# The Civil Rights Movement

## Weberian Theory of Social Stratification

Max Weber is a German sociologist who is widely known for his immense efforts towards the development of the Weberian stratification theory. He viewed the hierarchical system social structure in three different dimensions which include social status, economic class and political power (Pyakuryal 16). Weber’s theoretical propositions were significantly influenced by Marxian ideas. Marx had based his theory on the percept that in the society there are two groups of individuals; the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The former group includes those who own various means of production such as factories while the latter is composed of workers who are used as tools of creating wealthv (Pyakuryal 16). He predicted of a workers’ revolution which would arise once the employees understand how bourgeoisie exploit them. They will unite against their exploiters to an extent of owning means of production and by then the world will have become a communist.

However, Weber criticized Marxian presumptions claiming that the social structure was more extensive than the way Marx was proposing. In his three-dimensional model, Weber considered power to be the most critical component (Pyakuryal 18). Power is any chance that a man gets, regardless of whether it is achieved politically, economically or through social status, and which enables them to achieve their communal will in the midst of intense competition. He examined the social structure of Germany to come up with many of his key concepts. He assessed how aristocratic people lacked economic strength yet they had political power (Pyakuryal 18). Such a realization made him oppose Marx idea that stratification was dependent on possession of capital. For instance, majority of the economically stable families lacked political power simply because they were Jews.

According to Weber, economy is one of the tools that enable certain groups of people to exercise power since they can manage to meet the demand for goods and services. Most of the work that is done in most of the factories is machine oriented and only those who are competitive enough in terms of personal experience are considered valuable (Pyakuryal 20). They are expected to run companies which they do not own and whose returns benefit others. Therefore, ownership of property creates the main difference of social classes (Breen 44). Owners of property have an advantage of being able to monopolize the market and also have access to various sources of wealth (Pyakuryal 20). The second phenomenon that creates differences in social structure is status. People with similar capitalistic chances such as supply of goods, life experiences and living conditions, belong to the same status. Difference in status mainly results from inequalities in the distribution of natural resources as well as opportunities (Pyakuryal 21). People with similar economic potential are usually adjusted to express similar interests and as a result having a unique way of life (Breen 44). Hence, wealth is the basic foundation of prestige whereby rich people claim more honor thereby undermining the status of the less privileged (Pyakuryal 21). Finally, there is political power which allows certain individuals to exercise authority. The rest of the population is expected to remain loyal to those who are in leadership positions and comply with all the commands they issue. Therefore, politics creates a separation within the public spheres whereby some people issue instructions while the rest are supposed to comply.

## Civil Rights Activists

Civil right movements which shaped in the early 20th century aimed at ensuring that African Americans had equal access to opportunities and privileges just like any other American citizen. This minority group was being segregated in many aspects such as education, political presentations and economic opportunities (Johnson). There existed strict voting rules that had left them powerless both politically and economically. So as to oppose such kind of segregations, the African Americans started boycotting under the shadow of human right activists.

Martin Luther King Junior was one of the strongest activists who led the Southern Christian leadership Conference (SCLC) in protesting against the ongoing seating segregation in seating buses. The movement later gained support from Freedom Riders in 1961, an activist group which was the founder of Congress of Racial Equality (Johnson). They would board commercial buses and embark on tours around various parts to pressure the American government to enforce the racial equality ruling that had been passed in 1960 (Johnson). Other activists included Fred Shuttlesworth who led the Alabama Christian Movement to protect against racial discrimination.

However, it was difficult for majority of these movements to succeed because they lacked the three dimensions of social structure. Most of the activists did not have conclusive support from majority of the African Americans (Johnson). There was a lot of controversy whereby some of the activists were of the idea that the blacks should be separate themselves and practice economic autonomy within the movements. On the other hand, there was a group of activists that preferred racial segregation. Such differences made it hard for them to have a common stand resulting in their discrimination. For instance, in the 1960 most of the black Americans residing in the southern part of the US had been disenfranchised due to lack of voting rights (Johnson). Despite the intense Summer Project campaign that aimed at enhancing massive registration of black voters in 1964, white resistance was highly spread. About three activists were killed during the demonstrations since the local whites did not want the blacks to have any political power. Majority of the enslaved African Americans who worked in plantations acted as field hands and were a critical resource for the growth of the American economy (Johnson). However, they were paid peanuts and this oppressed them both politically and economically.

## Effects of Non-violent Strategies

Much of the success that has been noted in the US regarding racial equality can be credited to civil right activists because they fronted demonstrations that propelled the federal government to take the necessary actions. However, it is their change of strategy to non-violent steps that resulted in a complete status and political capital. Some activists such as Baker started to launch movements that pushed for participatory democracy so as to empower all citizens at equal levels. Even students started taking part in non-violent protests such as sit-ins to desegregate public spaces in learning institutions. A breakthrough was witnessed in 1961 during a freedom ride that was sponsored by the CORE and SNCC where some white volunteers joined African Americans to protest against segregation (Johnson). As time passed by, many other movements left their violent tactics and embraced the new urgency. After the 1964 freedom summer, the African Americans started enjoying political capital. NSCC initiated what is referred to as Mississippi Summer Project that saw a large number of blacks registering as voters (Johnson). In 1965, the congress passed the Voting Rights Act that that excluded any literacy qualifications during a voting process. The same movement also sought for funds from volunteers and started building freedom schools that accommodated the black community as well as the white middle-class students.

In the 19th century, the whites stereotyped African Americans as being inferior and culturally unevolved. Even most of the media houses pictured the blacks as being violent, lazy and immoral (History Net). However, most of the activists who were pioneering for racial equality made efforts to invert these stereotypes by challenging these ideologies. For instance, Booker Washington made numerous statements that described the blacks as being patriotic and democratic. Through educating the public that African Americans were not enemies and did not pose any threat to other communities, the activists were change the mindset of the whites (History Net). The media was also criticized for the role it played in misleading the public about the blacks. Through such efforts, the civil right movements were able to change the public perception and numerous laws were enacted by the congress which protected the rights of the minority (History Net). The Supreme Court became the epicenter of defense for the African Americans since they always responded to the litigations and demonstrations that were being fronted by civil rights movements (History Net). They became acceptable in the society and this promoted their status capital.

References

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