what they want. They see Mediterranean. They see Latin."

He is sterotypically non - African features were one of Powell's early assets, according to Gunther, whose biography follows Powell through his rise to the New York City council and his first term in the House from 1945-47.

But Powell had other assets, including a family tradition of education, which he glossed over by claiming his grandfather was a white slave master.

Born to parents descended from free blacks who had purchased their freedom in Virginia before the Civil War, Powell never knew the poverty so common to the people he later inspired from the pulpit.

His father, Adam Sr., became one of New England's most influential black ministers before the turn of the century while serving the Emmanuel Baptist Church in New Haven, CT. It was there in 1908, just before Adam Sr. moved to Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church, that Adam Jr. was born.

Adam Sr. held the Abyssinian pastorate until 1937, when his son "inherited" the mantle.

Powell grew up a member of the black middle class, Gunther points out, and "didn't suffer the trials and tribulations of being a poor black — much like Martin Luther King. And also like King, he participated in the prophetic tradition, participated in the reforms of his people but was not a member of the suffering classes.

The suffering wasn't something Powell umbilically felt, but it is something he comprehended. He was a product of the Depression, and I think that had a profound effect on him."

Powell was also educated well beyond the level of his parishioners. He studied at the City College of New York before being expelled when he "blasted off into outer space," according to Gunther, after his older sister Blanche died.

He resumed his studies at Colgate, graduated, and enrolled at Union Theological Seminary before earning a master's degree in religious education at Columbia Teachers College.

Powell knew early on how to attract attention. He wrote for the black newspaper, The Amsterdam News, and from 1935 to 1940 had his own column.

He then founded The People's Voice, what Gunther terms "the most radical black newspaper during World War II" and wrote a column in it from 1942 to 1946.

"With the exception of maybe a year and a half total from 1935 until 1945-46, Powell constantly editorialized — a major, major thinker," says Gunther.

"We're talking about a guy who every other week was condemning the black middle class for its apathy, condemning light-skinned blacks for their disassociation from the masses, condemning black ministers for

Adam strikes a familiar pose while making a point in the House.

'pimping' in the pulpit. He was a man in the pulpit who constantly criticized members of his profession for selling a ticket to heaven and not getting on the plane.

"He was the first 'bad nigger' in the pulpit, and I use that term as it was used in the title of a biography of [boxer] Jack Johnson. He could 'talk stuff' and he could back it up."

Powell's rhetorical ability stood out as he built on his father's power, based on what in effect became "a 15,000-member political club called Abyssinian."

And Powell's political rise benefited from several trends in New York City, according to Rev. William James, who knew Powell well and was the pastor of the Metropolitan Community Methodist Church in Harlem for 33 years.

Franklin D. Roosevelt sparked respect for black leaders by asking their advice during his administration; Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia had begun appointing blacks to prestigious political positions; black education and the ferment for job opportunity became more effective; and a coalition of church leaders, led by Rev. William Lloyd Imes and including Powell's father, started organizing for political action.

"They became the powers to deal with," says James, now director of Drew's Multi-Ethnic Center for Ministry," and into that group came Adam Clayton Powell Jr. . . . . Adam was elected to the city council by this very group, by Imes and the coalition. That coalition wasn't exactly led by Adam Powell; he was the recipient of the leadership."

Once in office, particularly in Congress, Powell proved an adroit manipulator and legislator. His longevity in office eventually brought the important committee assignments and chairmanships that are the heart of congressional power.

But some of the very traits that Powell capitalized on during his rise to power proved liabilities in forging political networks. For Gunther, Powell's downfall stemmed from the consequences of three facts.

First, although he was the most powerful black politician in America at the time, Powell remained unpredictable.

"He got into the white man's game, and he didn't understand the white man's rules. And

With his attorney Edward Bennett Williams, Powell talks to newsmen during his trial on income tax evasion charges.

he became cocky with his own power . . . . His seniority put him in a position where it had to be stripped because of his adamant nature and defiance.

Plus, he was not that ideologically in-tune with partisan politics. He couldn't be fully trusted as a Democrat . . . . Partisan politics do not give a keen eye to unpredictability."

Second, he had also accumulated plenty of black and white enemies, although for different reasons.

"Powell's greatest enemies were middle-class and light-skinned blacks who believed he was a traitor to their rather aloof, unemotional distancing," Gunther claims, but he outlines a less-apparent barrier Powell faced — anti-intellectualism.

"He took religion away from other-worldliness and made it more existential.

"That's where he got into trouble with black spirituality. In effect, the mobility of his thought isolated him. He lost his friends because of his creative intelligence, because of his pragmatic functionalism. He believed that God was a force, a creative force that everyone owned."

Finally, Powell may also have been a too-obvious goad to his white colleagues.

"He entertained, as Jack Johnson did, in the world of miscegenation. Adam Clayton Powell Jr. socialized with white women and that's an anathema in American society.

Her was not only a political threat; he was also a social threat. In effect, his very presence

The dapper to-be congressman in January, 1944.

and power castrated while male hegemony: he was a white-looking black man who entertained as a white.

"And he was an embarrassment to even dark-skinned blacks because he was proud of his blackness and was more 'black' than they were but took congressional junkets with his white secretary. Of course, they went at him through his congressional junkets, women, and a libel suit."

House proceedings under then-

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