Preemptive Power: Floyd Hunter's "Community Power Structure" Reconsidered*

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Much of the analysis of community power has occurred within a cost of compliance paradigm. The character of this conceptualization of power leads inevitably to pluralist conclusions and results in a misreading of Floyd Hunter's *Community Power Structure*. The alternative conception presented here, one of preemptive power, allows a restating of Hunter's argument and enables us to see how power in a complex community can at the same time be fragmented (as seen through a command and compliance prism) and concentrated (in the form of preemptive occupancy of a strategic role). The concept of preemptive power also provides a way of comparing power in Atlanta during the initial era studied by Hunter with the current era of the mid-1980s. In a context of profound social and political change, such a comparison reveals continuities and modifications in the power position of business.

Bachrach and Baratz (1970) were surely right in suggesting that there are two faces of power. Yet their concept of nondecision making has never fully fended off its critics. When Bachrach and Baratz applied their ideas in an examination of poverty in Baltimore, their analysis proved vulnerable to the charge that it was not so much a study of nondecision making as an account of how ideological and institutional change ultimately did alter the structure of power in that city. Defenders of pluralism have thus argued that either nondecision making is not all that different from decision making or that it is unresearchable (Polsby, 1980; Wolfinger, 1971). Yet, despite these criticisms, many observers continue to believe that Bachrach and Baratz were on the right track in treating power as having more than one face.

Is there an alternative to nondecision making? Can we conceptualize the process in another way to get at the second face of power? I think so. I propose to do this in a manner that may strike some readers as odd. I have gone back to the pioneering work of Floyd Hunter in *Community Power Structure* (1953) in order to develop the idea of preemptive power. While this term itself was never used by Hunter, the concept is embedded in his work. I am convinced that Hunter had an intuitive understanding of power that his critics have never confronted; consequently the community power debate has not been as squarely joined as it might have been. My way of trying to remedy that is by presenting the idea of preemptive power and then attempting to apply the idea to the Atlanta of Hunter's original study (late 1940s–early 1950s) and to the Atlanta of today (mid-1980s).

I use the term preemptive power for a particular reason. My working assumption is that much of the community power debate—certainly on the pluralist side and to a degree on the antipluralist side—has been caught up in a view

of social power as a compliance problem: *A* getting *B* to do what *B* would not otherwise have done. That is the standard formulation, dating back to Max Weber. I am going to argue that the compliance paradigm inevitably leads to pluralist conclusions, even by those who are not staunch partisans of that position (see, e.g., Debnam, 1984).

"Preemptive power" is a term that points to a different paradigm: power as a capacity to occupy, hold, and make use of a strategic position. I think this is the view of power that Hunter had, and I believe this is the conception Bachrach and Baratz leaned toward but did not fully develop. If we are clear about distinguishing between the two paradigms, we can see how power can be fragmented (power as a compliance problem) and at the same time concentrated (power as occupancy of a strategic position). That paradox, I think, has bedeviled the community power debate from the start.

Power as a Compliance Problem

If one treats power as a problem in compliance, it is easy enough to show that control can be exercised only over a small domain and limited range of activities or only to a restricted level of compliance (Wrong, 1980, pp. 14–20; see also Dahl, 1982, pp. 32–36). In Chester Barnard's (1938) terminology, "the zone of indifference" for most people most of the time is so narrow that achieving compliance is costly. Particularly in a formally democratic system, no group possesses enough resources to be able to afford wide compliance. Further, no group has the cognitive ability and the organizational magic to operate and maintain an extensive control system (Wrong, 1980, p. 20; Banfield, 1961, pp. 294–301). For this reason pluralists have argued that political actors are inevitably drawn into processes of bargaining and coalition building, and the resulting coalitions are believed to be issue specific and therefore short-lived (Polsby, 1980, p. 137).

In reaction to this line of argument, Bachrach and Baratz (1970) coined the phrase "nondecision making." The idea of nondecision making addresses the problem of compliance in a way that shows how elites can reduce the cost of control. It is a "you can get it cheaper wholesale" argument. Instead of expending resources issue by issue and gaining compliance in that costly fashion, elites expend their resources strategically by *preventing* unfriendly issues from gaining access to the decision-making agenda. Maintaining agenda control is less burdensome than maintaining comprehensive control. This line of argument is appealing, in part because it has a certain resonance with Herbert Simon (1976) and others who make a case for behavior rooted in limited cognition. Agenda control does not require omniscience. Nondecision making is also an appealing concept because it comports with astute political observation (Schattschneider, 1960). Able and experienced politicians do, in fact, concern themselves greatly with the beliefs and arrangements by which issues are defined and agendas controlled.

Surely the cost is less and the return greater from investing in the shaping and maintaining of arrangements and beliefs than from fighting issue-by-issue battles (Stone, 1982, p. 276). And if one can benefit from past successes and settled arrangements, so much the better. The argument can be extended from a second to a third consciousness-shaping face of power (Lukes, 1974; Gaventa, 1980).

The difficulty with the concept of nondecision making is not that it is wrong-headed or that it is inherently unresearchable. Quite the contrary on both counts. The difficulty is that it appears ultimately to be tied to some notion of gaining compliance, albeit in a form of prevention or gatekeeping. Bachrach and Baratz talk about efforts to prevent conflict or to thwart demands for change (1970, pp. 46, 50). By linking nondecision making to some form of interaction in which the superordinate actor must gain compliance from the subordinate actor, they make the process researchable. Moreover, the cost of compliance in such a situation is a great deal less than the cost of compliance in a comprehensive command and control situation. However, there is still a cost of compliance factor.

In terms of concrete experience, nondecision making explains how and why some challenges to established power are smothered, but it falls short of the full story. In response to Bachrach and Baratz, pluralists can employ their own form of infinite regress and respond to any incident of preventive action (keeping the poverty issue off the public agenda in Baltimore before the 1960s) with the claim that surely there are many occasions when such preventive actions did not occur (e.g., the poverty issue in Baltimore in the 1960s). Back of this pluralist line or argument is the assumption that, because compliance (even that purchased wholesale) is costly, no group in a democratic society is able to blanket the community with enough preventive actions to smother all outlets of dissidence. If the discontent is serious and not confined to a small band, then presumably resistance will occur at some point (cf. Dahl, 1982, p. 35).

According to its critics, since nondecision making sometimes works and sometimes does not, and in any event may be employed by more than one group, nondecision making must itself be pluralist (Wolfinger, 1971). Add to this the criticism that nondecision making is hard to link to broad social outcomes as a form of purposive behavior (Debnam, 1984), and one can conclude that non-decision making as presently understood (and misunderstood) is in need of clarification, or perhaps redefinition. A similar line of argument might be developed about the third face of power or false consciousness as a dimension of the total power picture. After all, a case can be made that in the 1960s and 1970s the masses did stir, and a fairly wide range of issues was brought on to the agenda of public debate.

Instead of rehashing the nondecision-making controversy, however, I propose a different focus: to depart from the paradigm of power as a compliance problem and instead to talk about preemptive power. As indicated above, I do not regard this as a totally new idea, but, instead, as one derived from a sympathetic

rereading of Floyd Hunter's original Atlanta study, *Community Power Structure*. Although preemptive power has kinship with nondecision making, the notion of preemption bypasses problems associated with preventive actions as a species of control and compliance.

Preemptive power has the special virtue of acknowledging that a wide range of issues may be on the agenda of public consideration while explaining why there is a pattern of sustained support for some policies but not for others. It also has the appeal of specifying what it is that is controlled, given a world in which the power of command is fragmented. Having borrowed heavily from Hunter, I shall in closing use the Atlanta case to illustrate preemptive power and what it might enable us to say about continuity and change in the structure of power in an American city.

Rereading Hunter

Floyd Hunter's *Community Power Structure* is not an unambiguously argued book, and his follow-up study of Atlanta (Hunter, 1980) did little to remove ambiguities. Still, the original book was a path-breaking work that had a profound effect on both sociology and political science, opening the way for a profusion of community studies and provoking a countertheory of power (see esp., Polsby, 1980). At the risk of activating long-held views of Hunter's work and arousing ingrained defenses of those views, I want to show that *Community Power Structure* offers an underappreciated insight into the nature of power that is more sophisticated than Hunter's critics credit him with. He did not spell out but had an intuitive understanding of what I call here "preemptive power." There is a logical structure to Hunter's argument that is often overlooked. Let me recapitulate that argument and then indicate why Hunter's position points toward a conception of preemptive power.

In briefest form, Hunter's argument includes the following components:

1. Power in the sense of a structure capable of playing a policy-setting role is formally divided between governmental and economic authorities (Hunter, 1953, pp. 5–6).

2. This policy-setting role is a necessary *function* in society (Hunter, 1953, p. 6).

3. Those who hold institutional positions of authority within the major business enterprises set policy not only in the economic sector but in the governmental and civic sectors. And they are prestige figures as well.

Parenthetically, note that Hunter's figure of 40 top leaders is derived by asking respondents to choose the top 10 in *each* of four sectors of community life. His next step was to determine how those four sectors were related to one another—what "associational, clique, or institutional patterns" were in evidence (Hunter, 1953, p. 6). That step identified the informal structure that carries out the policy-setting function.

Hunter thus used his particular form of structural-functional analysis to show that business interests in Atlanta exercised an extraordinary form of power or leadership (note the explicit credit to Merton that Hunter gives in talking about his approach, 1980, p. 177). In the spirit of Merton's analysis of political machines (1957), Hunter argues that an informal structure (a business-dominated insider group) overrides the formal structure (the division between governmental and economic authority), and it is able to do so in part because it responds to a set of social needs.

Bear in mind that Hunter is not making a deterministic argument, and he certainly is *not* contending that the particular structure he found in Atlanta prevails because it best fills a functional need. Indeed, his concluding chapter is about how that structure could and should be reformed to make it more consistent with democratic ideals (Hunter, 1953, pp. 223–54).

Merton emphasized how the machine as a social structure was useful to a wide array of particular groups. Hunter shifts the emphasis and talks about Atlanta's informal leadership structure filling a communitywide need by setting policy in response to social change. This is the leap to a notion of preemptive power. Hunter does not develop the idea, but plainly he made the leap. Note that he is not arguing that the leadership group runs the community in command and control fashion. He credits social inertia and a large number of inherited practices with much of the shaping of the current order (1953, p. 10). Further, while no precursor of Norton Long's (1958) "ecology of games," Hunter did state that he doubted "power forms a single pyramid with any nicety in a community the size of Regional City" (1953, p. 62). So Hunter's top 40 and the group for which it is shorthand do not control the community in monolithic fashion. Nor do they command the tides of social change. Their domain is much more modest; they control the policy-setting function of the community *in response to social change;* "new times bring new problems, and decisions have to be made concerning changed conditions. Policies have to be formulated and made effective" (1953, p. 10).

This leadership role is what is preempted by the insider group; this is the communitywide function occupied by a structure too narrowly based to represent the community on whose behalf it acts. An inadequately representative structure in control of a communitywide function is the political problem that Hunter describes and wrestles with.

Because Hunter was opening a line of inquiry, not elaborating an argument, I must extend his analysis to cover some missing elements. First, he says little about why the particular insider group rather than some other preempted the policy-setting role. Implicit in his analysis is a political economy perspective. Governmental and economic authority are, he argues, formally separated, but in practice they must be brought together in order to make *community* policy (cf. Elkin, 1985). The kind of control exercised by executives in charge of large business enterprises gives them command of vast resources, some of which are

vital to the economic life of the community. However, business corporations are unable to set community policy directly. Government is the institution that bears the official responsibility for much of that task, but its resources and its informal legitimacy are too limited (cf. Clark, 1969). It is thus helpful to have some show of support from a variety of policy participants. What this means, then, is that the insider group in Atlanta was by no means homogeneous. Rather, it was a coalition, composed of various business cliques, the news media, government officials, professionals who work in civic and nonprofit organizations, some leaders in the black subcommunity, and others who chose to ally themselves with a set of business-led insiders.

Hunter regarded business participation in this governing coalition as largely inevitable. The issue is not how to replace business participation, but how to complement it with the participation of other community interests. That, according to Hunter, requires two steps. The first is making visible the real nature of policy leadership, exposing what is behind the promotion of particular issues. Fuller understanding, Hunter believed, would encourage greater public accountability of the process (1953, p. 254). The second step is to organize other community interests so that they too can be involved. He observed, "The better organized groups do have some voice in community affairs" (1953, p. 250). As Hunter saw it, the policy-setting role is a function that concerns and affects the entire community. It is therefore important to focus attention on who is excluded and then do what can be done to make the system more inclusive.

We can now state Hunter's argument in a more extended form, as follows:

1. Communities need policy-setting leadership; the ecology of games or purely interactive processes (like market exchange) are not enough to adapt to social change in an orderly fashion.

2. Local government commands too few resources, possesses too little civic status, and has too little authority to perform this function on its own.

3. With the formal structure being inadequate for the role, an informal structure fills in.

4. Business commands such a concentration of resources, some of which are vital to the life of the community (e.g., credit and investment capital), that it cannot be excluded from the informal structure that sets policy (cf. Lindblom, 1977; but see Domhoff, 1986). Other interests, particularly those weakly organized, may be excluded.

5. To the extent that the informal policy coalition operates covertly and various community interests are excluded, *adaptation* to social change will be guided by an unrepresentative set of power wielders.

6. The informal coalition represents a paradox: its power derives from the community function it serves, but the community is poorly situated to hold its power accountable and to limit it to community-serving purposes.

Note how this argument differs from any claim that 40 individuals run the

community in command and control fashion. All it claims is that a policy coali-
tion with the advantage of an insider position guides the community's purposive
response to social change. The very structure of the argument precludes any
claim that a leadership group controls social change itself.

Preemptive Power and Rethinking the Cost of Compliance Problem

Hunter offers no analysis of different forms of power. He has, however, pro-
vided us with a scenario in which we can see inadequacies in the conventional
categories of power, particularly as they focus on the cost of compliance prob-
lem. Hunter's work suggests a form of power more complex than an A versus B,
dyadic test of wills. Instead of power as a relationship between actors engaged in
pursuing or resisting compliance (what might be termed "command power") or
as a relationship between actors bargaining from autonomous bases of strength
(what might be termed "coalitional power"), Hunter has in mind competing ca-
pacities to occupy a strategic position (what I am calling "preemptive power").
Further, at one level in Hunter's *community* power scenario, the power "actors"
are complex entities, not simple units. Both of these ideas of Hunter's shift our
understanding of power relationships away from the standard cost of compliance
problem.

We can see this more clearly by considering the differences among com-
mand power, coalitional power (on these two terms, compare the discussion of
integral and intercursive power by Wrong, 1980, pp. 11–13), and preemptive
power. The kind of control corporate executives have over the resources of their
firms illustrates command power. Of course, control over subordinates, even in a
business firm is always imperfect. Thus, command power typically extends only
over a limited domain and a restricted set of activities. For that reason influence
over a larger sphere of activity usually comes only by finding allies with com-
patible goals and complementary domains. That process of working out arrange-
ments between complementary domains is coalitional power. We can see that any
coalitional arrangement *tends* to be somewhat unstable, resting as it does on
compatible goals and complementary resources (see Polsby, 1980, p. 137).

The understanding of both command power and coalitional power grows out
of the standard conception of power: A getting B to do what B would not other-
wise do, or in other words, A being able to overcome B's resistance and achieve
compliance. Note, however, that this is a simple, dyadic relationship without re-
gard to context. The emphasis is, therefore, on one actor's capacity to achieve
compliance and the other's capacity to resist. This is most obvious in command
power, and in coalitional power the mutual capacity to resist is what restricts the
coalition to compatible goals and makes for instability. In both forms of power,
there is a kind of reciprocity built into the situation through the capacity of one
actor to increase the cost to the other actor by intensifying resistance (Dahl,
1982, p. 35). The limitations of command power (the cost of obtaining com-

pliance) lead into coalitional power, and the potential of coalitional arrangements for instability is at the center of the pluralist view of community power.

Consider how Hunter's scenario differs. In the first place, he provides a context—the community (cf. Anton, 1963). In the second place, Hunter's relevant categories are not individual actors, but more complex entities. That is the level at which preemptive power occurs. Community context, a strategic role within that context, and complex entities—those are the ingredients for a preemptive power relationship.

The community is composed of interrelated elements. It is also a setting in which social change occurs, affecting various elements of the community and giving rise to a need for new or modified procedures and arrangements to cope with change. This need is manifested as a policy-setting role, and the dependence of various elements of the community on a structure to perform that role confers power on the structure occupying that role. The basic relationship is one in which the power of one entity comes from the dependence of the other (cf. Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962). The entities involved are a dependent public largely unorganized for specifically political purposes and an informal but organized structure concerned with setting policy. Since this informal structure is composed of multiple elements, it can be referred to as the policy *coalition*.

Now let us look at the significance of there being a structure capable of performing the policy-setting function. The presence of such a structure confers advantages on those who are able to claim membership in it. This has been recognized in traditional analyses of machine politics by acknowledging that the machine in its role as broker is able to siphon off a share of benefits as its "fee" for services rendered. The argument is more complex, however. By its presence as broker, the machine is able to set the terms on which transactions occur, making some kinds of transactions more likely and others less likely (Crenson, 1971, pp. 136–51). Focusing on the policy-setting role, one can see that those who control it are in a position to give or withhold rewards to particular individuals or segments of the community, thereby opening up the possibility of a divide and rule strategy.

At this point it might be argued that Hunter's idea of a policy-setting structure can be welded onto the cost of compliance paradigm. One could take the position that occupancy of the policy-setting role generates an opportunity to control a supply of side payments through which compliance can be bought. That, however, is a significant amendment to the original cost of compliance model of how the power system operates—a matter we shall return to below. One might also argue that side payments do not always work. Dissatisfied publics do revolt.

A mobilized public can, then, wield sanctions against elements of a policy coalition and, in this way, perhaps weaken an established structure. Yet that action does not itself remove the need for a coalition to set policy. The need re-

mains. That is the significance of talking about a strategic role in the community context. Ultimately the challenge group faces the question of how it can replace one policy-setting coalition with another. In other words, mounting opposition is not enough. One must be able to come up with an alternative coalition. This is not simply a matter of putting up a slate of challengers to replace incumbent public officeholders: the weakness of public authority assures that voting power is inadequate. What is needed is a coalition able to perform a policy-setting role.

While this is a complicated picture of power, it nevertheless points us toward a new way of thinking about the problem of the cost of compliance. Control of the strategic policy-setting role enables the element in control of it to generate resources with which to counter resistance. We can begin to see that institutional context provides a way of distinguishing between what March (1966) calls force-conditioning and force depletion models of power. Control of a policy-setting role helps solve the resource-supply problem for power wielders.

Defenders of pluralist orthodoxy might respond by taking a different tack from the cost of compliance argument. They might argue that the existence of a strategically important position does not prevent challenge; it only heightens the incentive for making a challenge. That is a fair enough retort, but note what it does to the cost of compliance model. The very notion of making a challenge invites us to think about costs on that side of the equation. We are no longer talking about passive resistance raising costs to an actor seeking compliance. Instead we are talking about costs borne by those actively engaged in a challenge. More than that, we are also talking about the capacity to reconstitute a new policy-setting coalition.

Thinking about power in this way turns the problem of the costs of compliance upside down. In the simple, dyadic relationship the emphasis is on the cost to A (the superordinate actor) of achieving compliance from B (the subordinate actor). The notion of preemptive power shifts our understanding of costs. At the level of a struggle over preemption (control of the policy-setting role), B (the challenge actor) cannot simply resist and drive up the cost of compliance. Instead, the challenge group must be able to withstand the costs of being in opposition *and* be able to constitute an alternative set of governing arrangements. That process requires command of an enormous body of resources. The challenge group is thus drawn into coalition building and the necessity of trying to secure the cooperation of organizations and institutions that control indispensable resources. Far from being able passively to drive up the costs for the superordinate actor, the challenge group—those restive with their subordinate position in relation to an established policy-setting coalition—must be able to bear the cost, not only of resistance, but also of bringing together a viable policy coalition.

The term "preemption" thus has two dimensions to it. It refers to the power advantage of holding a strategic position. In this dimension it is like being able to name trumps and play the game on your terms. Preemption has a second dimen-

sion—a capacity to occupy a strategic position. It suggests that the ability to occupy the strategic position, while perhaps partly a matter of skill and timing, requires suitable resources for capturing the position in the first place.

The standard cost of compliance conception of power focuses on the direct struggle over compliance and resistance between two actors and leads logically from the limitations of command power to the necessity of coalition building. Preemptive power denies none of that. It does, however, put the discussion in a context in which there is a strategically advantageous position to be held. Command power with its compliance and resistance and coalitional power with its emphasis on the bargaining relationship are a part of the total picture. The central issue in preemption, however, is one of who is able to aggregate enough of the right kind of resources and bring together a coalition capable of exercising the policy-setting role—who can put together a structure capable of performing the needed function? At this level there are few contenders and even fewer viable alternatives.

The point is more than that groups differ in the amount and importance of resources they command or that they differ in their attractiveness as coalition partners. All of this is subsumed in the notion of preemptive power. Hunter's work also encourages us to realize that the public is dependent on an organized coalition for policy leadership. While there is a sense in which the policy-setting coalition is dependent on the public for compliance, the public is not an organized and unified entity. It cannot simply withhold compliance; it must be organized to do that. Generally, the policy-setting coalition can act as a unified entity: its members have an incentive to remain intact, and they control resources to work at it. The public lacks a comparable capacity for unified action. To be sure, segments of the public can be organized at some cost and risk, and the policy-setting coalition will have to decide whether to include such a group (and if so, on what terms) or counterattack. But the logic of Hunter's argument is that a challenge group cannot simply challenge; it must seek to reconstitute the policy-setting coalition or become part of it.

Taking Stock

Concepts in and of themselves are not amenable to testing against observation. Still, they are often associated with claims about observable behavior. So it is with preemptive power. While preemptive power is itself a way of thinking about relationships, it is associated with a set of claims about urban political practices. Thus, although the notion of preemption is grounded in normative concerns about representativeness, the concept is derived from assertions about observable behavior. Furthermore, they are assertions that are not circular nor so general as to be unamenable to disproof. In order to show that the preemptive power argument is about assertions that could be disconfirmed, let me indicate some points at which that might occur.

Consider this initial set of assertions:

1. Communities faced with social change have a need for a policy-setting role.

2. This role is the formal responsibility of local government, but such governments are not adequate standing alone.

3. An informal structure *tends* to develop to meet the need. (Since complex forces may be at work, it is important to phrase this assertion as a tendency in order to allow for a process of evolution: see the account of how, under Jane Byrne particularly, the system Daley created in Chicago weakened and stood in need of reconstitution and new alliance building, Klepner, 1985, esp. pp. 121–24.)

Disconfirming evidence could take the form of a finding that there is no informal structure. We could discover that city government is able to act with a high level of autonomy in taking policy initiatives and in following through on those initiatives and that government is able to do so without relying on a stable set of allies held together by informal arrangements.

By contrast, the argument here suggests that a newly elected mayor, for instance, is likely to encounter established community relationships and ongoing modes of cooperation. The mayor must reach an accommodation with this informal network or be able to create a new one to take its place. The difficulty of creating a new one is the preemptive challenge an officeholder faces, and it explains the strong pull toward accommodation and alliance building with those already ensconced in city civic life.

We turn now to the next key assertion:

4. Because the business community is resource-rich and controls forms of civic cooperation as well as vital economic activities, it or some substantial segment of it will be a major element in the coalition that establishes and maintains the informal structure (for discussions of which business elements are likely to be included and why, see Salisbury, 1964; Molotch, 1976; Friedland and Palmer, 1984).

Disconfirming evidence on this point could take the form of a finding that there is an informal structure, but business interests are not a significant part of it.

Let us elaborate the argument further, to highlight the normative concern that guided Hunter's analysis. This will bring us to another point by which observation might disconfirm the argument.

5. The informal structure can be thought of as a set of arrangements whereby a coalition is enabled to act with sufficient unity to prevail in setting policy, that is, to be able to formulate a succession of policy initiatives in response to social change and mobilize resources behind those policy initiatives.

6. While the informal structure is not invincible on each and every issue (this is a point where the differentiation of preemptive power from command power is useful), it is the prevailing coalition in the sense of being able to set a policy direction.

7. Policy reflects the interests of the members of the coalition *and* the maintenance needs for the arrangements through which the prevailing coalition is held together. (The old-fashioned political machine is an applicable model, see Shefter, 1976.)

At this point, findings that there is an informal structure and that business interests are a part of it would not be sufficient to make a claim of supporting evidence. The preemptive power argument would still be disconfirmed by a finding that policy direction is related to informal structure in no patterned way. Put another way, if outside groups are accommodated about as well as those on the inside, the argument fails.

Even if the evidence proves supportive of the preemptive power argument on the points covered above, the research mission will be incomplete. The reformist concerns that accompany the argument call for an eventual specification of the conditions under which policy is set by a narrow and inadequately representative coalition versus the conditions under which broader and more inclusive coalitions set policy. That task will require an extensive comparative analysis well beyond the scope of what can be undertaken here. But it is in order to outline what that research might cover. Hence, we have a final and somewhat open-ended assertion:

8. Membership in and relationships within the prevailing coalition are themselves dependent on social, political, and economic circumstances—such factors as the degree of involvement from and unity among business interests, the demography of the community, the extent to which nonbusiness groups are organized and involved (on the connection between widened participation and broadened policy agenda, see Cobb and Elder, 1972), and the visibility of coalitional arrangements.

As an initial step in testing the usefulness of the preemptive power argument, it should be instructive to consider the Atlanta experience, first in the period covered by Hunter's early research and then during the present time. In both periods the course of political events supports rather than disconfirms the argument derived from Hunter. Further, a comparison of the two periods provides some insight into the interplay between change and continuity in preemptive power.

The Early Post–World War II Years

Hunter described a business-led coalition that included government officials and a variety of civic and voluntary organizations in setting community policy. Blacks were also a part of the alliance, though their role was very much a subordinate one. Hunter provides no narrative account of how this structure of power came into existence and only slight indications of what might bring about change. In examining preemptive power, these are shortcomings. That power at the preemptive level is structured does not preclude change—quite the contrary.

Indeed, I am prepared to maintain that power relationships are best understood over time, as one follows the maneuvering for position within the policy coalition. Let us then look briefly at the policy coalition in Atlanta during the early post–World War II years and at how that coalition has changed down to the present time.

The Great Depression saw the collapse of patronage-based organization in Atlanta's city politics. Beginning nearly a quarter of a century of service as Atlanta's mayor, William B. Hartsfield was elected in 1936 as a reform mayor. Faced with a bankrupt city government, Hartsfield promised an end to spoils politics and, after an initial trimming of city payrolls, filled positions with employees of recognized technical competence. With insufficient revenue to cover the city's debts, Mayor Hartsfield turned to the city's business community for support and to the banks in particular for loans. Hartsfield thus had an especially close tie with Atlanta's downtown businesses and financial institutions from the beginning. He ran on a business-backed platform of reform, received business support during the mayoral campaign and afterward, and depended on business-extended credit to meet the city's financial obligations and to carry out his program of reform. Without a patronage base through which to mobilize mass support, Hartsfield needed to maintain a good-government image, and he saw newspapers as vital in projecting a favorable image. He also realized that the newspapers were an integral part of the business community, even holding membership in the downtown business association. Hence, he tended to check out policy decisions with business leaders, and he was open to their initiatives.

Another major influence on the city's structure of power emerged in the mid-1940s. The United States Supreme Court's invalidation of the white primary in 1944 was followed by an upsurge in black voter registration and the necessity of accommodating black electoral influence *within* the city. (Georgia's county unit system and a malapportioned state legislature assured that urban voter influence of any kind would be minimal in state politics.) The Plan of Development discussed by Hunter (1953, pp. 211–15) was devised in part to counterbalance increased black electoral participation. But more positive accommodations were also made, and blacks gained a place in the city's governing coalition, albeit a subordinate one.

The reasons for black subordination within the governing coalition are several, but two seem overridingly important. First, white business leaders made large donations to black organizations, provided assistance to black nonprofit efforts, and placed substantial deposits in black financial institutions (Walker, 1963). City Hall was also a source of benefits and opportunities. As the city undertook redevelopment, black real estate companies and builders were provided with major business opportunities in land acquisition and in relocating and rehousing those displaced. Thus strategically important and co-optable black organizations and institutions were brought into the system of inside cooperation

and negotiation, but they came in largely as clients of white patrons (for the Greensboro parallel, see Chafe, 1980). The benefits of going along were well understood in both the black community and the white business and civic network. It was this pattern that was to be challenged in the 1960s as "white colonialism" (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967; see the supporting evidence in Walker, 1963).

To understand why co-optation was possible, we need to see those practices in larger racial context. That brings us to the second element underlying the sub-ordinate role of blacks in the governing coalition. White business leaders con-trolled more than material benefits. Hunter's early 1950s analysis occurred in a political climate and political circumstances that are quite important. *Brown* v. *Board of Education* had not yet put national authority behind the disestablish-ment of the Jim Crow system. The United States Congress had proved unwill-ing to enact antilynching legislation, much less stronger civil rights measures. Georgia's county unit system exaggerated the voting influence of the state's most tradition-bound elements, and racial demagoguery was rampant. In that racial context, white business leaders stood out as a moderating influence, and they had enough clout in state affairs to be recognized as an element capable of holding in check violence-prone whites. In that period blacks and progressive-minded whites perceived white business leaders as guarantors of responsible race relations.

Thus black voting strength in city elections was significant enough to bring representatives of the black community into the insider coalition, but the inter-dependence between blacks and white business leaders was far from symmetri-cal. With business backing, Atlanta did develop a reputation for racial modera-tion and prided itself on being "the city too busy to hate." In the 1950s, when this slogan came into use, that was no insignificant accomplishment. For those seek-ing improved race relations, the slogan symbolized enlightened policy. It was, however, a policy position that did not come about cost free. In exchange for white business support for racial moderation, black leaders were reciprocally constrained in their opposition to the city's redevelopment program (high on the white business community's priority list), even though redevelopment was enor-mously disruptive and filled with broken promises about relocation (Stone, 1976).

From the mid-1940s on through the 1950s, Atlanta had an informal policy coalition in which white business leaders played the central part. This group was broadly useful to public officeholders, and it played the role of guardian of re-sponsible race relations. It enjoyed a patron role in relation to both white politi-cal leaders and to various interests within the black community. The city's policy of racial moderation, of redevelopment and transportation centered on down-town, and of low taxes reflected the composition of the governing coalition and relationships within the coalition.

Atlanta's black population was a significant part of the prevailing electoral coalition (Jennings and Zeigler, 1966) from the mid-1940s on. As that electoral influence grew and as the national legal and political climate changed, Atlanta's

black population grew increasingly restive with its subordinate role. Moreover, as a subcommunity with a sizable educated middle class and a rich network of organizations and institutions from which to mobilize, the city's black population was well situated to press for a more prominent place in the governing coalition. Still, with modifications, the old structure held through the 1960s.

By the early 1970s, however, Atlanta was ripe for change. A new generation of more assertive black leadership had come on the scene. The city's population balance had tilted to a black majority for the first time. And a decade of ideological ferment and political activism had helped spawn a neighborhood movement ready to carve out a role in governing the community (Grist, 1984). Moreover, a new city charter recognized neighborhood claims for political access by shifting council representation from an at-large basis to a system in which two-thirds of the 18-member body are elected by district. The charter also mandated citizen participation in the city's planning process, and the city council enacted an implementing ordinance that established a system of Neighborhood Planning Units (NPUs) with formally recognized advisory powers. The mayor followed up by creating a Neighborhood Planning Division, through which neighborhoods were given professional planning assistance.

The advantage of the inside position had held for a long time and in the face of significantly altered conditions, but clearly the city was on the verge of a new order. The depth of change in demography, climate of ideas, and institutional apparatus was too great for the old coalitional arrangements to hold.

Change and Continuity

One aspect of preemptive power is the strategic advantage of membership in the community's prevailing policy coalition as evidenced in a capacity to discourage challenges and withstand those that do occur, while setting the direction of community policy. That aspect of preemption was demonstrated in Atlanta before the 1970s. That these arrangements did not prove permanent is, of course, an indication that preemptive power was far from absolute. Moreover, the policy coalition was unable to repeat its 1950s external-to-the-city feat of shifting the population balance through annexation or some form of metropolitan consolidation.

With the old order coming apart, the post-1970s period provides an opportunity to examine another aspect of preemptive power. It offers a chance to see who, in a fluid situation, has the capacity to become part of the policy-setting coalition and why. The profound change reaching fruition in the 1970s sufficiently unsettled arrangements to open up the question of who would obtain membership in the inner circle of community governance.

The full details of what happened in the reconstituting of Atlanta's governing arrangements are too intricate to be spelled out here, but the broad picture is clear enough. In the fall of 1973, Atlanta elected its first black mayor, Maynard Jackson. Much of the downtown business community supported another candi-

date (at this stage, whites held a slight majority in voting age population, though not in overall population). Jackson, however, was elected with overwhelming support in the black community and significant support from the white, middle-class component of the city's neighborhood movement. As mayor, Jackson was committed to affirmative action, neighborhood participation in the planning process, and, in general, the broadening of participation in Atlanta's political and economic life. He proclaimed openly his intention of changing the system, and asked major business institutions to put blacks and women on their boards.

Within his first year in office, Jackson found himself under attack publicly in the newspaper, and major figures in the business community assembled privately to discuss the crisis. Under the auspices of Central Atlanta Progress (the downtown business association), they sent Jackson a letter, indicating that many members of the business community perceived him to be antiwhite and citing the danger of disinvestment. The charge was made that business leaders "can't get through to talk to the mayor" (Ball and Ball, 1976, p. 125). Plainly the white business establishment felt that it had lost access and did not regard that loss as a natural outcome of having backed the loser in the mayoral contest.

It should be pointed out that the white business establishment was not, in fact, without significant access. The city's finance director, among others in the Jackson administration, was close to the business community, and the city council contained strong probusiness representation (Jones, 1978). Nevertheless, Jackson responded to the Central Atlanta Progress letter by launching a series of "Pound Cake Summit" meetings with representatives of the business community to discuss their concerns, and subsequently he supported a number of business initiatives to encourage development and promote public safety in the central business district.

After Jackson completed the two terms Atlanta's new charter allows a mayor, he was succeeded by Andrew Young. The process of accommodation started under Jackson reached full strength as Young openly acknowledged that he could not "govern without the confidence of the business community" (*Atlanta Constitution*, 24 July 1983). Other aspects of the city's governing arrangements also evolved. Assistance to the NPU system was gradually cut back during the Jackson years, and under Young the system itself was eviscerated. Young deemphasized planning as a function of the city government, but joined Central Atlanta Progress in a "Central Area Study" to consider ways of upgrading Atlanta's central business district. Neighborhoods, preservationists, and proponents of protecting the existing supply of affordable housing have suffered a series of defeats over transportation and development issues. The mayor, the chairman of the county commission, and a slender but workable majority on the city council have emerged as close allies of downtown business interests. After having enjoyed a brief period of favor in the Jackson years, Atlanta's neighborhood movement finds itself on the outside, struggling against policy initiatives antagonistic to its interests.

The experience of Atlanta's neighborhood movement is particularly instruc-

tive. Why was it unsuccessful in exercising preemptive power in securing its position in the policy coalition? It had been close to Mayor Young during his congressional years. It was organized; it possessed considerable resources (in particular, able volunteers for issue and election campaigns); and it had institutionalized some key channels of access. In a city desirous of holding onto its middle class, the neighborhood movement spanned a wide segment of the home-owning public eager to conserve and upgrade the quality of residential life. Hence, its goals were congruent with an economically viable city.

The neighborhood movement, however, had weaknesses. Its organizational genesis lay largely in mobilization against highways in the early 1970s, highways supported by downtown business interests. Hence, it was from the beginning in an adversarial relationship with the business community, and it seemed unlikely that both could remain insiders in the same coalition. In contesting business interests for inside position, the neighborhood movement carried two serious liabilities. One was organizational. While Atlanta neighborhoods are well organized in the sense of having a network of civic associations and other community-based organizations to operate from and various interneighborhood links as well, they are not a cohesive force. Instead they respond mostly to immediate and particular threats or to the excitement and activity of an election campaign under way. They are not a unified and ready-for-action force on an ongoing basis. Mere organization is not enough.

A second weakness they faced had to do with the usefulness of their objectives to elected officials, to the mayor's office in particular. Politicians, faced with an election cycle, have a need for visible accomplishments or the appearance of visible accomplishments. The goals that neighborhoods seek are often defensive: preservation of residential quality and perhaps simply maintenance of the status quo. Or, they involve improvements that are so diffuse in time and place as to lack visibility.

The cutting edge of neighborhood weakness seems, then, to be its competitive disadvantage with business as a potential partner in governing arrangements. Consider some business strengths. In Atlanta there is a long tradition of business unity in civic affairs. Disagreements are worked out *within* business circles so that a unified stance can be presented to the larger community. Business interests are also organized and staffed for ongoing involvement. The business community itself thus represents a formidable organizational network and a capacity to deploy "volunteers" (including those whose official responsibilities encompass community affairs). It also represents the primary source of campaign funds, especially "early money" that is so important in shaping go/no-go decisions for various candidates. The question of who faces serious opposition versus who gets an easy ride is often a matter of who can amass money early.

Of course, business also represents control of credit and investment money. And, as the Central Atlanta Progress confrontation with Maynard Jackson re-

vealed, that is no light consideration. Even so, it should not be exaggerated. Banks and other large businesses have sunk investments in the central business district, and they cannot simply walk away from these investments. Major holders of commercial property cannot afford loose talk about disinvestment. If such talk got out of hand, it might engender a self-fulfilling prophecy. Nevertheless, businesses can vary their commitments to investment in the city.

The contrasting experiences of Mayors Jackson and Young seem clear. Without the full support of the business community, the city's most resource-rich group, governing is a struggle every step of the way. Jackson thus moved from confrontation to greater and greater cooperation. On the other hand, governance is fully possible without the support of the neighborhood movement. Young has moved farther and farther away from the neighborhoods, and a council majority has followed his lead despite the fact that two-thirds of the body are elected by district.

The general attraction between business and public officeholders is readily understood. Less apparent is what makes these two elements into a close-knit alliance, capable of withstanding the opposition of neighborhood and preservationist groups. The answer is that white business interests and black officeholders have evolved a system of reciprocal benefit, which each has a strong incentive to protect. They are thus willing to combine their resources in exercising together the community's leadership role.

The system they have evolved has several components. One is "equal opportunity" networking. Starting in the late 1960s, at the end of the Ivan Allen era, the white business community realized that the racial gap between the black and white middle class had to be bridged if projects such as MARTA, the city's mass transit system then in planning, were to be launched. This realization led to the creation of the Action Forum and Leadership Atlanta. (Action Forum is reported to be all male; Leadership Atlanta is not.) Both are biracial organizations in which business and professional persons can expand their contacts and, particularly in the case of Action Forum, explore business opportunities. The Chamber of Commerce and Central Atlanta Progress themselves have become biracial. A second component is the city's affirmative action program, which includes more than employment by the city government. A major element promotes minority business enterprise (MBE) by requiring that a share of city contracts go to such businesses. Initially resisted by white business interests, the MBE requirement has come to be accepted as a necessary condition for conducting business in a city that is now two-thirds black.

The overall system of cooperation has also given rise to an unseemly side. At least two city council members have been involved in major controversies about conflicts of interest over connections with developers and contractors. And other council members are known to have occupational and business ties to firms seeking actions from or holding business connections with the city. Development

and other business firms, as mentioned above, are a major source of campaign funds.

For their part, business interests receive a strongly prodevelopment policy in which there are few restrictions that big developers particularly have to contend with, and there are a range of enticements variously available, from tax abatements and land write-downs to below-market loans. The city has no policy of "linkage" for developers, and there is no follow-through on development to see that promised jobs are actually generated.

Business autonomy in economic development has been institutionalized by the creation of a large number of nonprofit corporations and independent agencies to handle various city-supported development projects and such functions as the allocation of tax-exempt bonds and the running of the major conventional facility, the World Congress Center. Virtually all of the board members that control these various entities are business people. In addition, downtown business interests created and continue to finance a nonprofit organization, Research Atlanta, to do analyses of major policy issues, thus leaving the business community independent of the city government for research information, but being able to cite studies that are tied to no one private interest. The city's formal coherence as a governing body faces a possible further weakening in the form of special tax districts, in which tax revenue can be earmarked for expenditures on services and facilities *in those areas.*

When one takes stock of these various institutional moves and how the city is governed today, it seems first of all that, important as business interests are, they are not the broad and central force in the city's governing coalition that they were at the time of Hunter's initial study. That they no longer play the protector role in race relations perhaps assures that. Business policy leadership focuses mainly on taxation, finance, transportation, and the general issue of development. The Chamber of Commerce keeps a hand in education and its finance. And development is defined broadly enough to include aspects of public safety. Even so, business leadership is subject to more negotiating conditions than in the past.

These newly emerged arrangements represent mainly an accommodation between the black middle class and white business interests. They are not subject to close scrutiny. The newspaper, being part of the governing coalition, is not a diligent watchdog. The affirmative action symbolism of the city's promotion of minority business enterprise assures a large amount of uncritical support within the black community. And the dispersed, quasi-private character of development gives it low public visibility and thereby provides a high level of autonomy for those engaged in making decisions.

While business occupies a less central role overall in setting community policy, it has secured a very strong position in development. A general strategy is evident in the institutional moves that business has engineered. It has encouraged a dispersion of official policy efforts, splitting off many activities from direct city

hall control and fragmenting the execution of economic development policy among a number of independent agencies. Direction of these activities no longer occurs through any single public agency. The place where private resources are mobilized and efforts are coordinated is Central Atlanta Progress, the association of downtown businesses for Atlanta. Thus there is a diffuse public capacity and a concentrated private capacity. It is not surprising, then, that the major planning venture under way, Central Area Study II, is a joint effort by the city and Central Atlanta Progress. Central Atlanta Progress could not reasonably be left out, especially since it has made extensive efforts to secure for itself a wide role in community affairs.

The capacity of Atlanta's business community to preempt a role in the city's governing coalition remains evident. Yet, comparing Atlanta today with the Atlanta of Hunter's initial study is also an exercise in examining change. The business role is narrowed; the place of the black middle class is enormously expanded. The lower class of both races remains outside the realm of preemptive power today, as it was earlier. In broad class terms, the main loser between then and now is the white middle class; their residential interests are especially threatened by Atlanta's particular brand of development policy. That development policy has become almost unassailable, however, because it provides the central arrangements by which public and private authority are joined and community leadership exercised.

Conclusion

The community power debate remains alive, but continues to be frustrating. Antagonists talk past one another. In the terms I have offered here, the debate sounds something like this:

Pluralist: No group exercises command power over a wide domain of community activities.

Elitist: Insider groups, based in strategically important institutional positions but unrepresentative of the whole community, are able to preempt the community's policy leadership function and exercise power accordingly.

The first assertion is sound, but uninteresting, and no one disagrees. The second assertion is genuinely debatable and therefore interesting. How then, does preemptive power differ from command power? Command power is a direct form of control, attested to by the capacity to gain compliance. It is fairly easy to demonstrate that such power is limited in domain, scope, and intensity. All one has to do is show that an alleged dominant group failed to gain compliance on a significant issue (cf. Dahl, 1958). But then what? Is no one in charge? The answer suggested by Hunter's version of structural-functionalism is that complex communities are in need of leadership. Social cooperation is not spontaneous. Though there may be many autonomous processes at work, friction points develop and breakdowns occur. Planning and analysis to adapt to change, conflict

resolution, and mobilization of resources to ameliorate problems are essential activities in all modern communities. They are activities that governments are expected to engage in, but public officials may feel that they have too little authority and control too few resources to act on their own. Because they need allies, public officials form coalitions with private interests that enable them to carry on the activities of governing and of exercising policy leadership. To the extent that a given coalition becomes a closed group of insiders, they have preempted the community's leadership function. The insider coalition is, in Hunter's terms, the structure that exercises the function.

Note what is being claimed in Hunter's argument. It is not control of the community in a command and compliance fashion. It is not indoctrination of the masses into a false consciousness. It is not that some group is in charge of the processes of social change. It is that some group, less than a cross-section of the population, is able to guide the community's policy responses to social change and alter the terms on which social cooperation takes place.

How does preemption occur, and why is it tolerated? It occurs by an insider group bringing together enough interrelated and complementary positions of strength and mastery of resources to make control of the leadership responsibility difficult for anyone else. That is the act of preemption. The leadership role is what is preempted. Why is it tolerated? Because it can be displaced only by a coalition itself capable of bringing together enough interrelated and complementary positions of strength and mastery of resources to be able to exercise leadership responsibility.

Further, alliance building toward such a rival coalition is made difficult because it is costly to operate in opposition to established leadership. Controlling the leadership function is itself a source of power through a general public dependence on that role. Thus we have the paradox of complexity making a broad power of command more tenuous, but making the leadership role more important and thereby enhancing the importance of preemptive power. But, it might be objected, if leaders do not command, what do they do? The answer, as any good organization theorist knows, is that leaders alter the terms under which various groups of "followers" act and interact (see, e.g., Selznick's [1957] distinction between critical and routine decisions). Setting the terms of interaction is what Atlanta's previous governing coalition did, and that is what Atlanta's current governing coalition has achieved, particularly in the area of development policy.

There is no way of telling at this stage how closely the Atlanta experience might apply to other communities. While the idea of a governing coalition is not new and certainly can be found in other communities past and present, it is not apparent what can and cannot be said about such coalitions in terms of general propositions. My argument here has been only that preemptive power is a useful way of thinking about community political relationships, and it frees us from limitations of a perspective based mainly in a command power conception of

power. Research into the composition and internal relationships of governing coalitions and how they are altered promises to be more fruitful than research preoccupied with questions about the cost of compliance and the workability of systems of command and control.

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