhaps I believe all poor people deserve the same opportunity to receive support. With so many reasons for white people to support colorblind policy proposals, it is no great surprise that some people believe advancing frames that encompass all races will better enable members of the Black community to influence political decisions. While this may be the case, advancing this approach disregards the way in which the actualization of colorblind policies often results in minority groups being “written out” of legislation. Therefore, advancing a frame that brings broader support, might also lead to the promotion of goals that fail to address the needs of the subjugated community in question.

The literature on social movement framing, however, suggests that it might be efficacious for marginalized groups to advance a universal frame, despite this trade off. Since the wider population will not share similar experiences to members of marginalized groups, a group can adopt universal framing to avoid ostracizing outsiders, and the failure to do so may hinder

bystander support. As Robert Benford and David Snow (2000) explain, if a frame is to be persuasive, movement actors must work to present the frame in a way that is cognizant of the values and beliefs of its audience—or in a way that “culturally resonates.” Explaining the usefulness of developing a culturally resonant frame, Benford and Snow (1986) note that collective action frames should work to interpret the world for its audience, and do so in a way that is “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support and demobilize antagonists” (198). Without working to develop a culturally resonant frame, a movement may fail to mobilize people to join their cause, may ostracize potential sympathizers, and may face opposition from those whose interests are in opposition to movement members. Holly McCammon and colleagues (2007), for instance, found that being sensitive to dominant cultural norms proved important for the success of women’s movements aimed at gaining the right to be on juries. Further supporting the need to present a frame that can reach a broad audience, Shah and Thornton (2004) find that the media will ignore a frame that cannot be easily digested by the wider public. Since it is unlikely members of the wider polity will easily identify with movements representing groups who experience multiple forms of marginalization, it seems particularly important that members of these movements do the work to develop a frame that might garner bystander support.

We have found that developing a culturally resonant frame is regarded as important, but what would this kind of framing look like for a movement representing the interests of Blacks living in poverty? Sniderman and Carmines (1997) conducted a series of experiments aimed at supporting the idea that the use of colorblind rhetoric is most conducive to bringing about support for policies that are beneficial for this community. They explain that the “‘particularist value of ethnic diversity’ conflicts with the ‘universalistic value’ of equal treatment before the

law and that this conflict makes it difficult for Americans to support policies that give ‘preferential treatment’” (118). To test this suggestion, they designed an experiment meant to measure how much support for social welfare increased when the framing of policies was universal in nature—i.e. by making certain the case for assistance relied upon a moral principle that goes beyond race. Their results supported their claim: the authors found that just 31% of whites supported policies that benefited Blacks when those policies were racially targeted and racially justified, but that 57% of whites support such policies when they were universally targeted and universally justified.

Assuming the results of their experiment are valid, we still have many reasons to question the efficacy of adopting such an approach. Support for colorblind policies does not mean that the policies will be colorblind in execution. There is a legacy of colorblind legislation that has failed to adequately address the needs of Blacks in this country. For instance, the New Deal was written in a way that the majority of Blacks were unable to benefit from it for decades. While the policies were ostensibly neutral, both Social Security and unemployment insurance were not extended to farmworkers or domestic workers. Similarly, Black veterans technically had the same benefits as whites through the GI Bill, but were often unable to capitalize on them. In his article in *The Atlantic*, Ta-Nehisi Coates argues that Title III of the bill, which granted low interest home loans, was essentially impossible for Blacks to utilize because whites running the VA and the banks sought to exclude Blacks from buying homes. It appears that when policies do not explicitly speak to the needs of the Black community, the majority community has the power to implement them in ways that fail to address the needs of Blacks. Indeed, Williams (2003) argues that even if “universal policies were enacted, history has shown that like Social Security, the GI Bill, and other universal policies, they would in all likelihood reproduce racial inequality”

(378). These examples highlight that there is danger in adopting a frame that focuses on universal appeal at the expense of the particular needs of the community facing domination.

While past colorblind policies failed to meet the needs of Black citizens, some might argue that the real problem was that these policies were enacted when greater portions of the white population held explicitly racist views. The examples of colorblind policies failing Blacks in America do not disappear with explicit racism, however, and continue to shape the life chances of many Blacks. As we saw above, implicit racism continues to shape the way in which whites interact with Blacks. The failure of colorblind policies to address the needs of Black citizens is most obvious when one looks at the stagnant statistics of white versus Black poverty rates (11.6% vs. 25.8%)⁴, white versus Black income (\$75,371 vs. \$40,581)⁵, and white versus Black net worth (\$134,118 vs. \$11,068)⁶. Without legislation specifically aimed at countering the gap between Blacks and whites, it seems that high rates of poverty in the Black community will persist. Indeed, specific examples of how present-day colorblind legislation continues to fail Blacks are not hard to find. For instance, despite the passing of the 1968 Fair Housing Act, protecting buyers and renters from discrimination by sellers and landlords, Blacks are still targeted by sub-prime lenders. Williams explains that sub-prime loans are five time more likely in Black than white neighborhoods, making it more difficult for Blacks to generate wealth in the form of home investment. A recent *New York Times* article also brought to light that Blacks continue to be segregated in poorer areas with fewer resources because counties introduce discriminatory zoning policies. The article explains, for example, that a New York village was

⁴ From the 2013 American Community Survey Briefs: "Poverty Rates for Selected Detailed Race and Hispanic Groups by State and Place: 2007-2011".

⁵ From the 2013 Federal Reserve Consumer Survey (income for "prime" working age head of household).

⁶ From the 2013 Federal Reserve Consumer Survey.

accused of “discrimination by catering to residents who had protested the board of trustees’ initial embrace of a zoning classification that would have allowed multifamily housing”. Further, Coates explains that the decision to make additional Medicaid funds optional in the implementation of the Affordable Care Act provides another example of Blacks being disproportionately hurt by a colorblind policy. Coates explains, “this policy will help Blacks one day [just as Social Security does today], but they will be injured in the meantime.” Universal policies may bring some change for marginalized citizens, but these policies do not tend to empower dominated citizens immediately and there is no guarantee domination will be alleviated in the future.

It is clear that the history and continued experience of discrimination and domination faced by Blacks living in poverty requires more than equal treatment before the law in order to be combatted. Rather, our biases make it difficult for us to enact colorblind policies fairly, necessitating that movements representing members of dominated groups advance a frame that addresses the particular circumstances that keep them from making gains. In her rejection of the promotion of universal policies, Williams argues that “rather than blunting the wedge issue of race, as universalists...advocate, both the commonalities that bind and the race-specific experiences that objectively separate whites from most people of color must be components of the new political logic. Both targeted compensatory and universal benefits are needed (398).” If members of dominated groups follow Williams’s suggestion, it would mean they might do best to adopt a frame that can appeal to the broader community, but also one that does not fail to highlight the way in which *racial* discrimination keeps them in them in an oppressed state.

Institutional Routes and (Lack of) Influence

If adopting a broad, universally resonant frame can fail to promote the interests of marginalized groups in our society, perhaps groups will be better off if they focus their efforts on pursuing institutional routes in order to gain influence. Advocates of ‘insider’ routes—such as lobbying, electoral politics, and litigation—argue that adopting these tactics enable groups to gain long-term policy influence and suggest that pursuing avenues for long-term influence is likely to be more effective than trying to change a single policy (Rochon and Mazmanian 1993). Supporting this claim, Browning, Marshall and Tabb’s (1984) study of minority politicians highlights that incorporation of minorities can be important if the interests of minority groups are going to gain influence in policymaking. Further noting the benefits of institutional routes, Staggenborg (1988) argues that the organizational memory that comes with a formalized institutional approach allows a social movement to persist even when mobilization of recruits reduces. This means that formalized organizations are ready to act when political opportunities arise. Clearly, scholars who study institutional routes of influence have shown that there are advantages to this kind of approach.

Pursuing change through political institutions, however, can negatively impact members of groups who experience multiple forms of marginalization. Indeed, McCarthy and Zald (1973) argued decades ago that the institutionalized routes that had become increasingly important for social movements were having a conservatizing effect, noting that “the bulk of the institution-backed participatory revolution is ameliorative rather than radical in intent” (26). This is, in part, because those persons who choose to pursue this approach to advocacy are more likely to have the skills and resources that are required to engage with bureaucracy. Smith (1996) argues that this helps to explain why Blacks living in poverty have failed to make political gains...

...the middle class leadership establishment is wedded ideologically, institutionally and economically to white structures of power and is therefore adverse to independent or radical thought and action, having as one of its foremost concerns quiescence in the black community and stability in American society. The material conditions in the black community, however, necessarily give rise to radical and nationalistic thought and action, which in turn makes race group solidarity and action all but impossible. (280)

Put simply, the interest groups that represent marginalized citizens will generally be shaped by the most advantaged segments of these populations. This means that the needs of the most disadvantaged subgroups, ostensibly represented by a movement organization, may fail to influence an organization that adopts 'insider' tactics.

The literature on intersectionality helps elucidate the reasons why people at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities may often find their voices squashed when social movement organizing efforts pursue inside bargaining routes in order to achieve policy change. As Kimberlee Crenshaw (1995) theorized, the many different identities people possess intersect and create a unique experience for each person. For instance, Crenshaw notes that a woman who experiences domestic abuse and speaks English needs different support services than a woman who experiences domestic abuse and does not speak English. This means that legislation that helps "women" or legislation that helps "immigrants" will often fail to account for the needs of a person who is both a woman and an immigrant. Strolovitch (2006) finds empirical support for this claim in her study of interest group politics; she finds that organizations representing the interests of marginalized groups give greater weight to the interests of their most advantaged constituents and that the interests of the least advantaged subgroups receive the least amount of attention. For instance, organizations that represent the interests of the Black community will be more likely to advocate for affirmative action in higher education and least likely to advocate for increased welfare benefits. Further, organizations that promote the interests of labor will be less inclined to advocate for policies that will address discrimination against minorities than they will

be to advocate for white collar unions. This means that Blacks who are struggling to find employment or to attain a decent paying job will find that their needs are often under-represented when movement organizations adopt institutional routes of influence.

While adopting an insider route for achieving policy change can be useful for a movement that represents marginalized groups, it may also come with the unfortunate result of neglecting the interests of those who are the most disadvantaged in that group. The interests of more powerful group members will be promoted because they are the people who have the time, skills, and resources to engage in this kind of advocacy. For Blacks living in poverty, this is a problem because the needs of their community do not align with middle-class and upper-class Blacks. When members of dominated groups pursue an institutional approach in order to gain influence, more powerful members of society make it difficult for them to do so.

Disruption and (Lack of) Influence

Some scholars have suggested that both of the above tactics are misguided and that the only way a group that truly faces marginalization can gain influence is through disruptive acts. Rather than trying to gain the support of bystanders or gain influence through "insider" routes, advocates of a purely disruptive approach argue that marginalized groups garner political gains when they manage to keep their autonomy and are, in turn, able to actually threaten the power of out-group members (Piven and Cloward 1971). Advocates of this approach argue that when a movement is steered away from disruption and brought into the institutions themselves, marginalized groups lose the ability to threaten the power of their opponents. Still, it is clear that not all disruptive acts will manage to threaten and that some threats are easily squashed. If a movement is to gain enough support to threaten opponents (and eventually influence policy), it

must garner media attention and that media attention must present a favorable (or at least neutral) portrayal of the movement actors.⁷ This is because an unfavorable media framing of a movement will make it unlikely the movement will garner sympathizers from non-group members.⁸

Unfortunately, there are many reasons that the disruptive acts performed by groups who experience multiple forms of marginalization often fail to engender sympathy from bystanders.

A key problem faced by groups that find themselves at the intersection of multiple forms of marginalization is that it is quite difficult for them to upset the status quo in the first place. Members of these groups represent such a small portion of the wider population that contentious political action aimed at addressing their needs is unlikely to mobilize the large swaths of people that are often necessary for a movement to gain momentum and influence. Piven and Cloward further note that the efforts of marginalized groups are frustrated because they are in “weak institutional locations to use disruption as a tactic for influence” and that “some of the poor are so isolated from significant institutional participation that the only ‘contribution’ they can withhold is that of quiescence in civil life: they can riot” (25). Indeed, if a movement is unable to successfully threaten the institutional functioning of more powerful groups, some members of the group may resort to taking actions that garner negative attention. Put simply, the lack of power held by those who experience multiple forms of marginalization will likely encourage some members of the group to adopt nonnormative tactics⁹ for two reasons: 1) they are frustrated

⁷ Two caveats to this claim. First, I do not mean to suggest that political opportunities are not important for whether a movement is able to make gains through disruption, but the performances chosen by movements also matter. Second, it is increasingly suggested that the reliance on the news media for mobilization is reducing with the increase of social media networking. This may be true, but until studies support the claim that the mainstream news media is no longer important for mobilization and scope enlargement, I will still assume that attention from the news media is important for a movement to garner recruits (See Andrews and Biggs 2006 for support on news media).

⁸ It has been found that favorable framing of a group impacts public support for policies that benefit that group. (See Rose and Baumgartner 2013 and Gilens 1999).

⁹ Action that violates the norms of the wider social system (Tausch et al 2011).

by being unable to influence the system peacefully¹⁰, and/or 2) they recognize that they are more likely to gain media attention when they adopt nonnormative tactics.

Unfortunately for the broader movement group, the negative ramifications of adopting nonnormative tactics is exacerbated by the fact that reporters seek conflict for news stories. This focus on conflict, therefore, leads the media to highlight the nonnormative tactics taken by social movement participants, at the expense of the preferred framing of other movement actors. Supporting this claim, Sobieraj (2010) finds that reporters demand authenticity, rather than legitimacy from activists. This demand for “authenticity” not only means that activists are unlikely to gain coverage when they try to present themselves as legitimate, but she also finds that the media will actively choose to disregard those aspects of the movement that aim to be perceived as legitimate. While this means that engaging in violent or aggressive forms of disruption will increase the likelihood of a movement garnering media coverage, such a decision comes with a trade-off. Ackerman and Duvall (2001), for instance, argue that violence serves to discredit movements.

The reason violence can have such a negative effect on a movement is likely linked to Sobieraj’s finding that reporters rarely report on why movement participants adopt nonnormative tactics in the first place. Such a claim is supported when one considers the media portrayal of the Black Panther Party (BPP). Jane Rhodes (2007) finds that racial stereotypes were highly prevalent in national-level and Bay Area media coverage of the Black Panthers, stating that “press accounts about the Black Panthers relied heavily on certain racially coded frames that communicated deeply held beliefs about black Americans—as a group, prone to violence and criminality, lacking the ability to behave reasonably and responsibly, and driven by an irrational

¹⁰ Supporting this claim, Taush et al (2011) found that lack of perceived efficacy and contempt for out-group members predicted the adoption of nonnormative collective action tactics.

(and dangerous) hatred of whites” (89). She further finds that coverage told the public little about why the organization existed. Boykoff and Gies’s (2010) study of the media coverage of the BPP in Portland further supports the claims advanced by Rhodes. The authors find that the predominant framing the media advanced when discussing the BPP was one of criminality, followed by a violence frame. While the Oregon media did sometimes report on the group’s community organizing efforts to provide free breakfast to those in need, these stories did not actually mention the overarching goals of the organization when they did so. From this coverage, readers could not have known that one of the primary goals of the BPP was to combat the poverty that plagued (and continues to plague) substantial portions of the Black community. By highlighting the violent (or nonnormative) tactics and neglecting the overarching goals of a movement group, the media makes it more likely that public opinion will be shaped in a way that causes the wider citizenry to reject the movement as illegitimate.

Once again we have found that an advocated approach to gaining influence through social movement organizing can be advantageous, but that it can also result in negative ramifications. Since some persons who experience multiple forms of marginalization are likely to try to overcome their lack of power by adopting nonnormative tactics, the media is able to easily sensationalize those tactics and ignore the actual goals of movement participants. The way in which the media frames an issue likely impacts the possibility of a movement to gain sympathy from the wider polity, but the preoccupation of reporters with portraying conflictual or ‘authentic’ activists makes it less likely that the movement will gain this much needed sympathy (Rose and Baumgartner 2013; Gilens 1999; Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Again, an unfortunate trade-off makes it difficult for members of dominated groups in our society to gain influence in political decision-making.

Overcoming Domination: the Adoption and Navigation of a Diversity of Tactics

The above section makes clear that movements representing the interests of those who experience multiple forms of marginalization (or those who are dominated) must navigate a great tension when they attempt to influence political decision-making. I began by arguing that open democratic conflict is the best way for members of dominated groups to overcome their domination, but I have also just made clear how difficult it is for dominated groups to engage in conflict in a way that will actually enable them to gain influence in political decisions. We saw how attempts to appeal to the wider public through culturally resonant framing can result in the advocacy of legislation that fails to address the interests of the particular group in need. We saw how trying to influence policy through institutional routes can result in the interests of advantaged sub-groups being advanced, but fail to adequately promote the interests of the truly dominated, disadvantaged sub-groups. Finally, we saw that when members of groups who experience domination are encouraged to adopt nonnormative disruption tactics, the efforts of the whole movement can be easily sensationalized as violent or illegitimate by the news media. If these routes often fail to empower the members of groups who experience domination, what can members of these groups do to force their influence upon the wider polity? To answer this question, I will argue that groups who face systemic domination in our polity might be more likely to gain influence if they adopt an approach that embodies the elements of Kenneth Andrews's 'movement infrastructure model'. To briefly support this claim, I will suggest that perhaps the current successes of the Black Lives Matter Movement can be attributed to their

following an approach similar to the one outlined by Andrews. Finally, I will conclude with two claims about overcoming domination that I hope this essay has adequately supported.

Andrews (2001) agrees with my above assessment that following just one of the three tracks I have outlined is not the best strategy for a social movement to gain influence in the political process. In response to the differing camps that promote each route, he argues that a movement must actually recognize the necessity of disruption, persuasion, *and* bargaining, and he outlines a movement infrastructure that enables this diverse approach. First, this infrastructure requires that the movement have diverse leaders who are embedded in indigenous networks. This allows leaders to be more responsive to those they are meant to represent, and allows for a diversity of skills to be brought to the movement. Second, he argues that relationships between activists and organizations are important for mobilization, and that relationships with formal organizations are important if a group is to influence the policymaking process. Finally, the model also requires that movements draw their resources from the labor and monetary contributions of movement participants. The diversity of approaches and leaders enables the movement flexibility in how it chooses to exert influence, and the dependency of organizations on movement participants ensures that movement members are able to shape the actions of the various leaders. As Andrews explains it:

A strong movement infrastructure can spur political elites to initiate policy concessions in response to the perceived threat of the movement. That threat rests on the belief that a movement has the capacity to institute more substantial change through parallel, autonomous institutions. (76)

Andrews tests his theory through an examination of how civil rights movement activists were able to impact the implementation of local poverty programs in Mississippi—programs that disproportionately met the needs of Blacks living in poverty. He finds that when community organizers better embodied his ideal infrastructure, they were able to gain greater influence on

how poverty programs were implemented. Andrews's study provides us with empirical evidence of how members of a dominated group were able to gain greater influence in political decisions.

If Andrews is correct that movements are most successful at achieving influence when they adopt an infrastructure that is similar to the one he has outlined, perhaps we can make sense of the recent successes of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) as partially attributable to the movement doing just that.¹¹ BLM leaders, for instance, seem to recognize the importance of a leader's actions being shaped by movement participants. A recent article in *The New Yorker* explains that founders of the Black Lives Matter Organization advocate "a horizontal ethic of organizing, which favors democratic inclusion at the grassroots level" (37). These leaders recognize that leadership is important for organizing, but also believe it is vital that people at the bottom shape the actions of those leaders. A clear example of the grassroots nature of BLM can be seen through the way in which its frame was developed. According to a recent study examining Twitter's role as a platform for BLM, the framing of the movement was shaped by the trends in tweets of movement participants (Freelon et al 2016). #blacklivesmatter was not amongst the top hashtags at the start of the movement; instead the tweets tended to reference the place where an act of police brutality was being protested (#nypd or #ferguson) or they referenced the victim's name (#ericgarner or #mikebrown). By December 2014, however, #blacklivesmatter was used more often than any other tweet. The authors argue that "this indicates both the arrival of 'Black Lives Matter!' as the movement's defining rallying cry and a shift away from a single-minded focus on individual police brutality incidents toward an understanding of the issue as systemic, racialized, and in dire need of remediation" (63). In so

¹¹ Recent successes include a \$500,000 grant awarded to the Ella Baker Center (directed by cofounder of the BLM Organization) in order to develop ways to monitor and respond to police violence, gaining meetings with both Democratic presidential candidates, and successfully encouraging voters to oust the Cleveland prosecutor and Chicago state attorney after each of them failed to adequately address police killings of Black teenagers.

shifting the frame, movement participants were able to broaden the message in a way that could better resonate with persons who were not in the geographic setting of these acts of violence. Further, the issue could better resonate with opponents of other issues of injustice, enabling the movement to draw support from other activists and sympathizers. Despite this broadening of the movement, the study finds that the discussion on Twitter remained Black-led. The grassroots efforts of movement participants led to a frame that both broadened the message, allowing it to resonate with a larger audience, and highlighted that this issue could only be adequately addressed if society recognizes the role of racism in police brutality. If the framing of the movement had not been shaped by the grassroots efforts of activists, it might have been conservatized by leaders who believed a more universal message would appeal to a broader audience.

Not only have movement participants been able to shape the movement framing, but the recognition that disruption, persuasion, and bargaining are all important for garnering influence in political decisions gives the movement the flexibility that Andrews suggests is so important to movement success. Indeed, Freelon and colleagues note, “BLM’s members engage with politicians, the press, and the public through both conventional and contentious means, setting it apart from movements that operate exclusively in one mode or the other” (7). Many BLM leaders, for instance, accept that institutional routes can be useful when those pursuing them actually uphold the interests of the Black community. For example, DeRay Mckesson, a prominent leader within the movement, has decided to adopt a ‘conventional’ route of influence by running for mayor of Baltimore. Moreover, some movement leaders met with President Obama in an effort to persuade him to adequately address criminal justice reform. Not only do they try to persuade those who hold power through ‘respectable’ meetings, but they also utilize

acts of disruption to threaten those who are meant to represent their interests in institutions. BLM protestors shut down Democratic presidential nominee Bernie Sanders's campaign rally in July 2015, for example, demanding that he speak more to issues that impact Black citizens. In response, Sanders added a criminal justice reform section to his website and hired a woman affiliated with BLM to work for his campaign. Clearly, this act of disruption encouraged Sanders to more adequately speak to the needs of Blacks who face systemic domination. Finally, BLM protestors have also been responsible for obstructing traffic—in one instance closing down the Golden Gate Bridge—in an effort to force the wider community to address the problems that negatively impact movement participants. By adopting a flexible approach, BLM has been able to show that if politicians fail to speak to them, they will find another way to be heard.

While Andrews's model highlights the benefits of diversity, it is also true that such an approach comes with its own trade-offs. As Andrews notes, a diverse leadership structure "can generate ongoing tension within a movement" (76). This is because the more decentralized the movement structure, the more likely a diversity of goals will arise amongst the various movement organizations. Goal diversity can create tension amongst leaders in a movement because goal diversity does not increase the likelihood of influencing policy (Olzak 2005). Instead, it seems to muddy the message presented by a movement, leaving the public wondering what the movement is asking for. Some of these difficulties have certainly impacted BLM. For instance, some prominent leaders within the movement have expressed frustration that the founders of the BLM Organization receive much of the credit for the movement's genesis. Lamenting that these frustrations have been expressed by movement organizers, Alicia Garza, BLM Organization co-founder, noted that "Movements are destroyed by conflicts over money, power, and credit. We have to take seriously the impact of not being able to have principled

disagreement, or we're not going to be around very long" (40). The negative ramifications of decentralization are also felt when more radical actors adopt tactics that reflect poorly upon the movement. For example, in 2014 movement organizations had to distance themselves from protestors who chanted that they wanted to see dead cops. Diversity allows movement participants to adopt whatever strategy best enable them to use their skills and resources, but movements also must exert energy into navigating the tensions that arise with that diversity.

An approach that allows for decentralization requires that movement participants put energy into conflict management and coordination amongst those with whom they may disagree, but the diversity of approaches that this decentralization affords seems necessary if dominated persons are going to gain influence in political decision-making. Therefore, enhancing influence for our society's most peripheral groups seems to require that dominated citizens fight to be heard by adopting disruptive tactics, providing persuasive arguments, and gaining inside influence. Movements representing members of dominated groups will need to develop claims that do not ostracize potential sympathizers, but should not advocate legislation that can easily exclude its supposed beneficiaries. Acts of disruption should generally avoid violence or aggression, but must still be used as a way of being heard when the group is otherwise being ignored. Finally, those who are supposedly representing an identity group through institutional routes must be encouraged (through the previous two mechanisms) to promote the interests of less advantaged members of the group. While the resources and skills that are needed to engage in this kind of strategic organizing might prove difficult for members of dominated groups to attain, the likelihood that these citizens will be able to organize for their interests seems greater than the likelihood that our nation will cultivate unbiased citizens who are perfectly committed to inclusive political decision-making.

Conclusion

There are two primary messages I hope will be quite clear by now. First, if we are serious about wanting to live in a country where the freedom of all persons is ensured, then we should not write ideal citizens into our political theories and should instead accept that overcoming domination will require conflict between imperfect persons. This is because we humans are biased in our own favor. This bias necessitates that the oppressed have an open space to engage in the conflict that can enable them to exert pressure on the citizens who hold greater power than they. Second, although current power imbalances make it difficult for dominated citizens to affect change, these citizens can combat their domination through carefully strategized political engagement. When citizens use the powers of persuasion, disruption, and bargaining, they are sometimes able to gain influence in political decisions. Admittedly, this is no easy task, but if those of us who are complicit in the domination of others want to combat that domination, we can choose to support movements that are shaped by the efforts of citizens who currently endure it.

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