17 Political institutions and minority mobility in the USA

Peter Skerry

In comparing the influence of different political institutions on minority mobility, the conventional approach is to look at social and economic outcomes. This essay will go further and scrutinize the *standards* by which such outcomes are evaluated. What levels, rates, and disparities of mobility are acceptable, or not, to minority groups and other political actors? The standards used to answer these questions are typically treated as exogenous to the political institutions being studied.[1] These standards are the product of many societal forces, to be sure. But they are fundamentally shaped by politics. Indeed, as conceptions of distributive justice, such standards are themselves political outcomes and are arguably more important than social and economic outcomes.

In the US context, such discussions inevitably address the impact of political machines[2] on the mobility of ethnic and racial groups. Machines are usually compared with trade unions, social democratic or labor parties, and Progressive reforms. Here, too, this essay will go further and compare machines with the post-civil-rights regime that has effectively replaced them. I call this regime "post-civil-rights" because it grew out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and, like all successful movements, has become institutionalized. My intention is to show the advantages and disadvantages of each, for minorities as well as for the larger society. Again, the focus here will be on how each regime has shaped *expectations* of minority mobility. This is key, because while the shortcomings of political machines are well known, the insights they provide about today's regime have been largely ignored.

Disadvantages of political machines

In the public mind, "political machine" connotes corruption. Yet when academic observers criticize machines, they tend to downplay this aspect, agreeing with James C. Scott that corruption is endemic to politics: "Just as social banditry and piracy must be viewed as integral parts of many agrarian and maritime economies, so, for example, must

vote-buying and 'rake-offs' be seen as an integral part of United States urban politics at the turn of the century" (Scott 1972: viii). For Scott and others, a more serious problem than corruption was the machines' role in reconciling immigrant workers to an unjust capitalist society: "The effect of machine rule under universal suffrage is to submerge growing collective policy demands with immediate payoffs, thereby retarding the development of class-based political interests among the lower strata" (ibid.: 151).

But Scott is not concerned that machines channeled class- or occupation-based demands into ethnic group-based claims. He suggests a more insidious outcome: "Although pork-barrel legislation provided inducements for ethnic groups and neighborhoods collectively, the machine did most of its favors for individuals and families" (ibid.: 108). Likewise, William Grimshaw writes that the Chicago machine redefined "public services" such as "patching potholes, collecting garbage, trimming trees, and the like" as "private 'favors' dispensed on a quid pro quo basis" (Grimshaw 1992: 54). Machine politics catered to constituent needs less through the passage of legislation, which would have required public rationales for broad categories of beneficiaries, than through enforcement, which allowed individual benefits to be quietly targeted and tailored (Scott 1972: 23–7). Public declarations about issues and principles ill suited the needs and often the talents of machine politicians. Hence the fabled inarticulateness of Mayor Richard J. Daley.[3]

The realist critique of machines focuses right here on their limited political vision. As Daniel P. Moynihan once quipped, "The Irish didn't know what to do with power once they got it" (Glazer and Moynihan 1970: 229). Machine politicians conceived of politics as the pursuit of power, pure and simple. They were not attuned to the articulation of broad public goals. No wonder they were overwhelmed by the national trauma of the Depression and the sacrifices demanded by World War II. It was not simply the New Deal's greater fiscal resources that hastened their end. It was also the political and intellectual resources that Roosevelt amassed in Washington in order to inspire a nation on the verge of demoralization and defeat.

After the war, those same intellectual resources engaged an increasingly affluent, educated, and issue-oriented citizenry in the pursuit of the Cold War. This further marginalized machine politicians who, like their aging constituents, had long been preoccupied with pressing material needs and therefore unaccustomed to looking very far ahead (Scott 1972: 117–18). Edward Banfield and James Q. Wilson have noted that the machines were about conflict management, not leadership (Banfield and Wilson 1966: 18–19). As they conclude, "The machines failed because bosses lacked statesmanship" (ibid.: 125).

Advantages of political machines

The virtues of political machines are also widely acknowledged. Scott highlights their ability to keep the peace: "The social setting of the machine is ordinarily one where ties to the community as a whole are weak and where the potential for violence is great. The capacity of the machine to organize and provide material inducements (often corruptly) operates as a means of solving, for the time being at least, conflicts of interest that might otherwise generate violence" (1972: 145). And while Ira Katznelson criticizes machines for discriminating against blacks and blunting working-class challenges to capitalism, he similarly acknowledges that "the machine form of political organization maintained social order in a setting where the potential for threats to the social order was high" (1981: 114).

Further, Katznelson expresses begrudging respect for the way machines "provided an organized, coherent access link to government and acted as the key distributor of political rewards" (1976a: 224). The machines' affective ties to their adherents made them better at "controlling *both* the input and output sides of politics" than the service bureaucracies that succeeded them, Katznelson argues. Having only impersonal ties to their clients, such bureaucracies cannot shape demands at the prepolitical level. So they resort either to rigid enforcement of rules, which of course alienates clients, or to their relaxation, which is intended to co-opt them.[4]

Quite unlike "urban villages," the communities in which machines operated were typically disorganized and violence prone. To some extent this reflects the transience and travail of migration and assimilation. But it also reflects the fact that immigrants were – and are – "transitional" populations that have shaken off the deference patterns of traditional societies without yet acquiring the perspectives of modern society. As Scott explains:

> For portions of the modern sector where broader class loyalties and civic sentiments have begun to take root, or for the traditional sector where deference and symbolic goals are common, machine blandishments are likely to fall on barren soil. Machines therefore can manage conflict best among "transitional" populations and may be unable to alleviate strife – or may actually exacerbate it – in other social contexts. (Scott 1972: 147)

This accounts for the instability of machines. Indeed, as immigrants and their children assimilated to more modern styles of politics, the machines were left behind.

Of course, the machines themselves contributed to this process. As Scott observes, "The machine simply destroyed its own social base"

(1972: 152). It accomplished this by serving, in Morris Janowitz's term, as a "bridging institution" between immigrant neighborhoods (the private realm of family, neighbors, and friends) and the wider society (the public realm of politics) (Janowitz 1983: 19). Or as Theodore Lowi puts it, the machine combined "rational goals and fraternal loyalty."[5]

Thus did machines provide a critical nexus between the formal institutions of the state and the informal, even chaotic world of immigrants. They did so by being rooted in the face-to-face, primary group networks that still enable even the most unsophisticated individuals to travel great distances and find work in unfamiliar, even hostile settings (Massey et al. 1987: 170–1, Piore 1979: 17). For peasants unschooled in democracy, the precinct captain gave politics a concrete presence. And because immigrants – then as now – seek chiefly economic goals, the material inducements of the machines drew them into politics by connecting it directly with their families' well-being. The lesson was reciprocity: political support in exchange for economic benefits. To be sure, the machines also taught the less than ennobling lesson that votes could be sold to the highest bidder. But arguably this was a necessary first step. Unlike the Progressives, who demanded disinterested civic involvement from politically inexperienced European peasants, the machine politicians met newcomers halfway.[6]

Machines did not leave immigrant networks unaltered, however. In Steven Erie's phrase, machines were "engines of political modernization" (Erie 1988: 231). They took primary group ties and reoriented them toward rational, instrumental, political-organizational goals. Tracing the "communitarian basis" of the New York machine, Katznelson notes that "the centralized machine's political clubs organized this social impulse [of friends and neighbors] and made it the cornerstone of an electoral politics through patronage and services."[7] A measure of the social alchemy wrought by the machines was their ability, when strong, to get members of one immigrant ethnic group to vote for candidates from another. Hence one connotation of "machine" (Banfield and Wilson 1966: 115, 159).

That a trade-off is involved is captured by Samuel Huntington in his treatise on political development:

> If the society is modern and complex, with a large number of social forces, individuals from any one of the social forces may have to make extensive changes in their behavior, values, and attitudes in the process of acquiring power through the political institutions of society. They may well have to unlearn much which they have learned from family, ethnic group, and social class, and adapt to an entirely new code of behavior.[8]

It is precisely such "unlearning" that was fostered by political machines. As a nation the United States may have been "born modern," but ironically, it has grown by absorbing large numbers of pre-modern peoples. The machines helped to perform this function, and they did so at a time when few other institutions did. The high-minded civic consciousness urged by Progressives did not have much to offer struggling newcomers. But neither did trade unions, which were not only weak but also less welcoming of immigrants than were machines (Shefter 1994: 161, 164, 165).

Machines and African-Americans

How many of these benefits extended to African-Americans? The short answer is – not many. Still, African-Americans fared better under machine rule than is often acknowledged.

Of particular help here are comparative studies, such as Katznelson's work on racial politics in the United States and the United Kingdom. In both liberal democracies, he argues, political elites created "buffering institutions" that "link potentially partisan black and Third World migrants to the polity *indirectly* through institutions over which the elites could exercise significant control – institutions which precluded direct group inclusion in the relevant competitive establishments" (Katznelson 1976b: 119, 175–88, 193).

Katznelson's specific evidence offers additional insights. He demonstrates that from 1900 to 1930 blacks fared better under Chicago's machine than they did with New York City's. During that era, black Chicagoans were registered to vote in higher proportions than whites. And they held municipal jobs commensurate with their proportion of the city's population. Katznelson emphasizes that most of those jobs were menial, but the significance of this is unclear, since his study does not control for group educational differences (Katznelson 1976b: 99–100).

Katznelson notes that by 1930 black New Yorkers had secured only about 20 percent of the top patronage positions that they deserved, based on their proportion of the population. Here again, he does not control for educational differences. Nor does he say anything about black voter turnout in New York – obviously a critical consideration for machine politicians parceling out patronage slots. Nonetheless, he reports that black New Yorkers did not fare much worse than Italian New Yorkers, "who in this period fared least well among the European ethnics." Based on their proportion of the population, Italians held only 27 percent of the expected top patronage jobs (Katznelson 1976b: 117).

By the 1960s, blacks in Chicago were benefiting less from machine rule. Faced with new and fundamentally challenging demands from the civil

rights movement, the Daley organization shifted its attention to white ethnics (Grimshaw 1992: 115–40). In New York, by contrast, the demise of the machine improved political opportunities for blacks, albeit marginally (Katznelson 1976b: 118). But by the 1970s and 80s the remnants of machine politics in New York were doing even less for blacks, as the whites in charge (with substantially fewer resources and patronage prerogatives) proved indifferent to black and minority inclusion.[9]

Another illuminating comparison is in Amy Bridges's study of urban reform in the Southwest. Here, again, the evidence indicates that machines were not as hard on blacks and other minorities as typically assumed. While acknowledging the critique mounted by Katznelson and others, Bridges argues that machine cities compare favorably with reform cities:

> From the perspective of the big cities of the Southwest, machine politics does not look nearly so antiparticipatory . . . machine politics must be judged a veritable school of politics for working-class and minority voters, compared to big-city reform. (Bridges, 1997: 216)

As for turnout, Bridges reports that it remained greater in "machine-descendant cities" than in "big reform cities," and concludes:

> This is hardly accidental. Party workers and leaders continued to have incentives to get out the vote, be present in neighborhoods, contact voters, and be responsive to voters' contacts. The result was, comparatively speaking, a highly participatory form of local politics. (ibid.: 217)

Bridges doesn't minimize the travail of blacks under machine rule. But she also emphasizes: "It should surprise no one that the first African-American Democrat, in the Senate, like the first African-American Democrat in the House, came from Chicago" (ibid.).

Such comparisons – across decades, groups, and cities – are helpful, because they move analysis beyond the global explanation of "racism." Katznelson highlights the advantages to blacks of the intense party competition in Chicago in the years before World War II. Other scholars reveal the structural constraints under which machine politicians tried to manage conflict among ethnic and racial groups.[10] Still others show that machines were more inclusive of blacks than, say, trade unions (Katznelson 1976b: 97). Taken together, these findings suggest more realistic standards by which to judge machine performance.

Of course, by any yardstick it must be said that African-Americans consistently got less than their due. The simple truth is that machine politics was not capable of addressing America's racial dilemmas in any fundamental way. What machines could do was address the demands of

individual blacks. But by their very nature, such particularistic benefits could not begin to solve the problems facing African-Americans *as a group*. And to the extent that machine politicians did engage in bargaining among ethnic and racial groups, they could not alter the basic terms of trade.[11] But this of course is precisely what blacks needed, and eventually demanded. As short-term conflict managers, not statesmen and definitely not prophetic leaders, machine politicians could neither conceive nor articulate a broad new public purpose with regard to race.

Such a challenge had to come from outside – and it did, from the civil rights movement. The outcome is captured in an encounter between Mayor Daley and the young Jesse Jackson, depicted by Nicholas Lemann. Having recently moved to Chicago in the 1960s, Jackson called on Daley, who promptly offered the civil rights leader a job as a toll-taker on the Illinois Tollway.[12]

The problem was not simply that Daley misjudged the "price" demanded by an individual black constituent (this having skyrocketed).[13] The problem was that the benefits sought had shifted from individual to collective. Even more to the point, as black demands for desegregated public schools and neighborhoods mounted, the Daley machine began to deliver such collective goods – but to enraged white ethnics, not blacks (Erie 1988: 163–5). At that point the very basis of machine politics was crumbling. For as Scott observes: "Only in circumstances where ethnic groups do not feel threatened with physical or cultural extinction do ethnic cleavages promote machine politics. Where the threat is perceived as great, the result is often collective solidarity" (Scott 1972: 106, footnote 14).

A black nationalist postscript

A neglected irony of this story is how, despite such manifest shortcomings, machine politics still enjoys considerable respect among minorities. The antipathy that white liberals harbor toward the machines is certainly seldom voiced in minority communities.

This observation is based on years of interviewing black and Latino activists and leaders. But an echo of pro-machine attitudes can also be found in the Kerner Commission report, which counted among the causes of black civil disturbances in the 1960s "the demise of the historic urban political machines and the growth of the 'city manager' concept of government." Reform had produced more honest and efficient administration, the report conceded, but at the price of eliminating "an important political link between city government and low-income residents" (Kerner Commission 1968: 287).

A certain begrudging respect for machines can be discerned in the work of black nationalist scholar Harold Cruse (1987, 1967). This becomes explicit in Ture and Hamilton's 1967 manifesto, *Black Power*, in which blacks were reminded that "each new ethnic group in this society has found the route to social and political viability through the organization of its own institutions . . . Italians vote for Rubino over O'Brien; Irish for Murphy over Goldberg, etc."[14] In the mid-1970s Hamilton would favorably contrast the "patron-client" basis of machine politics with the "patron-recipient" politics of the emergent post-civil rights regime (Hamilton 1979: 211–27). Concerned about the rights-oriented litigation strategies then beginning to dominate black politics, Hamilton complained that such efforts were nurturing "plaintiffs instead of precinct captains" (Hamilton 1974: 191).

Thoughtful black nationalists distrust the tendency of liberals to evade the rigors of political competition, whether through over-reliance on the courts or through moralistic appeals to conscience (for which Cruse harshly criticized Martin Luther King, Jr. [Cruse 1987: 232, 236–7, 267]). Suspicious of American individualism, nationalists also argue that although the United States is formally a regime of individual rights, economic and political power have always been wielded by groups, especially ethnic groups. Granted, this perspective fails to appreciate the fundamentally individualistic ethos of machine politics (not to mention their ability to get Rubino to vote for Murphy!). Nevertheless, it is striking to see such regard for the machines among minority leaders and thinkers.

The post-civil-rights regime

The civil rights movement was a genuine grass-roots effort that helped to sweep away the remnants of machine politics. It also laid the foundation of a new style of politics – public interest politics – whose roots are either shallow or nonexistent. Unlike the civil rights movement, which was characterized by "thick" communal and organizational relationships, public interest politics (and the post-civil-rights regime of which it is a part) is notable for "thin" relationships. These have certain advantages. But when it comes to the empowerment of minorities, there are also undeniable disadvantages.

Theda Skocpol has suggested that the career of Marion Wright Edelman tracks this institutional transformation. Starting off in the front lines of the civil rights movement in Mississippi, Edelman was by the late 1960s a Washington lobbyist for Mississippi's Head Start program. Eventually, with the backing of major foundations, she founded the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), whose policy research and media savvy have made

it one of the most prominent advocates in behalf of poor children and families (Skocpol 1999b: 488).

Many such efforts emerged after the 1960s, when it became apparent that various unorganized or hard-to-organize interests were not being heard in the usual din of pluralist politics. The prototype is Common Cause, founded by John Gardner in 1970.[15] Focused on issues like campaign finance reform, consumer protection, and the environment, such public interest organizations have reflected the "quality of life" concerns of middle- and upper-middle-class Americans. Yet as the example of CDF suggests, they have also sought to represent racial minorities. Even the venerable NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), which began as a conventional membership-based organization, had by the 1990s made itself over in the public interest mold (Raspberry 1994: A23).

Because they represent diffuse, difficult-to-organize interests, public interest organizations tend to rely less on membership dues than on third-party funding from wealthy patrons, corporations, and especially foundations. Indeed, they make a virtue of the free-rider problem by greatly reducing the costs of membership. Some, like the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), have reduced those costs to zero: they have no members at all but nevertheless advocate on behalf of all Latinos.

When public interest groups do have members, they tend to be widely dispersed, with weak ties to the organization and almost none to one another. Jeffrey Berry calls this "cheap" membership, because it typically requires no more time and energy than it takes to write an annual check (1989: 55). Robert Putnam notes that such "checkbook organizations" are low on "social connectedness," with most members "unlikely ever (knowingly) to encounter any other member" (Putnam 1995: 71). Bound together by abstract appeals and symbols rather than face-to-face interaction, these members rarely (in Albert Hirschman's terms) exercise "voice" or "loyalty." If dissatisfied, they simply "exit" (Hirschman 1970).

This affords leaders and staff of public interest organizations considerable discretion. But it also obliges them to sustain the interest of members and patrons through "outside strategies" aimed at attracting public – especially media – attention. Neil Komisar and Burton Weisbrod conclude that public interest lawyers maximize publicity, not profits. Favorable media attention stimulates funding, especially in a nonmarket environment where the effectiveness of public interest activities can be difficult to assess (1978: 80–101). Furthermore, as Jack Walker notes, public interest organizations rely on the media to communicate with members and patrons. These organizations do, of course, use newsletters and other internal media. But as Walker emphasizes, people drawn to *public*

interest efforts want *public* results. He doesn't put it this way, but his analysis suggests a kind of public interest revivalism: a continual, public, and often contentious rededication to stated goals (Walker 1991: 106).

Another component of the post-civil-rights regime is a transformed Congress. Now that the old Southern-dominated committee hierarchies are gone, individual representatives have the resources and opportunities to be policy entrepreneurs. The "iron triangles" – in which power and influence were wielded out of public view by pressure groups, agency bureaucrats, and members of Congress – have been broken up and exposed to the light of day. Power now is more likely to be dispersed among formless, continually shifting "issue networks" of policy experts and public officials, whose ties to concrete interests are more attenuated than those binding lobbyists to interest groups (Heclo 1980: 87–125). Central to these developments are the media, which since the 1960s have become not only a more important source of information but also a more aggressively reformist player.

Again, the emphasis is on representing constituencies that are either hard to organize (illegal immigrants, taxpayers, airline passengers) or impossible to organize (snail darters, redwoods, the unborn). Hence the growing importance of class action lawsuits, facilitated again by third-party funding and by media-savvy entrepreneurs. Such efforts are in essence legal fictions, in which the formality of consciously experiencing and then voicing a grievance are relaxed or forgotten (Macey and Miller 1991). The result is what James Q. Wilson calls "vicarious representation" (1980: 370–2).

Underlying these changes is an intellectual revolution in the meaning and scope of rights. Whether recognized by the courts or granted as entitlements by Congress, rights have become, in Shep Melnick"s phrase, "the stock in trade of American political discourse" (1989: 188). The connection with public interest politics is clear. Those who make rights claims tend to conceive of their efforts as transcending mere self-interest and to regard opponents as churlish and mean-spirited. This fosters a politics of symbols and ideas that purports to be, and in many respects is, loosely tethered to material interests. Conventional interest politics has hardly disappeared. But at the cutting edge today, particularly with regard to social policy, is a politics of vaguely defined interests interpreted by elites whose accountability is much more to third-party funding sources than to the constituencies they seek to represent.

Accountability and reciprocity

This post-civil-rights regime is not without its virtues, chiefly the representation of previously excluded interests and groups. This new regime

also makes it easier to overcome the inertia – or stability – of the Madisonian system. Swift policy change no longer requires public concern, much less outrage. Indeed, change may now be easily pursued against the grain of public opinion.[16] The Madisonian system is still there, but overlying it is a new one lacking the constraints that once stymied change. One could even say that the attenuation of the close-knit ties of the pre-civil-rights regime is a Madisonian remedy to the shortcomings of the Madisonian system.[17]

One virtue of public interest organizations specifically is their "long-term horizon" (Berry 1999b: 157). Indeed, their reliance on third-party funding insulates them from the pressing concerns of those for whom they speak, allowing a focus on longer-range goals. An example would be MALDEF's approach to immigration reform during the mid-1980s. At that time rank-and-file Mexican-Americans eagerly supported the amnesty for illegal immigrants then pending in Congress. But such legislation also called for sanctions against employers hiring illegal immigrants. MALDEF lawyers were so opposed to sanctions, which they argued would result in discrimination against all Latinos, that they successfully blocked any such legislation. In the end, MALDEF did relent and amnesty was enacted, but only because sanctions were rendered toothless. Such a strategy was possible only because MALDEF was not directly answerable to Mexican-Americans, who were so enthusiastic about amnesty that they would have tolerated sanctions (Skerry 1995).

In other words, the price of such long-term horizons can be lack of accountability. Absent any revealed preferences for public goods, representation of those preferences is inherently problematic. This is exacerbated when the organization speaks for a minority characterized by low levels of political participation. One reason why illegal immigration became such a controversial issue during the early 1990s was because MALDEF felt so little pressure to moderate its de facto open-borders stance in response to the views of ordinary Mexican-Americans, many of whom were – and are – as anxious about immigration as Americans generally. Indeed, during its protracted battle against immigration reform during the 1980s, MALDEF was perceived by allies and opponents alike as downright intransigent (Sierra 1989: 24–7).

As mentioned earlier, a guiding principle of machine politics was reciprocity (Scott 1972: 109). This changed dramatically in the 1960s, when mayors like John Lindsay realized that their constituencies included not just voters in their cities but also national elites. As Martin Shefter notes, Lindsay relied on federal grants to increase benefits to minorities and came to see that he no longer had "to induce members of the Board of Estimate and the City Council . . . to appropriate local

revenues for this purpose." It also became clear that "the major benefit Lindsay received by working with black and Puerto Rican community activists was legitimation, not votes." The result was a decline in organization and participation: "Because black and Puerto Rican leaders were not rewarded in proportion to the number of followers they mobilized, they had no overriding incentive to mobilize large numbers of followers" (Shefter 1985: 94–5).

Echoing Hamilton's distinction between the "patron-client" politics of the machines and the "patron-recipient" politics of the new regime, Erie writes that "bureaucratic politics has acted as a depressant on electoral participation . . . Precinct workers are encouraged to mobilize loyal voters on election day. Human service workers, however, have little incentive to politically mobilize their clientele – as long as social programs and budgets grow" (Erie 1988: 265). So along with accountability, reciprocity has eroded.

The participation–representation trade-off

Viewed as a whole, the post-civil-rights regime presents a striking paradox. On the one hand, the workings of government are more transparent than ever. On the other, politics itself is more insular and more removed than ever from the lives of ordinary Americans. For minorities and nonminorities alike, political participation is now at historically low levels, and many Americans feel they have little control over the institutions that decide the fate of their families and communities. Hugh Heclo offers this explanation:

> The reformers of the 1960s and 1970s were institution challengers, not builders. With the major exception of the civil rights movement, their work remained generally detached from the political lives and affiliations of ordinary Americans . . . Procedural rights of participation were a reality for only small circles of activists. Their efforts penetrated the arcane world of administrative law and legal maneuverings but not street-level politics. The reformers could capture media attention, but they were much less interested in the mundane work of grass-roots organizing and precinct politicking. (1989: 304)

Clearly, there is a trade-off here between participation and representation. After weighing them, Jeffrey Berry comes down squarely in favor of representation. This is noteworthy because in the past Berry has been highly critical of public interest organizations (Berry 1980: 42–7). Now, it seems, Berry is reconciled to them. "Membership in a national interest group is, in its own way, a search for community," he writes. "It is not, of course, the same kind of community that face-to-face interaction offers,

but by identifying with a cause, people also identify with others who join the same group" (Berry 1999a: 369–71). As the center of political gravity has shifted to Washington, Berry now defends public interest organizations as the obvious way to address "a set of issues that could not be resolved without the involvement of Congress, the president, and the federal courts" (1999a: 369–71, 1999b: 166–7).

Yet Berry also acknowledges that this new regime is biased against certain segments of society. Noting that the power of unions has declined, he admits that public interest organizations "represent middle-class and upper-middle-class citizens" and "*empower only part of the population*" (emphasis added).[18] In fact, the problem is worse. Not only does the post-civil-rights regime favor resources lacking among the disadvantaged, such as money and media; it also devalues resources, like social capital, that they have relatively more of. Indeed, such resources are bypassed by the depersonalized, professionalized politics of campaign consultants, media buys, and computerized direct mail.[19]

Perhaps most troubling is the failure of today's regime to facilitate the political learning – or "unlearning," as Huntington describes it – that is necessary for marginal groups to attain political power. Public interest organizations are not deliberative. Whether for affluent suburbanites or impoverished minorities, they offer scant opportunities to weigh conflicting interests and perspectives. This reflects an overall trend in contemporary American politics emphasizing interest *articulation* over interest *aggregation* (Fiorina 1999: 395–427). As Michael Walzer observes more generally about "thinness" in moral argument and politics, it is "less the product of persuasion than of mutual recognition" (1994: 17).

But while the system has changed, the needs of the disadvantaged have not. Uprooted immigrants and disconnected minorities still need to learn about "loyalty" and "voice," not just "exit" (Hirschman 1970). Such lessons are not taught by public interest organizations (McFarland 1984: 96–9). Political machines were not very deliberative, to be sure. But by drawing newcomers into face-to-face interactions based on accountability and reciprocity, machines provided at least a rudimentary political education to those most in need of it. Today the need still exists, but school is no longer in session.

The new corporatism

The post-civil-rights regime has other shortcomings. Berry has observed that despite their label, "public interest" organizations represent a decidedly narrow set of interests and have actually helped to weaken the one institution that has a much stronger claim to representing

broader societal interests – political parties.[20] A consequent irony, which redounds to the specific disadvantage of minorities, is that organizations like MALDEF work outside the party system and end up looking a lot like the "buffer institutions" criticized by Katznelson (1976b: 119, 175–88, 193).

Another problem with the current regime is its formalism, which relates back to the participation–representation trade-off. In our eagerness to ensure that diverse groups are represented, we Americans have grown accustomed to paying little or no attention to the substantive nature of that representation. More specifically, we seldom look at its organizational basis.

In fact, today's regime contains a strong element of corporatism. Michael Piore argues that in recent decades the United States has fashioned a "new corporatism" based on ascriptive traits such as gender, race, and ethnicity. Indeed, he writes that "blacks are the first of the new noneconomic corporate groups in American society" (Piore 1995: 25).

Like peak labor and business organizations in more traditionally corporatist regimes, the organizations that represent blacks, women, Latinos, Asians, and other such groups enjoy something like a representational monopoly – in return for which the state seeks social peace. The obvious problem, of course, is that corporatism fails to acknowledge that individuals have multiple, even competing interests. Indeed, corporatist regimes are predicated on assigning individuals interests that *by definition* do not overlap with others.

As a result, corporatist arrangements tend to be particularly thin and rigid. This certainly applies to the racial and ethnic groups targeted by American policymakers. As the demographer William Petersen notes, these are often "categories" more than "groups." The ubiquitous term "group" implies a level of self-conscious cohesion and solidarity lacking in what are often mere statistical aggregates. For Petersen, the difference between a "category" and a "group" is analogous to Marx's differentiation of a "class in itself" from a "class for itself." Moreover, Petersen distinguishes a "group" from a "community": each has an awareness of being different from other groups, but only the latter has an organizational structure (Petersen 1987: 206–8). In this typology, only some racial and ethnic categories are groups; very few are communities.

In this light, one would not prudently characterize African-Americans as a "category." But the term does seem to fit looser designations such as "Hispanic" or "Asian or Pacific Islander." When we look at the organizational life underlying these various "groups," they are revealingly "thin." Of course, as Arlene Saxonhouse reminds us, the conventional groupings of political life are inescapably arbitrary (1992). But there are

degrees of fit, and in the context of American individualism and voluntarism, the racial and ethnic categories we rely on seem especially concocted and ill-fitting.

Still more troubling is the point raised by Ralf Dahrendorf:

> The risk of the corporatist perversion of the democratic class struggle is that it creates rigidity in the place of movement. Corporatism enters into an easy union with bureaucracy, and both tend to rob the constitution of liberty of its essence, the ability to bring about change without revolution . . . fundamentally corporatism takes life out of the democratic process. (1988: 110–11)

One way of overcoming such rigidity is, of course, corruption. As Roger Waldinger highlights elsewhere in this volume, formal institutions typically rely on informal relationships to achieve their goals.[21] The machines illustrated this, and so do today's post-civil-rights institutions. For example, the "old girl network" of feminist activists and foundation executives has come to rely on longstanding, face-to-face relationships not unlike the "old boys network" that the women's movement once denounced (Cigler and Nownes 1995: 92).

Similarly, Bridges highlights how in reform cities the "nonpartisan slating groups" intended to replace political parties as a way of endorsing candidates functioned like parties – except that as private organizations their deliberations were shielded from public scrutiny (1997: 121). Thus do corporatist arrangements ossify over time, efforts at transparency lead to opaqueness, and thin politics become thick.

Conclusion: conflict and impatience

Finally, the thin politics of the post-civil-rights regime is highly volatile. Its capacity for change carries with it a certain faddishness, especially among elites.[22] And as a politics of symbols and ideas, it encourages conflict (albeit of a unique and curious sort) while discouraging bargaining and compromise. As one journalist has quipped, "Symbols cannot be split in two" (Schnur 1999: B9).

Critical are the new regime's structural underpinnings. As discussed earlier, public interest organizations rely heavily on the media to communicate with tenuously connected members. So it's hardly surprising that these organizations would share the media's taste for the dramatic and outrageous, using 'the-sky-is-falling' rhetoric to gain the attention of members and third-party benefactors (Easterbrook 1989: 304–5). As Walzer suggests, thin politics unites people by focusing not on common commitments but on common enemies (1994: 17–18). Donald Brand underscores the point: "It is highly likely . . . that public-interest groups

will always be more combative than their interest-based counterparts because conflict generates publicity and allows public-interest groups to mobilize their constituents."[23]

This dynamic is illustrated by the contrasting styles of two organizations – MALDEF and the Alinsky-inspired Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) – during the campaign to reform school finance in Texas during the 1980s. Ever since MALDEF's defeat in the 1973 *Rodriguez* decision, increased state aid to poorly funded local school districts had been a popular issue among Mexican-Americans (San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez). Yet when the IAF got recalcitrant Texas legislators to agree to a compromise package (which was eventually enacted), MALDEF balked out of concern to avoid undermining its litigation strategy charging the legislature with racial discrimination.

The difference could not be more stark. Committed to building a network of church-based community organizations, the IAF was able to get the attention of state elected officials by busing into Austin thousands of Mexican-American (and some African-American) parents from across the state. Justifiably known for their confrontational style, the Alinsky organizers had aroused their members to action – and by the same token were reluctant to disappoint them. From their perspective, a reasonable compromise with the state legislature was clearly desirable as a way to reward members and build the organization. By contrast, MALDEF had no members to mobilize or reward – which allowed it to remain focused on the long-term litigation strategy that funders like the Ford Foundation want public interest law firms to pursue. In other words, MALDEF had every reason to prolong and nurture the conflict.

But such conflict, so characteristic of today's post-civil-rights regime, is curious. It is not the "unrealistic" conflict that Lewis Coser identified (1956: 48–55). Nor is it the irrational, "expressive" conflict that Wilson has analyzed (1995). Rather it is a highly rationalized mode of conflict, perpetuated chiefly to maintain the peculiar institutions of this regime. Such conflict is rarely resolved – in part because the issues it places on the agenda are hard to resolve, and in part because the players have few incentives to resolve them. Writes Heclo: "It appears that a great deal of postmodern policy-making is not really concerned with 'policy-making' in the sense of finding a settled course of public action that people can live with. It is aimed at crusading for a cause by confronting power with power" (1996: 34–63).

Perhaps this is why so many Americans turn away from politics as pointless bickering – not because they reject politics or conflict per se, but because they intuitively grasp that today's ritualized, self-reinforcing conflict is dysfunctional. By contrast, Machiavelli of course saw political conflict as benefiting republics by arousing citizens to heroism and love

of glory (Crick 1970). In our own era, Skocpol inveighs against the "neo-Durkheimian stress on social trust as the essence of democracy" and notes that "in a very real sense, first liberal-parliamentary regimes and then democracies were a product of organized conflict and *distrust*" (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999: 14).

Similarly, Dahrendorf sees conflict as promoting social progress, but stipulates: "To be fruitful conflict has to be domesticated by institutions" (1988: 111). And this was precisely what political machines did – perhaps to a fault (Banfield and Wilson 1966: 25–7). But today we see the opposite: political institutions that fuel conflict for their own organizational ends.

Yet this organization-maintaining conflict is also curiously selective – particularly with regard to racial minorities. On the one hand, conflict between the white majority and racial minorities is presumed to exist everywhere as a deep-seated, endemic problem. On the other hand, conflict between various minority groups is presumed not to exist at all. Indeed, a basic premise of the post-civil-rights regime is that all protected minority groups share the same fundamental experience of debilitating racial discrimination, and that their basic interests are therefore congruent. As John David Skrentny characterizes this perspective, blacks, Latinos, Asians, and other protected minorities are "the same, but different" (2002). Thus, for all its fueling of conflict, the post-civil-rights regime does the opposite when it comes to relations among racial minorities.

There is a striking similarity between this presumed homogeneity of racial minority interests and the eighteenth-century republican view of "the people" as a coherent entity whose interests were opposed to those of the Crown. It was this theory, embraced by statesmen like Burke, which undergirded the notion of "virtual representation" of the colonies in Parliament (Wood 1969: 174–9). Like its eighteenth-century predecessor, today's presumption is a kind of corporatist fiction – one of those areas of political life where consensus is assumed to have supplanted conflict (Dahrendorf 1988: 111). I say "presumed" because there are, of course, many conflicts among minority groups – between blacks and Latinos during the 1992 Los Angeles riots, between Korean greengrocers and African-Americans in New York City,[24] and between MALDEF and the old-line black-oriented Leadership Conference on Civil Rights over employer sanctions.[25] Now and then one of these conflicts breaks through the surface, but because the regime has no way of acknowledging or dealing with it, it quickly sinks back out of sight.

This denial of conflict – or, for that matter, difference – among minority groups profoundly impacts the way we assess minority social mobility. This is particularly true with regard to one of the most fundamental but overlooked variables in political life: time. Bernard Crick reminds us that

time is how politics is able to reconcile the inevitable tensions between ideals and realities.[26] Yet time is what our post-civil-rights regime affords us precious little of. Certainly when it comes to minority mobility, time has been foreshortened.

How are we to interpret the social and economic progress of Mexicans who recently immigrated to the United States, say within the last twenty years? By the same standard applied to African-Americans who have been here for twenty generations? Framed thus, this standard seems inappropriate. Yet it is the one we use. Relying on the policy paradigms developed in response to the black civil rights movement, we interpret statistical disparities in income, education, residential settlement, and other outcomes between Latino immigrants and their children, on the one hand, and non-Latino natives, on the other, the same way we interpret disparities between blacks and nonblacks – through the lens of racial discrimination. In essence, we have institutionalized impatience.

Now, impatience is understandable, even laudable, toward the continuing inequalities experienced by the descendants of African slaves. But when transposed to immigrants, this same impatience overlooks what a long and arduous process it is for newcomers to become full participants in American life. We forget our own history – not just that of Mexicans in the Southwest, but of European immigrants in the last century. Indeed, we seem unable to wait for today's recent arrivals to settle in and adapt to their new home before declaring them to be victims of a society intent upon excluding them.

In a political culture characterized by self-reinforcing conflict and institutionalized impatience, the crucial question is whether the progress of immigrants will be fast enough to satisfy either them or the rest of us. The answer will not come from social science, I hasten to add, but from politics. Which means that it will be critically shaped by the post-civil-rights regime, whose institutions may be less tolerant of social disadvantage than political machines but also less capable of bringing newcomers into the mainstream. But whatever they accomplish, today's political institutions will not do it individually and discretely, as the machines did, but collectively and stridently.

NOTES

1. My point here parallels Martin Shefter's critique of "the neoclassical theory of patronage." See Shefter 1994: 22–25.
2. In this essay I use the term "political machine" broadly to encompass the important distinction between a stable, citywide organization (a political machine) and a patronage-driven style of politics that does not necessarily result in such an organization (machine politics). See Wolfinger 1972: 365–98.

3. On the aversion of machine politicians to debate issues and principles, see Banfield and Wilson 1966: 116 and Scott 1972: 108.
4. Katznelson 1976a: 226. See also Katznelson 1987a: 129–30 and Erie 1988.
5. Lowi 1967: 86. James C. Scott pushes this insight further and argues that the rationalized, bureaucratic structures of modern societies depend for their day-to-day functioning on the flexibility of informal relations such as characterized machines (see Scott 1998: 352).
6. So did astute Progressives like Jane Addams. See J. B. Elshtain 2002: 77, 104, 157.
7. Katznelson 1981: 70. Here Katznelson's analysis of the machine echoes that of Polish mutual-aid societies in Thomas and Znaniecki 1958: 1590.
8. Huntington 1968: 83. On the transformative role of patronage parties, see Schmidt 1977: 326–7.
9. Katznelson 1981: 108–34; see also Jones-Correa 1998: 69–90.
10. Examples of these structural constraints can be found in Erie 1988: 163–5, Grimshaw 1992, Scott 1972: 108. Shefter 1985: 33, 34, 71.
11. On how this bargaining ethos persists today in New York City politics, to the advantage of immigrants, see Kasinitz 2000.
12. Lemann 1991: 91. My thanks to Steven Teles for bringing this episode to my attention.
13. By contrast, a few years earlier Wilson had noted that blacks in Chicago had "not priced themselves out of the market" established under machine incentives (see Wilson 1965: 54). For parallel developments in New York City, see Shefter 1985: 71. On the fundamental tension between the civil rights movement and Daley, see Grimshaw 1992: 125.
14. Ture and Hamilton 1992: 44–55. The irony here of course is that Ture and Hamilton got it wrong; at least according to my analysis here, machines did not work so exclusively on ethnic, solidaristic incentives.
15. The classic work on Common Cause is McFarland 1984. See also McFarland 1976.
16. See, for example, Schuck 1995: 47–87.
17. See McWilliams 1995.
18. Berry, 1999a: 391. Theda Skocpol argues that the new regime is "open but oligarchical": Skocpol 1999a.
19. On this point, Marshall Ganz's work is particularly instructive. Specifically, Ganz cites how the effort to mobilize California Latinos for Robert Kennedy's 1968 presidential campaign would not likely be undertaken in today's world of rationalized, consultant-dominated politics. See Ganz 1994: 100–9. On the other hand, community organizing efforts under the aegis of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) *do* build on the social capital of the disadvantaged. See Skerry 1995: 144–74. See also Warren 2001.
20. See Berry 1980. It is worth noting that Berry's stance on public interest organizations became more positive over the years.
21. Waldinger in this volume; and as pointed out above, this classic sociological insight pervades Scott 1998.
22. See Wilson 1995: 249–268; also Shapiro 1995: 3–20.
23. See Brand 1989: 38, Gilmour 1995, Skerry 2000: 251.
24. For an interesting analysis of black-Korean conflicts, see Kim 2000.

25. See Kirschten 1991.
26. Crick 1982: 156. A similar point is made in Nisbet 1975: 176.

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