POWER, IDENTITY, AND THE LIMITS OF AGENCY[1]

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis of the limits of "power to" and agency through an examination of the Barry administration in Washington, DC. I begin by asking why this administration, born of the civil rights movement and tremendous optimism, was unable to live up to its expectations. I provide an in-depth examination of Barry's efforts at reform, his popular appeal, and his appeal to business within the context of Washington's local political history. I find that Barry's power was constrained by a combination of structural factors, personal choices, the legacy of racism and racist exclusion, and a failed identity-deployment strategy. The findings have broader implications for the use of identity-deployment strategies for minority political leaders generally.

Keywords: Political Power; Political Agency; Identity Politics; Washington, DC; Marion Barry

INTRODUCTION

Marion Barry was elected to office during an era when African American mayors were beginning to exercise political power in cities across the United States, opening a new front in the battle for civil rights. During his first campaign for mayor of Washington, DC, in 1978, Barry ran on a platform that emphasized a vision of a unified city and the need for leadership that residents could be proud of (Coleman 1978a). In his opening fourth-term address to Congress he testified:

> I have a vision for Washington, DC. I see a city . . . of thriving industries of tomorrow, including health care, music, tourism, and publishing—as well as government. I see a city where service—in the public and private sectors—is considered honorable. And I see a city where faith abounds . . . and faith is rewarded. I come today not with all the answers, but with a deep desire to partner with you to see this vision become the new reality for America's number one city—Washington, DC (U.S. Congress 1995, p. 9).

Despite Barry's seemingly good intentions, his tenure in office is frequently described as a failure at best, with a corrupt administration, an inefficient bureaucracy, and poor city services. Why was Barry's administration, born of the civil rights movement and tremendous optimism, unable to live up to its expectations?

The urban regime literature demonstrates that political incorporation is simply not enough to ensure an inclusive regime agenda, and that the area's political economy and the regime's connections to local networks are critical factors to success (Stone 1997). The identity politics literature shows that identity and its corresponding deep agenda of affirmation can have powerful consequences for the outcomes of urban regimes (Bailey 1999). The Barry administration suggests something further: major structural constraints that are coupled with incorporation and identity-deployment strategies can have a devastating impact on the ability of a regime to meets its goals, limiting the potential of agency and the possibility of an expanded version of "power to."

POWER, AGENCY, AND STRUCTURE

Central to analyses of politics and history is the concept of power. *Power* is generically understood as transformative capacity exercised through resources or structures (Giddens 1979). *Power to* is a key concept in regime theory that means choice, deliberate action, and change are possible. The concept of "power to" comes out of the long-standing discussion of the nature and operation of power in society. According to urban regime theory, regimes are by definition empowering and engage in "power to." That is, "power to" rests on the attractiveness of an individual, a group, or an institution as an ally to become part of an arrangement to make decisions—"power to" lies in the attraction of the alliance. "Power to" also lies in the attractiveness of a policy option itself that is feasible within the limitations of available resources.

These processes of "power to" take place in observable ways. For example, a political leader wants to build a record of accomplishment and has several different alternatives in mind. However, the leader cannot accomplish much by utilizing his or her own store of resources (that is, what is controlled by the authority of the political office), thus limiting "power over." The leader, therefore, turns to alliances, combining efforts with others who have the necessary resources to make other possibilities more feasible. Some alliances are easier to put together and have a stronger capacity than others. By putting together these alliances, the political leader opens up new possibilities for realizing his or her intended goals. The range and possibilities of "power to" are found in the degree of creativity utilized in the process of accomplishing the goals.

This description suggests that "power to" is purposive and positive, but this is not necessarily true. Is "power to" simply a mechanism or process, or does it have normative concerns, as suggested by some feminist literature? Introducing the concepts of structure and agency help answer this question.

Agency, or the possibility of bringing about change in the face of structural constraints, is a central organizing principle in the study of social and political phenomena (for more discussion, see Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Accepting that agency exists does not preclude the possibility of structural accounts of politics and political decision making; in fact the opposite is true. It does mean that structures are taken as a reality of the political or the wider social arena, and that these structures may constrain the actions of the agent. The agent in turn can choose to reinforce or alter the structures in place—the agent is limited but not bound by structures. The

agent thus has agency, or the capacity to change the structure. The creativity of the agent, or the "power to," can be used for both good and bad purposes, but even good purposes can have bad results, and agents can be blocked from doing good work because of lack of creativity and the presence of structural constraints. The agent's creative role is in seeing the possibility of a new alliance or operating arrangement; "power to" is in the arrangement itself. Agency becomes more powerful as it becomes more creative and transformative.

There are several implications for accepting the concepts of agency and structure as contingent, rather than determinant. First, agents have the capacity (whether or not it is used) to act, or "power to." This changes how we view the purpose and central issues of politics. The emergence of the *social production model* is a good example of this. The traditional model, or the social control model, used by pluralists is set in a paradigm in which power equals dominance, politics equals legitimizing forms of social control, and the central issue of most analyses is the cost of compliance. With the shift to a social production model, the model used by regime theory, power becomes capacity, politics brings together essential elements in a fragmented world, and the central issue of analysis is cooperation building that can yield action. In the social production model, power lies in the details and marginal changes brought about through collaboration and coalition building (Stone 1997).

Second, accepting the concepts of agency and structure affects the types of questions that can be asked with respect to power. Whereas under the social control model we asked such questions as, who has power? Now we must ask, how can power be developed? What type of actions, resources, and relationships yields the most capacity? What makes actors powerful? What is it that makes one person more attractive as an ally than another? How do structures constrain or encourage agency (or "power to")? Are there certain kinds of relationships that are more flexible or adaptable than others?

Third, because agency implies "power to" action and change are possible, the strategies we employ to achieve change depend, at least in part, on how we understand political structures. If power is understood as influence (the first face of power), building political efficacy and advocacy skills are the most effective change strategies. If power is understood as access, decision making, and mobilization of bias (the second face of power), development of broad-based citizen organizations is the most effective change strategy. If power is understood as consciousness (the third face of power), development of political education and awareness building are the most effective change strategies (Gaventa 1995). And if power is understood as capacity, the understanding put forth by regime theory, then resource building and rearrangement of relationships will be the most effective change strategies.

The change strategy put forth by regime theory does not necessarily exclude the other strategies, as resource building may include these as well. However, resource building is the key to change in regime theory, as opposed to noncompliance (noncompliance can be employed as an extension of the strategies of the second and third faces of power). Noncompliance as a tool for change will be scattered and will therefore face many difficulties in breaking down or changing structures, and it is more likely to simply deplete its own resources. Resource building in effect means that when a marginalized group becomes attractive as an ally to the hegemonic group, the marginalized group therefore is able to "infiltrate" the structure of authority and create change through rearranging relationships within that structure. This can also be thought of in terms of preference formation. As new resources develop, the potential for new relationships emerge, in effect altering the characteristics and preferences of the hegemonic group.

Accepting agency necessitates an analysis of leadership, particularly of how leaders overcome institutional and structural constraints. The power of leadership lies in two areas:

> The power advantage that comes from occupying that role and being able to take the initiative and to frame proposed community actions as *community* actions, . . . [and in] the capacity to hold together enough resources and positions of institutional strength to foreclose any rival group or coalition from exercising the power of governance (Stone 1989a, p. 147).

Within this framework, elected leaders must appeal to and negotiate the needs of government(s), businesses, civic organizations, and constituents. Leaders are also constrained, and their strength is in their ability to see creatively beyond these constraints to produce new arrangements, or, put another way, in their "power to." Pushing for these new arrangements sometimes forces leaders into uncomfortable territory and threatens the stability of their positions. These new arrangements influence the strategic choices they make, including pursuing reforms (in government programs and services, bureaucratic processes, hiring, etc.); appealing to new and different groups; forming partnerships with business and community organizations; working to develop new coalitions and collaborations; and so on.

Leaders maintain their stability by accumulating *idiosyncrasy credit*, that is, by the combination of competency, performance, and positive characteristics that keep a leader popular (Hollander 1958). When leaders push for new arrangements that may be unpopular or uncomfortable, or when they make personal blunders that embarrass their administration, it is their stores of idiosyncrasy credits that secure their positions of strength. When a leader loses his or her idiosyncrasy credit, he or she loses his or her potential for agency.

BACKGROUND

Local contextual factors make Washington, DC, intriguing and important as a case study of the role of agency. The combination of the federal presence in the city and its self-contained political structure with no state government for support makes Washington, DC, unique, but at the same time the challenges faced by city residents and leaders are similar to the challenges in many other large U.S. cities (Siegel 1997). And because of the highly racialized history of the city, it serves as an important case to explicate the consequences of formalizing African American empowerment after the civil rights movement. Finally, the area is characterized by White privilege and power that is unmistakably and deeply entrenched. It is here in the confluence of the federal city, the Black city, and the city of White privilege where the potential and power of the urban regime is tested and its limits are clarified.

Washington, DC

In 1800 the nation's capital moved from Philadelphia, PA, to Washington, DC, with jurisdictional control of the capital city given to Congress. Initially, the District had a territorial government and suffrage was extended to its citizens. In 1890 this government was shut down and suffrage for the citizens of the District was revoked by Congress. The next major push for "home rule" developed in the late 1950s and extended into the 1960s, culminating in a congressional Home Rule bill backed by

President Johnson but killed in the Senate in 1965. It has been suggested that much of the congressional opposition to DC home rule was the result of overt racism by the members of Congress (Jaffe and Sherwood, 1994). In 1967 Johnson developed the first plan for an appointed city council and mayor with budget and veto power given to Congress. The bill passed in 1967, and Walter Washington (an African American man) was appointed the first mayor, and John Hechinger (a White and wealthy local businessman) was appointed chair of the city council. The first elected school board was voted into office in 1969, and in 1971 the city held its first election for a nonvoting member in Congress.

In 1973 both houses of Congress passed a second Home Rule bill, which Nixon signed into law, and in 1974 the city held the first elections for mayor and city council. Congress maintained a strong role in running District affairs, which included having review power over the city's budget. Simultaneously, conservative members of Congress took increasingly active roles in District affairs. Representative Philip M. Crane (R-IL) suggested, "We are the local government here. Congress is the local government. We have a responsibility to review everything the DC City Council does—everything" (Kurtz and Isikoff, 1981, p. A1). Despite the congressional role in local affairs, the local government grew in size and scope over the next twenty-one years. Then in 1995, after years of perceived and real mismanagement, President Clinton authorized a fiscal control board to manage the city budget, contracts and laws (through veto power), and city agencies. The presence of the control board had the *de facto* effect of ending home rule.

The District has attempted to gain statehood on several occasions, but this has never been granted. The historic racism of the Congress, particularly before the civil rights era, prompted more opposition to statehood than to home rule, a result of the prospect of the addition of two liberal (and also probably African American) senators (Benjaminson 1985; Jaffe and Sherwood, 1994). In 1987 the committee that provides oversight for the District passed a statehood bill, but the bill did not pass in the larger congressional body. Subsequent attempts to achieve statehood through Congress have been unsuccessful, and current attempts to gain statehood are primarily pursued through the courts.

From the city's inception, its politics have been steeped in racism and racist separatism (e.g., the Black Codes of the 1830s and the razing of the Southwest area of the city). After the 1960 census, Washington officially became the first majority African American city in the country. Despite the potential power of this new political majority, wealth and privilege lay primarily in the hands of the Whites in the city, though there has consistently been an established African American bourgeoisie. Until very recently, the city, with a few exceptions, could be split into two sections along 16th Street, NW. To the west resided White privilege, and to the east, a mix of middle-class and lower-class African Americans, particularly across the Anacostia River. The result of this history for lifelong residents is a dual and conflicting outlook on city life. On the one hand they fear that outsiders and Whites will take over the city (given the reality that outsiders, i.e., Congress, control a great deal of the city), but on the other hand, they desire to build stability and security (Coleman 1979b).

Marion Barry has been a central figure in the politics of the city, beginning in the late 1960s through today. He entered office in a period of emerging Black mayoral leadership and counts among his peers such leaders as Coleman Young of Detroit, Tom Bradley of Los Angeles, Maynard Jackson of Atlanta, and Ernest Morial of New Orleans, among many others. His political career has spanned most of the period of home rule, including the demise of home rule when President Clinton appointed a

control board during Barry's last term. Regime politics in Washington, DC, cannot be understood without also understanding the life, career, and impact of this man.

Marion Barry

Marion Barry was born into poverty in 1936 in a small town in Mississippi and was raised in Tennessee. He received a bachelor's degree from LeMoyne College, a master's degree from Fisk University, and he pursued graduate studies in a doctoral chemistry program at the University of Tennessee. From his early twenties, Barry was actively involved in community organizing and civil rights issues, primarily through leadership positions in civil rights organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). His personal life is best described as colorful: four marriages; numerous reports of affairs, drug use and overdoses, and assaults on women (all unsubstantiated); a couple of arrests for minor offenses; and, of course, his infamous arrest in 1990 and later incarceration for possession and use of crack cocaine, tax fraud, and then later violations of his probation (Jaffe and Sherwood, 1994; Lemann 1979; Leonnig 2007).

Barry's political career is no less interesting. It began during his twenties with his involvement in the NAACP, and later in SNCC. After Barry moved to Washington, DC, in 1965 to head the DC SNCC office, his skills for community organizing and politics emerged. He began by organizing a local bus boycott, and then helped to develop Free DC (an organization to support home rule), the Citizen Committee for Equal Justice, and Pride, Inc. (an organization to provide job training). In 1969 Barry was selected to join the Economic Development Committee, a local committee primarily composed of business elites and established to help deal with the results of the 1968 riots (Jaffe and Sherwood, 1994). These experiences accounted for much of the idiosyncrasy credits that sustained him later in office when under fire for personal and political failings.

It was Barry's involvement with the Economic Development Committee that ushered in his formal political career. Barry was able to assemble the necessary support to launch his first campaign for school board. He won, and was then elected internally as president of the school board. In 1974 he ran for an at-large seat on the newly created city council and won, and later that year he was appointed to head the Finance and Revenue Panel on the council. He was reelected for the seat in 1976. In 1978 he ran for mayor in the city's second mayoral election, with a platform that called for reform in a myriad of areas, including social services, planning and zoning, taxes, pay and hiring inequities, housing, and job training (Camp 1980; Coleman 1978a, 1978b; Eisen 1979; Mintz 1986; Williams 1982). He was endorsed by *Washington Post* as having "the particular qualities of leadership—energy, nerve, initiative, imagination, toughness of mind, an active concern for people in distress, [and] command presence" (Lemann 1979), and he won the election. He again ran for mayor and won in 1982, and again in 1986.

As mayor, Barry brought real strengths with him, including a significant network of civil rights leaders and organizers, growing business contacts, widespread public support, and an administrative acumen which helped him dig the city out from the financial problems left by Walter Washington (Agronsky 1991; Barras 1998). He publically demonstrated his desire to continue the work he had begun in the civil rights movement, and his rhetoric was forthright, passionate, and challenging. For example, with Mayor Ernest N. Morial of New Orleans, he wrote:

> The central question . . . is: what is the share of responsibility that affluent communities have to those with heavy poverty concentrations. . . . The nation seems to have made a commitment to retain housing subsidies for middle and upper income citizens through the tax system, but we should determine what level of housing assistance should be extended to the lower income group as well (Morial and Barry, 1986, pp. xix–xx).

The hope of many across the country was that he would be able to create real change where others might fail. The case of Barry is so interesting because he had the skills and resources to make major changes, and he started to, but then it all fell apart.

Barry launched a campaign for a fourth term, though that effort was cut short by his January 12, 1990, drug-possession arrest and subsequent conviction and incarceration. It would have appeared that Barry's political career was effectively over after his 1990 arrest and incarceration, but Barry, kept down by little, ran for an at-large city council seat around the time of his sentencing. He lost that election. After his release from prison he moved into Ward 8 (a predominately poor African American area east of the Anacostia River) and ran for that city council seat in 1992 and won. In the 1994 election, Barry ran for mayor and was again elected. During this term the control board was appointed by President Clinton, and Barry's administration lost control over key aspects of local decision making; with the loss of control over these functions came his loss of power (Gillette 2001; Thomas 2000). In 1998 Barry elected not to run again for mayor, but reemerged after a battle with prostate cancer, and in the 2004 election again won the Ward 8 council seat—Barry is a phoenix.

BARRY'S STRATEGIES

Barry's personal and regime power were expressed in many ways, though three areas in particular stand out when trying to answer questions about why his regime failed to live up to its promise. First, an examination of his attempts at reform, particularly with respect to the development of his administration and city services, helps to explicate the ways he attempted to embody the goals of the civil rights movement while simultaneously meeting with resistance and criticism. Second, a discussion of his popular appeal sheds light on both his prowess as a politician and his use of racial appeals for political gain. Third, a review of his relationship to business shows the real divide between his administration's minority empowerment goals and his attraction to money and power.

Reform

From the start, Barry's administration was purposely put together to reflect the leadership of the civil rights movement in Washington, DC. Under Walter Washington, governance of the city lay primarily in the hands of the traditionally White bureaucratic establishment, despite Washington's power to make local appointments. This stood in direct contrast to Barry's administration, which purposefully recruited members of the civil rights movement, other African Americans, and women. These appointments permanently changed the face of the city bureaucracy, as well as the structure and operation of city services. Many of his staff members were considered "outsiders" by lifelong residents, but Barry balanced these hiring decisions with a large hire of local "insiders" (people raised in the city who were

well-known in the community) (Coleman, 1979b). Despite the large number of appointments of people of color to the administration, these appointments were not proportionately representative of the ethnic groups in the area, a fact noted by many local Latino activists (Bredemeier and Marriott, 1985). In addition, Barry consistently encouraged minority business contracts, reflecting the ideological basis of his campaign and work in Washington (Jaffe and Sherwood, 1994).

Barry encountered problems with the people he appointed to positions of power and with those to whom he gave city contracts. Almost immediately after being elected as Mayor, Barry's associates were accused of, and in some cases arrested for, theft and fraud, both from the civil rights groups in which he was involved and from his own administration. They also made accusations against Barry himself. This trend continued throughout his political career.

Barry's record on city services was mixed. At the start of his first term, his plans included building 6000 housing units, creating 30,000 summer jobs, addressing health and infant mortality, and improving the school system (Lemann 1979). By the end of this term he began hiring unprecedented numbers of city workers—a trend that would continue until the start of his third term when it was revealed that no one in city government knew how many people were actually on the payroll. Shortly after his first administration was established, his staff discovered millions of dollars in deficit and debt, which was not previously public knowledge (Jaffe and Sherwood, 1994). They responded by cutting programs, a move inconsistent with the economic and social redistribution goals of his campaign. However, this constraint alone serves to underscore the difficult situation faced by Barry and his administration when attempting to reform city services.

Barry was consistently seen to be doing less than he promised (Lemann 1979). Take for example the summer youth jobs program. It never met its goal of 30,000 jobs and, in the end, fell well short of the larger policy goal of economic redistribution. Although the program was distributive and, in that way, served Barry's electoral purposes, it did little to alter the long-term pattern of scarce opportunities.

Barry modeled other city service policies after his civil rights priorities, though these policies were sometimes unpopular. For example, in 1981 the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) was hiring several hundred new police officers. Barry devised a plan to hire 200 of these officers through an affirmative action hiring lottery to ensure increased hiring of African Americans and women into the police force. This plan met with criticism from the police force and Congress. In response, Barry withdrew the plan, noting it was actually unnecessary, as the numbers of African Americans and women who would have been hired with the lottery would be hired anyway from among the entire pool of applicants (Isikoff and Pianin, 1981). By his fourth term, the structure of the MPD came under tremendous fire. At issue were hiring choices for the top administrative positions, with criticisms coming from all sides: U.S. Attorney Eric Holder; Congress; city council; the control board; and the consulting firm Booz-Allen, hired to evaluate the MPD (Thomas 2000).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Barry's reforms is the differing evaluations of the same initiatives. One the one hand, Barry is charged with creating a bloated bureaucracy with a patronage system and a steady decline in city services (Borger 1999), while on the other hand, it has been suggested that his continued support resulted in improved services in traditionally neglected African American areas such as Anacostia (Jaffe and Sherwood, 1994). That is, despite reports of poor and even declining city services during the Barry regime, the poorer and overwhelmingly African American sections of town received better services under Barry than they had previously received. It is perhaps for this reason that Barry's support from

the African American population in the city persevered, despite rumors of his administration's corruption and his regime's failure. This is an example of his great ability to build idiosyncrasy credit.

Other big city mayors who have attempted reform strategies are considered more successful than Barry. Mayor La Guardia of New York in particular made attempts to restructure government, and was faced with similar constraints in what he was able to accomplish. La Guardia's experience as a reform mayor and his promise of a new agenda drew new people into city governance, which had a transforming and liberating effect on the way citizens saw their relationship to city government. La Guardia instituted broad-based reforms in public health, welfare, and housing. And though La Guardia, like Barry, was not able to completely live up to his promises, he fared much better in the end in the court of public opinion (Heckscher 1978). Though both Barry and La Guardia created jobs and instituted service reforms, the media saw Barry's efforts as an attempt to have (under)qualified African Americans and women claim their share of jobs, wealth, and power that had historically been denied to them, particularly on the basis of racist exclusion. The media, on the other hand, saw La Guardia as instituting his program in the spirit of public service. Though their efforts were similar, media saw La Guardia's reforms in a much more positive light than Barry's.

Popular Appeal

Barry's popular appeal illuminates his political prowess. He established his foothold in city politics through his first election for mayor by courting the progressive White vote and constituencies not normally appealed to, including lesbians and gays, feminists, Latinos, and unions. It is well documented that he had more support from Whites in his first mayoral election, but over subsequent elections this support dipped, while his support in areas of the city with high concentrations of African Americans skyrocketed (for example, see Gillette 2001). Barry consistently made appeals on the basis of race. Local reporters noted:

> He drew the maximum advantage from racial issues, so that in his campaign, running against two other African Americans, he talked the most about White racism, made it clear that the real vote against racism in the campaign was a vote for Marion Barry, and heavily outpolled his opponents among White voters (Lemann 1979).

He continued to focus on race while in office, portraying himself as a victim of White racism, particularly when under attack for failed policies and personal and administration problems (Gillette 2001; Lemann 1979; Rich 2007). In effect, Barry used an identity-deployment and identity politics strategy to undergird his popular political support.

Barry's appeals to nontraditional constituencies continued while in office through hiring and policy decisions, though he quickly lost the progressive White vote (Pianin and Engel, 1984; Lemann 1979). At the same time, he was able to balance his appeals to these groups by paying attention to opposing groups. For example, gays gave strong support to Barry in his early campaigns, and in return he appointed gays to government jobs and positions and appeared at gay-sponsored events. Barry was criticized for these actions by many pastors and church leaders on the grounds that he was endorsing and sanctioning homosexuality. Barry in turn appealed to pastors

through the creation of an interdenominational committee developed to advise him on social affairs (Coleman 1979c).

Barry's hiring scheme served to support his electoral base, in that many of the city workers hired were from the traditionally lower- and working-class African American neighborhoods, groups that grew to compose the majority of his electoral base. This electoral base was consistently extensive and forgiving. Theories for this abound, but in general race is considered to be the primary factor in explaining this support (Jaffe and Sherwood, 1994). In effect, there is no two-party system in the District, and the White opposition to Barry centered in the Northwest section of the city never had enough strength to defeat the mayor on its own. Significant portions of the African American population, despite Barry's flaws, continued to support Barry. It has been suggested that the African American population in DC would rather deal with the problems "in house," and that Barry as mayor was preferable to a White mayor or an African American mayor who really reflected the White establishment (Jaffe and Sherwood, 1994).

Barry's relationship to the media played into this. Barry's early coverage was largely positive, but the longer he was in office, the worse it became (Agronsky 1991). The media attacked Barry, particularly the *Washington Post*, but instead of hurting his reputation among his voters, these attacks served to undergird his support because Barry "was able to frame himself against a 'White media'" (Rich 2007, p. 203).

Barry was not alone among mayors in his knack for popular appeal, particularly to the less affluent. The mayoralty of James Michael Curley in Boston, who was particularly popular even in times of personal conflict and scandal, bears a striking resemblance to that of Barry's. Curley was jailed once for fraud and later, during the election for what would be his fourth term as mayor, was under federal indictment for mail fraud. After his first release from prison, constituents literally rallied around him in support, and while under a federal indictment, which would later end in the granting of executive clemency, he was reelected as mayor. What unites these two mayors is their successful use of identity-based strategies to win popular support. Barry appealed to African Americans, particularly lower- and working-class citizens who had been previously ignored by the city and those in power. Likewise, Curley made the same appeals to Irish citizens of Boston, particularly those of the lower and working classes. In both cases, identity-deployment strategies served the purpose of both mobilizing mass support and deflecting attention about the mayors' problems from the personal level to claims of anti-Irish and anti–African American resentment and attacks.

Business

Barry developed the contacts he would need to undergird his political career in the late 1960s with his appointment to the local economic development committee. It was there he was able to learn the game of local politics and was introduced to the business interests that became critical to supporting his campaigns. In each of the early elections Barry entered, he faced formidable opponents, often with more experience and support than he had, but he always emerged victorious.

As Barry's support grew, so did his administration's cooperation with local wealthy businesses, as well as with the chamber of commerce (Watts 2005), spurring a downtown development boom that changed the face of the area. There was widespread opposition to the downtown development across the city, particularly in the less wealthy and more neglected neighborhoods. This opposition was largely ignored

by the administration, and downtown development went ahead as planned (McGovern 1998). The effect of his support to business was the growing economic strength of the city, but this did not translate into permanent jobs for city residents (Gillette 2001). Though not as large-scale as the downtown development, the Barry administration did encourage development in predominately African American sections of town. This development included the construction of the Black Entertainment Television (BET) complex and FedEx, as well as redevelopment projects in areas devastated by riots, including the H Street Corridor in Northeast and U Street in Northwest.

Barry's success at raising funds from the local business establishment and elites was evidenced from the start of his mayoral career and, as would be expected, grew significantly by the mid-1980s when businesses knew that they could count on the mayor for support, particularly in development. His fundraising success was impressive even in his first election. By the 1986 campaign, Barry could count on representatives from almost every business, bank, or law firm for financial support. His finance committee for the 1986 election was composed of 28 nonaffiliated individuals, 3 labor representatives, and representatives from 116 local businesses and large corporations. Despite, or perhaps because of, this success, Barry has continuously been accused of varying levels of campaign fraud and mismanagement over the years, though he has never been indicted (Agronsky 1991; Barras 1998; Jaffe and Sherwood, 1994; Thomas 2000).

In addition to cooperation with big business, Barry's business policy was aimed at encouraging minority business in the District. This came through a three-pronged approach. First, he instituted a minority business promotion program that allocated 35% of contracts for minority businesses, a significant increase (Brisbane 1985). Second, he developed a program that encouraged major businesses to have equity partnerships in order to receive downtown commercial business contracts (Coleman 1979a). Third, his administration established a quasi-public corporation specifically designed to aid small and minority businesses (Pyatt 1984). As a testament to the city's work on encouraging minority contracts, the city received a HUD Minority Contractors Utilization award (Brisbane 1985).

Despite Barry's minority business program, it is clear from his other business dealings that the economic bottom line, rather than minority empowerment, was the key to his administration's success. For example, in 1984 he allowed Coors, Inc. to hold a reception for him, despite an AFL-CIO instituted boycott of Coors for discriminating against minorities, women, and homosexuals in their employment practices (Pichirallo 1984). Barry ignored his civil rights agenda in favor of his business and personal interests, with the result that "although he had successfully used jobs and contracts to expand the black middle class, he had failed to go beyond that patronage system to sustain economic growth. In fact, much of the District's economic power remained in the hands of whites" (Barras 1998, p. 251).

Barry negotiated a balance between the White business elite in Washington and his minority economic development goals, a balance often tilted in favor of the White business elite. Mayor Jackson in Atlanta faced similar challenges in his dealings with the White business elite, but with different outcomes. Jackson employed similar minority business improvement strategies through Atlanta's Minority Business Enterprise program, setting the required percentage of city contracts to minorities even higher than Barry did. The two mayors met with similar complaints about each of their programs; particularly, they received charges of reverse racism. The difference between the two mayors and their handling of business concerns was that Jackson pushed his progressive policy and social reform agendas further than Barry did (Stone 1989b). The result was that insider privileges and perks were not a big

issue, and they did not take precedence in Atlanta under Jackson as they did in Washington under Barry.

THE LIMITS OF AGENCY

It is easy to attribute the failures of the Barry regime to either structural factors that inhibited Barry's ability to act or to his personal limitations, but the more interesting story is found in the interplay between the two and Barry's identity politics strategy of appealing to racial and civil rights groups. The answer to questions about why the Barry regime failed to live up to its promise, why he abandoned his progressive agenda, and what are the limits of agency are found in understanding the structural and facilitating conditions encountered by Barry and the choices he made in the face of those conditions. Barry was not able to be transformative, engage "power to," nor embody agency in part because situations are not equally amenable to change; the challenge he faced was substantial, but he also had substantial assets.

Constraints

As laid out above, there are several structural and personal factors that served as constraints limiting the scope of Barry's choices as mayor, including the history and political structure of the city, the city's systematic dependence on business, the personal problems and leadership style of Barry, and the prevailing racial issues of the city. The historical and political constraints are clear-cut: DC's unique position as a federal city with no state; the relatively new governing body and thus relative local inexperience with governing; and congressional oversight of city functions, even during periods of home rule.

Another significant constraint in Washington was the city government's systematic dependence on business. The degree of the city's dependence on business can be seen in three ways. First, though not completely dependent because of the federal government presence in the city, the local political economy was nonetheless affected by business. When Barry entered office he faced a fairly unified business sector, particularly in terms of development. Second, business also dominated campaign finance in the mayoral elections. Barry was quick to court and obtain business support for his campaigns, particularly after his first mayoral election. Finally, the concerns of business dominated local public discourse on city affairs, particularly with respect to the impact development had on communities within the city. These factors were balanced in some ways by the degree to which other groups were organized in the city. Though not strong at first, local community organizations and ward politics grew in strength, demonstrating against development efforts that affected their communities, but these objections often went unheeded in favor of business interests under Barry.

Barry's personal life and choices also explain his limitations in establishing a regime agenda that would more broadly represent the interests of the African American community. Aside from the oft discussed darker sides of Barry's life, the forces that drove Barry are very important. When resigning from his position with SNCC, he noted that both he and the civil rights movements needed to shift focus from protest to power (Jaffe and Sherwood, 1994). Whether for the movement or for himself, the accumulation of power seems to have been very important to Barry, important enough to forego carrying out his stated political goals in the interest of his personal ambition (Lemann 1979). While this does not make him unique among

politicians, it is here that the limitations of "power to" are most clear: Barry's preoccupation with personal ambition restricted his ability to think about "power to" in a more expansive way. A key part of agency leadership is creativity and the ability to see possibilities that someone with lesser ability would fail to see. Barry lacked such creativity and ability.

An excellent example of Barry's inability to overcome personal limitations and see possibilities for positive change was his dealings with the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). By Barry's fourth term as mayor, crime was up in the city but the rate of cases solved was falling. In addition, the city faced a fiscal crisis that required many departments, including the MPD, to make cutbacks. The MPD itself was facing a moral crisis in light of a rash of officers slain in the line of duty; in two instances African American officers were slain by their fellow White officers (Thomas 2000). The MPD and Barry's handling of the department faced continuous criticism from a variety of sources: U.S. Attorney Eric Holder, Congress, the city council, and the control board.

The MPD was primed for change, and Barry, with appointment power over the chief of police and other high-ranking positions within MPD, was in an excellent position to help encourage that change. But rather than instigate a nationwide search for this position or involve citizens groups who were clamoring to take part, Barry fell back on a pattern he had used before to keep control over the operations of city services. He hired a chief of police from within, in this case Larry Soulsby. Simultaneously, Barry appointed assistant chiefs

> who did not get along with the chief. For Barry, this created a system of checks and balances, which kept the chief on notice that it was really Barry who was running MPD. During this time it was not uncommon for various assistant chiefs to leave a meeting with the chief, take the elevator downstairs, and walk across the street to One Judiciary Square, in order to tell Barry about the meeting (Thomas 2000, p. 71).

And Soulsby, who can be credited for some positive changes in the MPD, nonetheless left the department in a state of disarray. As in so many other instances, Barry encountered a situation, an opportunity in which he could have effected positive change, but instead was unable to see past his version of politics as usual and creatively identify alternative arrangements that could have resulted in better outcomes for the city.

Racial issues also served as both a significant constraint and a facilitating condition for Barry. The city developed and in some ways was defined by racist exclusion, and the contemporary urban governance structure was born out of the country's larger civil rights struggle. Combined, these factors created contradictions in DC politics, and Barry simultaneously took advantage of these contradictions and was trapped by them. By playing on the understandable resentment of the African American majority's historical exclusion and at the same time serving the needs of the capitalist developers, Barry was able to stabilize and ultimately institutionalize a regime, the lasting effects of which are still felt today. Barry was able to achieve popular support for the regime by defining the city in terms of the majority, thus providing symbolic endorsement for the desires of the city's majority population while simultaneously accommodating business for short-term gains. Barry faced a situation in which he needed to mobilize popular support, and an easy way to do this was on a racial basis. Here, race and the overt racism exercised by those in power in the city seem to have worked in two directions. That is, though the racism in the

District led to delayed home rule, producing a majority of citizenry with little governance experience (the negative effects of racism), with the onset of the civil rights movement the reaction to that same racism enabled Barry to mobilize the citizenry on its behalf (the "positive" effects of the same racism). That Barry was able to capitalize on this sentiment without simultaneously alienating the business elite is a testament to his political skill.

Identity

The structural and racial constraints that existed in Washington well before Barry was mayor led many to view Washington as a city in search of an identity. In the eyes of a majority of voters, Marion Barry was the answer to this problem, as captured by an opinion piece written about Barry in 1981:

> The voters didn't turn out Walter Washington because the city was going to hell. They chose Marion Barry because they wanted a New Generation, a New Style, an Identity, a New Spirit (Gilliam 1981).

But the search for identity goes deeper than simply a city's need to define itself. It plays another important role in the story of Washington, DC—identity politics are the key to understanding Barry's political power and his limited influence in the city's regime. Barry utilized an identity-deployment strategy to frame issues, obtain and ensure support, and deflect problems encountered by his administration.

Identity politics is about "building our public action on who we are and how that identity fits into and does not fit into our society" (Phelan 1989, p. 170). The new social movement literature defines *identity deployment* as "the collective portrayal of the group's identity in the political realm, whether that be in city council hearings or at sit-ins in segregated restaurants" (Bernstein 1997, p. 537). In this analysis, identity deployment can come in the form of "identity for education" (using identity politics to alter perception of the identity group and develop group legitimacy) or "identity for critique" (a confrontational use of identity politics to raise issues about the hegemonic group). The form utilized depends on organizational infrastructure, access to policy making, inclusion of the social movement, and the type of opposition that exists. According to this analysis, the southern civil rights movement utilized an identity-for-education strategy, whereas the Black nationalist movement utilized an identity-for-critique strategy (Bernstein 1997).

Barry used both forms of identity deployment for differing purposes: as tools for mobilization and for deflecting problems. The strength of using both forms can be understood by looking at the meaning and goals of identity politics. That is, the difference between interest group strategies that pursue "rational" policy gains and identity group strategies is that identity group strategies pursue a deep agenda of affirmation by embedding the "values, languages, and frame of reference" of the group (Bailey 1999, p. 2). This can be a single group, multiple groups, or the inter-section of groups (Hancock 2007). By appealing to the majority group in the city, as well as to other smaller and sympathetic groups, with a deep agenda of affirmation, Barry simultaneously mobilized citizens to give him popular support and deflected his personal and regime failings as attacks by the hegemonic group, particularly the media, on his identity group's language and values (Rich 2007).

The answer to the question of why Barry abandoned his progressive agenda but was still able to maintain his popular support is found in the interplay between his idiosyncrasy credits, made up of his civil rights achievements, and his utilization of

an identity-deployment strategy, his systematic dependence on business, and the other structural constraints that limited the possibilities for steering the regime toward a social policy agenda. Appeals to the White business elite in Washington gave Barry legitimacy and financial support at first, but it then became the path of least resistance. Appeals on the basis of identity politics gave Barry the mass support of the populace and helped deflect problems in his administration. Barry quickly and successfully tapped this resource in Washington, a city primed for such a strategy. But his use of this strategy also represents the more destructive side of its potential.

To what extent did Barry contribute to a different set of arrangements through "power to"? Barry's business alliances did not contribute much to "power to," as he made so few policy demands on business to promote his more progressive agenda. His reform programs in his first administration certainly demonstrated "power to," but later these programs, including others such as summer job programs and administrative and hiring changes, also demonstrated limited creativity. It was easier to respond to problems in the department by imposing personal control rather than searching for new solutions, especially those involving the community. The administrative hiring schemes in the MPD serve as case in point. The overlay of identity politics plays a key part in how Barry was able to attain widespread support of the populace, even during times of personal failing. Identity politics has tremendous potential in solving problems and empowering marginalized communities, that is, in engaging "power to" and agency. But the Barry case shows that this strategy can be the source of other problems: it can be manipulated for self-serving reasons to weaken accountability. Finally, and this part of the answer cannot be stated strongly enough, the combination of historical and structural constraints in Washington doomed to failure any effort at regime change that did not doggedly pursue change through a "power to" strategy.

CONCLUSION

Marion Barry's oft cited phrase after being arrested for smoking crack cocaine, "bitch set me up," characterizes the dark side of Barry's life. But the phrase, when applied to his regime's failures, also points us to the limitations and constraints of agency. Who set Marion up? Was it a local political structure and environment? Was it the legacy of a neocolonial racist atmosphere in Washington, DC, (and in the United States generally)? Or was it the man himself, tempted by money, status, women, and finally drugs, who was unable to overcome those temptations? What turned a promising African American urban mayor and his administration into a failure?

The answer is that it was all of these things. Barry was unable to live up to popular expectations for change because he could not use his leadership to creatively overcome the structural obstacles that he faced, even where some opportunities existed. Just as political incorporation is insufficient to ensure real change for a regime's agenda, the Barry story shows that identity politics appeals, even under conditions of Black political incorporation, cannot ensure success. In fact, the Barry case shows that the opposite is true: identity-based strategies can have powerful and negative consequences for urban regimes, limiting the potential of agency and the possibility of "power to" to emerge.

Barry wanted to build a record of leadership that would produce the premiere African American–led city in the United States. One can imagine that at the outset of his first administration, he weighed the possibility of pursuing a full civil rights

agenda versus a partial civil rights agenda with a business partnership. He chose the second option, which was more feasible for a myriad of reasons, not the least of which was the tremendous deficit that his administration encountered when it took power. Barry's choice says as much about the limitations of "power to" as it says about Barry himself. The calculus was between creativity and risk versus certainty. Barry chose certainty, and coupled this strategy with an identity politics strategy to deflect negative attention from his administration while simultaneously undergirding the regime's support. Appealing to the electorate on the basis of identity was attractive because it required few resources. Another approach would have been to examine what the constituency really needed, for example a reformed criminal justice system, and appeal to the electorate on that basis. The problem with such an appeal was that it would take more time, resources, and energy than an identity politics appeal. The temptation that surrounds identity politics is that it can be employed while expending few resources and avoiding higher-risk tasks. Barry was skilled at the complex identity game and brought it off, whereas a specific policy challenge would not have been as easy. The two coupled together might have been unbeatable. Identity can also be used as a way to mobilize the citizenry around a real city issue. Identity-deployment and identity politics strategies, then, are just that: strategies that, coupled with creativity and "power to," can be used for tremendous good. However, these strategies coupled with major structural and personal constraints limiting "power to" can have tremendous crippling effects.

Identity deployment can be an important strategy to enhance "power to," but used improperly it lessens the potential of its future use. Agency suggests the need for transformation, that a structure is not working properly. In American cities, many structures are desperately broken. These cities are also home to large numbers of the poor and members of racial and ethnic minority groups. A powerful mayor in one of these cities must exercise great strength, engaging in "power to" to create change. When this leader is also a member of one of the marginalized groups hurt by the structural constraints of the area, he or she has an important tool, identity deployment, to enhance the ability to make positive changes. The use of identity deployment to deflect attention from mistakes or to serve personal ambition reinforces negative structural arrangements, and has the potential to exacerbate the racial divide and to limit the potential for identity deployment that might be used for good in the future.

The limits of agency in the case of Marion Barry in Washington, DC, are found in the interplay of structural constraints, Barry's personal limitations, and the use of identity-deployment and identity politics strategies. The result was failure to realize important social goals because of limited agency and ebbing "power to." This suggests that identity deployment and identity politics should be engaged carefully and purposefully, keeping in mind the limitations of such strategies and their potentially detrimental effects.

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