

Democracy and Citizen Participation in the U.S.: The Role of Local Government

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The experience of self-government in the U.S. is centered in two institutions, local government and civil society. The strong tradition of local government is directly related to the fear of a potentially tyrannical central state. Jefferson idealized the access to local government and the participation of the educated citizen in it as intrinsic to democracy (Jefferson 1943c). Participation in elections in a larger representative political system, the Republic, was only one aspect of citizenship. Local governments were the source of community identification, and more responsive to felt public needs and therefore a more direct vehicle for citizen engagement.

Sandel describes the politics of citizenship in the United States as dominant until the Civil War (Sandel 1996). Citizens were directly engaged in electoral politics, local government and political parties. They participated in local associations and communities. Thereafter, industrialization and the growth of a strong and remote central government accompanied by a new constitutional and judicial emphasis on rights promoted individualism at the expense of community, minimizing the experience of self-governance.

Participatory Democracy is Praised and Shunned

There are contrasting views among American political theorists and practitioners on the importance of

citizen participation and participatory democracy in shaping a viable democratic society. Morone considers the concept of a direct democracy a “utopian dream”; the concept of participating citizenship a “wish” that could not be achieved because it conflicted with the creation of the Republic (Marone 1990). The Federalists eschewed direct democracy and established the representative system of the larger Republic to diffuse the threat of a consistent majority. Under the Constitution, the formal governance structure further limited citizen participation by exclusion: the vote was denied to women, non-property owners and slaves. Over the next hundred years the category of eligible voters was reluctantly expanded, for women as late as 1921. And although the Civil War purportedly resolved the issue of slavery, African-Americans did not, in fact, become entitled to vote in many states until 1965. Furthermore, election practices, which created barriers to voting such as literacy tests and Jim Crow laws, were common practice. Even now, state election laws establish unnecessary requirements which discourage voting (Piven 1988).

Participation in local organizations enhanced individual experience as acts of citizenship, but perhaps more importantly provided associational experience which encouraged the recognition of and the primacy of common and public goods. The very local structure of some of these organizations and the source of their membership contributed to the fact that they engaged people of common values and supported their identification with common purposes. It would be expected that they would, by association, come to build trust and expand networks together. The resultant social capital which they created reflected common identity and interests. Differences, including class differences, were secondary to common aspirations and concerns. Civic action, however, often took the form of protection of the group.

Local Party Organizations Encouraged Citizen Participation

Because of their local and decentralized structures, open membership and appeal to immigrant and low-income populations, political party organizations encouraged participation and, therefore, had an

important place in providing access to the political system. The leadership of the local party organization emerged from the community; it served and reflected the values of the community. In cities, local party organizations were neighborhood-based. They viewed themselves as community organizations which should engage and serve citizens in the governmental process. In fact, these party organizations were the first, and often the only, point of access to government for new immigrants and migrants to the cities.

The local precinct organization was not only an open institution; its function was to seek out as many voters and participants as possible. Shared values and trust were built into its structure and purpose. In exchange for votes, the precinct organization provided access to its networks for jobs and basic support (Bridges 1984). It was the source of social capital accumulated in clubhouses, in neighborhoods, and in cities. And although the political party may not have been as receptive to African-Americans as it was to ethnic immigrant groups in many large cities, the creation of separate African-American party clubs early in the 20th century in city neighborhoods was supported and encouraged by local party leaders (Wilson 1974). Women were not equal participants, especially since they were not eligible to vote. But they were welcome in limited roles and interacted with the local organizations when they needed assistance.

In general, active participation in party organizations, which were directly responsible for nominations and elections, required some participation in electoral politics and voting. Strong voter turnout in certain clubs and certain neighborhoods reflected the accumulated social capital of those organizations and the community.

Impact of Gender, Race and Income on Participation

Such analysis challenges the data on citizen participation which identifies gender, race, education, and income as the most significant correlates to voting behavior (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979). Recent research on the effects of community cohesion on participation in voting in low-income, minority communities confirms the importance of social variables as significant influences on voting participation,

overriding the influence of traditional, individual-centered variables (Callahan 1998). In fact, Berry, Portney, and Thomson conclude that efforts to increase participation structures in low-income city neighborhoods resulted in increased feelings of efficacy which, in turn, led to increased participation (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993). The changes in governmental structures in Birmingham in the 1990's and Atlanta during the first Jackson administration, which decentralized local government to the neighborhood level, encouraged broader participation in low-income communities. In both cases, however, newly elected African- American mayors publicized their efforts and fostered trust in the reorganizations. In a study of a similar but less trusted mayor's decentralization in Indianapolis in the 1980's, the African-American community was not encouraged to participate (Swindell 1995).

During the 1960's and the 1970's city revitalization reflected strong grass roots efforts to decentralize city institutions and decision-making to make policies more responsive to the needs of local low-income and minority communities. Community-control proposals dominated the political landscape and federal programs reflected the need for social and political change. Reform mayors in New York City, New Haven, and Detroit were committed to engaging new constituencies in the political processes and increasing community advocacy in new institutions, including community schools and health care centers, neighborhood city halls (Nordlinger 1972), and community-controlled institutions. Kotler even wrote about the need to create formal neighborhood governments as institutions of direct democracy (Kotler and Cunningham 1983). Resistance by professionals who controlled the services, as well as the inflexibility of bureaucratic agencies, minimized the community-control movement (Gittel 1980). The emphasis on participation and direct democracy, however, pointed out the failure of American institutions to address exclusion from city politics and the need to develop and encourage the creation of more institutions in which excluded groups would become active citizens.

Participation Leads to More Participation

The research on participation confirms that participation leads to more participation even when, as is

often the case, participants become cynical about government. These findings suggest that the act of citizen participation—whether within an association, as part of a group, or in a community—by its associational aspect, is more likely to result in an enhanced sense of efficacy, which, in turn, encourages further participation. It would be useful to explore the relationship between individual feelings of efficacy and how those attitudes reflect group, as well as individual, experiences. Guttentag's research on students in a community-controlled district in Harlem, compared with a group of students in a regular school holding SES constant, concluded that the former students felt more efficacious (Guttentag 1972). Gittell's research comparing students in the service corp experiments in Syracuse in 1978 showed a significant difference in the attitudes of suburban, rural and inner city students. Suburban students had greater confidence in their ability to influence what would happen in their lives; rural students were sure nothing would change for them. City students who were active in the program were more positive than the rural students but less assertive than the suburban students (Gittell, Beardsly, and Weissman 1981). Clearly, these differences in attitudes reflect the social and political structure of the society. Researchers should analyze how young people view the political system and the programs developed to engage them in the political process. Differences by race, gender, age or local place would tell us more about the formation of democratic attitudes and institutions.

Amy Bridges' critical study of neighborhood party organizations found that these organizations were so accessible to poor and immigrant groups that the participation in those groups probably contributed significantly to minimizing working class alienation (Bridges 1984). Since the clubs were organized at the neighborhood level, they often were ethnically structured, providing the basis for shared values, trust and the building of networks, which is the classic definition of social capital. In some Irish neighborhoods, the party clubhouse was networked with the parish, the parish school, local enterprises and local charitable organizations (Erie 1988). These networks expanded from neighborhoods to city-wide institutions so that the social capital of the Irish in American cities could be called upon to influence broader policies.

In particular, the parish church encouraged citizens to participate not only in their church-related organizations but in other neighborhood-centered organizations including the local party organization. The church and its organizations became an important source of social capital but also contributed to the development of neighborhood social capital. Worthy of note, however, is the fact that community identity and cohesion was synonymous with the development of social capital. Often, the accumulated capital was used to protect the values of that community or those organizations. Wood's research on the particular role of the Catholic Churches organizing efforts in Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) suggest the value of more substantive research about important church roles in community development (Wood 1997?).

Localism is at the Heart of U.S. Democracy

Democratic localism is an important part of the heritage of American democracy. Historically, citizen access and participation in the political and social systems has been through local governments, local organizations and voluntary associations (deTocqueville c1966). The strength of the democracy was directly related to the proliferation of local institutions and community-based organizations. That these organizations became an integral part of the local community reinforced identity with that place, and its culture and values. Membership in these groups, participation in local governance, and access to information contributed to expectations of inclusion, which defined a kind of participatory citizenship. Often the system fell short of expectations, but the practice of creating associations for a myriad of purposes in different segments of the community added to the experience of self governance. The separateness of the organizations insulated their members but also provided common identity and cohesion. These local organizations were also the source of provincial and insulating attitudes and practices. McCourt, in her excellent description of the participation of low-income women in neighborhood organizations in Chicago in the 1950's, notes that a good part of their activism is directed at maintaining segregated neighborhoods and schools (McCourt 1977). Boyte, on the other hand, regards all forms of activism as positive and an indication of the vitality of participatory democracy in

America (Boyte 1988). More insight must be provided into how localism effects social change through coalition building among groups and the circumstances under which interaction and joint action occurs.

American Political Values Shift From Public Good to Individual Rights

Sandel's use of the term republican liberalism to characterize the early American public philosophy stresses the importance of self-government and community, both concepts manifest in the tradition of voluntary association and participation (Sandel 1996). Public life cultivates civic virtue which then creates liberty and choice for society's members and concern for public good. He contrasts this definition of republicanism with the public philosophy of liberalism which is primarily concerned with protecting the citizen from government, promoting individual liberty, and placing the emphasis on private interests at the expense of the public good.

In addition to Sandel's work, other theorists have identified a shift in priorities in American political theory and practice which minimizes the value of social goods and redefines the role of government as the protection of individual choice and self-interest, at the expense of community purpose. Ehrenhalt, for instance, compares Chicago of the 1950's with contemporary Chicago. His comparison, although narrowed to the last half century, affirms that the earlier community life style which eschewed individual choice has yielded to a post 1950's Chicago in which individual choice and self-interest reign; commitment to community values has all but been abandoned (Ehrenhalt 1995). Schlesinger observed an historical swing of the pendulum from emphasis on community and association to affirmation of individualism in different eras of American history (Schlesinger 1986).

Community Organizations Enhance Citizen Participation

Another group of analysts is concerned with the relationship between civic virtue, attention to

community goals, voluntary and community organizations and citizen participation. Putnam's study of Italian democracy explores the centuries-old differences in civic virtue in different regions of Italy. He observes the greater responsiveness of selected, largely northern Italian regional governments which he attributes to their history and tradition of strong associations and participation in voluntary groups in those regions over 400 years (Putnam 1993). What he describes as the accumulated social capital in those communities is what "makes democracy work." Barber also writes about the differences in strong and weak democracy, which hinge on the elements of citizen participation, assembly and association, and the differential commitment to public goals which result (Barber 1984). Neither of these studies, though, are concerned with how issues of race, class, or gender may circumscribe or constrain participation or the development of social capital. Further, while the role of political culture is evident in Putnam's work, it is ignored by Barber and other democratic theorists.

Gittell (1980) over a decade ago in a study of 15 community-based organizations in three cities described the importance of local community organizations as a vehicle for political access, especially for marginalized populations. This was particularly true for grass roots organizations created to advocate a cause as contrasted to community organizations mandated by Federal legislation or service-delivery organizations, many of which originated as advocacy groups. She warned, however, that the emphasis on local democracy in urban communities placed a major burden for citizen participation and local advocacy on the individuals and groups with the fewest resources: the poor and minority populations. Significantly, her research concluded that organizations whose membership was comprised of lower income populations exercised less influence on public policy than did middle class groups (Gittell 1980). This finding suggests a strong economic dimension to social capital accumulation and its use for political or civic action.

Most of the research on organized groups stresses the general behavior of organizations; it does not distinguish the effect of external or internal social variables (Olsen 1967). More recent research describing women's organizations and leadership characteristics has provided important insights into

differences in behavior and styles of management-based organizations on women's socialization in American society. Our own forthcoming research on women's roles in community development suggests that race, class and political cultural differences of women in these organizations is of primary importance. Most gender studies conclude that women place stronger emphasis on common goals and are more likely to engage in collective decision-making and accept or promote social and institutional change. Our research confirms this conclusion (Bookman and Morgen 1988; Kanter 1977; Tronto and Cohen 1997).

Linking Gender and Race to Community Activism

Scholars of social change have not sufficiently explored gender, race and social differences nor do they incorporate them into their theories. Feminist theory offers a way to look at social behavior as a cause as well as an outcome in change theory, which has much to offer to the study of race and class (Pateman 1989). Operationalizing these themes is not easily accomplished and requires a different theoretical underpinning to direct the conceptualization of the problem; but there are too few empirical studies looking at the role of specific participants, or groups of participants, seeking or achieving change in local communities.

But among studies that do exist, the most notable is a recent book by Woliver who presents four case studies of community activism with emphasis on race and gender issues (Woliver 1993). Some of the detailed studies of the 19th century movements for adoption of public education in the states do consider the role of women's groups, workers' organizations, and the business community (Katz 1968; Tax 1980). Comparing Chicago school reform in the 1980's to New York City school decentralization in the 1960's, Gittell points out the importance of the coalition created by Mayor Washington in Chicago and the commitment to making fundamental change in the structure of the system (Gittell 1994).

For two decades, social scientists adopted a growth politics analysis which assumed that the business

elite dominated all city renewal decisions and measured success by economic-growth standards. That emphasis marginalized more intensive analysis of what was happening in the development of city policies, who was participating in setting the policy agenda, and how we could change the structure of institutions to open the system to new groups.

Case study, which is the most commonly used methodology to study groups, denies the opportunity to identify comparative differences in organizations. Such comparisons might provide insights into motivations for participation or differentials in the effect on producing or using social capital. None of the studies on social capital distinguish the differences in the kind and quality of social capital created by different groups or explain the reasons for these differences. There is no writing on the impact of structural racism and its effect on the creation of social capital. However, Walter Stafford's upcoming work on the black church and social capital could begin to provide us with important insights into some of these issues, particularly with regard to the role of the church in the African-American community and racism.

Creating Social Capital and Social Change Amid Diversity

Since local organizations tend to be created around common interests, identities and communities by relatively homogeneous groups, one can assume that social capital— as defined by Coleman and Putnam as values, trusts and networks— is a natural consequence of the organization of those groups (Coleman 1990; Putnam 1993). A serious question to pursue is how social capital is created by heterogeneous organizations with more diverse members who find common purpose not in identity alone, but in particular political, social, and economic values and goals. It is, and will be, those groups together which will make social change in American cities.

The literature on community organizations, interest group politics, and community participation recognizes the strong relationship between citizen participation and local democracy but has not

addressed the issue of social change. Putnam's writing on American politics suggests a decline in organizational membership and activism based on a decline in membership in traditional kinds of social organizations and associational activities. He describes this "bowling alone" as a shift from social and associational experiences to individual activity, thus diminishing social capital (Putnam 1995). Many critics of Putnam's conclusions regarding the U.S. experience, however, suggest he underestimates new kinds of self help and social organizations, public interest groups and community development organizations. He has also been criticized for his lack of knowledge about low-income communities and communities of color.

The large body of survey research on citizen participation which identifies individual variables to explain the low participation rates of African-Americans and Latinos and women in electoral politics ignores important differentials of political motivation, experience, and context. Carol Pateman's critical analysis of the legal, political, and social mechanisms which discourage, if not prevent, women from participation provides one of the few insightful analyses of the subject (Pateman 1989).

Local organizations are not only essential to the principle of local self government, but provide the primary mechanism for broadening citizen participation in the political system. Researchers and theorists need to expand upon the differential effect of local organizations in contributing to participation and social change by different groups, races, in different locales and in different policy areas. Context and organization determine access to the political system for otherwise excluded populations: some organizations provide better experiences of participation and more opportunity to access the resources of the system than others.

The Emergence of Local Civil Societies in America

The importance of what Katz describes as democratic localism in the early years of the Republic, as observed by de Toqueville in 1807, was in the prominence of local governments and the access and inclination of Americans to join and participate in a variety of local voluntary associations (Katz 1982;

Katz 1993). The importance of the local church also especially impressed de Toqueville. He highlighted the access to the social and political system through strong local institutions and citizens' enthusiastic participation in these organizations as distinctive and essential to the particular American experience of democracy. He saw the connection between these associations and self-government: "The Americans make associations to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to antipodes; in this manner they found hospitals, prisons and schools." He concluded that the right to freely associate and to combine to express an opinion or exert some form of action in the name of collective interest was a political imperative for a stable democracy. In his view, associations would provide some counter force, as well, to the growing power of government (deTocqueville c1966, 116).

Civil society includes a wide array of organizations which range from the social and fraternal to religious groups, sports associations, burial societies, unions and charitable community organizations; personal, economic and political. In the United States, the creation of associations is historically sanctioned by a minimum of regulation and the encouragement of a political culture which thrives on associations. Therefore, restrictions on the creation of local associations and organizations are largely a result of lack of resources. Racism, sexism and class-ism serve as constraints on the development of certain types of organizations. Other types of organizations are more common among certain kinds of groups. For example, poor and marginal youth are more likely to form gangs which can be a source of social capital; gangs provided a base of membership for the Black Panthers and the Young Lords in the 1960's . The Grey Panthers, probably the most cohesive advocacy group for seniors, organized first in local communities to support their special needs and later became part of larger coalitions.

Churches and Latent Social Capital Spark Civic Action

It is the shift towards identification with a group, sharing values and developing trust, that is significant to the creation of social capital and to civic action. The accumulation of social capital is an outcome of

association and a latent resource which can be called upon for civic action.

A good example of the use of stored social capital that later propelled civic action was the mobilization of the black church in the south and its participation in the civil rights movement in the 1960's.

Ironically, in the 1930's, Du Bois was critical of the lack of political engagement of the church (DuBois 1969); however, in the sixties the civil rights movement drew upon the strength of this accumulated social capital to support protest marches and boycotts (Morris 1984). In the 1970's and the 1980's, many church organizations were designed to engage in community development and community organizing. The accumulated social capital in local church organizations in religious sects can be an important source of social capital. The Catholic church, for instance, with its emphasis on parish organization and interest in, and attention to, the poor was, and is, an important source of social capital for many ethnic groups in American politics. In fact, the IAF does all of its political organizing using parish churches and unions as base organizations to address local problems, recognizing their latent social capital as a political resource. We have little research, however, on the methods that different churches or religious groups use to expand participation and promote social capital and, more importantly, how they use that social capital for civic action. Nor do we have much research to explain the use of social capital by the new urban masses such as African-Americans and Latinos in American cities.

Associations Can Build Social Capital Through Civic Activism

Social or political action by an association may add to their social capital, just as the use of power enhances power. Members acting together in association with common values and norms are able to build networks among themselves and with others, further increasing the strength of their social capital. Networking leads to coalitions and increased status and the power to influence decisions and public policies, although the path may be more difficult for some groups than others. Citizens working in groups together can build political capital, either because they can translate that identification into votes or because of their capacity to transform the organization into an effective pressure group. For most

political scientists, “protest is not enough”; social change ultimately requires engagement in electoral politics. For others, social change is a product of historical confrontation, oftentimes violent, with the political system over long periods of time (Moore 1966; Tilly 1977).

From a political perspective, it is the differences in the purpose, values and networks of associations and organizations and, most importantly, how they use them which gives meaning to their efforts. Because social action goes beyond individual acts to include political participation, it has significance for those interested in the use of social capital for political purposes. Important questions not addressed by the research include the circumstances in which social capital becomes a means of expanding political participation and a source of social change and the influence of race, class, and gender on those developments.

But theories of movement politics differ and, accordingly, the relationship between the concept of social capital and movement politics is a complex one. In describing the change from movement politics to institutionalization of change in Hungary in the 1980's and 1990's, Myszlivetz and Jensen suggest that the leaders decided that “...the time for social movements was over...stating that grassroots mobilization was unnecessary, if not dangerous to the new democracy” (Myszlivetz and Jensen 1998). In South Africa, the transformation of the society is based on active local organizations establishing processes and plans for community developments based on increased citizen participation.

Piven and Cloward view movements as organized but largely ad hoc, grassroots efforts using protest and confrontation as major strategies for achieving social change that depend upon class or social consciousness to arouse public action. This emphasis on minimum organization assures that resources and energy will be invested in the politics of the movement. On the other hand, the resource mobilization theorists see movements as planned, “top-down” efforts and deny that they could occur without significant investment of resources. They suggest that movements, in fact, rely on mobilizing the resources of existing organizations for their strength and are not spontaneous.

The differences in the emphasis of these theories results in contrasting priorities, one approach stressing the development of strategies for organizing large numbers of people to engage in protest actions versus efforts directed toward building permanent organizations with active memberships which develop networks and a variety of civic agendas and strategies for civic actions. The latter practice relies on the development of social capital which can be used for general and specific purposes, but is more likely to act within the general framework of the political structure as it is.

Both theories, however, rely on social capital for civic action. Balancing the intrinsic values of both strategies is essential to social change and responsive democracy. Movement politics, with limited reliance on strong organization, is too dependent on short term actions and mobilization and less well defined goals. Clearly, the stress on building social capital is too conservative a construct for many movement enthusiasts. They are skeptical about the relationship between social capital and political action. On the other hand, the advantage of resource mobilization organizations is that they establish ongoing agendas, networks and coalitions. But they are also likely to be less willing to relinquish their status and priorities (sometimes quite provincial or narrow) to the more radical goals of movement politics.

Racial and Gender Diversity Among Urban Movement Elites

Urban social movement politics, first described by Castells in the 1960's (Castells 1983), has been cited by some analysts as the most successful approach to community revitalization. These movements stressed building activist local constituencies among populations most effected by urban deterioration. The squatters movement, the community control and the environmental justice movements are the examples most cited. However, Gittell and Gardner, in their survey of environmental justice groups, found that these groups were not as racially diverse as assumed and included few poor people or people of color (Gittell and Gardner 1997). Janice Bockmeyer, in her research comparing large urban

social movements in squatter housing movements in Berlin and New York City, also found that people of color and the poor were not part of elite decision making in those groups, and their organization structure and priorities of the urban social movements were based on local culture. These findings suggest that the issues of race and poverty are probably deeper than the solutions which have been offered to solve them in urban social movements.

Political theorists, and especially movement theorists, define political involvement as citizen action. Concepts of trust and values which accrue from non-political associations like soccer teams and choruses, as described by Coleman and Putnam as the source of social capital, are rejected. The suggestion that membership in non-political entities can result in political participation is also rejected. Movement theorists have historically directed their action at welfare state goals, relying on building a strong central state, often in direct conflict with themes of democratic localism. Balancing the political values of localism and the economic values of centralism has resulted in a conflict between social capital enthusiasts and welfare state supporters.

Academic Disciplines Assign Different Meanings to “Civic Participation”

It is important to recognize that the research and literature on participation and groups varies with the methodology of the discipline. For example, sociologists are more likely to be concerned with the behavior of participants and the structure of organizations. It is not surprising that the concept of social capital originates with sociologists, in America James Coleman, a sociologist (Coleman 1990) took the lead. Political scientists, on the other hand, are more concerned with participation in electoral politics and therefore concentrate their research on overtly political organizations that seek to exert control in the policy process. They are less likely to regard the concept of social capital as useful if it does not address some dimension of political analysis.

More recently, a group of political scientists in public policy have been promoting research which examines the impact of policies on democracy including increased participation (Ingram and Smith 1998). Putnam, mentioned earlier as the leading political scientist to use the concept of social capital, defined its role in its influence on democracy. But Wilson, Moe, Walker and others, who have written on organizations, have not addressed the question of how these organizations contribute to social change (Moe 1980; Walker 1991; Wilson 1973). Mancur Olsen, the major economist to study organizations, saw the importance of free ridership because his concern was with the economic influences on participation and organizational behavior (Olsen 1967). It is no secret that the formulation of a research agenda, and the methodology employed in the research, will shape the findings.

This is certainly true regarding research on citizen participation and city revitalization. Evaluations of social change interventions are particularly reflective of these constraints. Early evaluations of Headstart, for instance, were negative. These evaluations were later contradicted by more longitudinal studies. Program evaluations conducted by MDRC, which compared training to employment using short-term job placement as the measure of success, predictably found limited value in training (The Brookings Institution Governmental Studies Program and Harvard University Project on Effective Interventions 1998).

Unlike these previous studies, however, interdisciplinary research will contribute more to our understanding of how to achieve institutional change. A significant vacuum now exists, for instance, in our understanding of the relationship between social capital, civic action, and movement politics and social change. Although McCarthy and Zald imply that social capital in organizations is the source for strength of movement politics, we need significant and empirical study to explore the ways in which social capital is used and accumulated by different organizations and over historical periods and how that information effects the ability to make change (Zald and McCarthy 1979). We know little, too, about how policies effect participation. We are not sure how the welfare state and centralization of the state effect the development of participation and social capital.

African-Americans and women have historically been discouraged from, or denied access to, participation in the political system. It is no wonder, therefore, that Dawson reports that in attitudes toward the state, both groups respond similarly to the need for state protection and support (Dawson 1994). Pateman demonstrates the ways in which the political system sets up social and ideological barriers to the participation of women in the political system (Pateman 1989). Dollard's *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* provides insights into historical political cultural constraints on African-American participation (Dollard 1937). Still, there are too few studies, and consolidation of data, to inform our knowledge of participation effected by structures designed to limit political access by race and class.

Why Some Groups Have More Social Capital Than Others

De Toqueville did not label what he was seeing as "social capital" when he observed that associations proliferated around so many issues in American life, but he considered what has become known as social capital a vital part of the new democracy. Pluralists describe the uniqueness of the American system as the balancing of the interests in the society through negotiations of groups (Bentley 1967; Dahl 1956; Truman 1959). As if groups had equal resources and equal power! Critics of that analysis point to the apparent differences in the resources and status of the various organizations, rejecting the concept of balanced interests. The more powerful groups speak as a "biased chorus" according to Schattschneider (Schattschneider 1960).

The same criticism can be made of the concept of social capital in its current use. Greater emphasis must be placed on understanding the differences in the accumulation of social capital by different segments of society and especially how, and under what circumstances, they convert social capital to political and civic action. From a political perspective, this means understanding how organizations and groups of associations use social capital to achieve power and create social change. We need to know more about how and why certain kinds of advocacy groups organize locally to express their interests

and challenge public policies in schools and hospitals, conduct rent strikes, and protest police abuse and how those efforts expand to state and national policy agendas.

In American politics, groups organize around single issues and policy areas. Existing church, social, and private organizations interact with, or have overlapping membership with, these groups. Most relevant at this moment in American politics is the greatly expanded use of social capital by the Christian Coalition to advance distinctive public policies. Utilizing a base of church membership and Christian Right ideology, the movement grew from local organization and membership to broader city, state and national agendas. Their entrance into active electoral politics is successfully producing significant social change, especially in how we as a society look at such issues as church-state separation, privatization and school vouchers. Not enough attention has been paid to conservative social change agents and movements and why they have achieved so much success.

Race, Political Culture and Group Participation in Regional Politics

Race and the history of racism are essential determinants of the character and quality of participation in organizations and groups in American politics, and there are regional and state differences in those practices. V.O.Key, in 1949 in his seminal work *Southern Politics*, provided a still vital comparative analysis of politics in the southern states. Utilizing an interdisciplinary economic, social and political analysis in his research he concluded that race was the overriding issue determining politics in the south (Key 1949). The most restrictive Jim Crow policies were adopted in the states with the largest African-American populations. While recognizing the value of his work, political scientists have failed to use it as a guide to further understand social change, or the lack of it, in American society. Race is never a popular subject of analysis in the mainstream of social science disciplines.

Local institutions can contribute to social capital by creating a positive environment for groups and participants. Little research has been done to explain the mechanisms which shape political

environments to encourage political activism and political associations as compared to those which discourage and negate active social movements.

Gaventa's analysis of power and powerlessness is most informing and could be applied to some communities of color. He says that historically closed and hierarchically structured communities run by narrow elites will socialize citizens to remain outside the system. Their lack of access and of experience in self governance will limit association and trust-building (Gaventa 1980). Other institutions of governance, including short ballots, city manager plans and non-partisan elections which formed the cornerstones of Progressive politics, can actually lead to marginalization of participation in political associations and government. The goal of Progressivism was to broaden access to political participation by destroying what was described as an unfair patronage system; but, in fact, these changes made political participation more exclusive. The decline of party politics and the promotion of the concept of merit that limited who had access to jobs in the government to those who passed written examinations resulted in narrowing the pool of participants. Although affirmative action studies reported on the poor representation of African-Americans which resulted from the tests, little has been written on structural racism as a causal factor. Reformers have generally tried to take the politics out of politics with the effect of limiting access rather than expanding it. Professionalization of government, which relies on experts, undervalues the benefits of self governance and citizen participation. These policies should be measured by their effect on the democratic process and the creation of social capital.

A city's political culture also impacts on the ability and success of groups to organize and participate in politics and to create social capital. This is most clearly demonstrated by the differential strength of gay organizations in different cities and the tactics used in those cities to promote gay rights. Gay groups have effectively organized local and state campaigns to change laws and practices effecting their rights, even in the face of what Alan Wolfe describes as the most emotional prejudice still in tact in America. Survey research describes the declining importance of race reflected in more positive views of respondents to integration and against discrimination (Wolfe 1998). Andrew Hacker questions these

findings in his recent review of books on race in the *New York Review Of Books*, “...unless we challenge their results, we might end up concluding that African-Americans are causing the problem themselves”(Hacker 1998).

Racism necessarily influences the structure and agenda of African-American activist groups. Marginal populations in America may experience constraints on their political activism but the particular circumstances and history of African-Americans is distinctive. Oliver and Shapiro and Bates and Howell’s research provides important evidence to suggest differences among African- Americans and Latinos in the assessment, development and use of economic and human capital (Bates and Howell 1998; Oliver and Shapiro 1995). Both studies stress the importance of networks in the Latino community to explain greater access to information about jobs and successful employment than is apparent in the African-American community. Both studies also agree on the discrimination against Blacks in particular. Why are the networks among African-Americans weaker? Is race an adequate explanation?

Early Charitable Associations Created Limited Social Capital

Historical and institutional research is essential to our appreciation of the purpose and use of social capital and social change theory, especially as regards low-income and minority groups. At the turn of the century among the most important associations were charitable organizations, the Temperance Union, and the settlement houses organized to address the problems of the poor in American cities. They created social capital for themselves, but did not contribute to the development of social capital for the poor. Boyer concludes that economic and social elites established those organizations to impose social controls on new immigrants and the poor (Boyer 1978). The middle-class reform groups acted to limit independent action and the creation of grass roots associations in the cities; the poor lacked the resources to create their own organizations and were represented by the elite organizations, minimizing their ability to create social capital for themselves.

Allan Ballard's research on African-American organizations in Philadelphia provides one of the few historical studies of independent community based groups (Ballard 1984). His work challenges the assumption that African-Americans were inactive politically in American cities in the 19th and early 20th century. Berg's book on the activism of American women's groups in the 18th and 19th century also sets the record straight on the activism of women and their pursuit of social change (Berg 1978). For both communities, genuinely local studies are necessary to rewrite the history of their activism in American cities.

Intermediary Organizations and Their Impact on Social Change

Intermediary organizations, especially in a federal system, are an important mechanism in the historical development and structure of groups, and their imprint on social change and social capital creation has not been adequately researched. Foundations, state and national associations, professional organizations and other not-for-profits have proliferated over the years, and we need to describe how they have influenced the development of social capital in local groups or whether they detract from its creation by their funding arrangements and agenda priorities. Funding by governments and foundations does encourage certain groups to organize and compete with each other, resulting in a lack of trust and discouraging networks.

Research that we conducted at the Howard Samuels Center (HSC) on community groups in the Empowerment Zones found that the Federal and EZ policies in several cities encouraged trust and networking and cooperation in the planning stage, but led to fierce competition among groups in the implementation and project-selection stage (Gittell and Newman 1998; Gittell, Newman, Bockmeyer, and Lindsay 1998).

In other research on community development corporations in three neighborhoods in three cities, we found that "legacy" organizations developed over time with leadership from the same families. These

long standing organizations, recognized and shaped by government and foundation funding over the years, had become gatekeepers in their communities. They are designated by the funders who also determine how and where money goes, often bypassing new immigrant groups and sometimes undermining the creation of new groups and limiting the development of others.

The institutional influences on social capital have taken into account the differences in community histories, culture and structures. Even in the civic society, particular organizations may monopolize control over resources and access to the system. In our research on CDC's, which focused on communities that were predominately African-American and Latino, we found long term, well funded groups in several cities, with legacies in leadership acting as gatekeepers in their communities. Maloney, Smith, and Stoker found similar circumstances in his studies of social capital in Birmingham, England (Maloney, Smith, and Stoker 1998). As in the U.S., these organizations, often run by professional staff, create the links between elected officials, economic elites and bureaucracies. They define themselves as "the community," and are funded by government and foundations as service deliverers.

Funding policies created by government and foundation officials have pressured organizations to move from advocacy to service delivery since the 1970's. The more circumscribed agendas of these groups reflect a reaction to social change oriented advocacy of the 1960's and 1970's and/or the limits placed on political funding by the federal tax laws. The failure of external funders to support and encourage local decision-making processes has probably limited the development of social change advocates (Brown and Garg 1997). How that happened, and is happening, needs more rigorous analysis if we are to pursue interventions to include excluded populations in the renewal of cities.

Voluntary associations and community organizations in every society are influenced by the composition of their membership, their status in society, class, ethnicity and race and their purpose. Those organizations will necessarily reflect the mainstream culture and values in the ways in which they build social capital. And we know diverse kinds of organizations differ in their ability to share common values

and norms and networks. Members of football associations, fraternal groups, and burial societies can find common ground and build trust differentially. Whether the social capital they build can be or is translated into political or civic action and under what circumstances is something we know little about. Wallerstein concludes that in the African nationalist rebellions, it was the burial societies and their members who were enlisted in the political struggle for independence and, later, in the recruitment of leadership for the new regimes. This conclusion suggests that latent social capital was converted into political action and political leadership. What determines how and whether organizations accumulate social capital, which leads to civic action, and the relevance of political culture in that process is worthy of more thoughtful study (Wallerstein 1966).

The shift within activist organizations from advocacy to service delivery moved civic society in the direction of professionalism. Funding was directed to enhancing professional staff and seeking more legitimate and appropriate agendas. The emphasis on developing power in order to influence policy undermined the purposes of mobilization, participation, representation and self governance. The result was reduced opportunity for building trust and bridging networks, thus minimizing the creation of social capital.

Unions, Sports Groups, and Others Can Develop Social Capital

Organizations may be created for one purpose and change their agenda under certain circumstances. Football clubs in Ireland and England have taken on local civic issues and even run candidates for office. Putnam (1993) describes these clubs in Italy as important resources for building social capital. In the U.S., other kinds of groups, including church groups and charitable organizations, have demonstrated an ability to become involved in social change and city reform movements. Organizations can begin as social groups and become political advocates for certain causes. Some groups are organized as advocates for one cause and are easily enlisted to other related issues. Unions, community organizations and interest groups serve the common purpose of their members, and their members may share some

common values and create trust in their association.

Unions and immigrant associations organized for economic and social purposes have contributed to social action agendas in cities from school reform to the creation of open space and protection of the environment. The Workmen's Circle, an association of eastern immigrant populations at the turn of the century in New York City, was a burial society, health plan and social club which provided access to literacy programs and schooling to immigrant Jews. It also contributed to the growth of social capital in that community, which was used to promote their political and social status in the city, state and nation. We need to know if social capital results only from association or from meeting common needs or the advocacy of common purpose? Is it possible that diverse groups working together in common purpose do create social capital as a result of their shared action? Is time and longevity essential to the creation of social capital?

Some analysts would suggest that organization for short-term political advocacy limits the development of social capital because it does not allow for the development of norms and trust. Civic action could lead to more long term association, however, if it builds more permanent organization. On the other hand, for those analysts concerned with the democratic process and the citizen participation which comes with civic action, accumulated social capital that is not converted into civic action is of less importance. Other issues have priority. Can one assume that a society can create or encourage the creation of organizations which will accumulate social capital? Will groups created and supported by governments or intermediaries to address certain purposes and needs, be less likely to produce social capital? Saegert and Winkel's work is instructive in conceptualizing and operationalizing an evaluation of affordable housing policies for low-income populations to determine which arrangements resulted in greater creation of social capital. Not surprisingly, cooperatively owned housing produced more social capital than city-run housing, privately owned housing and CDC-owned housing (Saegert and Winkel 1998).

Turning Community Organizing into Social Capital

One of the important issues in efforts to revitalize local communities is whether community organizing can help build local constituencies as a resource and create sufficient social capital in these communities to foster ongoing renewal. A debate surrounding the form and character of community organizing is important to judging its potential to turn non-participative communities and populations into activists.

Social science research explains non-participation as a product of social indicators like education and income; gender and race have also been identified as explanations for non-participation. Countervailing research only recently has explained these phenomena by the institutional constraints and influences on these populations to deter them from organizing and participating in the political system. One would assume, therefore, that changing those institutions and attitudes would be the primary agenda for those seeking to engage those populations in local efforts. But such reforms must be preceded by research and a literature and debate about the kinds of institutions which can replace the existing structure to accomplish the more positive goals. If community organizing has as its purpose mobilization to make changes in those institutions, it can serve community revitalization better over the long run.

In the past, however, too much community organizing has established short term goals and confrontational engagement. The IAF program in Texas is exceptional and offers a positive model of constructive organizing, using latent social capital in the churches to organize around school issues, building school constituencies to change the decision making process in Texas schools. Reforms stress important new roles for parents in the policy process (Shirley 1997). But the Texas experience also offers another important lesson in using community organizing as a tool. Local organizers from the community often have a deeper appreciation of the problems in the community, especially regarding race politics. The IAF worked hard at recruiting local organizers and leaders and networked with university and community elites to win their status and positive recognition. In too many other circumstances, the agenda from organizers outside the community may ignore the development of local

leadership at the expense of gaining institutional reform to support greater participation in the process of governance.

Others in the community organizing world have risked weakening their effectiveness by, ironically, becoming less representative of their communities and serving dual purposes, sometimes at the expense of people of color and women. ACORN, for example, has been on several sides of the organizing issue in different communities. Premised on the assumption that membership and membership dues keeps their constituencies local and their agenda responsive, they have been criticized for making many key decisions in the central office where there has been limited representation of people of color and women. In addition, ACORN has taken on service roles in housing and education; in those efforts they have been less attentive to building local constituencies. Skepticism is raised when organizers also become service deliverers in the communities they are supposed to be organizing, an issue that has not been adequately addressed in the research.

Consensus organizing, developed by Mike Eichler has been criticized by the Alinsky-type organizers in ACORN and Third World Organizing for being too committed to pluralistic politics and condescending to other elites, particularly the business elites, in their effort to get stakeholders to the table to agree on community goals. Eichler would say their efforts include special stress on bringing the local constituencies to the table as equals, and he sees their function as working towards that goal. In their evaluation of Eichler's work, Gittell and Vidal suggest community organizing should emphasize strategies which consciously build social capital through local organizations to achieve community development (Gittell and Vidal 1998).

Political Alienation and Civic Action

For marginalized groups, participation often leads to cynicism about the political system but results in increased participation in more change-oriented groups. We know too little about how alienation effects

participation and an orientation to social change. Can we assume that associations which recognize and support group identification such as race, ethnicity, place, and profession, are more likely to create social capital, networks and share norms and values? Do organizations which control their own destinies have more advantages in building social capital? Does the use of social capital for civic action add to the accumulation of social capital? Does outside funding or the need to satisfy external support institutions undermine advocacy and social change orientations? Do professional staff or outside organizers maintain dependency and prevent direct participation and undermine the creation of social capital?

Grass roots, locally created organizations assure a functional basis for shared values. Marginal populations, those who suffer exclusion from the system because of race, gender or ethnicity or because they lack resources, have difficulty maintaining their own, wholly controlled local organizations. Dependence on external support must effect the ability of organizations to accumulate and use social capital. Since place-based community organizations are a primary source of social capital building, when organizations from outside the community supply resources, they are likely to impose their values on the community and insist upon an agenda for those organizations. Government programs, which mandate the creation of local organizations, narrow their scope and advocacy (Gittell 1980; Selznick 1949). Any external creation of local organizations for the creation of social capital may be a diversion from locally conceived civic action, minimizing the participation and creation of social capital in the community. Our research has shown that often the lack of community representation and active participation in these organizations is ignored by the funders, even though the intrinsic value of these organizations as instruments of democracy is in their ability to represent local interests through direct participatory democracy and representation.

Community Development Corporations and Local Participation

In our research on gender and race in CDCs, we found that those groups which had greater representation of women and African-Americans on their boards adopted more comprehensive policies,

(Gittell, Gross and Newman 1994). In the Community Development movement of the last two decades, reliance on local organizations to rebuild communities should have been conceived as an opportunity to build social capital so that the policy of renewal was local and ongoing. Instead, the funding programs gave priority to specific outcomes; units of housing constructed was the major measure of success (Vidal 1992). Little or no thought was given to the opportunity to build local leadership and engage new participants. (Gittell, Gross and Newman 1994). Local problems, which residents viewed as equally and sometimes more important than housing, were virtually ignored. Those labeled the most “successful” CDCs were the professionally run organizations which, in fact, relied on outsiders to make decisions for the community (Vidal 1992). The current emphasis on Comprehensive Community Initiative is offered as an alternative to more narrowly focused community development. The concept, however, ignores the importance of process and local democracy and may, therefore, not effect significant change over the long term.

In the last several decades, efforts to promote more comprehensive community development strategies to enhance the affordable housing agenda ignore the fundamental issues of process and participation. Community development policies should be measured by how they effect local democracy and the development of local social capital. This means they must show greater concern with encouraging open access and citizen participation, the encouragement of networking and coalition building. As a result of that emphasis, approaches to community development will become more comprehensive reflecting community definitions of that concept. There would be greater likelihood that policy areas would be more integrated as community needs are defined, not by professionals trained in particular fields, but by citizens seeking responses to their needs. Community organizations are vital to comprehensive community development, but they must themselves be models of democracy and participation if they are to formulate the changes to be made. The concept of social capital allows us to see these developments through a different lens.

Policies regarding membership, internal democracy, representativeness and circulation of leadership,

stressing self-determination for local organizations, will enhance the creation of social capital and increase efforts to use that capital to join in coalition with other groups to achieve social change and to enhance the political process. Youth programs adopted in San Francisco and Oakland are good models for engaging a new generation in citizenship. These programs had youth-evaluating-youth programs in their city and making suggestions for new kinds of programs they considered more useful.

Essential to an understanding and appreciation of the political role of local organizations in a democracy is to describe how groups engage in self-governance, promote participation and shared values and encourage the building of networks and pursuit of common purpose through discourse and civic action. Greater energy must be expended to develop policies and programs which produce these results.

Intermediary organizations, particularly foundations, are important players in the efforts to achieve community revitalization. In the community development and housing fields, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and Enterprise, created by the foundations, have been key institutions in the structure. Our research suggests that there are several problems with related to these circumstances. First, intermediaries fill weak structured holes, thus limiting access and potential networking for community leaders and thus the building of more permanent social capital. In addition, foundation staff develop their own strategies and programs and often persuade local organizations to buy into their ideas; in return, local organizations are funded for their efforts. This contradicts the process of self-governance and has probably accounted for more failures in social programs than anyone knows or is willing to admit. Perhaps most destructive has been the emphasis of intermediaries on product goals and evaluations built on narrow achievements. The failure to stress the importance of participatory and representative structures as the first and primary step in community revitalization has resulted in the creation of a constituency vacuum. In addition, the lack of priority given to local governance reform, especially the need to bring decision-making to the community level so that local decisions reflect the opinions, needs and hopes of local communities reflects the conservative character of foundation efforts and the lack of appreciation that institutional reform is essential.

Conclusion

At this time, the virtual rejection of the welfare state has placed greater emphasis on the role of civil society. We are compelled therefore to address some important issues related to the abdication of national and state responsibility to local organizations. Local groups are not equipped to address national economic and social problems and we need to find a way to recognize and encourage their role at the same time that we struggle for supportive national policies.

A strong strain in American political culture is the commitment to strong local government in general and to vital communities or neighborhoods in cities. This emphasis reflects a recognition of the role of self governance in a democratic society; keeping government close to the people allows for more responsive institutions as well as more participatory institutions. The same tradition is intrinsic to conservative theory, but includes the rejection of a strong state. Strong local government can, however, co-exist along side of a strong central state. The central government is responsible for general welfare and equity issues which cannot be addressed by local or state government. The growth of the grant-in-aid programs in the 1970s testifies to the fact that local governments can and will grow with federal programs if the policies are written to achieve that purpose. Government policies and funding must take cognizance of the need to shape programs to enhance the democratic process.

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