

December 1993

The Observer as an Instrument in Qualitative Community Studies

Pranab Chatterjee

Case Western Reserve University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Chatterjee, Pranab (1993) "The Observer as an Instrument in Qualitative Community Studies," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 20: Iss. 4, Article 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.2093>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol20/iss4/3>

This Article is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



The Observer as an Instrument in Qualitative Community Studies

PRANAB CHATTERJEE

Case Western Reserve University

A qualitative study of leadership in local black communities was done by an Asian Indian scholar in Cleveland during the nineteen sixties and seventies. This paper narrates the conditions under which and the methodology with which the study was done. Using participant observation, interviews, and reviews of published and unpublished documents, the author develops ten propositions about organizational and electoral leadership in black communities. Further, three additional propositions about the adequacy of qualitative research are also developed from this research experience. A short comparative review of trends in these communities is appended.

I write this paper in the first person, reviewing my own efforts which led to the qualitative research for and the publication of the monograph, *Local Leadership in Black Communities: Organizational and Electoral Leadership in Cleveland, During the Nineteen Sixties* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 1975). While most authors of community research write in the third person, it is my position that it is not possible for me to distance myself, the researcher, from the subjects I studied, the leadership struggles of a minority people of color.

To reflect on the study, at first I plan to orient the reader to two introductory items: (a) the Study; and the (b) the Author. After getting the reader acquainted with these two matters, I plan to devote the remaining parts of this paper to the following three time periods. (1) *Before the Study*; (2) *During the Study*; and (3) *After the Study*.

The Study

The study (Chatterjee, 1975) was published in 1975. However, the research effort for the work began in 1967 in Cleveland, when Carl B. Stokes was elected as the Mayor of Cleveland. At

that time I had just graduated from The University of Chicago, begun my professional career as a social work and social science educator at Case Western Reserve University, and had worked for the Stokes campaign. From the beginning of the work to its publication, the study took eight years. Morris Janowitz of The University of Chicago wrote the introduction to the monograph. Upon its publication, Traylor (1976, p. 253) commented in the pages of *Social Work*:

Using formal interviews, newspaper files, and public and private documents, the author looks into environmental characteristics of black communities in a city with social and economic problems that are typical of urban areas of America. . . . The author's perspectives, theoretical questions and propositions are more important than the conclusions and observations gained from the study.

The Author

I am a man of Asian-Indian origin, born in India, who was educated both in India and in the United States. I had finished a graduate degree in social work (MSW), and two graduate degrees in sociology (MA and PhD). During my student years in sociology, I was exposed to the qualitative methods of the Chicago School. I was taught among other things, "Learn to be a scientist!" by my mentors, all of whom were white males.

I brought with me an ideological orientation: an orientation of Third World solidarity. Nehru had preached this, and Richard Wright was enthusiastically endorsing this (Wright, 1956). This orientation meant that the poor (and mostly non-white) peoples of the world should unite against racism, colonialism, economic oppression, and imperialism. I admired people like Richard Wright, Paul Robeson, Nat Turner.

I became aware very soon that my Third World perspective was suspect in the "scientific" community of Chicago. I learned to keep quiet about own ideological bias. I adopted a learner's role about how to study social problems and social disorganization, Chicago style!

Within the Chicago School, however, I did not see any advocacy tradition or effort. Saul Alinsky had to drop out of the Chicago School to do that. And E. Franklin Frazier was the only major social scientist of color who wrote about the black

community. Once, while a student in Chicago, I approached one of my venerable mentors (the year was 1965) about doing a doctoral dissertation on the newly emergent Islamic community within the black communities of Chicago. After all, it should be as legitimate to ask why Islam (as preached by Elija Mohammed and Malcolm X at that time) had so much appeal in poor black communities and none at all in the middle class white communities. One of my venerable mentors, who had traveled throughout the world, answered: "These people are not real Moslems. Do not waste your time with such trivia. If you want to study American Negroes, study why their kids can't make it in school. Or, study why their families are so screwed up. Read Frazier" (cf Frazier, 1939).

I graduated and moved to Cleveland. The year was 1967. Cleveland had seen the worst of rioting (the Hough riots of 1966) in recent years, and Carl Stokes was running for the mayor's position. Stokes was black, and if he were to get elected, he would be the first black mayor of a major American city.

As I got organized to begin my study, I realized that a great deal of work had been done on black community leadership by such scholars as Wilson (1960), Banfield and Wilson (1965), Hunter (1953), Ellis (1969), Greer (1962), and others. I began my struggles to formulate some research questions which were to be answered by the Chicago School style qualitative research. In the back of my head, my Third World ideological bias reemerged, and I told myself: "Now I can do this study in my own way, may be!"

Before the Study

The Study Questions

The entire study was to focus on two types of leadership within black communities: organizational leadership and electoral leadership. I was aware that there were other forms of leadership, but my study would focus only on these two types.

Within each type of black leadership, in turn, the following subset of questions were phrased: (1) What seem to be the goals of *this* particular type of leadership behavior, and (2) with what types of means do they pursue the goals? It was proposed

that the goals of organizational leadership would pursue one of the following goals: (a) integration (into American mainstream) or (b) identity (seeking group identity in a historical matrix). Further, the pursuit of these goals by organizational leadership would use either (a) confrontation (sit-ins, demonstrations, large community meeting where some demands are voiced, etc.) or (b) consolidation (of resources, which means building skills, finding and funding social programs which build skills or educate, find or fund programs which litigate against various forms of discrimination, and the like).

In electoral leadership, it was proposed that the goals of electoral leadership (i.e., elected political leaders) are likely to be one or both of the following: (a) personification (a role-model, or the individual person portraying a "success" story of what a black person can be) and (b) representation (of the specific ecological and class constituencies). The means used by elected black leaders would be (a) diffuse coalition building (i.e., a coalition of diverse and contradicting interests, coming together due to a charismatic and emotional appeal); and (b) specific coalition building (a coalition of one specific set of communal and class interests, such proper garbage removal, adequate police protection, prevention of harassment, and the like).

The research questions were designed in such a way that as I documented the natural histories of leadership in local black communities of Cleveland, I could place them in one of the boxes in Table 1a or in Table 1b.

Table 1a

Research Questions about Organizational Leadership

		Means	
		Confrontation	Consolidation
Ends	Integration		
	Identity		

Table 1b

Research Questions about Electoral Leadership

		Means	
		Diffuse Coalitions	Specific Coalitions
Ends	Personification		
	Representation		

The Research Effort

Sponsorship. The research effort had no sponsor. No funding body, no foundation, or no special interest group was providing funds or any other form of social support for this project. I was on my own. This was to be a one-person research and, throughout the project, remained so. A not-so-hidden source of support came from my faculty role at Case Western Reserve University, which was at the time (and still is) a private urban university, located within close walking distance from some of the most poor black communities of Cleveland. I had available to me some sympathetic students, an office with a telephone, and a group of selected colleagues who believed that it was my business to engage in any any kind of research that I saw fit!

Oppositions. Some comments came from certain key administrators, who reminded me: "You realize that there would be no workload reduction for you while you go on with this research! And, don't get the School in any trouble. And, if you are going to do this anyway, why not get it funded by somebody, like NIMH or some organization like that?" I did not consider this a form of opposition. Very soon, however, opposition came from a source where I had least expected it. Several white students from my own School voiced opposition. I knew some people from this group were members of the Students for Democratic Society. One of them — I will call her Debbie — confronted me and commented: "Why not do a study of suburban white

communities? It is as legitimate to study them as it is to study black communities? Why is it that establishment scholars always study oppressed groups and never the oppressors or the instruments of oppression?"

I did not try to placate Debbie. Instead, I respected her position. I was familiar with her position, and had heard the same position articulated in American Sociological Association and American Anthropological Association meetings. I attempted to befriend her. The cost of this friendship, from my perspective, was that from time to time I would have to swallow her barb: "Some of my friends think that you are a CIA agent!"

The Proposed Study Design

My basic study design involved developing (a) natural histories of key actors trying to build organizations; and (b) natural histories of key actors trying to get themselves elected and trying to keep themselves in elected positions after election.

These natural histories were to be developed by interviewing key informants from both within and outside the black communities. I began developing a list of key informants. This list contained names of both organizational and electoral leaders. The list also contained names of persons who worked with these leaders, newspaper reporters who saw these people in action, and other parties who may have had information about these people.

In addition, I became a participant in some of the organizations, like the local chapter of Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the local Urban League. I participated in some organizational strategy meetings, sit-ins, and the like. I was never arrested. I also attended some prayer meetings at local Muslim churches. The Imam there asked me: "Are you a Muslim?" I answered, "No, but I want to learn about your church!" He permitted me to attend without requiring me to offer prayers in Muslim style.

My study design, then, was a combination of participant and non-participant observation, archival information retrieval, interviews with key informants and key actors, examination of newspaper files, and befriending many key actors in a black community bar called "Art's Seafood." I knew that many key

informants came there to socialize, and by being present there, I had the opportunity to befriend them. All of my newly acquired friends there as well as the key informants I interviewed were aware of my interest in writing a book. None voiced any objection.

From time to time, two graduate students helped in doing some of the interviews of key informants. One of these students was a white female in her late twenties, and the other was a white male in his mid-thirties. At that time, I could not find any black students interested in the study.

During the Study

Gaining Entry

The matter of "gaining entry" is an important one in qualitative community research (cf. Jorgensen, 1989; Whyte, 1984, pp. 23-34). For me, gaining entry involved entrance in several places: (1) entrance in Art's Seafood, the community bar located in the middle of the black community where I "hung out" (and which burned down during the mid-seventies); (2) entrance in key organizations, like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Urban League, and in the Congress on Racial Equality, where I was to do participant observation; (3) entrance in several other key organizations, like the Islamic Church, the Afro Set (Black nationalist groups), and several other organizations, where I was to do non-participant observations and interviews; and (4) entrance into the friendships and other such primary group networks of people who were either the leaders themselves or knew about the activities of these leaders.

Gaining entry into Art's Seafood was easy. At first, I began going there for lunch regularly. Then I began going there for a drink after work. Then I began staying after work (after 5:00 p.m.) and befriending people sitting on a bar stool. Many persons who were involved in organizational or electoral leadership would come there, and I would find an opportunity to talk with them. Often times, I would leave Art's Seafood at about 9:00 p.m. or later. Always, however, I would go back to my office before going home. Once at the office, I would write down (in longhand) who I had talked with and what they said.

Entrance in key organizations where I was to do participant observation proved to be relatively easy. I called key actors in these organizations (SCLC, Urban League, CORE), and offered to do volunteer work. I also informed them about my interest in black community leadership. There was never any opposition or hostility.

Entrance in other organizations was not always easy. The Islamic Church did not show opposition, as I have described above. However, several other organizations (at that time called Black Nationalist groups) gave polite refusals, or were evasive. I had developed a list of their leaders, and succeeded in interviewing them at Art's Seafood when they were there. I also succeeded in interviewing several other leaders (from these Nationalist groups) in another bar which was known as The Circle Pub.

Entrance into several primary group networks was time-consuming and labor-intensive. I developed a long list of persons from my contacts at Art's Seafood and The Circle Pub, and began contacting persons from this list. My two graduate students and I began calling them for interviews. We got no refusals. All impromptu interviews in the bar scenes were done by me. Many of the formally arranged interviews in the leaders workplaces or offices were done by my two graduate students. (They were white, and were somewhat reluctant to "hang out" at Art's Seafood.)

Gender/Color as Factors in Gaining Entry

I became aware that perhaps my Asian-Indian origin, my brown skin complexion, and my gender were a part of a package which supported my efforts at gaining entry, first at Art's Seafood, and then later at key primary group networks. First, I was not socialized to be "afraid" to be in these settings, and I had reasons to believe that many whites born in this country were. Once having found myself in this setting, I never had any reason to be afraid, either for my person or for property (i.e., car). Second, I had worked as a group worker in Chicago in "tough" neighborhoods, and in my youth, I had spent many nights in the "tough" neighborhoods of Calcutta.

Walking through the streets of poor neighborhoods was not a new activity to me.

The Study Questions Revised

Several months into the study, it became clear to me that my study questions needed revision. Placing leadership behavior along the dimensions of means and ends was important, but I needed to ask (and understand) several other related matters:

(a) what were the nature of *constituencies* of these leaders, both organizational and electoral? and (b) what were the types of issues which led to the mobilization of leadership behavior? After some intellectual struggle, I reformulated my questions as follows.

(1) Organizational leaders are essentially responsive to two types constituencies: those confined by geography and those by social class. By geography I meant ecologically identifiable black communities in a given section of the city of Cleveland (with identifiable names like Hough, Glenville, Kinsman, Lee-Miles, and the like). By class I meant middle class or underclass (at that time, many new upwardly mobile black people with two parent families in white collar occupations lived in identifiable sections of the black neighborhoods, and I referred to them as middle class; while the remaining, poverty-stricken, mostly single-parent families were called under-class). At that time, black communities of Cleveland were divided as either closer to a middle class community or an impoverished community. I referred to the latter as underclass communities.

(2) Organizational leaders with primarily middle class constituencies are likely to be integration-oriented, whereas those with primarily underclass constituencies are likely to be identity-oriented (See Table 1a).

(3) Integration seeking organizational leaders are more likely to use confrontation as means, whereas identity seeking organizational leaders are more likely to use consolidation as means (See Table 1a).

(4) Organizational leaders using confrontation as means are more likely to mobilize around single or minimal number of issues, whereas those using consolidation as means are more likely to deal with multiple or maximal number of issues.

(5) Elected black leaders are essentially responsive to two types of constituencies: those which could be identified along racial lines (i.e., all black people) or those which could be identified along class lines (i.e., middle class interests versus underclass interests).

(6) Elected black leaders with mostly race-generic constituencies are more likely to seek personification goals, whereas those seeking class-specific (and, in this case, mostly middle-class specific) constituencies are more likely to seek representation goals (See Table 1b).

(7) Personification seeking electoral leaders are more likely to use diffuse or diverse coalitions as means, whereas representation seeking leaders are more likely to use specific coalitions as means (See Table 1b).

(8) Elected leaders using diffuse or diverse coalitions can coalesce only around single or minimal issues, whereas those using specific coalitions can do so around multiple or maximal number of issues.

In addition to the above reformulated research hypotheses, I also developed some questions which, I thought, were interesting and answerable in my research setting. I summarize them below.

(9) *Political Power*. What are the prerequisites to building political power in black communities. Under what conditions would a black political leader come to occupy the executive office at city hall (i.e., the mayor's office), and what conditions are necessary for his survival there?

(10) *Cui Bono?* Blau and Scott (1962, pp. 45-67) had used this Latin phrase to ask: who benefits? Can we use this question about emerging form of black political leadership? In other words, who benefits from black political power, the black middle class, the black underclass, or both?

Having formulated these research questions or hypotheses, I felt I had made a substantial improvement over the work of James Q. Wilson (1960). Wilson had argued that Negro leaders work toward either "status ends," meaning "those which seek the integration of the Negro into all phases of the community" (Wilson, 1960, p. 185) or "welfare ends," meaning "those which look to the tangible improvement of the community" (Wilson,

1960, p. 186). This typology included all forms of political leadership, whereas my study *differentiated* between organizational leadership and electoral leadership. Second, Wilson's study implied that black leadership only develops along middle class lines, since both "status ends" and "welfare ends" are middle class goals. In fact "welfare ends," I thought, was poor use of the term, since the term "welfare" can be understood by many as income subsidy to members of the underclass through the public aid system, whereas Wilson meant "better services" by the term. Such "better services" from the local political system are often middle class goals.

Methodological Issues

While I was very proud of my research questions or hypotheses, I had created some methodological problems for myself!

One, my method involved building natural histories of organizations and elected leaders. Such natural histories were to be built by interviews, examination of published and unpublished documents, and participant and non-participant observation. Such natural histories would be hard to classify and fit into my research questions.

Two, I had two types of natural histories: that of organizational behavior over time; and that of individual elected leaders over time. While I had information on individual organizational leaders also, it would hard to develop clear operational definitions by which the behavior of these two types of leadership would be classifiable.

Three, while my approximation of *community behavior* is less problematic, since at that time the black communities had clear geographic boundaries, my approximation of class (between middle class and underclass) was somewhat crude. I was aware of all the involved measurement devices which claimed to measure social class (cf. Abrahamson, et. al, 1976, pp. 127-229), but was not in a position to use them. For the purposes of analysis, I could only make *educated observations* and use such observations to place my natural histories into class constituencies. At this time, there did not seem to be much of a black upper class in these constituencies. There seemed to was only a small black working class or blue collar population in these communities.

Thus the distinction between middle class (i.e., white collar people with two parent families) and underclass seemed workable, but not entirely satisfactory.

Four, I had similar problems with my key analytic concepts like *ends*, *means*, and *issues*. It would be hard to place my natural histories under these concepts. What I had to do was narrate the natural histories, and then tell the reader that according to my *best educated observations*, they seem to fall into thus and such box in my classification system! The reader may remain free to agree, disagree, or form a yet third position.

Ideological Issues

During my graduate student days in Chicago I had become aware that sometimes community studies had an ideological bias. One such bias may be referred to as what is now called Euro-centric bias. Another bias may be middle class bias (since most students of community behavior came from the middle classes). A third source of bias was what may be called a Judeo-Christian bias, since most of these scholars came from a Judeo-Christian framework. An example of the implicit Judeo-Christian bias was manifest in one of my mentor's comments: "These people are not real Moslems . . .," which I interpreted as denial of or hostility to non-Judeo-Christian institution building.

Contrasted with these earlier students of community behavior, I became aware that I myself had the following biases or sympathies. One, as an Asian-Indian, I was more sympathetic (and interested) in the emergent Afro-centric types of leadership, which included black nationalism, efforts to identify with African culture, interests in speaking Swahili, development of Islamic religion, and the like. Second, while I may be considered a middle class person in the American system of stratification, I construed my own status in the American stratification system as somewhat marginal or that of an "outsider." Consequently, I had another reason to often identify with an ethno-racial group which has had "outsider" status in America for a long time. Third, being a person from a non-Christian background, I was curious about the emergence of non-Christian institutions in the black communities. Fourth, at that time I was a believer in the ideology of Third World solidarity, and my interest in

black communities within a basically hostile white society was an extension of that.

The Findings

I had succeeded in documenting eighteen natural histories of organizations within the black communities (1967–71). Eight of these seem to have middle class constituencies, whereas the other six seemed to have underclass constituencies. Eleven were pursuing integration-oriented goals, whereas three were after identity-oriented goals. Seven were using confrontation as means, whereas seven were using consolidation as means. Almost all of these organizations, for the most part, were single or minimal issue oriented. Yes, the local branch of the Urban League, the NAACP, and two other organizations seemed to have stated goals which were multiple-issue oriented, but at any given time their *pursued goals* were around one or two issues (cf. Etzioni, 1964, pp. 6–7). Cleveland did not see the development of large, multiple-issue oriented community organizations at this time (or later).

There seemed to be a trend toward support, on the basis of my observations in Cleveland at that time, of my revised study questions #1 through #4.

In electoral leadership, I had succeeded in documenting the natural history of approximately thirty-one leaders. Some of these persons were famous or have since become famous (i.e., people like Carl Stokes, Mayor of Cleveland, 1967–71, and Louis Stokes, brother of Carl Stokes, as a congressman from this area). The others were elected representatives to the city council, to the state legislature, and to the state senate.

It turned out that while there does exist two distinct constituencies in black communities (i.e., middle class and underclass), elected black local leaders are, for the most part, responsive to *middle class* interests only: jobs, housing, credit availability from banks and department stores, city's services, and the like. Only Carl Stokes at that time could be thought of as having a race-generic constituency, since he attracted the support of all the black communities, and in addition the support of white elites and many white ideologues (from the churches, and from political left). Such support came his way as an "insurance

policy" after the Hough riots of 1966. By 1971 this support had dwindled. While Carl Stokes *personified* the dilemmas faced by black leadership (leadership position based a person's race because it is convenient at the time to a large number of people, both black and white) trying to represent all or almost all blacks, his claim to leadership was based almost exclusively on personal charm and glamour. A large number of interest groups, both black and white, came together to support him, but they came together under the crisis condition of the Hough riots. His leadership was based on diffuse coalitions, which were both fragile and temporary. In 1971 Carl Stokes decided not to run again, removed himself from politics, and went to work for an out-of-town TV station.

Returning to my revised study questions, #5 did not seem to stand up. Rather, it seemed that elected black leadership is mostly responsible to middle class interests only. Elected black leadership, when attempting to respond to multiple constituencies, seem to be short-lived, fragile, and unable to accomplish any political ends except be an exemplar or a role model to some. However, questions #6 through #8 could be seen as supported, or the trends were toward the support of these hypotheses.

My research effort also gave me some trends toward questions #9 and #10. On Question #9, it seems that there are several elements to building political power: (a) an ecological concentration by race; (b) political awareness in that concentration by race, culminating in block voting; and (c) crisis in the continuation of the status quo political style. However, black leadership emergent from a crisis in status quo does not seem very viable in the long term.

On the other hand, as we look at Question #10, we are inclined toward stating that the beneficiaries of both personification-oriented and representation-oriented black leadership are always the black middle class. The underclass is almost always left out.

As I looked at my findings, I came up with a general observation which fit both my findings and my ideological bias: middle class local leadership seeks integration into the mainstream American institutions, through jobs, quality housing,

patronage, fair credit, and role-models of how far blacks can go, whereas underclass seeks identity, either by embracing institutions which are away from Euro-centric American civilization, or by engaging in open deviance from the same.

The middle class, thus, seeks integration, while the underclass seeks identity!

After the Study

Having finished my research, I now became interested in reflecting on my experience in this project and how it supports the trends reported in earlier studies done by qualitative research methods using participant observation as the primary tool. I attempt to list them below.

The Scientist as Instrument

In qualitative participant or non-participant observational research, the scholar or the scientist himself or herself is the instrument through which a version of social reality is being perceived. In community studies in sociology and community organization studies in social work, this matter is fairly well known (cf. Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Warren, 1988; Fetterman, 1989; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Two particular earlier exemplars, among others, are relevant here: the classic work of Whyte (1943) and the work of Gans (1962). Both of these works are trendsetters, while others have followed (cf. Sudnow, 1978; Suttles, 1972; Miller, 1986). In these studies, the scholar/scientist builds rapport with the subjects, gains entry, and deals with how he or she is going to gather and then code the information gathered. The scholar's gender, social class, ethnoracial origin, religious preference, sexual preference, and other ideological inclinations are all perhaps factors which influence his or her ability to build rapport, gain entry, and gather and code information. Both during and after my study of Cleveland's black leadership, I was aware of this. My gender, my ethnoracial origin, and my non-Euro-centric identity, along with my Third World orientation helped me do the study. I came to develop the following general hypothesis about the scientist as an instrument.

(11) The social distance between the scientist and his or her subjects is a factor which contributes to the ability to build rapport, gain entry, and interpret information.

Whyte (1943), for example, was an upper-middle class white male patrician. He was much "higher up" in a class stratification ladder from Doc and his boys, who were working class Italians. Had Whyte been black, or female, or Asian, his capacity to observe the street corner society would have been very different. Conversely, in many cases it may be difficult for an upper middle class patrician white male to study the street corner society in a black community or in a Chinatown area. It may be also difficult for the same person (i.e., white male patrician) to study a self-help oriented feminist shelter for victimized women. Conversely, it may be difficult for a black or an Asian scientist to study the tribal behavior in a female-initiation ceremony which takes place during a debutante ball in an all-white country club. We thus add another hypothesis.

(12) The social distance between the scientist and his or her subjects can be seen as class distance, or gender distance, or ethno-racial distance, or linguistic distance, or other ideological distance. A history of intergroup hostility between the scientist and his or her subjects may make observation difficult. In the absence of intergroup hostility between the scientist and his or her subjects, the scientist located in a stratum higher than or equal to the subjects is in a better position to carry on a qualitative observational study than one located in a stratum below the subjects.

Ever since Gordon (1964) introduced the idea of "eth-class," a social scientist can use this concept (i.e., the combined position of ethnicity, race, and class, see Marden, et. al 1992), to look at the impact of "eth-class" on health, mental health, life chances and opportunities. In our particular case here, we use the idea of "eth-class" as a factor accounting for social distance and a social scientists s ability to observe his or her subjects.

The Declining Significance of Race?

While ethnicity and race (of both the scientist and his or her subjects) are a factor which contribute to position in a stratification ladder, Wilson (1979) has argued that social class

position of a person or a group is more important than ethnicity or race. In our qualitative research reported above, this trend was supported. The entire study documents substantial success of the black middle class in seeking integration, in participating in (Euro-centric) American institutions, in its struggles to make America a pluralistic multi-racial society rather than an assimilation-oriented Anglo-dominated society.

The thesis of declining significance of race can be examined in two settings: one, in the context of local communities in America; and two, in the context of the decline of the global Third World solidarity. In the local community setting, the trend of declining significance of race (and increased significance of class) was emergent in my research. Wilson articulated it forcefully in 1979. In the global setting, today the term "Third World countries" has come to mean poverty-stricken countries rather than non-white peoples uniting against global oppression. It has ceased to create a sense of solidarity against racism and imperialism, and has come to mean a group of fellow-sufferers in poverty. A group of new rich non-white nations now take great pains in distancing themselves from the idea of Third World solidarity (cf. "Preaching to the Converted," 1991). Our lesson here is perhaps that class and economic interests supersede race and ethnic interests or, at the least, form stronger ties than race or ethnic interests.

Afterthought: Qualitative vs. Quantitative Methodologies

Having reviewed my own efforts at qualitative methodology, it now seems appropriate to comment on its methodological advantages. Recently, some authors have recommended that the two methodologies can (and should) complement each other (Cf. Rossman & Wilson, 1985). When possible, this is the best of both worlds. However, there is another matter which needs to be made explicit:

- (13) It may be possible to cover a much larger and diverse form of information in qualitative research. Together, they may give us descriptive data and some trends toward accepting or rejecting formal hypotheses. Formal hypotheses testing requires a much narrower focus, and quantitative research is perhaps more advisable in that setting.

In my research effort, the ten research questions emerged *during* the study, and my qualitative natural histories gave me trends toward their affirmation or denial. An important lesson learned was that as a scholar submerges himself or herself in data gathered from multiple sources, research question or hypotheses become clearer and sharper. Narrowly focused quantitative research, or a combination of quantitative or qualitative research may then be appropriate.

Epilogue: Then and Now

Then and Now

An understanding of social change (or community change) becomes possible when a research effort is done twice: (a) at time-one, and then (b) at time-two. One classic example of this is in the middletown studies (Lynd & Lynd, 1929; Lynd and Lynd, 1937). This can be called then-and-now studies, if the "now" reflects the present. I offer below some trends now (1990-91), as they compare with the trends then (1967-71).

Organizational Leadership

It seems that between 1971 and 1991, almost all of the organizational leaders with middle class constituencies have survived. Most are still active. On the other hand, organizational leaders with underclass constituencies have (a) either become middle class oriented or (b) gone defunct. In general, there seem to be less of organization building in the black communities of Cleveland. These communities seem to have more underclass populations today (see Coulton, et al, 1989), and nearby middle class suburbs have absorbed a new, upwardly-mobile, middle class black populations.

The Middle Classification of Afrocentrism

The term "middle classification" was first introduced by Dollard (1957, p. 433), and then by Banfield (1970, p. 45). The term meant collective upward mobility into the middle class by members of a given group who had occupied a lower class

position earlier. The term also meant that one of the goals of American society was (and is) the middle classification of most of its population, whatever its ethnoracial origin!

During the sixties and early seventies, several new and emergent forms of organizational leadership with underclass constituencies were identity-oriented. One such identity orientation was manifested in Afrocentric behavior, as manifested in black nationalism, emergence of Islam, and embracing of African cultural style. Today most of these Afrocentric organizations seem to have become filled with white collar families with two parents present in a family. Afrocentric organizations exist both in the black communities as well as in the integrated suburbs. Islamic mosques are attended by two-parent black families as well as Moslems of foreign birth. While Afrocentric institutions are still relatively small in number, their members seem to be upwardly mobile from the underclass to the new middle class.

Afrocentrism, and Islam in particular (though arguments can be made that Islam is not uniquely African in origin), seems to have performed some important functions in the black communities. One, it has given dignified familial roles to the black male who is upwardly mobile from the underclass. Two, it seems to have enforced social control in sexual behavior, and has discouraged substance abuse. Three, it has encouraged family solidarity and a work ethic. Together, these accomplishments may have contributed to what I term middle classification of Afrocentrism!

The New Underclass: No Exit!

It should be noted that my use of the term, "underclass," predates that of Wilson (1979). Recently, there have been controversies over the use of the term (cf. Jencks & Peterson, 1991; Prosser, 1991). I emphasize here that my reasons for continued use of the term is due to the fact that the underclass is (1) politically underrepresented; (2) economically underemployed or unemployed; and (3) ideologically underdeveloped about its marginal role in American political economy. By "politically underrepresented" I mean that elected leaders, black or white,

do not represent their interests. By "economically underemployed or unemployed" I mean that they are very low in labor force attachment, a trend also noted recently by Martha Van Haitsma (1989). By "ideologically underdeveloped" I mean that no central idea or charismatic leadership has developed to give this oppressed group a historical mission or direction to date.

We have agreed that Wilson's (1979) "declining significance of race" thesis holds true in Cleveland. There is a new black middle class in the integrated suburbs of Cleveland. On the other hand, large sections of the black communities are now inhabited by a transgenerational underclass, most of whom will see "no exit" (to use the metaphor borrowed from Jean Paul Sartre, 1949) from this state in the near or distant future. Even Afrocentrism does not seem very present here. The pursuit of identity here continues through deviance from all the mainstream institutions: in absence of labor force attachment, in family abandonment, in substance abuse, and in violence as a way of life!

Electoral Leadership

Electoral leadership, on the other hand, has thrived. Cleveland has seen the emergence and decline of a political power boss in George Forbes (between the years of 1979 and 1989). Forbes became a powerful political local leader, and seemed on the verge of building a political machine. He was defeated in a mayoral bid by Michael White, a young black politician who became Mayor of Cleveland in 1989. Black elected leadership is well established and numerous. Most of it represents middle class interests and aspirations. Some, like Michael White, enjoys multi-racial (but middle class) constituencies, but this type of leadership is still rare.

Summary

By using methods of qualitative research, I have been able to develop some propositions about organizational and electoral leadership in black communities, in time-one (1967-71) and then in time-two (1989-91). These propositions are listed above, numerically between #1 and #10. I have also been able to learn

some things about the methodology of qualitative research, and I have also listed them numerically between #11 and #13.

Personally, I have had to let go of my dreams of Third World solidarity, although I continue to suffer from separation pains from this loss!

References

- Abrahamson, M. , Mizruchi, E. , & Hornung, C. (1976). *Stratification and mobility*. New York: Macmillan.
- Banfield, E.C. (1970). *The unheavenly city*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Banfield, E.C. & Wilson, J. Q. (1965). *City politics*. New York: Free Press.
- Blau, P. & Scott, W.R. (1962). *Formal organizations*. San Francisco: Chandler.
- Chatterjee, P. (1975). *Local leadership in black communities: Organizational and electoral leadership in Cleveland, during the nineteen sixties*. Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University.
- Coulton, C.J., Chow, J., & Pandey, S. (1990). *An analysis of poverty and related conditions in Cleveland area neighborhoods*. Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University.
- Dollard, J. (1957). *Caste and class in a southern town*. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor.
- Ellis, W. (1969). *White ethics and black power*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Etzioni, A. (1964). *Modern organizations*. Englewood-Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Fetterman, D.M. (1989). *Ethnography step by step*. Newbury Park, CA.: Sage.
- Frazier, E.F. (1939). *The Negro family in the United States*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gans, H. (1962). *The urban villagers*. New York: Free Press.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Gordon, M. (1964). *Assimilation in American life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Greer, S. (1962). *The emerging city*. New York: Free Press.
- Hunter, F. (1953). *Community power structure*. New York: Doubleday.
- Jencks, C. & Peterson, P. E. eds. (1991). *The urban underclass*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings.
- Jorgensen, D.L. (1989). *Participant observation: A methodology for human studies*. Newbury Park, CA.: Sage.
- Lynd, R.S., & Lynd, H.M. (1929). *Middletown*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Lynd, R.S., & Lynd, H.M. (1937). *Middletown in transition*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Marden, C., Meyer, G., & Engel, M. H. (1992). *Minorities in American society*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Miller, E.M. (1986). *Street women*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- "Preaching to the Converted." (1991). *The Economist*, 320 (September 21-27), 84.

- Prosser, W.R. (1991). The underclass: Assessing what we have learned. *Focus* 13, 2 (Summer).
- Rossmann, G.B. & Wilson, B.L. (1985). Numbers and Words: Combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a single large scale evaluation study. *Evaluation Review*, 9, 627-64.
- Sartre, J. P. (1949). *No exit, and three other plays*. New York: Vintage.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA.: Sage.
- Sudnow, D. (1978). *Ways of the hand*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- Suttles, G. (1972). *The social construction of communities*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Traylor, L.H. (1976). Review of *Local leadership in black communities: Organizational and Electoral leadership in Cleveland, during the nineteen sixties*, by Pranab Chatterjee. *Social Work*, 21, 253.
- Van Haitsma, M. (1989). A conceptual definition of the underclass. *Focus* 12, 1 (Spring).
- Warren, C.A.B. (1988). *Gender issues in field research*. Newbury Park, CA.: Sage.
- Whyte, W.F. (1943). *Street corner society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Whyte, W.F. (1984). *Learning from the field. A guide from experience*. Newbury Park, CA.: Sage.
- Wilson, J.Q. (1960). *Negro politics*. New York: Free Press.
- Wilson, W. J. (1979). *The declining significance of race*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Wright, R. (1956). *The color curtain*. Cleveland: World Publishing.