

Dimensions and Practicalities of Power

Authors John Gaventa and Thomas Hobbes do not have much in common, other than the fact that they both have written about power. Gaventa in the first chapter of Power and Powerlessness considers three dimensions of power while Hobbes in his Leviathan gives a brief definition of power and gives us examples of what gives or produces power in a person. It is important to see that Hobbes' definition is more philosophical and also more practical than Gaventa's dimensions. Hobbes gives a motivation as well as practical steps for the acquisition of power while Gaventa gives the mechanism for achieving the desired results.

Hobbes gives this definition of power "(the) power of a man is his present means to obtain some future apparent good." Gaventa defines power, quoting Robert Dahl, as "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do." Hobbes' definition is the underlying cause for all the three dimensions of power Gaventa mentions to come out. Basically a person realizes that he has something he desires. He also realizes that it is possible for him to get it in the future by "using" other people. We can say that the person has power because he can "use" other people for his own ends. However we know that people would soon realize this simple strategy

Gaventa's first dimension of power is the simplest one, that A can get B to do what B otherwise wouldn't do. Hobbes perhaps would add the phrase "for A's future

good.” In this first dimension, we see that A can and does “force” B to do something B wouldn’t normally do simply because A wants it done and perhaps has the power of persuasion or of force. The society with simply this type of power relationship would either be very egalitarian or very oppressive. But there has to be more to power than this one dimension because there is too much non-participation among the people for this to be true in most societies. If it was egalitarian we would see all participating, if it were oppressive, they would revolt. Power in societies is deeper than this.

Gaventa’s second dimension of power is more complex, basically stating “the elite” keep the things important and good for the “lower classes” from arising in a political arena so that the elites interest’s would be still dominant. Again, we see the connection between this and Hobbes. It would not be in the elite’s future interest to allow dominant issues to arise in a truly legitimate and democratic arena.

The third dimension of power that Gaventa mentions is where he and Hobbes really come together. Gaventa basically states that “the elite,” shape the ideas of “the non-elite” so that the non-elite’s interest end up being the elite’s! B wants to do X because B believes X is for his future good. But B does not realize that X is really in A’s interest because A and that A is manipulating B’s thoughts and desires for his own future good. A wants X, B (if he really was aware) really wants W, but A makes B want X rather than W.

Hobbes makes assumptions about human nature and one of those is inherit in his definition of power, that humans want something we feel to be good. Also that we desire more power not because we are not content, but to hold on and reinforce the power we already have. Hobbes, especially in chapter 10 of Leviathan mentions

numerous things which men which do reinforce a person's power, mentioning things that make a person feel honored and respected, or dishonored and disrespected. As our power or lack thereof is reinforced daily by simple things mentioned by Hobbes such as "to believe, to trust, to rely on another," we realize that those with power gain more and those without it are told that they do not have much power. Gaventa in analyzing his third dimension of power sees that the ultimate way for one already in power to retain hold of that power is by changing the desires of the one not in power.

What ends up happening is as Gaventa talked about, that because of constant reinforcement of who has power and who does not, those without power do not resist or are tired or resisting and loosing and so they simply allow their minds to be shaped by those in power, soon reaching the point where they do not realize that their desires are not their own. Drawing from Hobbes we can see that the start of this process occurs when humans desire something for our future good. Then we see our need to gain more power to keep that which we already have. Soon one side's values grows dominant and the other grows tired and stops fighting. Then the "loser's" side of the story is not even put on the debate table, and finally ending with the "losers" not even realizing what is for their future good and accepting the dominant party's values and participation in the process declines. Furthermore, certain characteristics humans value constantly reinforce the belief that the group A belongs to is superior to the group B belongs to, making it even harder to fight against. To reverse this, they have to discover what is truly for their good, get it on the "bargaining table," and fight for it, and throughout it all, must always keep in mind that the A group is not superior to the B group, no matter how many times it is reinforced in their daily lives.

Allen Reid
106830223
Soci 30223-030
1/30/10

False Consciousness in District 19

John Gaventa and Michel Foucault are writing on two different, and yet similar topics. Foucault writes about legitimate authority and how it evolves into false consciousness. That which was once legitimate goes beyond its power to enforce that which is legitimate. Basically the concept he states is that everyone being sovereign over themselves, forms a group for certain purposes and which eventually takes away that complete sovereignty. A little bit of an expansion on the contract theory of government. We as a people decided that we would give the authority to govern to specific branches of government (legislative, judicial, and executive), but it has gotten to the point where that group is starting to breach on us, who gave them that authority and power. We are starting to be alienated from our government. Gaventa gives examples of how this plays out in the Appalachian Valley in the various dimensions of power.

The main theme in Gaventa's book is that out of all the coal mining towns, there was one particular place in which they sided with the Company. Gaventa looks into why that is so. One of the things he traces is that there was a short period of ten years in the 1920s and 30s in which miners did strike but it fell apart. The main reason that was mentioned was because the union did not help them and feed them and take care of them like they said they would. This would lead them to resist rebellion in later years.

However we learn that there was a lot of manipulation and influence by the Company regarding the information the miners received. The Company prevented

trucks of food and support from reaching the valley and then influenced the local newspaper to state that the union was lying to them, and thus weakening morale. The people did not know it, but the company to whom they gave some authority was now reaching into the town's press and influencing it, a sphere the townspeople did not expect would be taken over. So as the strike died down the people distrusted the union and would side more with the company, since they knew the price of rebellion. This is the third dimension of power at work.

After this defeat, the coal miners started to submit and quiesce to the Company's beliefs, values and ideas. Foucault called this the "society of normalisation." So when local elections took place, most of the time the people voted the way the Company wanted them to. In this realm some still went against the Company, but they quickly took care of that. The Company started with legitimate authority to tell them what to do. Then it expanded so that they had to live in company houses and buy at the company store. The Company had power to enforce it and any protest was subdued quickly. What started as legitimate authority became false consciousness, the people did what they didn't want to do because they knew that if they didn't, they would be threatened.

This fear that was instilled in them by the Company would transfer over to the union during the candidacy of Yablonski for union president. He ran on a platform that was beneficial to all union workers, however those of district 19 did not support him but supported the corrupt current president Boyle. In the same way as the Company suppressed information about the aid from outside the valley, Boyle suppressed information regarding Yablonski from reaching the people in District 19. Without Yablonski's campaign information, the miners felt that there was no legitimate reason to

support one of the elite members of the union or another. But they did know the cost of protesting the Company, and they saw the union as being run by elites as well, so they supported Boyle, the authority already in place. The Company had so much influence and over the coal miners in District 19 that the miner's very beliefs were changed from what was beneficial to them, to whatever would not have negative consequences.

That is what Foucault wrote about, concerning going from a sovereign to a disciplinary "state." The people once sovereign took to themselves the Company and gave them authority to discipline so that all can benefit by the coal. However the Company worked to discipline the people to conform to its own norms, values and beliefs, taking away their sovereignty to choose what they feel is best. The Company enslaved the people and made them conform otherwise something bad would happen, they would get fired, lose their homes, etc. When protest arose by the people attempting to reassert their sovereignty, the Company manipulated the media to make them believe the union was not really their friend. Being tired of the failures and the punishments thereof and seeing the status quo constantly reinforced, they internalized the idea of rebellion leading to punishment. The miners did not feel that Yablonski was any different than Boyle, and knowing the cost of supporting rebellion against the established leadership, they did not support one who would have greatly benefited them, but rather they killed him. We can see in this Appalachian Valley how false consciousness occurs, that through manipulation and constant defeat, they connected rebellion against authority with negative consequences, which provided a framework for future interaction with power and those in authority.

Allen Reid
106830223
Soci 30223-030
3/16/10

Who Rules America? The Rich?

Is there an aristocracy in America? Many today would say no. America has never had a history of the wealth being in control of the country. This is America, a place where anyone can become anything they desire if only they work at it. The rich may have some privilege but nothing that is that bad, just the extra money that they have from business ventures. At one time, this would be true. In Tocqueville's day, the answer to the question, "is there aristocracy in America?" would be an astounding "no!" But today the wealth of the United States is growing more and more concentrated. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer and we can clearly see how the rich have more advantages over those who are poor.

In Tocqueville's time, you could move up the socio-economic ladder if you worked hard. Even the president that allowed him into the country, Andrew Jackson was living proof of that. President of the common people, a man of the hills and of the country. Tocqueville wrote about how wonderful democracy was in America, how the people wanted everyone to be equal. However he also warned about what we have today in a section called "How an Aristocracy may be Created by Manufactures." He warned "if ever a permanent inequality of conditions and aristocracy penetrates into the world, it may be predicted that this is the gate by which they will enter." How right he was. Today we have numerous corporations but a relatively small amount have enormous power over the whole realm of "manufacturing" and now "services."

Tocqueville saw what we have today, a pseudo-aristocracy based on the manufacturing of goods. It started with the Mellons, the Carnieges, the Rockerfellers and has come down to us by companies such as General Electric and Sara Lee. The owners and the wealthy today put their children into certain preparatory schools who then go on to certain prestigious colleges and a lot of times end up in prestigious positions in the political, financial or educational institutions. Today if you're born rich, you are more likely to be a CEO or some kind of political leader than you are if you come from a working class family. The turnover rate is less than 50% so if you are poor, there is still a possibility that you can become a CEO of a major corporation or rise in the ranks of politics, but it is less likely. I would go so far as to say that someone like Andrew Jackson, one with no formal education and a rough country man could not even make it into the national spotlight, much less become the President of the United States. Most Presidents today have an Ivy league education and more often than not come from rich and upper middle class families. Even President Obama went to a preparatory school, Punahou. So to say that he comes from a "common people" background may be a bit of a stretch.

We can also see that many of the cabinet members of presidents are former corporate leaders, or have some relationship with corporations. This is further evidenced by the fact that after the president leaves office, the advisors go back to sitting on corporate boards and continue to be a part of the policy planning and making system. Many corporate leaders sit on the boards of various other corporations, some sit on as many as eleven different ones. Their children intermarry and so the "old rich" do not usually bring up any "middle class" persons into their fold. There is a degree of

class consciousness with the rich and they often utilize that whenever their interests or wealth are threatened.

The equality that Tocqueville saw in America is no longer true. His prediction that industry would bring in a new aristocracy has come true as evidenced by the interlocking directorates in corporations and the degree of class consciousness and unity the rich can have. Industry concentrated the wealth into the hands of a relatively few amount of people who have now perpetuated their norms, values and beliefs in a web of upper class pride by putting their children in certain prep schools and colleges, by attendance at certain county clubs and debutante balls.

The rich today are slowly gaining more and more wealth and power while the middle class is slowly being polarized to the poor. It is still possible to become a successful CEO without an upper class background; Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and the founders of google demonstrated that. However it is becoming increasingly harder to do so. Without money it is extremely hard to do anything these days. Without money you cannot run for political office and to get money you have to appeal to those who have it, so those who might come from a working class background to become a government leader have to side with the interests of those who sponsored them. The rich dominate this country today, and as we can see in the political arena, a common man like Andrew Jackson could not become the President today. We can truly say, that if the rich do not rule America, they certainly have a bigger say in it than the average American.

Allen Reid
106830223
Soci 30223-030
3/16/10

Cultural Beliefs and Attitudes Which Impact Politics

In his book What's The Matter With Kansas? author Thomas Frank starts off with making a point of noting what liberals, those who vote democratic, are to the conservatives (those who vote republican). They are latte drinking, over-educated, non-Christian, communists who want to destroy the American way of life. The conservatives view themselves as the backbone of society, the good Christian, hard working, beer drinking, fishing and farming, good ol' Americans. However while most conservatives vote on this basis alone, Frank makes the case that the Republicans are basically divided into two camps, those who vote based on economics and those who don't.

Thomas Frank's book is about why the poor and rural vote Republican when economically, the Democratic party is in their best interest. He makes the case that many Republicans are only so because Republicans agree with them on social/cultural issues. That they vote Republican for this reason alone and he goes on to chronicle how and why this happened and the struggle for power within the state of Kansas between Cons and Mods (conservative Christians generally, and moderates, proponents of big business).

He succeeds in his main point of showing why Republicans vote against their economic interests but fails to see the bigger picture. He fails to see how that the rich, those who have business interests are both Republican and Democrat. Domhoff implies it in his book Who Rules America? by showing how certain of the rich business owners and leaders have some impact in what happens in America by way of lobbying, think

tanks, educational institutions. Business owners, CEOs and board members also influence each other, regardless of political affiliation with their interlocking directorates, one major businessman being on the board of more than one company. They also have contacts in government in important fields such as U.S. Foreign Policy.

Taking both Who Rules America? and What's The Matter With Kansas, we can get a better picture of the role that the rich play with regard to the average person in the country. Again, we must remember that both Democrats and Republicans are rich, they both value certain things. Both value education, a strong economy and keeping their own wealth.

Frank says that there is a struggle between moderate and conservative factions of the Republican party. I think that this is true, but I will also go as far as to say that the moderate faction has “played” the conservatives, saying they are for traditional values but really could care less and are only interested in getting the vote. For the most part, both Republicans and Democrats are looking for the same thing, power and wealth. This may be hard to see, seeing as how they seem so different from each other. But ultimately, both parties are going toward the same goal.

Most people in America voted for the last president of the United States on the basis of one of two things. Republicans voted on the basis of the candidates stand on abortion and homosexuality, culture war issues. While Democrats voted on the basis of the economy and change. The problem comes in when we realize that economically, they are on the same page. This is proven by the people who President Obama chose to be on his cabinet, lobbyists, think tank members, corporate board members and sympathizers. The same type of people that President Bush had as his advisers. The

two parties want to get America divided by the social issues because if we look close at where they stand economically, we see that they have the same economic ideas. Both sides come from the elite of the country and both sides realize that economic class is more important.

I have not seen any way that the two parties are different, I see both as coming from the same elite upper class. President Obama chooses the same type of advisers as President Bush did. President Bush wanted to be in Iraq, and Obama opposed it but now is sending more troops over there. The Democrats are for abortion and the Republicans who are supposedly against it, had so many years in which they could have easily overturned Roe vs. Wade as well as stop federal funding for international abortions. Both sides are hypocritical and both sides have lied to the American people. Domhoff shows that they all come from one class of people, that they went to the same schools and appoint similar people to high positions. Frank saw that conservative Americans vote for Republicans because of culture issues and prides the Democrats for realizing the importance of economics. But he doesn't see that many vote Democrat for the same culture issues and that if the American people saw how important economics was and how similar both parties are in their ideas about it, they wouldn't vote for either. If Americans saw how similar both parties are, they would develop class consciousness and understand that the rich want to rule America. Americans need to see that leaders in both parties are on the same economic level and have the same interests and are willing to help the American people, only after they help themselves.