

# Studying dynamic and structure of power as seen by weber and gaventa, in appalach...

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To understand the structure of power and powerlessness in the community of Appalachia, one has to first consider what power is. In broader terms, what are the mechanisms of operation for power? John Gaventa and Max Weber both present theories on the dynamics of power. While the former presents an analysis of suppression of one group by another through both indirect and direct ways to explain the phenomenon of nonparticipation, the latter presents social stratification as the basis for parties to gain dominance. In my opinion, both include elements which are part of the system of power organization.

Weber defines power as the ability to realize will in the face of resistance. Power is thus dependent on another will's, and its legitimation is based upon three sources: class, status, and politics. Similarly, Gaventa's definition of power is one requiring two parties, A which prevails over B in matters of conflict. However, he also focuses on the ability of the dominating group A to not simply prevail in direct conflict, but to win through by means affecting B's actions and perceptions of the conflict. Powerlessness and power are two sides of the same coin. In addition, there is a particular attention to quiescence, or nonparticipation, and how this functions in the relationship.

Weber argues that social stratification is at the center of power, because without this multi-dimensional order, there would be no multi-dimensional class categorization. Interrelated are the ideas of social class, social status, and political party. Class, or in other words economic power, may emerge from existing power, or political power may help in holding onto power for example. However, power is not derived from a single one of these sources; they are all interrelated.

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Social class broadly refers to property ownership. One can either possess property, providing goods or other opportunities for income, or they can lack property, and therefore depend on those in possession of it to get by. Among property holders there is further differentiation, in terms of ' the kind of property that is usable for returns...' and, " the kind of services that can be offered in the market" (Weber, 45). Social status is not strictly economic, instead measured by consumption of goods and services. This is also referred to by Weber as social ' honor' or ' style'. The outward appearance of how one lives his life can beget dominance if one group or individual believes another to be socially superior. Finally there is the concept of political party, which ties in with the factor of the legal system. Parties work towards the interest of a certain group, and power is obtained through influence on decision-making processes.

Gaventa's idea of power likewise concerns the dominance of one group by another, yet is structured in three-dimensions. The first dimension of power is a direct one in which A has power to make B do what he wishes, even against B's own wishes. Social class can parallel this to some degree, as it is the direct ownership of goods or property that facilitates the power relationship. The second dimension of power is the so called " mobilization of bias." This involves setting up barriers to prevent grievances from entering the public spotlight. Determining the players and the rules essentially represents the political realm from Weber's theory. Finally there is the third dimension of power, or the indirect manipulation of the subservient group to accept their position of powerlessness. One can somewhat draw a connection with social status, in that it attempts to assert one culture over

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another through lifestyle, however, Gaventa's theory more closely examines the idea of nonparticipation. " Power and powerlessness may each re-enforce the other towards B's quiescence" (Gaventa, 22). The culture of silence emerges from the lack of involvement due to acceptance of the order and exclusion from speaking up, a result of the application of the dimensions of power.

The case study of Appalachia is an interesting one because it clearly provides an example of the struggle between two groups of people, and how both sides shaped the nature of the struggle. The three dimensions of power as applied to the situation are outlined in Gaventa's book. The first dimension was the process by which the American Association gained control over the land of the Appalachian mountaineers. They were simply able to buy the land, giving them control over the coal resource, to be shaped into a ' company valley'. Political leadership at a local level became populated by allies of the company as well. This ensured their interests would be protected. For example, Colonel David G. Colson, seen as a hero for the mountaineers, initially lost in the first city election. He later was hired by the company and then began a political career which ended up in the State Legislature, a puppet of the company. This illusion of someone fighting for them in power connects with the third dimension.

The second dimension can be seen in the agricultural limitations placed on the now company owned land. People had little choice in what to do looking into the future, either become an abiding employee of the company or leave. Furthermore, nonparticipation occurred because the poor simply did not

have the time or resources to invest into political activism. They were busy simply trying to get enough money for them and their families to survive. Meanwhile the wealthy elite could afford to engage in decision-making.

The third dimension comes in the form of “ engineering consent.” The example of Colson gave the miners the false impression that there was someone in power looking out for them when in reality they weren’t. This impression would mean that it was less likely they would become aware of the injustices against them, and thus less likely to rebel. There was also a subtle critique of culture going on, where the ideology of industrial progress was promoted against the hillbilly backwardness. Changing the names of cultural centers in Middlesboro to English sounding names, while retaining the Appalachian names of places such as mines, was an example of this practice. The construction of a grand hotel which attracted wealthy tourist functioned in the ideological apparatus as well. The miners came to believe that through perseverance and hard work they could achieve success which would allow them to afford such luxuries. These were pervasive ways that the elite manipulated the thinking of the weak into silence.

Weber would probably outline these actions as part of the three sources of power. Social class obviously reflects the first dimension, in that the American Association had greater economic worth than the mountaineers of Appalachia and thus could exert their power to gain property ownership over the land and resources. Once in control of the land they used status and politics to ensure they would remain in power while the miners would remain both beneath them and unwilling to rebel. Social status garnered respect

from the miners who believed that they too could increase their personal wealth. The idea of social mobility being possible decreased the chances of rebellion. The political community was one appointed by the company because they controlled economic production. It further cemented them into their position of power.

The notion of power is one central to the study of sociology, and Weber and Gaventa both present theories on its inner workings that in many ways state the same ideas. Economic and political power, along with status shape power relationships and how they will develop. Gaventa goes into detail on the idea of manipulation, and how this creates quiescence, further facilitating the power relationship remain unchanged. It is important to understand these ideologies because they can help in addressing why nonparticipation occurs and how the dominated group can improve their standing in the power relationship.