

CHAPTER 1

Social Science Theory and Research on Black Leadership

Most of the serious works dealing with the Black political experience in the United States are studies in leadership (Jones 1972:10; Morris 1975:9). Ladd (1966:114) writes that to ask questions about “Negro leadership” is to ask some basic questions not only about the nature of that leadership but also about the larger subject of Negro politics. Jones (1972:7) also argues that much of the research on Black leadership in America “proceeds in an atheoretical manner.” Consequently, what is needed is the development of some fundamental categories of a theory of Black leadership and politics in America. While there are various meanings of theory (Stinchcombe 1968; Rapoport 1958), in general, empirical social science theory has three major functions: (1) it should serve as an aid to the inventory and codification of the existing knowledge of phenomena, (2) it should serve as a guide to areas where further research is required, and (3) it should contribute to the development of the capacity to invent explanations of phenomena in a series of interrelated verifiable propositions.

This study, of course, cannot purport to fulfill these functions adequately. Rather, it is an effort to formulate the categories that are fundamental to analysis and theory construction in Black leadership research. The procedure is to dichotomize the extant social science research—representing more than one hundred published and unpublished studies going back nearly fifty years—into the old “Negro” leadership literature, which dates roughly from 1930 to 1966, and the new “Black” leadership literature, dating roughly from 1966 to 1980. This dichotomy is based on the assumption, fundamental to this study, that a transformation in Black leadership occurred in the 1960s.

Given this dichotomy, in chapter 2, I inventory and codify the old literature of the Negro leadership group organized around the following major analytic categories: power structure, social background (including class, color, and ethnic origins), organization, leadership types, and whatever theoretical fragments may be gleaned from these categories. In addition to these basic categories of analysis, I also review the literature

for facts and insights on the role of Whites, the masses, preachers, and politicians in understanding Negro leadership. After this review of the old Negro leadership literature, in chapter 3, I specify and analyze the factors affecting the transformation from “Negro” to “Black” leadership in the 1960s. Chapter 4 contains a review of the literature about the new “Black” leadership, organized around the categories used in the review of the old literature in chapter 2. Finally, in chapter 5, I attempt to pull together the existing knowledge, draw out the interconnections between the old and new leadership, and suggest directions for theory and research.