

**Follow the Civil Rights Road: Black Capture Meets the Faith-Based and Community
Initiative**

by

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Follow the Civil Rights Road: Black Capture Meets the Faith-Based and Community Initiative

Black politics writ large is illustrative of the enduring significance of the civil rights movement. Black politics is inseparable from a broader socio-historical-cultural milieu. The emergence of indigenous black institutions in response to societal and governmental repression is perhaps the crowning achievement of black culture. The black church, originally meant to reign in black resistance became the foundation upon which it was built. A resilient black consciousness and a distinct black culture culminated in a movement that transformed American society (Levine 1977).

In the contemporary era, debates proliferate about whether contemporary black politics epitomizes the substance and tactics of mainstream electoral politics or whether black politics has maintained its commitment to protest ideals and mechanisms (Reed 1986, 1999; Tate 1994). Certainly, the electoral capture phenomenon whereby the interests of the black collective are relegated to second tier status among the universe of Democratic party concerns is instructive.

The median voter theory (Downs 1957) is turned on its tidy head where parties cater to swing voters crucial to amassing electoral majorities while paying token obeisance to the demands of a core constituency. Short of electoral reform along the lines of proportional representation, collective African American interests may continue to be addressed by the broader body politic in symbolic ways, if at all.

While historically speaking, social justice and especially racial equality have dominated black concerns, other policies and problems now dominate concerns (Tate 1994; Dawson 1994; Harris-Lacewell 2005). Katherine Tate (1994) asserts that “civil rights is no longer considered to be a priority issue among most Black Americans” (47). The point of departure for this paper is not whether civil rights as an issue is at the top of African Americans’ list of policy priorities, but whether civil rights might represent the dominant policy image (Baumgartner and Jones 1993), causal story (Stone 1989;1997) or collective action frame (Harris 1999) of all of black politics.

All political processes can be understood with reference to issue definition and agenda setting (Stone 1989; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Rochefort and Cobb 1994). A perusal of the policy agendas and policy pronouncements of some major black institutions and organizations illustrates that black political issues are defined and framed in terms of civil rights. Politics in the black mold is collective, emphasizing group concerns and group goals. Black political discourse and issue definition reflects this communal orientation by locating the pulse of black politics in the language of the quintessential mass movement: *civil rights*.

Accordingly, black elite objection to an issue like the Faith-Based and Community Initiative is justified not upon the grounds that the policy violates the separation of church and state, but upon the grounds that faith-based participants may *discriminate* in hiring. Black elite objection to the Faith-Based and Community Initiative, however, defies mass black public opinion given that an overwhelming 81% of African Americans support the Faith-Based and Community Initiative (Pew Study 2001). Indeed, this recent public policy calls into question how neatly black faces represent black interests (Swain 1994).

Despite the electoral capture phenomenon, a group-based heuristic remains the norm in black politics. If cues for black political decision-making are not based in individualistic action frames, but collective ones, we might expect the salience of the civil rights frame to endure in the black political realm. What does the black policy agenda of civic elites and the policy

pronouncements of black church pastors reveal about the salience of the civil rights frame? The current project emerges out of a broader study concerning the role of black pastors in black politics. Specifically, the research focuses upon how policy images of the Faith-Based and Community Initiative as crafted by black church and civic elites affect the black policy agenda. Accordingly, the findings and conclusion will consider how the civil rights frame relates to the Faith-Based and Community Initiative.

Theory

In *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (1993) Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones assert that *all* political processes can be understood with reference to issue definition and agenda setting. This postulation deserves serious scholarly attention given that the entire political process hinges on how an issue is defined. From media coverage to public and political debate to policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation, issue definition lies at the heart of the political process.

Baumgartner and Jones (1993) demonstrate how the political process accommodates both incremental change and rapid policy change by considering the relative stability achieved by policy monopolies and by realizing the potential for the unmobilized to affect disturbances and instability in the political system. The key to this relationship, however, is the *symbiotic relationship between issue definition and agenda setting processes*. Accordingly, the theory of punctuated equilibrium accounts for both macro and micro political processes, providing a corrective to predominantly pluralist or elitist accounts of the policy process. The authors assert that the manipulation of policy images by political entrepreneurs represents the ultimate political power: the transformation of issue definition to comport with new ideas about policy problems and solutions. The institutional venue in which policies are addressed also represents a fundamental political resource given structure-induced equilibrium and the scope of conflict.

The interaction between policy image--public understandings of policy problems and policy venue--the policy arena with authority to make decisions concerning the policy issue, indicates the fundamental importance of institutions to the policy process. Thus, Baumgartner and Jones (1993) reaffirm the notion that the expansion or retraction of the scope of conflict is fundamental to politics (Schattschneider 1960) and has implications for issue definition as well. Institutions make possible periods of relative policy stasis, or policy monopolies, given the mobilization of bias (Schattschneider 1960). However, different institutional venues mean that policy entrepreneurs can shop for the location where their policy image carries the most currency. When a policy image loses currency within an existing venue, a new venue may be sought out.

The inherent difficulty of penetrating policy subsystems means that policy punctuations (instability in the agenda setting process) are most often derived from other sources. That is, policy monopolies which are stable in the short run are subject to relative volatility and instability in the long run given the potential for policy entrepreneurs and previously apathetic audiences to transform predominant understandings of policy questions by manipulating images about policy problems and policy solutions. Indeed, Deborah Stone's (1989, 1997) depiction of causal stories as crucial to what she terms problem definition illustrates the importance of political symbols and of what Baumgartner and Jones (1993) term the empirical and evaluative components of the policy image.

Deborah Stone (1989, 1997) asserts a role for political reasoning in the policy process. Her critique of the stagist view of the policy process illustrates how content and meaning are created via the manipulation of ideas and information. Since goals are never fixed in the political community, Stone asserts that ideas continuously compete for attention generally and a place on

the governmental agenda specifically. Thus, “problem definition is never simply a matter of defining goals and measuring our distance from them. It is rather the *strategic representation* of situations” (Stone 1997, 133). Symbolic representation, then, is the primary mode of communication throughout the policy process and represents the most crucial “means of influence and control” (Stone 1997, 137).

Symbols invoked in the policy process include stories of decline and stories of control, synecdoche, metaphor, and ambiguity. Importantly, symbols “enable us as individuals to read ourselves into social programs and collective actions” (Stone 1997, 162). As such, they facilitate understanding of public problems and allow for groups to coalesce around shared notions of a problem’s causes and perhaps also around similar ideas about a problem’s solutions.

For example, on the surface, numbers appear as a mere means of problem measurement. Upon more considered examination, however, numbers reveal how problems are shaped and defined by the choice of what to measure. Such deliberate decisions about the boundaries of policy problems are necessary yet controversial. Numbers require both experts and novices alike to make judgments about the efficacy of current and proposed policies. As such, numbers make “normative leaps” (Stone 1997, 167), implying a need to move from description to prescription. This comports with Baumgartner and Jones (1993) contention that policy image consists of an empirical component.

According to Stone, if numbers and symbols are important, it is because they depict the causes of problems. Policy entrepreneurs utilize causal stories not only to assign blame for policy problems, but also to present themselves as capable of fixing policy problems. Finding the actual cause of a problem is often secondary to the placement of moral responsibility and economic costs on the continuum of possible causes (Stone 206). Thus, causal stories may serve as “devices for building alliances between groups who have problems and groups who have solutions” (Stone 207).

The current research utilizes Baumgartner and Jones (1993) approach which deems the linkage between policy image and political institutions as fundamental to an understanding of issue definition and agenda setting. Furthermore, the insights of Deborah Stone’s (1989, 1997) causal stories as each contributes to an understanding of the black political dynamic. Agenda setting involves more than the mere placement of issues on the public agenda. Indeed, issue definition and agenda setting drive politics.

Methodology

Qualitative tools and methods enable the examination of the historical, social, and contextual nuances that frame the backdrop of the Faith-Based and Community Initiative and its intersection with the ‘black sacred cosmos’. Fredrick C. Harris (1999) notes:

The religious culture of African Americans is a preexisting resource for mobilization that is autonomous from, yet complementary to, psychological and organizational resources for mobilization. A qualitative approach to the study of religion and political mobilization unearths cultural elements of activism that are difficult to tap through quantitative approaches (134).

Thus, the qualitative approach provides the maximum amount of exploratory latitude with which to embark on descriptive and inductive research. Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman note that a qualitative approach is justified for “research that delves in depth into complexities and processes” and “research for which relevant variables have yet to be identified” (Marshall and Rossman 1999, 57). Given the dearth of literature specifically detailing the policy images and causal stories that contribute to the black policy agenda, a (primarily) qualitative research agenda is most appropriate. This approach will undoubtedly uncover topics and

questions ripe for future research while shedding new and interesting insight into how black elites (both church and civic) shape politics, policy agendas, and black political mobilization.

The current research examines the policy images that frame black politics, particularly the civil rights frame. This project stems from broader research that seeks to identify the policy images and causal stories, specifically those of black pastors that swirl around the Faith-Based and Community Initiative as well as the messages that they receive from political elites, such as members of the Congressional Black Caucus and officials related to the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. The fact that black pastors receive, send, and filter political messages illustrates their integral importance to the black policy agenda.

Content analysis of the policy pronouncements and legislative agendas of black church, civic, and political organizations will provide crucial information concerning black political dynamics, specifically, the black policy agenda. The black policy agenda, treated here as the formal agenda of the Congressional Black Caucus and the NAACP, will be examined to determine the messages conveyed therein. Content validity in the present case appears high given that the analysis will focus on public and official pronouncements and will likely tease out the predominant causal stories and policy images that black church and civic elites utilize to portray black politics. The survey tool cannot tease out the nuanced frames that define black collective interests and form the black policy agenda (Harris 1999), validating the qualitative approach in this case.

An examination of black politics provides the contextual framework for the activities of the black church as well as black civic groups. In terms of case selection, given that the black church is not monolithic, three distinct black denominations are explored herein. Individual churches are certainly idiosyncratic in terms of membership, but given shared histories and theologies, the possibility of relative unanimity within discrete African-American denominations renders denominational variety of utmost importance for this research.

The Congressional Black Caucus was selected as a group which claims to represent the interests of all African Americans in politics. The NAACP was selected given its claim to represent the civil rights of African Americans. Importantly, the selection of these prominent black institutions allows an exploration of the conventional wisdom regarding black politics: collective interests and the policy images and causal stories utilized to portray them.

People with Permanent Interests: Contemporary Black Politics

Ossie Davis' speech at the first Annual Legislative Conference of the Congressional Black Caucus in 1971 exemplifies the zeal and the zeitgeist of black politics:

...the burden of my appeal is to you, to the thirteen Congressional Black Caucus members, to give us a plan of action. Give us a plan of action...a Ten Black Commandments, simple, strong, that we can carry in our hearts and in our memories no matter where we are and reach out and touch and feel the reassurance that there is behind everything we do a simple, moral, intelligent plan that must be fulfilled in the course of time, even if all of our leaders, one by one, fall in battle (Clay 1993).

The search for the holy grail of black politics continues unabated. Collective interests and bloc power represent the name of the game in black politics.

Black institutions and social networks constrain the propensity for a dynamically heterogeneous black body politic (Dawson 1994). Black indigenous institutions arose necessarily during the despicable days of legally enforced and socially sanctioned slavery and segregation. A distinct black culture and consciousness (Levine 1977) was the result. For example, black song, both sacred and secular, emerged as an outlet for both implicit and explicit expressions of black solidarity, black spirit, and black resistance. The souls of black folk remain intimately connected today.

Per the conventional wisdom, this ‘we are family’ attitude that pervades black culture translates to the political realm in an electorally-intelligent fashion. Individual African Americans consider the interests of the broader black public as a proxy for their own interests. Shared institutions (i.e. the black church), shared experiences (i.e. racism and other civil rights battles) and common sources of information (i.e. the black media) engender a sense among African Americans that one’s fate is linked to the fate of the black collective (Dawson 1994). Despite this special consciousness, Michael Dawson (1994) asserts that black institutions are not wholly distinct from the dominant culture and from social control by the same. The assertion of a lack of total separation between black spheres and the dominant culture does not necessarily negate a vibrant political discourse within and among black institutions. It may however, indicate that scholarly assertions of a separate black politics are wrongheaded (Reed 1986).

In an effort to counter such notions, Melissa Harris-Lacewell (2005) explores the nature of black discourse in an effort to discern how ‘everyday black talk’ contributes to the development of black ideology. Certainly, she views “the prospects for a unique black politics forged through collective racial deliberation” (Harris-Lacewell 2005, 7) as alive and well. With race as a “sufficient condition for togetherness”, members of the black counterpublic--shielded from the formal constraints that accompany discursive debate in the broader public square, work out their ideology by conversing with one another.

Conversations conducted in the realm of the everyday serve to demystify politics while also imbuing individual black experiences with broader social significance and meaning. While ideology for the African American is worked out in a distinctively black sphere, individual blacks hold varying attitudes, making “politics a contested terrain within blackness” (Harris-Lacewell 2005, 23). Accordingly, Harris-Lacewell (2005) presents four political ideologies that frame black political thought in the contemporary context: Black nationalism, Black feminism, Black conservatism, and liberal integrationism. While blacks sing to different ideological tunes, the ideologies developed in the context of everyday talk in the black counterpublic both impinge upon political elites and serve as a tool for the black masses to interpret the authenticity of elite claims (Harris-Lacewell 2005).

Debates about whether black ideology is imposed from the elites above or bubbles up from the masses below notwithstanding, how have African Americans fared in the broader political dynamic? Elite claims about attention to and the importance of black issues are profligate on the left end of the political spectrum and have gained increasing currency on the right end of the political spectrum (relatively speaking). Nevertheless, a penchant for incrementalism in the governmental realm may render relatively ineffective a black constituency and congressional delegation that demands broad-scale social policies and programs. The winner-takes-all electoral system and the broad-based political system may undermine minority interests. Indeed, given the political reality that broad-based coalitions are electorally advantageous (if not downright decisive), incentives may exist for a black agenda reflective of black collective interests to be marginalized altogether or at the least, deemphasized. Contemporarily, the affinity of African Americans for the Democratic party may exacerbate such marginalization.

The concentration of black political eggs in the Democratic party basket reflects that party’s commitment (in recent history) to issues of civil rights and social justice. Such loyalty, whether deliberate or blind, may backfire. Democratic party leaders, aware of the natural alignment between black issues and the Democratic platform, may view appeals to the loyal black base disruptive of a broader coalition. In the ongoing struggle to secure swing voters, a

Democratic party has more incentive to emphasize majority interests and to deemphasize black interests. What option, then does an active black bloc have in this case?

The answer is little or none. Electoral capture (Frymer 1999) occurs when a group has little choice but to remain loyal to a political party given that the opposing party has little need for or interest in securing the group's allegiance. Despite being bantered as a viable option in recent history by some black leaders, threatening mass black defection from the Democratic party for the purpose of forming a black party does not represent a plausible electoral option given the vagaries of a non-pluralistic, two-party system (Clay 1993). Thus, even within their own party, black Democrats have little leverage for exacting concessions to an agenda of black interests. The historical and ideological ambivalence of Republicans toward black concerns secures the electoral trap. Defection to the political right is unappealing to most African Americans given a lack of Republican attention to civil rights generally and opposition to affirmative action specifically. Thus, African Americans remain captured by the Democratic party--the party of civil rights.

Progress and Public Policy: The Civil Rights Movement in Perspective

The barometer of black political progress remains the state of civil rights. Indicative of this fact is the extent to which contemporary black political agendas and singular black political issues are framed in terms of civil rights. This is not a contention that black politics in the contemporary context is a subset of broader movement politics. Indeed, scholars should not extrapolate the lessons of a mass movement to black political behavior. Yet, such caution should not preclude a careful examination of the continuing salience of civil rights frames in contemporary politics.

The civil rights movement underscores the significance of black institutions and black leaders (Morris 1984, Findlay 1993). Indeed, an enduring lesson of the civil rights movement is the notion that the protest may be galvanized from the black counterpublic and black counterelites (Lee 2002). Less spontaneous combustion of masses than an organized effort of various centers of pre-existing movement activity (Morris 1984), the civil rights movement represents a successful amalgamation of civil societal institutions and individuals in pursuit of political goals.

The black church is the crucible of the civil rights movement; the linchpin on which success was predicated. Certainly, the efforts of the NAACP and other organizations cannot be underscored. However, the formal, institutionalized approach of the NAACP was not amenable to the type of grassroots insurgency that emerged during the more formal civil rights movement. Indeed, the NAACP's institutional path was more consonant with incrementalism than with dramatic social disruption and significant policy change.

Nevertheless, the windows of opportunity afforded by the legal victories of the elite NAACP were capitalized upon by churches and religiously-related organizations that specialized in reaching the masses (Morris 1984; Findlay 1993). A dominated group transformed basic resources into a successful movement for social and political change via the efforts of various indigenous local centers of protest activity. Beyond the task of resource mobilization, the black church became the center of coordinated activity at the local level that transformed national identity and shaped the future of black politics.

Pulpits and Prophetic Politics: The Black Church

Given that confrontation (Morris 1984), defiance (Harris-Lacewell 2005), and protest (Morris 1984) are labels frequently utilized to describe black politics in the contemporary era, how does the prophetic tradition of the black church reify this black political bent? "The larger

significance of black protest lies in the fact that it is forever present in some form” (Morris 1984, x). Indeed, the black counterpublic (Dawson 1994) nurtures an oppositional civic culture (Harris 1999) that utilizes the symbols of black religion to demonstrate resistance to all forms of injustice.

The conventional debate about whether the black church is more other-worldly or this-worldly, notwithstanding (Frazier (1964)1974; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990), a social prophecy role for the black church is strongly favored in the black community (see Harris 1999). The pursuit of racial justice for African Americans and social justice for all betrays a broad belief within black Christianity that the church’s pursuit of the public good is consonant with the imperatives of Scripture: “He has shown thee, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you? But to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God” (Micah 6:8).

The vision of the black church, therefore, extends beyond the spiritual to spheres of physical and societal import. During Reconstruction, economic, political, and social issues spurred many churches and church leaders to create black mutual aid societies, banks, insurance companies, and schools, to name a few (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Beyond mere progressive reform, black churches, black ministers more specifically, have regularly been voices in the wilderness, calling for radical change in government and society. The prophetic voices of black ministers during the civil rights movement resonated not only among the black community, but extended to a broader mass base, propelling political and social change. The black jeremiad or political sermon represents “a powerful cultural idiom for expressing strong social criticism within normative cultural bounds” (Howard-Pitney 2003, 95).

Importantly, the black church has served as a source of information, organizational skills, and political stimuli since its inception (Morris 1984; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Harris 1999). While, the civil rights era demarcates a historical highpoint in this regard, the black church remains a central black institution, shaping the political fortunes of her members and nonmembers alike. Indeed, “the decline of party organizations and the increasing number of blacks seeking public office has probably stimulated more church-based political activism in black communities since the civil rights movement than took place during it” (Harris 1999, 180).

How, in the post-civil rights era, does the black church continue to shape black politics? As the cornerstone of black culture, the black church is an important shaper of collective action frames--those cognitive categories that guide collective black action (Harris 1999). ‘Everyday talk’ (Harris-Lacewell 2005) in the black counterpublic is laced with religious symbolism, yet sacred symbols need not work in isolation from secular ones (Harris 1999). Black religion is the source of many of the oppositional worldviews that blacks develop in the political realm. From using religious language in political discourse to lacing sermons with political references, “the religious culture of African Americans not only stimulates mobilization by serving as a guide for interpreting political goals, but just as important, it also provides sacredly ordained legitimacy to political action” (Harris 1999, 135).

If black collective action frames are shaped by black religion, the key frame emanating from religion in the contemporary era is the civil rights frame. The social and legislative successes of the civil rights movement were largely predicated on the symbols, leadership, and resources of the indigenous black church. The civil rights frame evokes collective commitment to secular political goals while upholding the social prophecy role of black religion.

What of the black jeremiad with regard to contemporary political issues? A transition to conventional politics could “lessen blacks’ traditional political appeal to conscience” (Howard-

Pitney 2003, 106). For example, financial partnerships between government and the black church might could serve to diminish the confrontational voice of protest that epitomizes the black church. What does an examination of the policy pronouncements of some black denominations and related organizations reveal?

African Methodist Episcopal Church, Incorporated

The African Methodist Episcopal Church, Incorporated (AME), organized in 1794, claims a membership of 2 million in 7,000 congregations across the world (www.ame-church.com/about-us/history.php). The church's doctrine and order of worship reflect the broader Methodist tradition with separation predicated on historical necessity rather than on doctrinaire. The mission of the AME reflects the social gospel tradition of its mainline Protestant predecessor.

At every level of the Connection (corporate church) and in every local church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church shall engage in carrying out the spirit of the original Free African Society, out of which the AME Church evolved: that is, to seek out and save the lost, and serve the needy through a continuing program of (1) preaching the gospel, (2) feeding the hungry, (3) clothing the naked, (4) housing the homeless, (5) cheering the fallen, (6) providing jobs for the homeless, (7) administering to the needs of those in prisons, hospitals, nursing homes, asylums and mental institutions, senior citizens' homes; caring for the sick, the shut-in, the mentally and socially disturbed, and (8) encouraging thrift and economic advancement.

(www.ame-church.com/about-us/mission.php)

This focus is unique in its primary emphasis upon social justice.

The hierarchical, Episcopal mode of organization of the larger AME church body is complemented by a strong local emphasis. While the AME's supreme body, the General Conference, meets every four years, Annual Conferences are conducted at the regional level on a yearly basis. The Council of Bishops, the executive branch of the AME, also meets annually to conduct public sessions on issues of import to the denomination. The AME Church's most recent pronouncement, the "Public Statement of Council of Bishops", reflects a variegated agenda consonant with the breadth of the church's social commitments.

Progressively, the church has formed an Economic Development Partnership with General Motors and the General Motors Acceptance Corporation that provides new and refinanced mortgages for individuals and churches in one AME district. With regard to government, the church plans to conduct its Second Annual Summit on Education to "address strategies to close the achievement gap among African American students in K-12. Our goal is to holistically address the national policy "Leave no Child Behind," (sic) as African American students are affected." The Council also approved an "international health initiative that would positively affect the quality of health for African people in the Diaspora" (Public Statement of Council of Bishops 2005).

Church of God in Christ

The Church of God in Christ (COGIC) was loosely organized in 1897 and was incorporated in 1907. The church now boasts around 8 million members and represents the second largest Pentecostal group in the United States (www.cogic.org/history.htm). The doctrine of the church reflects the holiness tradition's emphasis upon outward, charismatic manifestations of inner sanctification by the Holy Spirit. While home and foreign missions represent core church functions, the doctrinal emphasis upon individual holiness and the worship experience seemingly relegate social, communal goals a la the AME Church to a second tier status in the hierarchy of church priorities.

Indeed, one is hard-pressed to find evidence of a national COGIC commitment to revitalizing the black inner city. Nevertheless, one does detect evidence of the church

leadership's concern about perceived moral decay in the broader society as it impinges upon the individual holiness of the COGIC believer.

...in spite of the progressive normalization of alternative lifestyles and the growing legal acceptance of same-sex unions; we declare our opposition to any deviation from traditional marriages of male and female. Notwithstanding the rulings of the court systems of the land in support of same-sex unions; we resolve that the Church of God in Christ stand resolutely firm and never allow the sanctioning of same-sex marriages by its clergy nor recognize the legitimacy of such unions.

While other policy pronouncements were not available, the conservative morality of the General Assembly of the Church of God in Christ is unmistakable here. There was evidence of support for the Faith-Based and Community Initiative of the Bush administration at the website of a regional jurisdiction of the Church of God in Christ (www.nemichigan.org/news.htm).

Furthermore, the alliance of some COGIC ministers with the National Center for Faith Based Initiative is further evidence of a conservative denominational bent--at least where social morality is concerned.

National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.

The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., founded in 1886, represents the oldest of the black denominations and boasts the largest membership of all black denominations with 7.5 million members. In the Arminian tradition (free will and non-Calvinist), the doctrine of the church emphasizes universal salvation and is orthodox in other aspects of belief. Unlike the other denominations explored herein, the "Articles of Faith" of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. explicates the denomination's view of the role of government vis-à-vis the Christian faith:

We believe the Scriptures teach that civil government is of divine appointment, for the interest and good order of human society; and that magistrates are to be prayed for, conscientiously honored and obeyed; except only in things opposed to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only Lord of the conscience, and the Prince of the Kings of the earth.

Ironically, the convention refused to support the philosophy and tactics of the civil rights movement, leading to a schism whereby Martin Luther King Jr. and other luminaries created a splinter group, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, which boasts an explicit agenda of social reform as well as alliances with black civil societal groups that are committed to the same.

In January 2005, an historic meeting of the four black Baptist denominations, including the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., the National Baptist Convention of America, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, and the National Missionary Baptist Convention, convened in Nashville, Tennessee to discuss issues of commonality, rather than difference. According to Rev. William Shaw, president of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. the conference represents "...an affirmation that what binds us and calls us together is stronger than the incidents that caused us to separate. We are one body in Christ" (Allgood and Green 2005). If the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. was uncomfortable asserting its voice as social prophet to the government during the civil rights era, its obeisance to the will of the other black Baptist conventions at the joint meeting represents a departure from historical precedent.

The four presidents of the black Baptist conventions signed a statement with nine points of agreed action including a call for an end to the war in Iraq and withdrawal of military personnel from Iraq; an extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965; a national living wage; opposition to the confirmation of Alberto Gonzales as Attorney General; a full commitment to public education and opposition to vouchers and charter schools; an end to efforts to cut welfare and safety net programs for children; an end to the prison-industrial complex; an opposition to permanent tax cuts; aid relief to Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America (Joint Baptist Board Meeting Points of Agreed Action 2005). Citing unity and reflecting the collective

black interests, the pastors decreed: “As leaders of our respective bodies whose constituents total almost 15 million black persons, we will continue to work together on these and other issues of common concern” (Joint Baptist Board Meeting Points of Agreed Action 2005). The following is indicative of the continued salience of the civil rights movement as regards the causal stories spoken by the black Baptists united in one social prophetic voice regarding electoral irregularities and the extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965:

It is ironic, to say the least, that while U.S. military personnel face the hazards of war in Iraq and the administration intends to seek Congressional appropriation to spend billion more in that engagement, there is no effort underway to extend the provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that are scheduled to expire in 2007. Dr. King and other principled people of good will from across the racial, religious, economic, and political landscape struggled in the face of police brutality, bomb threats, hate campaigns, and even murder to bring substance to the right to vote guaranteed by the Fifteenth Amendment. Yet, each election cycle reveals disturbing evidence of continued and deliberate efforts to intimidate, discourage, or suppress voting by people of color, senior citizens, and people of limited income and impaired physical ability. Democracy in the United States deserves, at least, as much attention as democracy abroad.

The Black Contract with America on Moral Values

If the meeting of the historically star-crossed black Baptist conventions was unprecedented, so was another meeting conducted in January 2005. The Black Contract with America on Moral Values is a product of the High Impact Leadership Coalition (Banerjee 2005). Ministers associated with the project wear various denominational stripes, including Bishop Charles Blake Sr. of the West Angeles Church of God in Christ and Bishop Harry Jackson of Hope Christian Church outside of Washington D.C. The Contract’s six prongs call for family reconstruction; wealth creation; education reform; prison reform; healthcare; and African relief.

Even this black conservative effort retains a civil rights salience. With regard to healthcare the Contract calls for: “Affordable healthcare for blacks that acknowledges the higher disease and mortality statistics in minority communities” (2005). Not unlike the Congressional Black Caucus, the group emphasizes wealth creation with an emphasis on lowering black unemployment; home ownership programs for minorities; and the transformation of minority communities through governmental provision of “infrastructure for indigenous businesses” (Black Contract 2005).

Analysis

Table 1. Select Black Denominations.

Black Denomination	Core Focus	Public Policy Positions 2004-2005	Possible Religious Orientation	Possible Religious Allies	Possible Civic Allies	Civil Rights Salience
African Methodist Episcopal	Social Gospel	No Child Left Behind	Sphere Sovereignty	Catholics; Mainline Protestants	National Urban League	Implied
Church of God in Christ	Holiness	Gay Marriage	Moral Prophecy	Evangelicals; Fundamentalists	Focus on the Family	Little to None
National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.	Orthodoxy	Iraq War	Social Prophecy	Mainline Protestants; Jews	Rainbow Coalition	Explicit

❖ **Public Policy Pronouncements**

- *African Methodist Episcopal*
 - Public Statement of Council of Bishops (2005)
 - Education
- *National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.*
 - Joint Baptist Board Meeting Points of Agreed Action (2005)
 - A national living wage
- *Church of God in Christ*
 - Marriage: A Proclamation of the Church of God in Christ Worldwide (2005)
 - Traditional marriage

The churches explored herein, while each squarely in the Christian tradition, vary in their doctrine and their distinctives. The denominations differ in the extent to which they explicitly engage or oppose government. This may stem from religious orientations or worldviews (whether explicit or implicit) that serve as guides to action. Religious and civic groups sympathetic to the mission and orientation of each denomination are indicated here as possible allies in forays into public action or prophecy. Finally, the salience of the civil rights frame appears more or less explicitly with regard to the policy pronouncements of the different denominations.

While the AME Church is strongly committed to the social gospel, the corporate church emphasizes and supports the local church as the locus and vehicle of social service and mission. They are relatively silent on political issues, with an interest in public education emphasized not only in reference to the No Child Left Behind policy of Bush administration, but also to consider how the church might best address educational attainment at the local level. While the achievement gap between black students and white students is addressed here, there is little explicit intimation that this gap might be due to discrimination. What is interesting to note here,

however, is that the two issues addressed by the Bishop's Public Statement—No Child Left Behind and aid to Africa, reflect the among the key legislative priorities of the NAACP, the premiere civil rights organization in the United States as well as of the Congressional Black Caucus, the guardian of the black collective interest in the halls of power. Given the denomination's emphasis upon local responsibility and control, possible religious allies include Catholics with their belief in subsidiarity and Presbyterians and other mainline Protestants who espouse sphere sovereignty, the belief that governments and civil societal institutions should be sovereign within their sphere of influence. Similarly, the emphasis of the National Urban League upon local economic empowerment makes them a natural ally for church initiatives in the civic realm.

The Church of God in Christ and the Pentecostal tradition represent the marketplace of religion in the United States (Finke and Stark 1992). The denomination's stress upon the individual religious experience and particularly upon holiness, comports with an orientation toward moral prophecy. Transformation of society in the moral prophetic vein occurs from within the individual as opposed to transformation from without at the level of governmental institutions a la the social prophetic vein. The denomination's only recent public statement was concerning a perceived attack on the sanctity of marriage. The language of the public rebuke highlighted the root of the problem: the sin of homosexuality, an individual lifestyle inconsistent with God's original plan for humankind. There are no references to the civil rights of individual believers or any evidence that the church publicly supports the traditional black political or civic groups that lobby on behalf of black collective interests. The alliance of a prominent Bishop of the Church of God in Christ with the recent Black Contract with America on Moral Values was not met with denominational censure or rebuke. Given that the Black Contract was supported by conservative organizations like the Traditional Values Coalition, a natural civic ally for the organization is Focus on the Family. Natural religious allies include Evangelicals and Fundamentalists to the extent that their theology is consistent with a conservative morality like that of the Church of God in Christ. Interestingly, the same theology is perhaps most inconsistent with support for programs like affirmative action, a civil rights initiative that most other African Americans support (Pew Study 2001).

The statement on civil religion in the Articles of Faith of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. reflect a strong commitment to 'rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's'. While the denomination was unsupportive of the civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century, the recent revelation of its unity with other black Baptist denominations on issues of public import betray a belief that the line between church and state may be less demarcated than semi-permeable. Per other denominational statements and an examination of Rev. Shaw's pastoral addresses to the annual convention, the denomination perceives their role as that of social prophet, addressing injustice and reciting God's judgment for the society that neglects the imperatives of Scripture. The emphasis on social prophecy as revealed in the Joint Statement is consistent with the pronouncements and resolutions on social justice issues of many Mainline Protestant denominations and of some Jewish traditions in the United States. These umbrella religious denominations and traditions also actively lobby Congress on behalf of social concerns (Hertzke 1988; Hofrenning 1995). The Joint Baptist statement refers explicitly to civil rights concerns as they relate to the nine action items. Furthermore, there is an unmistakable congruence between the points explicated in the Joint Baptist Statement and the agenda of the NAACP and the Congressional Black Caucus. Given an underlying populism, a natural ally of the National Black Convention USA, Inc. is the Rainbow Coalition of Jesse Jackson.

Prophets in Pharaoh's House: The Congressional Black Caucus

In the black political realm, has protest à la civil rights and social prophecy succumbed to politics as usual? Perhaps the institutionalization of unfettered social and political access has resulted in a new type of institutionalization--an entrenched black leadership beholden to the same electoral connection (Mayhew 1974) as white politicians: "The inertial logic of incumbency operates to constrict the field of political discourse"...favoring "a preference for a brokered politics as usual that limits the number and range of claims on the policy agenda" (Reed 1999, 121). Perhaps a vigorous commitment to social justice in the vein of the black prophetic tradition has been uninterrupted by increased access to the halls of power: "the transition from protest to politics is neither as sharp nor as irrevocable as political analysts have maintained" (Tate 1994, 17). Whatever the case, the civil rights frame remains perfectly suited to contemporary black politics. The Congressional Black Caucus is a case in point.

The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was formed in 1971 upon the premise that "a more formal, more structured organization based on solidarity of purpose and program would enable (blacks in Congress) to wield a significant amount of influence in the House" (Clay 1993, 117). What opened the window of opportunity for the creation of this caucus (Kingdon 1984)? In the problem stream, the Nixon administration's assault on the programs of the Great Society galvanized blacks in Congress to action. In the political stream, the looming 1972 elections made possible position taking concerning this attack and credit claiming for other victories (Mayhew 1974). In the policy stream, 'benign neglect' and Nixon's Family Assistance Plan were countered by the new caucus' alternative budget and a set of sixty recommendations comprising "The State of the Black Nation" (Clay 1993).

From its inception, this elite mouthpiece claimed to represent black interests. Despite the fact that black leaders could not agree among themselves on how to proceed regarding what demands to press on the 1972 Democratic presidential candidate with regard to a "Black Bill of Rights" (Reed 1986, 1999; Clay 1993), the Congressional Black Caucus has remained steadfast over the years in its insistence that:

Black people have no permanent friends

No permanent enemies

Just permanent interests

(Clay 1993, 353)

While the black middle class has emerged and blossomed, catapulting more economic concerns to the forefront of black politics, what do the recent agendas of the Congressional Black Caucus reveal about the salience of the civil rights frame?

Analysis

Table 2. Congressional Black Caucus.

Congressional Term	Legislative Priorities	Some Other Prominent Issues	Annual Leadership Conference Theme	ALC Town Hall ALC Focus Forum
107 th “Broad Legislative Priorities”	Election Reform	Mandatory Minimum Sentences	Times Change: The Mission Does Not (2001)	Securing the Nation and Our Families (2001)
	Racial Profiling	No Fear Act of 2002	The CBC: The Voice for Global Understanding (2002)	Keeping the Faith: The Promise of Cooperation, the Perils of Government Funding (2002)
	Hate Crimes	No Child Left Behind		
	AIDS in Africa	Faith-Based and Community Initiative		
	Healthcare	Environment		
108 th “An Agenda for America: Focused on the Many, Not Just the Few”	Homeland Security	Leave No Family Behind	Collective Leadership: Challenging a Bold New World (2003)	Educational Apartheid in the U.S.: Tracking Policies and Re-Segregation in America’s Schools (2004)
	Foreign Policy	Faith-Based and Community Initiative		
	Economic Policy	Civil Rights Act of 2004	Defining the Moment and the Movement (2004)	
	Healthcare			
	Education			
	Ending De Facto Segregation			
109 th “Closing Disparities and Creating Opportunity”	Education	Social Security		
	Healthcare	Economic Empowerment		
	Economic Policy	Home Ownership		
	Justice	Electoral Reform		
	Social Security			
	Foreign Policy			

While the Congressional Black Caucus' legislative priorities seem to reflect mainstream, middle-class issues in several instances, it is interesting to note the foci of the CBC's agendas from the 107th to the 109th Congresses. Calling itself the conscience of the Congress, the CBC proffers an alternative budget to that of the Congress, one which prioritizes civil rights and social justice issues. While the relevance of a civil rights frame is clear on issues like hate crimes and racial profiling, less clear perhaps, is the connection between civil rights and economic policy; education; and healthcare to name a few. The best depiction of the CBC's continued use of civil rights as the dominant causal story and policy image of black politics is found in the language utilized by the members themselves as they define and describe public policy issues in their quest to represent black collective interests.

Healthcare

In the 107th Congress, then Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, John Conyers, expressed his commitment to universal healthcare via "eradicating disparities in (the) health care system". In further elucidation of the commitment of the CBC to the issue, Congresswoman Donna Christensen of the CBC called for "Health Care Justice NOW...With Disparities for None and Access for All" (June 2001):

Currently, I am co-sponsoring a bill, the Working American Families Health Insurance Act of 2001 (The Medical Access Plan)...(that) will extend Medicaid to cover the 42 million uninsured in America, the majority of whom are of color... We plan to fight for passage of (a) Medical Access Plan to guarantee one of the last civil rights not granted to all American citizens--the right to the quality health care that they deserve (9).

In the 108th Congress, CBC Chair, Representative Elijah E. Cummings, described healthcare policy as among the preeminent concerns in the pursuit of a just society (2003):

America has a critical and unfulfilled obligation. More than 9 million children are not receiving the care that they need and deserve--and 18% of these children are African Americans. Minorities are less likely to receive sophisticated medical treatments...The CBC is determined to eliminate the appalling disparities that plague America's health care system by assuring universal, nondiscriminatory access to affordable, high quality care. America deserves a health care system in which its citizens' income, where they live and the color of their skin are no longer mortality factors (3).

The causal story of civil rights with regard to health care is clear. Per Representative Christensen, African Americans and other citizens deserve health care as a matter of fundamental civil rights. Per Congressman Cummings, access to health care represents not a matter akin to capitalistic commodities whereby citizens opt in or out, but a fundamental civil right that cannot rightly be denied any American. Rather implicit in both statements is the notion that African Americans are discriminated against in terms of adequacy of treatment and in terms of access to the system. Even less explicit is the notion that the issue of universal access itself is an issue easily shunned by most of Congress given that the primary beneficiaries of universal health care represent a minority of the population. In the tradition of social prophecy, America is condemned for her failures. The policy image of civil rights in health care is more complex than simple, with numbers used to strategically define the problem (Stone 1989, 1997).

Education

President Bush's key domestic item, the No Child Left Behind Act, has become a favorite target of the Congressional Black Caucus. While the CBC focuses on fully funding the domestic initiative; closing educational achievement gaps between blacks and whites; and bridging the digital divide, there are few overt civil rights issues raised in the educational plank of the CBC legislative agendas from the 107th to the 109th Congresses. The CBC does, however, act as

social prophet, consonant with the black church tradition, here calling President Bush and Congress to task for their failure to fully fund the education initiative (Owens 2002):

Those in firm opposition are conspirators seeking to lull us into a deep sleep by insisting that the passage of No Child Left Behind legislation is all that is needed to improve education in this decade. Meanwhile, the President is refusing to support the funding promised for his own “most favored” legislation. The Congressional Black Caucus has the duty and responsibility to serve as the “whistleblower” (9).

In more strident civil rights vernacular, at the Annual Legislative Conference in 2004, a Focus Forum (featuring controversial remarks by Bill Cosby) revolved around the topic of “Educational Apartheid in the U.S.: Tracking Policies and Re-Segregation in America’s Schools”. In general, however, the language of education reform as regards the congressional agenda of the CBC is less explicit about the linkage between black educational achievement gaps and systemic discrimination. This is quite puzzling given that educational and sociological literature point to discrepancies in the educational system for black and white (for example, Kozol 1992).

The strongest language with regard to education found in the CBC’s very public legislative pronouncements over the past several terms relate back to *funding* for No Child Left Behind: “Under-funded federal education mandates only perpetuate existing inequalities” (Cummings, 2003). Why the Congressional Black Caucus does not utilize what appears a natural frame given the centrality of public education victories to the civil rights movement and the recent anniversary of the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education (1954)* decision remains a mystery. In 2003, the CBC even co-opted the language of Bush’s education bill to focus on the economic needs of African American families. While education was referenced in the *Leave No Family Behind Alternative Budget (2004)*, education was referenced primarily as the great equalizer for African American individuals and families vis-à-vis their white counterparts. While this emphasis on economic parity was certainly a key goal of the civil rights movement, the upper-middle class to upper-class status of the members of the Congressional Black Caucus may imbue them with a more mainstream view of the educational system given CBC members’ own successes in the educational system (current Chair Melvin Watt was educated at Yale Law School). Perhaps this is a partial explanation for the gap between black mass support of school vouchers and black elite opposition to the policy.

Economic Policy

Economic policy is not a mundane, technical consideration where the Congressional Black Caucus is concerned. Representative Major R. Owens describes the importance of the CBC’s *Leave No Family Behind Alternative Budget* for fiscal year 2004 in the following terms (Owens 2003):

The brand of African American genius that crafted and implemented the Civil Rights Movement has never been applied to the intense process of fighting to shape American Budget and Tax Policies. It is time to replicate the Civil Rights historic approach with many levels of innovative actions in motion at once. It is time to fully embrace the economic survival, prosperity and wealth accumulation challenge. We must Leave No Family Behind (8).

Owens appeals to African Americans by reminding them of the success of the movement and the propensity for a similar concentration of effort to transform the budgetary priorities of the United States.

The policy image of economic policy a la civil rights is buttressed by causal stories that emphasize the quantitative divide between black and white Americans (Cummings 2003):

The economic downturn has been especially hard on African American working families. African American unemployment is nearly twice the national average, and the weak labor market has caused the wage gap between African Americans and whites to widen...African American small business owners continue to confront unreasonable difficulties in achieving their fair share of government contracts...we stand firmly behind responsible economic stimulus measures (3).

‘Fair share’ might represent a benign reference, but more than likely refers to minority set-asides. The contention here by the Congressional Black Caucus is that fiscal and economic policy in the United States is irresponsible with regard to black economic interests, resulting in a racial gap between black and white employment and earning potential.

Environmental Policy

In an ingenious appeal for justice, Representative Barbara Lee calls for the 107th Congress to address the discriminatory aspects of environmental policy in the United States:

Environmental injustice grows not only out of poverty, but racism....Lower income communities and especially minority communities bear the life-long costs of industrial development while enjoying few of the benefits...Superfund sites that are underfunded; factories and plants that emit carcinogens under the protections of grandfather clauses; healthcare that is racially biased...all demand our attention and financial resources....Dr. King portrayed justice as a river. We can build on that metaphor and legacy: we can work to eliminate disparities at home and inequities abroad. Environmental justice cannot be dammed up; this darker side of the American inheritance must be addressed and remedied, and our children must be allowed to grow up in freedom, safety, and equality (14).

Since minority communities have been targeted for environmental dumping and other forms of pollution, Lee deems the remedy for environmental injustices the invocation of the civil rights paradigm.

William Clay (1993), a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus maintains that the propensity of the organization to transform politics rests on a continued emphasis upon the collective in the black community: “...we understand that the destiny of each of us is inextricably bound to the destiny of 32 million other black brothers and sisters, and that their struggle and our struggle are irrevocably tied one to the other” (353). Also necessary is “...unified support in...individual districts...and the will and determination of...black communities to insist that their white elected officials support the programmatic agenda of the (CBC)” (emphasis added, Clay 1993, 380). The civil rights causal story appears to be the most salient policy image of the Congressional Black Caucus, whatever the nature and content of the political issue.

‘Making Democracy Work’ for the People: The NAACP

“For all the widespread sympathy and support it has enjoyed in the black community, the NAACP has never been able to organize a mass base. Its membership has seldom included more than 2 percent of the black population” (Morris 1984, 15). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is the most recognizable of all African American civic institutions and among the most revered (see Harris 1999). The organization was founded in 1909 with a mandate to ‘secure these rights’ for the whole of American society, particularly black Americans. With an explicit civil rights mission and vision, this non-partisan organization seeks to “ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination” (www.naacp.org).

The objectives of the NAACP are action-oriented, placing the organization squarely within the controversies of the political and civic realm. As such, the organization publishes Legislative Priorities; Issue Briefs; Action Alerts and Issue Alerts; Federal Legislative Report

Cards. The following represents the coding and counting of recent press releases from the NAACP on issues that the organization has prioritized in recent congressional terms.

Analysis

Table 3. NAACP.

Press Release Year	Civil Rights	Labor	Health and Housing	Education	International	Social Security *	Other Domestic **	Internal Issues ***	Total
2001	28	5	1	5	1	0	7	41	88
2002	39	4	4	3	7	0	3	43	103
2003	20	11	4	4	3	0	3	25	70
2004	25	3	4	5	3	0	4	31	75
2005	24	2	0	3	1	2	1	37	70
Total	136	25	13	20	15	2	18	177	406
Mean	.33	.06	.03	.05	.04	.005	.04	.44	
Mean 2	.59	.11	.06	.09	.07	.01	.08	***	

❖ **Other Tactics**

- *Issue Briefs*
 - President Bush Proposes the Elimination of 60 Programs in 2005 Budget (February 23, 2004)
 - Discriminatory “Faith Based” Provision Retained by U.S. House of Representatives (February 26, 2004)

- *Action Alerts and Issue Alerts*
 - NAACP Supports H.R. 3809, The Civil Rights Act of 2004, The “Fairness Act” (April 26, 2004)
 - NAACP Urges U.S. House and Senate Members to Co-Sponsor The End Racial Profiling Act (February 25, 2004)

- *Legislative Priorities for the 109th Congress*
 - Civil Rights/Equal Opportunity/Racial Disparity/Criminal Justice Issues
 - Labor Issues
 - Health and Housing Issues
 - Education Issues
 - International Issues

- *Federal Legislative Report Card*
 - Key civil rights votes that progressed beyond the committee level

*Social Security was added to the code list given the salience of the privatization issue.

**Other Domestic programs include programs like transportation and other discretionary programs not included in the NAACP’s priorities, but which are nevertheless addressed by the organization.

***Internal Issues refers to those press releases which highlight organizational accomplishments (i.e. internal promotions). Mean 2 represents average press releases per category minus Internal Issues.

The NAACP categorizes as fundamental civil rights issues those related to civil rights, equal opportunity, racial disparity, and criminal justice. The Legislative Priorities of the 109th Congress demonstrate that recent political issues related to civil rights are inclusive of judicial nominations--“Equal Opportunity at the U.S. Supreme Court”; capital punishment--“Death Penalty Moratorium/Abolition”; and government funding of religious activity--“Eliminate Potential Discrimination in Faith-Based Initiatives”. With regard to the latter, the NAACP avers (Legislative Priorities 2004):

...The NAACP recognizes the crucial role faith based organizations have played throughout our nation’s history in addressing some of our nation’s most serious ills. Yet the NAACP is in opposition to the faith based initiative (sic) approach as presented by President Bush as it can result in legalized and federally funded discrimination.

...Unfortunately, the leadership of the US House of Representatives appears intent on lacing provisions into several individual bills that would allow faith-based institutions to discriminate against people because of their religion when implementing programs funded by federal taxpayers’ dollars while eliminating anti-discrimination safeguards. Specifically, they inserted this language into legislation reauthorizing a slew of job training programs, as well as bills reauthorizing the “Head Start” program and the Community Block Grants program.

In other words, the provisions were attached to legislation of essential importance to black Americans.

What is perhaps most remarkable about the NAACP’s Legislative Priorities is their consonance with the agenda of the Congressional Black Caucus. While each of the five legislative priority categories of the NAACP for the 109th Congress consists of related legislative issues:

- Civil Rights,
- Labor,
- Health and Housing,
- Education, and
- International,

this broader agenda mirrors that of the Congressional Black Caucus for the 109th Congress with its focus upon

- Education,
- Healthcare,
- Economic Policy,
- Justice,
- Social Security, and
- Foreign Policy.

To a real extent, this congruence provides qualitative evidence both of a collective black interest (Dawson 1994) and a collective black agenda in American politics. Whether black faces actually represent black interests is a horse of a different color.

An Indecent Proposal? The Faith-Based and Community Initiative and the Black Interest

The Faith-Based and Community Initiative affords the opportunity to explore the dynamics of black politics. African Americans collectively express greater support for public funding of faith-based social service delivery a la the Faith-Based and Community Initiative than any other group. While black mass support for the initiative is overwhelming (Pew Report 2001), black elites (both church and civic) express reticence toward this Bush plan. What do elite messages framed in civil rights reveal about the Faith-Based and Community Initiative as it relates to the black policy agenda and collective black interests?

While the welfare reform law of 1996 represented welfare retrenchment to many African Americans (the NAACP and other organizations decried the five year time limit among other

provisions), the Charitable Choice provision of the legislation allowing for religious-based providers of welfare-related social services to compete for federal funds was well-received by African-Americans generally (Bartkowski and Regis 2003). The Faith-Based and Community Initiative goes beyond the Charitable Choice provision to permit government funding of non-welfare related services on a competitive basis. A Pew Poll conducted in March 2001 indicates that an overwhelming 81% of African-Americans favor government funding of faith-based service efforts.¹

What is striking upon closer examination of the black population, however, is a chasm between the opinions of African-Americans as a group and their clerical leaders with regard to government funding of faith-based efforts. A recent survey of black pastors of black congregations reveals tepid support for such efforts with 46% of respondents agreeing with such support (8% strongly agreeing) and 52% of respondents disagreeing with such support (33% strongly disagreeing).² Given the conventional wisdom that black politics and the black church are inseparable, the considerable gap between the attitudes of the black masses and their church leaders represents a significant phenomenon worth exploring further.

The black church represents an indigenous source of black political activism. The Civil Rights movement originated in black civil society (Morris 1984) and continues to frame black politics (Smith 1996). The struggle for racial equality is central to the African American experience and contemporary black institutions reflect a continuing commitment to group goals (Dawson 1994; Harris 1999). The black church is the seminal institution of the black community and black pastors represent the crucial nexus between the black political and civic spheres.

Black politics writ large is fundamentally influenced by the relationship between black pastors and black politics. In many cases, church elites and civic elites are one and the same. Even where they differ, a symbiosis between the black church and black politics is a relative axiom and must be carefully considered in scholarly treatments of black politics.

The Faith-Based and Community Initiative was formally established by executive order on January 29, 2001, as one of the first domestic acts of the Bush presidency. It represents a significant policy change in terms of social service delivery given that it defines the black church as an arm of policy implementation. Emotive appeals to the black religious community by President Bush have been met by empirical retorts by some detractors as well as by emotive embraces by some supporters. Pressing for black support of the issue, Bush supported the House-Senate Majority Faith-Based Summit, an exclusive affair for select black pastors in April 2001; visited a black congregation in Wisconsin in July 2002 to promulgate his Faith-Based plan (Edsall 2002; Milbank 2002); and invited pastors and heads of religious organizations to the White House in March 2005 for a conference on the issue (Bumiller 2005).

What policy images contribute to the black political dynamic with regard to this policy issue? Do causal stories (Stone 1989, 1997) of civil rights contribute to agenda setting, agenda denial, or both with regard to black pastors and the Faith-Based and Community Initiative?

¹ The question asks whether the respondent favors, opposes or does not know with regard to "Allowing churches and other houses of worship to apply, along with other organizations, for government funding to provide social services such as job training or drug treatment counseling to people who need them". "Faith-Based Funding Backed, but Church-State Doubts Abound." Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, April 10, 2001.

² The question asks whether the respondent strongly agrees, agrees, doesn't know, disagrees, or strongly disagrees with "government funding of social services provided by churches". "The Public Influences of African-American Churches: Contexts and Capacities." A Report Submitted to the Pew Charitable Trusts by The Public Influences of African-American Churches Project The Leadership Center at Morehouse College, 2002.

President Bush

In a rhetorical coup, President Bush seems to have co-opted the civil rights frame. In reference to the Faith-Based and Community Initiative, the Bush administration casts a policy image by weaving a causal story that civil rights luminaries might envy: Faith-Based and Community Initiatives help heal the hurts of the black community by removing barriers to religious social service delivery at the level of black need and by eradicating discrimination in contracting via a level playing field for all (Unlevel Playing Field 2001; Rallying the Armies 2001). Such is the new manifesto for faith-based providers of services. Bush's appeals are replete with civil rights overtones and resonate with the broader black public. Black political and civic elites, however, smell a rat.

The NAACP

In 2001, the NAACP passed an emergency resolution opposing the Faith-Based and Community Initiative at its annual convention, citing as a reason the fact that the Initiative allows religious social service providers to discriminate on the basis of religion in hiring. In the 109th Congress, the elimination of "potential discrimination in Faith-Based Initiatives" represents a legislative priority in the civil rights category. A 2004 Issue Update of the NAACP betrays the group's major fear in a civil rights frame: "...faith-based organizations, some of whom, unfortunately, may use religious discrimination as a shield for racial or gender discrimination, will be allowed to legally discriminate against tax-paying Americans in the course of spending federal dollars."

The Congressional Black Caucus

In 2002, Representative Bobby Scott decried "The Promise of Cooperation and the Perils of Government Funding" at a Focus Forum of the Congressional Black Caucus' Annual Legislative Conference. He also introduced H.R. 2605 during the 108th Congress in an effort to "nullify the effect of the Bush Executive Order permitting employment discrimination with federal funds" (Scott 2003, 10). Crossing a threshold that is not so off limits in the black church in the first place, Scott (2002) extended his objection to black religious leaders, advising the Congress of National Black Churches to oppose the Faith-Based and Community Initiative:

We cannot accept funds from a government that will condone discrimination in the distribution of funds and services under the auspices of this legislation. The President's Faith-Based Initiative may be well intentioned, however, its implementation could have serious ramifications on hard-fought civil rights victories of the past" (10)

The Black Church

The three denominations explored here are all members of the Congress of National Black Churches, as are the five other historically black denominations. While none of the three denominations have issued proclamations against the Faith-Based and Community Initiative, those black denominations of the Pentecostal tradition seem most predisposed to favor the policy. As explored earlier, there is evidence that the Church of God in Christ is at least open to the policy initiative, if not resolutely in favor. The very public opposition of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. to the War in Iraq cannot be counted as opposition to the Faith-Based and Community Initiative. In fact, an early list of supporters of the Initiative included the Housing Convention of the NBC, USA, Inc (www.whitehouse.org). Given the social gospel orientation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, one might expect a natural affinity for government funding of faith-based social services, but the denomination is publicly rather silent on the issue.

The silence may emanate from precedent. Perhaps some black denominations reticence to fully embracing the Faith-Based and Community Initiative is due to difficulties encountered in delivering contracts for Great Society era programs (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990), Perhaps some

denominations are taking a wait-and-see attitude toward the policy while kinks related to administrative oversight and compliance are worked out in the short term implementation of the Initiative. Perhaps some denominations are leaving the decision to local churches rather than imposing a top-down denunciation of the Initiative.

Some black pastors have fully embraced the Initiative even if their denomination has not done the same. Dr. Floyd Flake, a former Congressman and an AME pastor is a prominent supporter and beneficiary of Faith-Based and Community Initiative. He is on the Board of Governors of The National Center for Faith-Based Initiative, an organization committed to inner city empowerment via wealth creation and collaborations between the church and economic sphere. A perusal of the organization's goals and mission indicate that the group seems more convinced that private investment in the black community is the primary route to revitalization. Nevertheless, the group is comprised of black pastors representing a cross-section of the United States, but primarily black denominations aligned with the Pentecostal and Holiness tradition. Bishop T.D. Jakes of the Potters House and Bishop Charles Blake of the West Angeles Church of God in Christ are other notable governors. While all twelve governors have not expressed public approval of the Faith-Based and Community Initiative, eight of the twelve members of the Board of Governors served on the Advisory Committee of the House-Senate Majority Faith-Based Summit in April 2001.

An evasive effort to dismantle welfare altogether. An authentic attempt to buttress the efforts of religious providers of social service providers. A political ploy to maintain and woo particular constituencies. The centerpiece of compassionate conservatism. The Faith-Based and Community Initiative has been billed all of the former. Whatever the motive, one key target and an essential element of the Bush administration's Faith-Based plan is the black church, a constituency that is generally neither attuned to nor impressed with the agendas of Republican presidents. Yet, the civil rights frame invoked by Bush to sell this Initiative may be working.

Conclusion and Future Research

The current study explores and raises new questions that may potentially challenge and affirm key aspects of the conventional wisdom of the black church and politics. Do black pastors set and interpret the black agenda with their causal stories (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Stone 1989, 1997)? Is the collective black agenda crumbling (Frymer 1999; Smith 2000)? Is the documented black proxy heuristic declining (Dawson 1994)? Is there any evidence of a new heuristic? Are new theological strands and new churches in the black milieu a source of increasing individualism and diverging black politics (Cone 1969; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Harris 2000)? Was the civil rights movement a rare exception with regard to black politics (Morris 1984)?

While these questions remain for a future research agenda, several things are clear. The confluence of black church and black culture renders a tidy separation between church and state impossible in the black milieu. This is evident in the voice of the Congressional Black Caucus, the conscience of the Congress, which continues to speak prophetically in Pharaoh's house. This is clear as the NAACP continues to speak truth to power from civil society. The black pulpit continues to be a source of both spiritual and political messages and the seat of the development of black civic skills (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). The black community's religious zeal (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990); black theology and black power (Cone 1969); and a shared culture and consciousness (Levine 1977; Harris 1999; Harris-Lacewell 2005), render the civil rights frame both accessible and salient to black politics with its continued emphasis on the collective, but in the realm of real politick, it may render black interests captive to the majority.

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