



**HARVARD Kennedy School**

JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

# HARVARD JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY

VOLUME 16, 2009–2010

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Reawakening Baptist Town  
Finding Plan B  
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State Representative Bakari Sellers  
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AN HKS STUDENT PUBLICATION

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ISSN# 1081-0463



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editorial board of the *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy* would like to thank the following individuals for their generous support and contributions to the publication of this issue:

Richard Parker, faculty advisor  
Martha Foley, publisher  
Lori Goldstein, copy editor  
Diane Sibley, graphic designer  
Ace Creative, production  
David Ellwood, Dean of the  
John F. Kennedy School of Government  
Kennedy School Student Government

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The *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy* is a student-run, nonpartisan scholarly review published annually by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Our mission is to educate and provide leadership that improves the quality of public policies affecting the African American community. In so doing, we hope to further the economic, social, and political empowerment of African Americans.

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- An electronic copy of the article on a formatted CD
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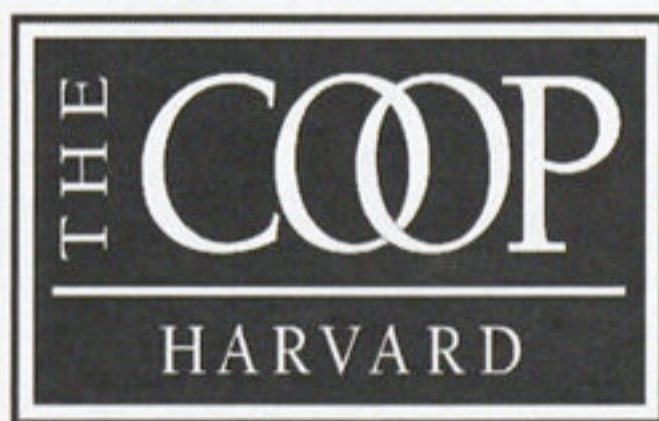
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## EDITOR'S REMARKS

The election of President Barack Obama embodies the significant progress made by African American people in the United States since emancipation. Nonetheless, some African Americans are still impoverished and living in disadvantaged rural and urban communities. We are all too familiar with racial inequalities in rates of arrest, high school dropout, unemployment, and HIV/AIDS morbidity. Many of these inequalities are long-standing and pervasive but not immovable.

While this volume of the *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy*, "What's Working for Black America?: Strategies for Sustained Success," documents some challenges that impact the Black community nationally, its primary purpose is to provide solution-oriented approaches to those challenges. Focusing on community development, education, politics, and public health, this sixteenth volume aims to facilitate a discourse among practitioners, policy makers, and academics regarding the many types of capital available within the Black community to effect change.

We begin with an examination of how social capital impacts the policies and programs that local elected officials champion while in office. Specifically, Ashley Reid tests the hypothesis that local elected officials' voluntary political action reflects the purpose and mission of their social networks. Michael Wolking and Ololade Olakanmi discuss the continuing efforts of a partnership between local residents and Harvard University graduate students to revitalize a neighborhood in Greenwood, Mississippi. Amarachuku C. Enyia explores the challenge of school desegregation but also makes a case for school districts across the country under consent decrees to abandon previous plans and start again.

The journal is also proud to feature other articles and commentary. Desmond U. Patton and David W. Johnson study how community violence impacts adolescents' access to social capital and offer recommendations for leveraging resources within communities. Kate Krontiris and Christopher Watler poignantly describe principles of problem-solving justice and efforts by community organizations to reduce recidivism in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. In addition, Lorraine Dean and Keon L. Gilbert review the evidence on the association between social capital and health among African Americans.

In addition, we present two interviews with trailblazers in politics and sports as well as a book review. South Carolina State Representative Bakari Sellers offers his perspective on several topics, from reflections on legislative accomplishments

to an interesting critique of “post-racialism.” Charles Woodson, a member of the Green Bay Packers and winner of the 1997 Heisman Trophy, speaks with the journal about a donation to the University of Michigan’s Mott Children’s and Women’s Hospital and the importance of giving. Finally, Ashley Farmer critiques Gwen Ifill’s *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama*, especially embedded assumptions about gender and race/ethnicity.

The publication of the 2010 *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy* is indebted to everyone involved in its evolution. The commitment, ingenuity, and diligence of this year’s journal staff are unmatched. Without them this would not have been possible. My sincerest gratitude is extended to our publisher, faculty advisor, and copy editor for their assistance and encouragement. Lastly, special thanks are also extended to our readers. Again, thank you.

The goal of this year’s journal is not to simply tally up the persistent inequalities experienced by African Americans. Rather, the focus is to draw attention to strategies that mobilize existing capital—social, human, and financial—within the Black community. It is our hope that we inspire you all to join together in crafting pioneering solutions.

Timothy Cunningham  
Editor-in-Chief  
*Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy*

## The Political Implication of Social Capital

by Ashley Reid

Ashley Reid is a Ph.D. candidate in the University of Michigan's joint doctoral program in public policy and political science. She earned a master's degree in political science from the University of Michigan in 2008 and a bachelor's degree in economics from Spelman College in 2006. Reid has applied her training in statistical and qualitative methods to research at the National Poverty Center and the Rackham Graduate School's Office of Graduate Student Success and in support of the vice president of government relations at the University of Michigan. Her dissertation focuses on the impact of social capital on the programs and policies local officials champion while in office, with particular emphasis on the influence of racial and gender identity.

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### ABSTRACT

Using interviews with members of elected bodies in two cities, I find support for my hypothesis that local elected officials' voluntary political action—measured by committees on which officials serve as well as programs and policies initiated and supported—reflects the purpose and mission of their social networks. Officials are generally aware of this connection, and even those who are not will leverage resources obtained from social and civic

participation in an official capacity. Demographic characteristics play the dual role of influencing both the social capital that officials bring to their position and potential alliances formed during the campaign phase.

### INTRODUCTION

Politicians do not live in a vacuum. Their lives span more than their political commitments, affiliations, and even careers. The line between personal and political life is particularly thin for local elected officials. While U.S. congressmen are often away from their districts for the majority of the year and have time to strategically develop their “home style,” local politicians do not have this advantage (Fenno 1978). Local elected officials interact with their constituents on a daily basis. They must work, play, and volunteer with the same people they serve. By having multiple roles within the same community, local officials are connected to various networks that affect their personal lives and political careers. This article explores the intersection between the two spheres. More specifically, I examine how social capital impacts the policies and programs that local elected officials champion while in office.

Social capital, a concept originating in the field of sociology, refers to the resources and value received from maintaining individual connections within organizations, as well as links between organizations that form broader social networks. These networks can be composed of a variety of formal and informal institutions, such as churches, bowling leagues, and gardening clubs. Social capital can also be attained through participation in groups that do not have a specific focus on social or recreational activity. For example, one can build

networks though relationships with people in the same labor union or professional society, as well as through parent-teacher associations in schools (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000; Sampson 2005).

Like physical capital and human capital, social capital has also been shown to play an important role in improving economic, community, health, and educational outcomes. In fact, it has been demonstrated that social capital can improve one's life opportunities overall (Dika and Singh 2002; Putnam 2000). However, the way in which social capital impacts politicians' activity in office and policy outcomes has not been explicitly considered.

As I will discuss in detail, literature on the subject of social capital has shown that social capital can aid politicians in their campaigns to get into office. And that is where the story generally ends. This article considers what happens once a political candidate becomes a political official. Does the social capital that helps officials win their seat impact the work that they do while they are there?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Modern theoretical definitions of the phrase "social capital" are attributed to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and American sociologist James Coleman (Portes 2000; Lin 1999). Bourdieu focused on distinguishing social capital from economic and cultural capital. One defining feature of social capital, in Bourdieu's view, is that people actively cultivate social capital and form networks in anticipation of the positive benefits that they will bring later (Bourdieu 1980). This differs from Coleman, who focuses more on the psychological foundation of the networks, such as reciprocity and

trust. Coleman does not specify that people are interested in other long-term benefits that can occur as a result of belonging to these networks (1988). Despite some inconsistencies in how these sociologists view the motivations for obtaining social capital, both definitions center around the resources accessed in social networks.

Social capital does not impact all groups equally. Just as there are disparities in human capital and economic capital, the literature on social capital highlights that individuals and groups also have inequalities in their social capital and the resulting benefits experienced. Specifically, social capital is distributed differently among the types of networks to which people have access. Since people have variations in their networks, then this naturally causes some people to have connections that are more extensive and diverse than others. This is particularly salient along the lines of gender and race.

In regard to gender differences in forming social capital, Gwen Moore (1990) finds that men's networks have fewer familial and neighborhood relationships than those of women. However, men tend to have larger networks overall, as their connections include more coworkers, advisers, and friends. The disparity between the size and heterogeneity of the groups to which different sexes belong is exacerbated when women—who culturally serve the role of the caretaker in a family—have children under the age of six (Moore 1990). Beyond the types of relationships that serve as the foundation for each group's social capital, there also tends to be gender homogeneity within networks, as men tend to be less integrated in women's organizations and vice versa (Brass 1985).

To examine the situation using a racial as opposed to a gendered lens, Blacks experience inequalities in social capital both externally with Whites and also internally within their own race. Unlike with Whites, the networks of Blacks tend to consist less of formal, professional ties and instead include informal connections with friends, family, and neighbors. This is particularly true for Blacks living in urban areas (Martineau 1977). St. Clair Drake (1965) also finds hierarchical differences in social capital within the Black community based on education and profession. The Black middle class tends to form social ties through membership and participation in churches and social clubs. The members of the "Black elite," which consists primarily of upper-class professionals and businessmen, also join exclusive fraternities and sororities. While Blacks with a higher socioeconomic status have access to the same networks to which Blacks with lower education and income have access, Blacks in lower classes are limited in their ability to attain access to more restricted groups.

Nan Lin finds that differences in human capital (defined as education and experiences that contribute to skills and knowledge), initial positions (defined as parental status or prior job), and the extensity of one's ties to one's networks impact a person's "accessed social capital" (Lin 1999, 471). This is an important concept because the amount of social capital to which one has access can impact his or her ability to achieve positions of authority, occupational opportunities, and earnings. To use the example of race, the Black elite has more *accessed social capital* than lower and middle class Blacks. In a follow-up article, Lin takes this observation a step further and posits that inequality in types of

social capital contributes to social inequality more broadly (Lin 2000). (Note: However, for the scope of this article, it is more important to note that these differences in social networks and social capital exist along gender and racial lines.)

Differences in social capital and social networks also have implications for political participation. Using public opinion data largely from the 1990 Citizen Participation Study, Nancy Burns et al. (2001) examine gender disparities in political participation. The authors find that although men and women participate roughly equally in activities including voting, working on campaigns, attending protests, and serving on campaigns, men are more likely to contribute to campaigns, belong to a political organization, and contact government officials. Men often acquire their civic skills in the workplace or in leadership roles within organizations, and the authors find that men are more interested in and knowledgeable about politics in general. For the women who do participate at greater rates and are engaged more politically, the authors attribute this to having a higher consciousness about the role of gender and being more aware of gender biases both in the private and political realm.

More broadly, scholars have found that political participation is a function of resources, interest, and mobilization (Verba et al. 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Given differences in education and income between Blacks and Whites, Blacks often possess fewer financial and civic resources in comparison to the financial and civic resources of Whites. Therefore, Blacks are mobilized less by political elites on an individual basis. In the context of the civil

rights movement, Blacks did possess enough collective resources and interest to participate in government and to generate responsive policies. Nonetheless, the conditions that made the movement successful—organizational strength, positive government response to specific racial needs, and feelings of efficacy in the Black community—are not present in today's age (McAdam 1982).

Transitioning from the perspective of the impact of social capital on the electorate to its impact on officials, most research tends to discuss incumbency, campaign contributions, and newspaper endorsements without explicitly mentioning social capital. While most scholars examine these factors for congressional and state legislatures, Timothy Krebs (1998) researches the impact of the aforementioned variables on city council elections. He finds them to be as important as they are in campaigns of officials at higher levels of government. As cities tend to be more homogenous in terms of party affiliation, voters must use other factors to determine whether or not to support nonincumbent candidates. It seems reasonable to ascertain that social capital and networks would serve as a way for candidates to collect campaign contributions and endorsements. In fact, name familiarity has been found to be a key factor in improving the electoral likelihood of first-time candidates (Lieske 1989).

Since Blacks' social networks tend to be less professional and extensive, Blacks are presumed to be at a disadvantage because they lack the resources to secure some of the contributions and endorsements to which their White opponents have access. However, Theodore Arrington and Gerald Ingalls (1984) find that although there are differences in campaign giving between

Blacks and Whites, Blacks' campaigns are not underfunded. It is simply that the donation patterns are different. Blacks may give less money to campaigns, but the authors state that "Black candidates are as well-financed as whites because black contributors concentrate their funds exclusively on the small number of black candidates" (Arrington and Ingalls 1984, 583).

Beyond the campaign stage, race and gender differences influence voting behavior during elections. Monika Mcdermott (1998) found that voters use demographic cues as a heuristic in making voting decisions. Voters will particularly use race and gender as cues about a candidate's ideological and issue positions when they possess limited knowledge of other candidate information. Blacks and women are stereotyped as being more liberal than White males. In regard to issues, voters think that Blacks care more about topics that affect minority rights and that women care more about good governance. In low-information elections, most voters use these stereotypes to determine which candidate is most like them.

However, this is where the story generally ends. Despite the evidence of the impact of social capital on access to social networks, political participation, and elections, there has not been a systematic study of how social capital affects the behavior of local officials while in office. Stanley Renshon (2000) develops a theory of how social capital can affect one's "leadership capital," which in turn leads to improved performance of a democracy as a whole. Nonetheless, Renshon focuses predominantly on personal characteristics, such as competence and integrity, and how these can be aggregated to benefit the greater good of a governing

body. He only considers social capital in relation to the degree to which it can influence how a person and an elected group govern and their success in doing so. Conversely, I argue that the social capital officials have prior to obtaining their political position directly impacts not only *how* they lead but also *what* they choose to undertake in office.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The literature on social capital provides a firm foundation as to how people obtain social capital and also presents examples of how the networks in which politicians are involved can assist their electoral prospects. From this point, I construct a theoretical framework as to how social capital continues to impact politicians once the ballots are cast and the elected position has been secured. In this section, I will detail the assumptions underlying my theory, describe the dependent variable and independent variables involved in my model, and develop four hypotheses about the relationships between the pertinent variables that I test and discuss in the remainder of this article.

#### Assumptions

Before I get into the specific details of the variables and my predictions regarding their relationships, it is important to discuss my assumptions. I am basing my hypotheses and research design on the belief that the following five assumptions hold:

- A1: Local elected officials possess social capital. Although social capital has been declining in the United States overall, those who run for a local elected office must gain a base of supporters to secure campaign financing, endorsements, and votes on election day.

Involvement in various organizations aids this process.

- A2: Not all organizational involvement is strategic. Although officials have an electoral incentive to stay involved in their communities once elected, the initial decision to join organizations as well as consideration of the types of organizational involvement and affiliations was probably not made with the primary goal of being elected to public office. Given that local officials often work for little, if any, monetary compensation, they are likely to have a vested interest in their community and a commitment to service beyond the personal and political benefits of becoming involved.

- A3: Politicians draw upon their social capital in order to get elected to office. The focus in the literature is primarily how local officials garner endorsements and campaign contributions. I extend this to assume that people without the political or monetary means to directly support a campaign will volunteer their time in other activities that aid the electoral process, including making signs, canvassing neighborhoods, and driving people to the polls on election day.

- A4: Officials also maintain involvement in various organizations while they are in office. In addition to leveraging involvement in social networks to get elected, current incumbents have an incentive to remain involved in organizations. Continued involvement in organizations and networks serves the dual purpose of signaling to constituents that the official remains committed to the community in a capacity beyond his or her official duty, and it also enables the official to stay abreast of issues that are important to his or her constituents.

- A5: Officials are unconstrained in their voluntary political behavior. I realize

that the interests and expertise of other members, seniority of the official, vacancies on committees, and structural limitations in place will limit some actions. However, in the interests of constructing a parsimonious model, I will not attempt to explain these complexities in this study.

### DEPENDENT VARIABLE

The dependent variable in this analysis is voluntary political activity that local officials choose to perform while in office. As a public servant, some duties that local officials have are mandatory. By focusing on voluntary actions and choices made, we can gauge which issues politicians feel are important.

For example, an official may be required to serve on a committee, yet he or she may be able to choose the committee on which he or she serves. (Note: See Assumption 5 for a more detailed description of how freedom in political behavior is treated in this study.) The choice made tells us something about the preferences of the official. In addition, another consideration and indicator of preference would be what members *do* on the committee. Do they simply show up to meetings and vote when appropriate? Or do members initiate policies and develop programs in their roles? The latter shows a greater commitment and interest to the mission and goals of the committee as it involves using more resources, such as time and expertise.

Therefore, participation in voluntary activities as well as the choices that officials make in those voluntary positions are the most appropriate places from which to begin an analysis of the connection between the personal and political lives of elected officials. The specific actions that I consider in this

study are the committees on which officials serve, the programs and policies that local officials have initiated, and the programs and policies that local officials support.

There are four reasons why I chose to examine local officials, as opposed to congressional representatives. The first is that local elected officials generally have smaller constituencies, while congressional districts are larger and have become larger over time. Granted, there are some small districts and there are some big cities, but generally local officials are serving fewer people. Second, local officials have more frequent and extensive interaction with their constituents. Congressmen are physically removed from their constituencies for the majority of the year. Therefore, their interactions with constituents are often in more formal settings (Fenno 1978). In addition, given the first two conditions, there is likely more overlap between the personal and professional roles in which local officials participate. Finally, local elected officials are primarily concerned with local issues and the agenda is more limited in scope. This is not to say that congressmen will not utilize social capital to inform their behavior and support. In fact, Richard Hall (1996) finds that representatives participate more when they have a personal interest in the issue being debated. Nonetheless, the agenda for members of Congress is broader and potentially less relevant to a congressional representative's specific district.

### INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The primary independent variable in this study is social capital. The breadth of social capital is measured as the organizations to which people belong outside of their elected office. However, it is becom-



ing more difficult to distinguish between groups that are traditionally social and groups that are primarily civic in nature (Sampson 2005). As there is no general consensus—as well as the presence of noted controversy—on how to measure social capital, I have decided to use a definition rooted in the notion of civil society more broadly (Portes 2000). Therefore, my definition of social capital includes any nonelected, unpaid involvement in social or civic organizations. (Note: Another stipulation of this definition is that the member has to be active in the organization. For example, some organizations simply require paying dues to be considered an “active” member. I specifically ask about involvement that requires more than an official membership.) The examination of officials’ organizational memberships and affiliations can lead to an understanding of issues that are important to people’s personal lives and social networks.

Furthermore, although people can build social capital even through having loose ties to an organization, it is important to consider the organizations to which people are most committed (Granovetter 1973). I define the level of commitment based on the time that people spend working for an organization or involved in organizational activities. Dedicating more time indicates a greater commitment to a particular group and thusly that group’s goals and purpose.

A third independent variable is how involved politicians are in personal and professional networking activities. While social networking encompasses a range of activities, I focus on active, rather than passive, social networking activities, including making public appearances, writing for newsletters, blogging, and maintaining a Web site. Passive network-

ing activities would include things such as receiving newsletters or being on e-mail listservs. Although these activities may or may not actually impact the knowledge that politicians have regarding community concerns, active networking indicates making a greater effort at staying engaged with constituents.

Finally, I believe that demographic characteristics will impact the activities that officials perform while in office. The two demographic characteristics on which I focus are gender and race. Since women are socialized differently than men, Blacks have fewer monetary and civic resources than Whites, and both Blacks and women have networks that differ from those of White males, I believe that these systematic differences will, in turn, impact the political action of Blacks and women who hold elected positions. (Note: Socioeconomic status is not considered in the analysis. Although given the literature on governance, I expect there to be systematic differences between the education and income levels of elected officials and their constituents, I do not expect there to be a great deal of heterogeneity between elected officials [Dahl 1961; Schattschneider 1960]).

## HYPOTHESES

To summarize, I believe that organizational involvement, level of commitment to organizations, participation in active networking in both personal and professional capacities, and demographic characteristics will impact the voluntary activities in which local elected officials engage while in office. More broadly, *local officials’ voluntary political actions in office will reflect the mission and purpose of their social organizations and networks*. I believe this relationship will be expressed in terms of commitment, awareness,

leverage, and the influences of identity. The following four hypotheses respectively describe each relationship:

- H1 (Commitment): Organizations to which officials dedicate the most time have the greatest influence on voluntary action, particularly programs and policies that are initiated.
- H2 (Awareness):
  - Politicians are generally aware of the connection between their personal and professional commitments and the impact that their organizational affiliations have on their professional actions.
  - Participation in networking activities will make this connection even more salient.
- H3 (Leverage): Politicians will use the resources and expertise gained from social organizations within a professional capacity.
- H4 (Identity): Race and gender will play a moderating role, as they will systematically influence the types of resources—economic, social, and civic—that people have and thusly the social networks to which people belong. This difference in social networks and social capital will influence policies and programs that women and racial minorities champion, as well as their choice of committee membership.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### Data

To test my hypotheses, I conducted in-depth, qualitative interviews with local elected officials in two cities in the Midwest. In order to encourage more candid responses, I agreed to keep personal identifying information confidential. Therefore, I will refer to the cities

simply as City A and City B, and I will use demographic information to describe the officials. I interviewed elected officials, including the mayor and members of the city council, in City A. I interviewed members of the board of education in City B. (Note: Originally, I wanted to include the board of education in City A. However, I was only able to secure one interview. I used this interview as a pilot to test my questionnaire and altered the design to promote a more natural flow of conversation. The findings from this interview were not used in my results.)

I used data from the U.S. Census Bureau to construct the overview of relevant demographic information for both cities provided in Table 1. There are a number of similarities between the two municipalities. For example, both municipalities are relatively small cities in terms of population. In addition, the municipalities are similar in terms of household size, median household income, and per capita income.

The cities exhibit differences in racial composition, college education, and poverty rate. City A is a majority-minority city, meaning that more than half of the city is non-White. City B has almost twice as many people over the age of twenty-five with a bachelor's degree, however, the percentage of people with college degrees in both cities is higher than the U.S. average of 27 percent. Despite the high levels of education, City B's poverty rate is nearly double that of City A.

Table 1 — Demographics of City A and City B

City Characteristics	City A	City B
Population, 2006 estimate	76,090	113,206
White persons, 2000	38.8%	74.7%
Black persons, 2000	54.2%	8.8%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, 2000	0.2%	0.3%
Asian persons, 2000	3.1%	11.9%
Persons reporting two or more races, 2000	3.0%	3.1%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, 2000	1.2%	3.3%
High school graduates, percent of persons age 25+, 2000	87.3%	95.7%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2000	36.7%	69.3%
Persons per household, 2000	2.27	2.22
Median household income, 1999	\$51,802	\$46,299
Per capita money income, 1999	\$28,096	\$26,419
Persons below poverty, 1999	7.4%	16.6%

In addition to the cities being relatively alike on a number of dimensions, they share another similarity that makes them especially appropriate for this study, which is that there is demographic diversity among elected officials. I purposely chose to interview elected officials at the city level in City A and board of education trustees in City B

because these groups exhibit racial and gender diversity. Of the elected officials in City A, four are White men, two are White women, two are Black men, and two—one of whom is the mayor—are Black women. The board of education in City B is composed of two White men, two White women, and three Black women. Given the demographic composition of the elected bodies, I was able to hold job description and community represented “constant” while varying race and/or gender of the politician to study how different groups utilize social capital and in order to test my fourth hypothesis.

To measure my dependent variable of voluntary actions that officials take while in office, I asked questions about committee involvement, program and policy support, as well as program and policy initiatives taken while in office. To measure my independent variables, I asked questions about organizational involvement across a variety of categories, including community service and volunteer, educational, family-oriented, professional, political advocacy, recreational, and religiously affiliated involvement. I also asked officials to which organization they committed the most time. For participation in networking activities, I listed a variety of the aforementioned active networking activities and asked politicians to tell me if they participated in any. Although I did not specifically ask the gender of the interviewee, I did ask the respondent to self-identify his or her race.

## Methods

I contacted officials by e-mail. In the e-mail, I stated that I was researching how involvement in social organizations impacts how local elected officials structure electoral campaigns, develop

political platforms, decide which programs and policies to support, and maintain relationships with constituents in general. Given the recent news headlines about corruption and misconduct in office in Detroit and Illinois (White and Williams 2008; Willis 2009), I wanted to minimize answers driven by social desirability. By asking about the entire political process, I had the opportunity to gain greater detail about each respondent while simultaneously checking the validity of my assumptions. This tactic also enabled me to establish a rapport with the respondent.

I conducted all of the interviews between February 2009 and March 2009. I interviewed all of the officials from City A by telephone, and I conducted face-to-face interviews with officials from City B. I used the same questionnaire to minimize response bias due to changes in the order or wording of questions, as well as to allow for comparisons across groups when appropriate. The length of the interviews ranged from approximately forty-five minutes to just over an hour.

I have interviewed four elected officials from City A and four board of education trustees from City B to date. Of the eight officials interviewed, there are three White men, three Black women, one White woman, and one Black man represented. The ages of the respondents range from forty to seventy with a median age of fifty-eight for officials in City A and fifty-two in City B. All of the officials interviewed in City A indicate that they have a yearly household income of greater than \$100,000. All of the respondents in City B have yearly household incomes of more than \$50,000, and two respondents report incomes that exceed \$100,000. All of the respondents from both cities have at least a bachelor's degree. One elected

official in City A has a doctoral degree. In City B, three board of education trustees have advanced degrees; one official has a master's degree, another has an M.B.A., and a third has completed a doctoral degree. The fact that elected officials have greater levels of education and higher income than their constituents was not only anticipated but is also consistent with classic literature on governance (Dahl 1961; Schattschneider 1960).

Two officials from City A declined to be interviewed, four councilmen simply did not respond to my initial or follow-up requests for an interview, and one interview is pending. Nonetheless, I was able to obtain information on these officials from their official biographies on City A's government Web site. In City B, one trustee declined. Some information about the officials from City B was discussed in interviews with other trustees. In both cases of the online biographies and colleague observations, the data is not as rich and hence the references to these data will be kept to a minimum.

## RESULTS

The data produced a great deal of support for my overall theoretical framework. I found evidence confirming all of my hypotheses. However, as I will discuss later in this section, awareness and identity were operationalized in a more sophisticated fashion than I had originally anticipated. These findings led me to expand my original model to consider the impact of an official's electoral support base as a moderating variable between social capital and voluntary political action while in office.

## ASSUMPTIONS

As I stated in the methods section of my research design, some of the questions I asked in the interview were relatively unrelated to the direct relationship between social capital and political behavior. However, these questions served to test the validity of my assumptions, as well as build a rapport with officials. Four of my assumptions were confirmed. All of the officials stated that they were currently active, beyond simply paying dues, in multiple organizations. When discussing how they originally became involved in politics and how they structured their campaigns, several officials mentioned how they drew upon both current and former networks for monetary or other campaign support. In addition, most of the officials explicitly stated that their interest and involvement in politics evolved over time and that their social capital facilitated that involvement, instead of political involvement being an end goal.

There is mixed support for my last assumption that politicians are unconstrained in their voluntary political behavior. While both groups have established committees and participation is contingent partially upon vacancies, local officials have the ability to pursue their own interests through their positions. They are not limited to their specific committee positions and often stay aware of and participate in meetings on issues beyond their mandatory elected duties.

As for the results of my hypotheses, I found some degree of support for social capital impacting the behavior of local officials through commitment, awareness, leverage, and identity. Since the sample size of those interviewed is relatively

small and the results are similar, I will discuss both bodies together.

### H1: Commitment

As far as commitment, in five of the eight interviews, I found that organizations and causes to which a respondent was most committed in their personal lives impacted their political behavior. For example, one board of education trustee noted that she was on the executive board of her neighborhood association (Interview: City B\_BOE\_4). She related the story of how she has seen her neighborhood decline economically in the nearly thirty years that she has lived in her house. Over time, the children became “the darkest, poorest, and least respected in the school” until eventually the district’s lines were redrawn and the neighborhood was assigned to a school that was both farther away and had a poor academic record. When asked which policies she most supported, she noted that she has pushed the notion of addressing more flexible school reassignment for children from disadvantaged neighborhoods.

In another case, a White trustee adopted two Latino children and subsequently became involved in various ethnic and culturally oriented organizations. Having grown up in racially homogenous community, he took advantage of an opportunity to serve on an equity audit committee because he wanted to “know who to call if [his] children faced discrimination” (Interview: City B\_BOE\_2). This experience opened his eyes to much race and class matter in an academic environment. He maintained his involvement in these organizations even after his children finished high school. As a member of the board of education, he is dedicated to

closing the achievement gap between underrepresented groups and Whites.

This does not just occur in community and familial involvement. The city treasurer of City A acquired most of his social capital through professional networks and used them to start a program where he holds two sessions a week giving practical financial advice to residents of the city and holding roundtables about financial concerns (Interview: City A\_CC\_4). Two officials stated that they had the largest commitments to groups—one being a church and the other a sorority—whose political agenda was not specifically defined (Interview: City A\_CC\_2; City B\_BOE\_3).

## H2: Awareness

With regard to my hypothesis about politicians being aware of the connection, I found that the officials interviewed do acknowledge the overlap between their personal and professional commitments. However, there was not support for the second part of my hypothesis that actively participating in networking activities made the connection even more salient. This second finding could be due to the fact that almost all of the officials interviewed acknowledged the connection. Therefore, isolating the impact of networking activities would be challenging in this sample size. In addition, actively participating in more formal networking activities may not even be necessary. When asked how he kept in touch with constituents, one councilman jokingly began his reply by stating, “I go to the grocery store” (Interview: City A\_CC\_1). Although he elaborated on his answer with more formal means of communication, all of the officials emphasized that people did approach

them in a variety of places when they were “off duty.”

Regardless of the role that networking may or may not play, seven of the eight officials interviewed responded affirmatively when asked if any of the organizations that they belonged to either expects or would like them to advance the mission of the organization through their official position. The officials provided various examples of how this was communicated—from policy suggestions to explicit, detailed statements about what needed to be done. In the case of one member of City B’s board of education who belongs to a group supporting special needs students with developmental disabilities, her organization coordinated her campaign because “they were sick and tired of issues being ignored. One of [them] needed to be on the board” (Interview: City B\_BOE\_1).

Conversely, the mayor of City A stated that she explicitly had a conversation with her groups to “nip any [expectations] in the bud” before it began because it would cross ethical lines (Interview: City A\_CC\_2). Furthermore, one councilwoman in City A declined to participate in an interview by stating, “I doubt that I can help you, inasmuch as I do not use ‘social or civic organizations’ to advance my *political* strategy” (from e-mail correspondence with author on 10 February 2009; emphasis in original).

## H3: Leverage

Nonetheless, whether the officials were aware of the connection or not, all of them leveraged the resources and expertise gained from their social capital in a professional capacity. For some, the connection was more in regard to administrative and interpersonal skills learned, such as the ability to organize

and garner support for issues (Interview: City A\_CC\_3; City B\_BOE\_2; City B\_BOE\_3). Other officials found that the connection gave them greater insight and knowledge of their constituents' needs and desires (Interview: City B\_BOE\_3; City B\_BOE\_4).

Ironically, the clearest example of leveraging resources and expertise comes from the councilwoman who declined the interview because she said she kept her political and personal lives separate. According to her official biography, she spent several decades of her life rallying around various environmental issues—organizing a grassroots effort in her community to prevent the building of an expressway through a wetland area, starting other environmental awareness and protection groups, and serving on the board of a number of environmental conservation councils and coalitions. In her tenure on City A's council, she has initiated several policies and been key in enacting a number of ordinances related to protecting the wildlife and wilderness of City A.

#### H4: Identity

Perhaps the results from my final hypothesis examining identity are the most interesting. Consistent with both the literature and my fourth hypothesis, I found that demographic variables, particularly race, influenced the social networks to which local officials belong. Church and religious affiliation proved to play a large role as—in the five interviews in which the issue was raised—officials went to racially homogenous churches (Interview: City A\_CC\_1; City A\_CC\_2; City A\_CC\_4; City B\_BOE\_2; City B\_BOE\_3). In addition, all of the women interviewed belonged to the National League of Women Voters; all of the Blacks

I interviewed belonged to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (in Interview: City B\_BOE\_2, a White male official indicated that he was a member of the NAACP but only participated through paying dues); and the mayor of City A indicated that she belonged to a Black sorority.

However, despite my prediction, this difference in social capital did not directly translate to a difference in political behavior. In relation to my second hypothesis, I found that politicians are aware of the resources and expertise gained through their organizations. In my interview questions about how politicians determined their campaign strategy, I found that they are also aware of the groups to which they do not have access and thus will seek ways to obtain a link. In three cases, this link was exhibited in forming an alliance with another political candidate of a different race and/or gender. If the alliance was successful, then members supported the policy initiatives of the candidate with whom they ran. Although members prioritized advancing their own agenda over that of their running mate once they were elected, they still supported the other member's policy and program initiatives.

In the case of City A, a Black councilman ran for election multiple times without success. Prior to his third attempt, a White incumbent confided that he was nervous about losing his seat as he had won the last election by a narrow majority. The incumbent thought that it would be mutually beneficial for the two of them to run together and broaden their support base. In exchange for arranging for the incumbent to speak at his church and informally endorsing him at meetings of his predominantly Black organiza-

tions, the Black councilman gained support from the White incumbent's current endorsements and professional connections. Both men won seats on the council during the next election (Interview: City A\_CC\_1).

In a more elaborate case involving the board of education in City B, in the early 2000s, members of the community were upset with a conservative board that they believed to be nonresponsive, not cohesive, and unfair in its treatment of school administrators, particularly a Black female superintendent who was removed from office. In the next election the lone Black female incumbent on the board teamed up with a White male to run a joint campaign. The exchange this time was that the man benefited from her endorsements and again gained access to predominantly Black groups, while the woman gained access to his professional organizations, social groups, and financial support for their joint campaign. Both of them were elected.

In the next election, only the White male's term was expiring. However, this time he campaigned jointly with a White female. The Black woman endorsed both candidates and arranged for them to speak at her church and at meetings of her various groups. After the election, all three members of the "coalition" had seats (Interview: City B\_BOE\_1; City B\_BOE\_2).

Although I did not predict this relationship, it is not surprising given the political science literature on biracial coalition building. According to Rufus Browning et al. (1984), Blacks and White liberals can successfully form a coalition to challenge older, conservative groups. The authors state that "[l]iberals on race issues are very different from conservatives, and ideology has an important influence on

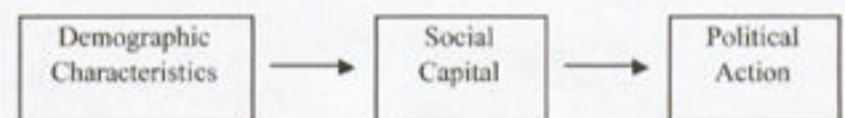
the nature and outcome of the minority struggle for access to local government" (Browning et al. 1984, 248). Although they conducted research about city councils in California, this finding also holds, at least in this case, for school boards in the Midwest.

However, forming alliances to broaden one's electoral support base is not limited to cross-gender and racial groups. The formation of such political alliances can also occur across class lines. In another example from City B, two Black women on the board of education ran a successful joint campaign by relying on each other's social networks.

This evidence leads me to alter my original incorporation of identity in my model. In my initial model, I postulated a linear relationship as to how demographic characteristics would impact social capital, which would then impact political behavior while in office. Figure 1 depicts this model.

This model is not a true representation of my results. Demographic characteristics may have been a moderating variable that impacted voluntary political action, as I hypothesized. However, electoral support

**Figure 1 — A Linear Model of Identity's Impact on Political Action**



served as a mediating variable, which causes me to update my model in Figure 2. (Note: There is also some evidence that a connection could exist directly between demographic characteristics and political action, as Black local officials who did not have as much social capital still supported policy initiatives that were consistent with

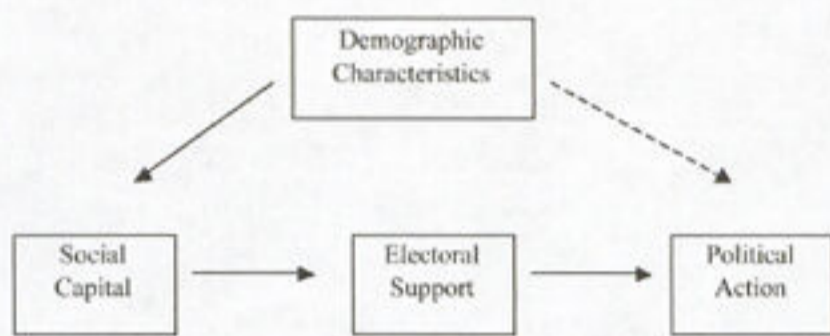


Black officials with a greater degree of social capital.)

## DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

### Limitations

Figure 2 — The Mediating Role of Electoral Support on Political Action



Although the findings of this study are largely consistent with my hypotheses, it is important to note the limitations of my data. The first limitation is the sample size. While eight interviews with two different elected bodies may be enough to show that there is *something* interesting to study, the findings are neither comprehensive nor able to be generalized to the broader population. Conducting a large “n” study based on a larger pool of representatives and performing a more rigorous, quantitative analysis would give me the ability to isolate variables and have more statistical power in my result.

Furthermore, given the relative political homogeneity with regard to party affiliation both within the cities and among board members, this study has problems with external validity. Perhaps the results would not hold in an environment where there is political heterogeneity. Another potential problem concerning external validity is that there are only two racial groups represented in my analysis. With the increasing number of multi-ethnic metropolises, social

capital could be operationalized differently when there are more than two predominant racial groups within a city.

Furthermore, there may be nonresponse bias within my results. Given that I was transparent about the topics that I would be discussing during my interview, respondents who are uncomfortable with the subjects may have chosen not to participate. On the other hand, since one of my primary assumptions is that local officials are involved in a number of organizations, perhaps nonrespondents were too busy with other activities. I simply do not have enough data to come to any firm conclusions about which circumstance is more likely.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study takes a step—albeit a small one—to link social capital and the political action of local elected officials. This finding has important implications for a number of issues. The most apparent matters are those relating to voting decisions and policy outcomes. If we pay more attention to the “nonpolitical” behavior of local officials, then we may be able to better predict the policies that will be passed and the types of programs that will be implemented.

More interesting, perhaps, are not the policy outcomes but the agenda-setting ramifications. Knowing what concerns are important to local officials outside of office is likely a clear indicator of what topics these individuals will try to support through their official positions. Therefore, we may be able to better expect what issues will be on the political agendas of local governing bodies.

## FUTURE AREAS OF RESEARCH

Two of the major limitations of this study are the sample size and potential nonresponse bias. However, upon comparing the information provided in the interviews with the online biographies of my respondents, most of the information given about organizational involvement, committee membership, and policies and programs initiated—important components of both my dependent variable and the independent variables—was the same. Since the biographies of most local officials are readily available online, I could expand my sample size by doing a content analysis of biographical information instead of relying solely on interviews. Although this may not enable me to expand on my findings on the mechanisms by which social capital impacts political action, this would enable me to conduct some statistical analyses with a larger set of data.

I could also study a city that is more politically heterogeneous and/or a governing body that is racially homogeneous. In the former example, it would be interesting to examine how, or if, coalitions are formed when there is not a common “goal” or perspective among candidates. In the latter, race would be held constant and gender would be isolated as the variable of interest. Perhaps the very factor that appealed to me about the cities for this research—diversity among board members—is confounding the results of the study.

A third direction this research could take is to study how community members have used social networks as leverage to increase the responsiveness of local officials. Since I found that officials are generally aware of the connection between their personal lives and professional duties, it is quite likely that

constituents are also able to see this connection. It would be particularly interesting to explore this relationship in communities with a sizable Black population.

Given the evidence that minority officials were the most ardent advocates of issues affecting other minorities in the community and more involved in minority-based groups than their White counterparts, I could explore how these groups support potential candidates, as well as their expectations. Are Blacks simply seeking descriptive representation in having a fellow Black person in an elected position? If it is substantive representation minority members are after, is it implicit? In this case, constituents would “assume” a Black official would empathize with their needs and raise the appropriate issues. Another possibility is that minority groups take a more direct approach in the development of an elected officials’ platform. Furthermore, I could examine the role of local citizen groups, as opposed to national groups like the NAACP.

Overall, this study has provided initial evidence that there is a connection between the social capital and the political behavior of local elected officials. This begins to address a gap in the literature on the impact of social capital in the political arena. I hope to expand on this research in future works.

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## Reawakening Baptist Town

by Michael Wolking and  
Ololade Olakanmi

Michael Wolking is a consultant for the Community Development Project, a group that harnesses the academic and professional resources of Harvard University to facilitate civic engagement in economic development projects in underserved communities, and a native of Michigan. Wolking taught at a middle school in South Los Angeles, where he collaborated with several youth development organizations in the region and also led professional learning communities for Teach for America. He graduated from the University of Michigan with a B.A. in economics and political science and holds an M.A. in elementary education from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. He is a master in public policy candidate at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Ololade Olakanmi is a consultant for the Community Development Project, a group that harnesses the academic and professional resources of Harvard University to facilitate civic engagement in economic development projects in underserved communities, and a native of Iowa. A graduate of Grinnell College with a bachelor's degrees in biology and philosophy, Olakanmi has conducted research projects at Jackson State University, the University of

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### ABSTRACT

The Community Development Project (CDP) harnesses the academic and professional resources of Harvard University to facilitate civic engagement in economic development projects in underserved communities. The group is made up of Harvard University graduate students who are working with local residents of Greenwood, Mississippi, to revitalize a one-hundred-year-old African American neighborhood known as Baptist Town. CDP began working with Baptist Town residents in the fall of 2008 to found the Baptist Town Community Organization, which encourages residents to address community problems like poor housing quality and low educational attainment through an inside-out orientation. With some early successes, both organizations now face the challenge of sustaining mission-driven teams as well as garnering broader support within their respective communities.

The neighborhood of Baptist Town is a small, one-hundred-year-old community nestled in the heart of the Mississippi Delta in the town of Greenwood. Spanning just four square blocks, Baptist Town is home to approximately 250 households, some of which are well maintained but many of which suffer from blight. The neighborhood of Baptist Town has been ignored and marginalized for the majority of its long history—a history

that many residents say contributes to a general level of disillusionment in the community (The Small Town Center 2002, 1-13). One resident noted, “It just gets to the point where people just give up; they just feel like nothing else will be done” (Wilson 2009).

The Community Development Project (CDP) is a consulting organization that seeks to facilitate the involvement of underserved communities in community and economic development projects. CDP is made up of a group of Harvard University graduate students who are currently working with residents in Baptist Town. CDP believes that the neighborhood of Baptist Town is at a critical nexus point in its history. CDP believes that now, more than at any other time in its recent history, Baptist Town is poised to make a dramatic shift for the better and that CDP can play a small but important part in making this happen. The following is the story of how we at CDP set out to accomplish just that.

### HISTORY OF BAPTIST TOWN

Located just east of downtown Greenwood, Mississippi, the community of Baptist Town derives its name from the Baptist churches that reside within its borders—particularly McKinney Chapel Missionary Baptist Church. Baptist Town is one of several predominantly African American neighborhoods that encircle the downtown area on the south side of the Yazoo River. The Yazoo, which courses through the middle of Greenwood, serves as a symbolic fault line that roughly divides higher-income North Greenwood residents—who are predominantly White—from lower-income South Greenwood residents—who are predominantly Black.

Baptist Town’s physical boundaries—the Illinois-Central and Columbus-Greenville railroads to the west and south respectively, the Pelucia Bayou to the north, and the Union Cotton Compress to the east—have contributed to a strong sense of identity for residents (see Figure 1). However, these boundaries are also a source of isolation, given that there is no major thoroughfare that passes through the community.

Baptist Town has a rich history—a history in which residents take pride. The famous blues artist Robert Johnson once lived there, as did actor Morgan Freeman (Wald 2004; *Inside the Actors Studio* 2005). Moreover, during the early 1960s Baptist Town residents, along with other Black communities in Greenwood, served as a key driving force of the civil rights movement in Greenwood. Greenwood was of strategic importance to the movement. According to historian Charles Payne, Greenwood’s “population of twenty-two thousand made it one of the largest cities between Memphis to the north and Jackson to the south. A movement beachhead in Greenwood would allow penetration into the surrounding Delta counties with their enormous Black populations” (Payne 1996, 132).

For much of Greenwood’s history, Baptist Town residents worked in the long-staple cotton-production industry, and the then middle-class neighborhood thrived (The Small Town Center 2002). In addition to the cotton market, Greenwood also became a catfish production hub and home to high-end kitchen appliance manufacturer Viking Range Corporation in the late 1980s (Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station n.d.; Welch 2006). However, what was once a thriving middle-class neighborhood has,

Figure 1. Map of Baptist Town



with time, become a primarily impoverished neighborhood. In the late 1950s, “Blacks were becoming increasingly irrelevant to the local economy. Each year, cotton production was more mechanized. Small farm owners, largely Black, found it increasingly hard to make a go of it” (Payne 1996, 134). As the Delta continuously shed jobs and increasing numbers of residents moved out—a direct result of the Great Migration of poor Blacks and Whites from the South between 1900 and the 1970s—Baptist Town entered a period of precipitous decline from which it has never recovered. Today, Baptist Town suffers from many challenges, including persistent poverty, lack of employment, low educational attainment, crime, drugs, lack of community connectedness, neglectful landlords, dilapidated housing, and family instability. These challenges are not unique when contrasted with other poor, predominantly Black communities in South Greenwood and the Delta as a whole (The Small Town Center 2002; Gregory 2005).

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

CDP was founded in 2007 by John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University student Jessica Lynn. CDP is a consulting organization that seeks to facilitate the involvement of underserved communities in community and economic development projects. To accomplish this goal, CDP consultants—Harvard University graduate students—draw upon the academic resources of Harvard, such as faculty, research institutes, and students, to provide strategic counsel and to harvest a dynamic network of organizations focused on community and economic development.

CDP began working with the Baptist Town community in the fall of 2008. We at CDP envision a Greenwood and Baptist Town in which everyone—from residents and their representatives to businesses and nonprofit organizations—works together to develop better homes, clean and safe streets, youth programming, and access to good jobs. Our mission is to work with Baptist Town residents to build locally driven partnerships and solutions that improve the quality of life within Baptist Town and Greenwood. We intend to realize this mission by:

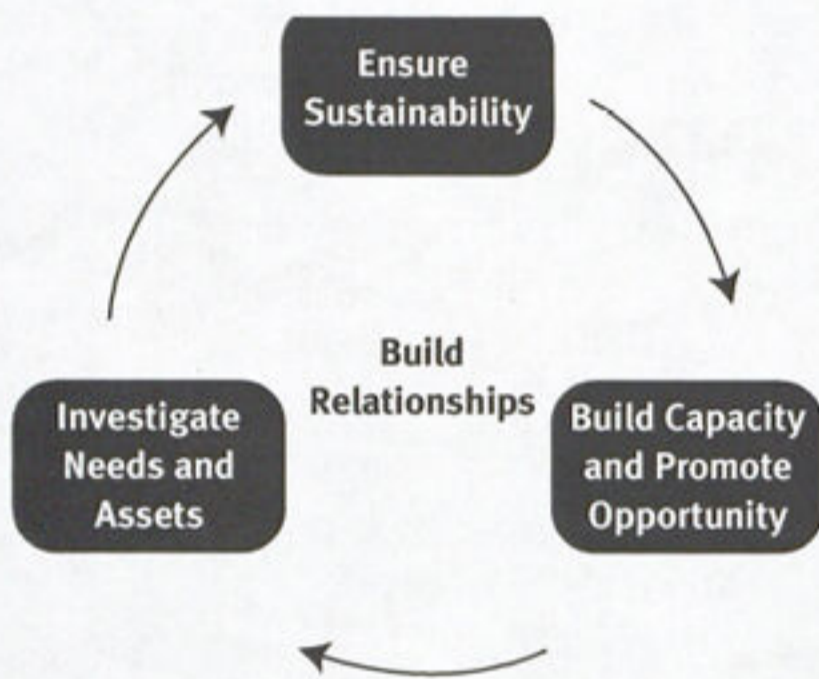
- Strengthening the ability of residents to advocate for their interests and achieve their goals
- Connecting residents with local, regional, and national resources
- Engaging the greater Greenwood community in the revitalization of Baptist Town
- Raising awareness of the assets and needs of Baptist Town, Greenwood, and the Delta region

Unique from other organizations that have engaged in community and economic development efforts in this area, CDP came with a few ideas but no prepackaged answers to the community’s challenges. We approached Baptist Town and Greenwood with the mindset that every community has assets and that our role would be to help community members build upon those assets. Our *modus operandi* was foremost to exercise humility and curiosity. Our strategy was to: (1) investigate the needs and assets of the community by examining local conditions and engaging residents in structured conversations about the past, present, and future; (2) build upon those assets by creating and pursuing locally driven solutions and seizing development



opportunities; and (3) ensure sustainability by supporting and assessing progress in the community as residents carry out their community and economic development initiatives. At the heart of this strategy was the need to build and maintain relationships with community members and to create connections between residents of all walks of life so that residents can take action on their own behalf (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2 — CDP Framework for Action**



## WHAT WE DID

After a semester of preparation, a field team of eight consultants made its initial site visit to Greenwood and Baptist Town in January 2009. The goal of this site visit was to learn from Greenwood and Baptist Town residents the details of their day-to-day lives, their individual capacities and community assets, their challenges and vision of the future, their strategies for realizing their dreams, and the outcomes of current and previous community and economic development efforts. To that end, CDP consultants met with residents both in one-on-one sessions and in groups, in formal and informal settings. In particular, we conducted a job skills survey and asset

map, a series of community visioning workshops, and a number of in-depth qualitative interviews (i.e., Columbo interviews, described below).

## Community Skills Assessment and Asset Map

CDP conducted a door-to-door survey of the formal and informal job skills that Baptist Town community members currently have, the skills they want to develop, and the social networks they currently possess (see Tables 1 and 2). This assessment was designed to identify community strengths and needs in order to uncover opportunities for economic development, encourage residents to think deeply about the tools they have to contribute to the community, identify resources that residents have outside of Greenwood, and identify community leadership.

## Community Economic Development Workshops

CDP held four community economic development workshops where residents shared their concerns, dreams, and possible ways of realizing their dreams. These workshops drew more than one-hundred residents of all ages from both Baptist Town and greater Greenwood. Workshop participants commonly highlighted several key issues, including dilapidated housing, teen pregnancy, truancy, the inefficient use of existing community resources, public safety, youth programming, and education. Almost all participants expressed an optimistic vision for Baptist Town's future.

## Columbo Interviews

CDP conducted more than forty Columbo interviews with Baptist Town residents; local business owners; industry

and commerce officials; city, county, state, and federal government officials; religious leaders; and members of the media.

The Columbo interview is a structured, in-depth (usually sixty to ninety minutes) qualitative interview. These interviews were used to learn about previous development efforts and why they were or were not successful; to uncover current development efforts; to discuss a vision for the future, including the possibility for a Baptist Town economic development task force; to shed light on existing community power dynamics; and to identify community leadership.

A key component of the Columbo interview was the snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a qualitative interview process that involves identifying respondents who are then asked to refer interviewers on to other respondents (Thomson 1997). This technique seeks to make use of the social networks of identified respondents to provide interviewers with “an ever-expanding set of potential contacts” (Atkinson and Flint 2001).

### What We Learned

In the eyes of most outsiders in broader Greenwood, Baptist Town has a decidedly negative image. To most residents of Greenwood, Baptist Town embodies some of the worst aspects of rural poverty in the Delta, including rampant crime, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy. Moreover, the widely known narrative about Baptist Town that propagates primarily through word of mouth almost always excludes the positive aspects while overly emphasizing the negative aspects.

Contrary to Baptist Town’s reputation in broader Greenwood, however, it was immediately clear to CDP that Baptist Town is a place of great potential. For

example, Table 1 suggests that even though the employment rate in Baptist Town is lower than that of the average resident of Leflore County—in which Greenwood resides—Baptist Town residents have higher educational attainment. In addition, Table 2 shows that Baptist Town residents have numerous skills, including trade skills like carpentry and automotive repair and health-sector skills like nursing. This data indicates that, despite its numerous and formidable challenges, Baptist Town is a place rich with potential and promise, and we believe it has the fundamental building blocks to once again build a vibrant and thriving community.

Baptist Town residents also have a strong sense of place and history. Capitalizing on this will be an important part of rebuilding community pride and bringing the community together around improvement projects. Finally, a small number of individuals have stepped up to the plate in various ways to help lead their community in the direction of progress. For example, Sharon Benford runs an informal youth center in her house to help keep kids off the streets. Mary Saaka led a petition initiative that successfully led the city to place a fence between the Pelucia Bayou and the playground in Baptist Town. In previous years, several children were injured and some drowned due to unrestricted access to the bayou. Another group of residents, including Ellen Wilson, organized a series of community cleanups.

### The Baptist Town Community Organization

While conducting surveys and workshops, CDP found that many Baptist Town residents desired to form a Baptist Town Community Organization (BTCO)

Table 1. Baptist Town Preliminary Data Findings

Variable	Data from CDP Survey	Data from 2000 U.S. Census, Tract 9507, Leflore County, Greenwood, MS
<b>Educational Attainment</b>		
No high school degree	25.6% (10 of 39)	50.4%
GED	5% (2 of 39)	n/a
High school degree	28.2% (11 of 39)	24.8% (includes GED)
Attended some college (including associate, junior, and vocational/technical)	20.5% (8 of 39)	15.9%
College degree	15.4% (6 of 39)	2.7%
<b>Employment Rate</b>	31.8% (14 of 44)	48.7% (in labor force)
<b>Homeownership Rate</b>	31.7% (13 of 41)	41.7% (owner-occupied units)
<b>Civic Engagement</b>		
Church-based	73.3% (22 of 30)	n/a
Non-church-based	26.6% (8 of 30)	n/a

that could act upon some of the community's most pressing concerns. Several residents possessed leadership experience and were willing to take part. CDP met with these individuals and discussed ways to successfully launch the BTCO. Together, CDP and residents identified the goals of the BTCO, a potential leadership framework, and ways that CDP could give support over time. Since its inception, the BTCO has organized a community back-to-school celebration and has established a neighborhood watch program, which city officials say has contributed to reduced crime in Baptist Town. BTCO members are also searching for funding to construct a community center for youth within Baptist Town.

### The Community Technology Center

The BTCO is also in the process of initiating a Community Technology Center (CTC) program. The CTC—which is scheduled to launch in 2010—

Table 2. Baptist Town Sectors and Skills

<b>Commonly Reported Employment Sectors</b>
Manufacturing/food production
Self-employed
Personal care/home health care
Services (cashier, store management)
Agriculture
Clerical
Transport services
Services (food)
Domestic services (housekeeping)
<b>Top Skills</b>
Repair (auto, machine)
Manufacturing
Care giving/health care services
Food production
Office/clerical
General management (retail, office)

will target youth ages eight to twelve and will instruct them in basic computer skills including the Microsoft Office suite. The program will also contain a mentorship component where youth and adults will be able to talk about issues such as racism and morality through guided conversations and storytelling. The CTC is the brainchild of BTCO members Dash Brown, Alice Leflore Banks, and Sharon Wright. Brown will be leading the program. Other BTCO members will provide additional staff support for the program. CDP provided fund development and curriculum development support.

### **The Importance of Forming Partnerships**

This recent progress should not lead one to the conclusion that Baptist Town can do everything by itself. On the contrary, much of its future success will depend upon the ability of Baptist Town residents to form partnerships and share resources with local associations and institutions, as well as to interface across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. To some extent, some of this work is already happening. Operating independently, the BTCO has sought advice from other community associations in the Delta, such as Action Communication and Education Reform in Duck Hill, Mississippi. The BTCO successfully reached out to numerous public- and private-sector sources to successfully execute its back-to-school event, including Walmart, the City Parks Commission, local politicians, and private citizens. Finally, at the city level, Mayor Carolyn McAdams has committed to improving the quality of life in Baptist Town. Within the first year of her term as mayor, she has already followed through with her promise by demolishing dilapidated

housing on Walker Alley (which is in a particularly blighted area of the neighborhood), repaving streets long left to crumble, and increasing trash pickup. Baptist Town residents will need to build upon these relationships, as well as forge new ones, if they truly want to make a long-lasting, transformative change to their community.

### **MEASURING SUCCESS**

Long neglected in Greenwood, Baptist Town residents have worked to spur a resurgence of regional interest in the neighborhood. CDP connects Baptist Town to Greenwood city officials and other partners fundamental to supporting revitalization efforts. Operating only a year, CDP and BTCO can claim a list of accomplishments on local and regional levels with support from businesses, government offices, religious leaders, and local nonprofits.

### **Accomplishments**

- Formed Baptist Town Community Organization, which began in January 2009 after four meetings organized by CDP and attended by more than one-hundred Baptist Town residents
- Wrote five policy memos for mayor of Greenwood with twenty-two recommendations for improvements in Baptist Town, eleven of which have been acted upon
- Held economic development conference in Baptist Town in summer 2009 with grant from the John F. Kennedy School of Government's Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government
- Organized back-to-school neighborhood picnic in fall 2009 attracting more than fifty people with support from the Greenwood City Council, City Parks

Commission, Walmart, and local community groups

- Purchased five new computers and founded neighborhood Community Technology Center, set to launch in 2010

### Partnerships

- Established partnerships with the following organizations and individuals:
  - Hollis Watkins, cofounder and president of Southern Echo, Inc., a leadership development and training organization dedicated to empowering the African American community in Mississippi
  - Action Communication and Education Reform, a local community organizing group
  - The Greenwood Mayor's Office and Mayor Carolyn McAdams
  - The Greenwood Police Department

### Ongoing and Upcoming Projects

- Development of nine-week technology and social justice curriculum to engage neighborhood youth in the Community Technology Center
- Employment Readiness Program to provide job searching skills, resume assistance, and interview preparation; targeted at those entering the workforce, returning from incarceration, recovering from addiction, or seeking employment after layoffs
- Application for 501(c)3 status by BTCO and further fund-raising for neighborhood projects
- Continuation of Neighborhood Watch program in partnership with Greenwood Police Department
- Site visit in January 2010 by CDP to set agenda for the upcoming year, introduce

residents to new CDP members, conduct focus group interviews, and participate in leadership development workshops with Baptist Town Community members

As the Community Development Project and Baptist Town Community Organization continue to grow together, collaborative efforts to effect change will be met with a host of shared challenges. Essential to both organizations will be attracting and maintaining a group of committed, imaginative individuals comfortable with engaging Baptist Town residents as well as garnering support from broader networks. In other words, each organization must possess the adaptability to meet horizontal and vertical demands on operational capacities and support structures.

### HORIZONTAL CAPACITY: SECURING EFFECTIVE BTCO AND CDP MEMBERSHIP

Efforts to integrate the Baptist Town community horizontally by involving many stakeholders, such as the founding of the Community Technology Center and Neighborhood Watch program, have attracted particularly strong interest in BTCO's work. They have also allowed CDP to do what it does best: let the ideas of local residents surface and then provide support to meet community-identified goals.

Building on these successes, a key factor in BTCO's long-term health will be maintaining community interest in the organization in the absence of large-scale projects. BTCO members emphasize that they operate in an area where historical barriers have often left fellow residents ambivalent toward efforts at collective action. In fact, distrust of any type of leadership or authority figure due to historical abuses of power is pervasive

and remains a significant hurdle in gaining the open backing of all community members. In order to engage Baptist Town residents and provide a mechanism through which they can act on community concerns, BTCO needs to maintain a transparent, inclusive organizational structure and be a conspicuous presence in the neighborhood.

For our part, CDP, which is open to all Harvard University graduate students in all schools, faces the challenge of sustaining long-term collaboration within the framework of a membership of predominately graduate students enrolled in two-year programs at the John F. Kennedy School of Government and Graduate School of Design at Harvard University. While attracting qualified and dedicated new members to CDP has not been a problem, integrating new groups of diverse students from Boston into the daily lives of those in Greenwood is a complex exercise in trust building. We must forge a community relationship as an institution such that new CDP members are accepted by Baptist Town residents because of their affiliation.

Weekly phone calls to Baptist Town residents with both new and existing CDP members assist in this effort, helping to forge strong relationships with local partners. In addition, an extended January site visit brought the BTCO and CDP teams together in Mississippi to address community challenges firsthand. Still, our organization stands to benefit from the support of stakeholders able to guarantee as much time as possible to the Delta; joint-degree students, Ph.D. candidates, and even university staff would all be able to commit more than two years to the project, capitalizing on the deep networks of trust necessary to assist in community-building efforts.

Such individuals would further diversify the varied skills CDP members bring to Baptist Town through policy, business, law, and urban planning backgrounds.

### **VERTICAL SUPPORT: BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL NETWORKS FOR THE LONG TERM**

For BTCO to remain a sustainable community actor, it will have to further cement its image as a group willing to tackle pressing community concerns. But it cannot expect to do so operating solely with CDP. As mentioned above, BTCO has had success in outreach efforts to local private and nonprofit actors when garnering support for community-based projects. But the organization is still searching for a way to leverage its position in the community in a systematic, vertical fashion. Applying for 501(c)3 status is a start; the search for a board of directors will prove a useful exercise in aligning with partners critical to the organization's mission and give the organization statewide credibility. Additional efforts, such as work with the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation and neighboring Duck Hill Community Organization, all speak to BTCO's awareness that community-building efforts often extend beyond the community.

Through it all, BTCO's most steadfast ally has been the CDP team, which has tapped into the vast resources of Harvard University to provide guidance from expert faculty and staff. For example, Loren Gary, associate director for Leadership Development and Public Affairs at the Center for Public Leadership, recently traveled with the CDP team to Mississippi to lead BTCO members in a workshop on constructing a public narrative. Distinguished John F.

Kennedy School of Government Professors Marshall Ganz, William Julius Wilson, and Julie Wilson have also provided significant guidance on CDP operations. Various Harvard University centers have also contributed significantly to the mission. CDP has graciously established its operational center in the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research, while financial support has been generously provided by John K. Kennedy School of Government centers such as the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, the Taubman Center for State and Local Government, the Center for Public Leadership, the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government, and the Kennedy School Student Government, in addition to Boston-based fund-raising.

Yet in the face of an uncertain economic climate, a key challenge CDP and BTCO face will be acting on ambitious projects like an Employment Readiness Program while covering the operating costs that accompany long-distance collaboration. Securing reliable funding over a long-run time frame would do much to enhance CDP's ability to commit to further endeavors of the BTCO. As both organizations continue to grow together, we remain proud of our accomplishments and excited by what remains to be done.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> 501(c)(3) organizations are tax exempt, nonprofit corporations identified by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as being organized and operated exclusively for religious, charitable, scientific, educational, and other specific purposes.

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## Finding Plan B: Critical Remedy Construction for School Districts Operating Under Education Equity Consent Decrees Post Seattle and Louisville

by Amarachuku C. Enyia

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### ABSTRACT

This article addresses the ever-increasing challenges facing schools in the midst of desegregation or racial-balancing plans and procedures. It also discusses the need for school districts across the country under consent decrees to return to the drawing board in finding an alternative plan for desegregation and education-equity measures that will keep them in line with constitutional mandates. The most recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings in Seattle and Louisville

have altered the landscape of remedial grounds for which cases can be brought before the courts. Moreover, they indicate a pronounced shift in legal discourse surrounding programs and initiatives that utilize race as a factor in developing educational policy.

In 2006, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear two cases that ended in what many believe may be a landmark ruling on the use of race in deciding school assignments. In ruling on public choice plans in Seattle, Washington, and Louisville, Kentucky, the Supreme Court struck down the plans, concluding that they relied on an unconstitutional use of racial criteria. The 5-4 vote reflected a divided court. With this ruling, similar plans in place in school districts across the country could be in danger. The cases in Seattle and Louisville revisit past debate over race and education, stemming from the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, which led to desegregation in public schools. Now schools face ever-increasing challenges in the midst of desegregation or racial-balancing plans and procedures and other education-equity issues. School districts are in a position where they must return to the drawing board to find alternative plans for desegregation and education-equity measures that will keep them in line with constitutional mandates. Consent decrees—judicial decrees expressing a voluntary agreement between parties to a lawsuit—have become a substantial part of the method to address education-equity issues in recent decades. Once established, the decree is binding for the consenting parties. In the context of education equity, the decree involves complex negotiation of both the problems at issue and the remedies implemented to address

those problems. The most recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings in the cases in Seattle and Louisville have altered the landscape of remedial grounds for which cases can be brought before the courts. Moreover, they indicate a pronounced shift in legal discourse surrounding programs and initiatives that utilize race as a factor in developing educational policy.

### BACKGROUND ON THE SEATTLE AND LOUISVILLE CASES

The Seattle and Louisville cases, specifically *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 11* and *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*,<sup>2</sup> were heard jointly before the U.S. Supreme Court in December 2006, and the Court's decision was issued in June 2007. The focus of both cases is the constitutionality of the integration plans of the school districts involved. In the Seattle case, local residents in the district voluntarily entered into an integration program to ensure that Seattle's high schools reflected the demographics of the city itself. Essentially, the school district implemented a tiebreaker system for those schools that had more applicants than slots available. Race was considered as one of the factors. Parents Involved in Community Schools (PICS) argued that the use of race unfairly denied some students the right to be able to attend their neighborhood school. In the case in Jefferson County, which is in Louisville, Kentucky, the majority White school district utilized a mandate that no single school could be more than 50 percent or less than 15 percent Black. White parent, Crystal Meredith, sued the school district for racial discrimination when her son was unable to attend the closest elementary school. Both cases called into question previous court decisions,

including the 1954 *Brown*,<sup>3</sup> specifically as it relates to whether race-conscious policies are acceptable for purposes of desegregation, as well as *Bakke*, *Grutter*, and *Gratz*,<sup>4</sup> with relation to if such policies are acceptable for purposes of affirmative action. They also raised the issue of whether the Fourteenth Amendment was being violated by these district policies.<sup>5</sup>

These two cases in Seattle and Louisville represent the latest in a trend of increased scrutiny by the courts with regard to race-conscious policies in recent years. Decisions in *Gratz* and *Grutter* signaled that the debate was far from over and, in fact, would come under increased pressure. Indeed, the Supreme Court's decision in Seattle and Louisville has helped to verbalize, in some senses, the notion that race-conscious policies must have some sort of shelf life and are, in fact, in stark contravention with the ideals stipulated in the U.S. Constitution. This notion of the shelf life of race-conscious policies countered by a marked resistance to a whole-scale overhaul of all affirmative action and race-conscious programs illuminates the tension between the goals of such programs and the necessity of remaining within the purview of the Constitution. The term "goals" insinuates that certain ends are desired by parties filing suit to preserve such policies and, moreover, that such goals are constructed taking into account the effects of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation.

Race-conscious policies have proven contentious subjects. In simplistic legal terms, the notion of compensation indicates that the wronged party is restored to the position in which the party would have been had the wrong not occurred. Translated into the framework of education, those supporting the use of

race-conscious policies argue that such policies are necessary to remedy the aftereffect (and current effects) of past segregation and discrimination of (primarily) people of color. As such, the measures proposed seek to serve as “healing” factors for wrongs committed by *de jure* and *de facto* racism and discrimination. However, the circumstances under which such policies are constitutional are not so clear-cut. Indeed, previous case law confirms that remedying the effects of past intentional discrimination is in fact a compelling interest under the strict scrutiny test.<sup>6</sup> But the strict scrutiny test does not encompass effects that do not directly stem from past *de jure* segregation or attempts to achieve racial balance (insomuch as the racial imbalance is not directly due to *de jure* segregation).

Given this conception of what such policies seek to achieve, the goal is not to unfairly advantage any particular group or to practice reverse discrimination in which one individual or group’s benefit comes at the expense of another’s; instead the goal should be an attempt to remedy an uneven playing field so that all parties involved (both those who have been wronged and those who have been traditionally advantaged by racism) have access to the same opportunities.

Subsequent to the rulings in both the 1954 and 1955 *Brown* cases,<sup>7</sup> suits have been filed in school districts across the country addressing both the issues of desegregation and those of racial imbalance; in particular, school districts have attempted to implement methods to address the many disparities and problems resulting from previously (and sometimes currently) segregated districts. This includes problems from not only the schools themselves, but also the effects of

housing policy, which essentially created segregated communities. Because of inequitable resources, children were often locked into attending sub-par, segregated schools as a result of the circumstances of their birth, which plaintiffs have argued is an infringement upon the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

However, there is a lack of alignment not only between the remedy sought by plaintiffs and the tools at their disposal, but also between the desire to remedy plaintiffs in such cases for the current manifestation of past discrimination and the shift in the Supreme Court toward discussions of diversity as compelling interest. This disconnect exists essentially between the goals and results of desegregation, the goals of racial balancing, the remedies employed by school districts, and the legal ideology utilized by the courts to determine the acceptability and constitutionality of the different mechanisms implemented to address the problems associated with segregated school districts and those school districts still grappling with challenges resulting from past segregation. The “healing” goal has remained the same for all intents and purposes. And yet the measures by which to achieve that goal have become markedly narrower particularly as key terms such as “desegregation,” “racial balancing,” and “narrow tailoring” are defined and applied to different court cases. For this reason, post Seattle and Louisville, some school districts are finding that they must refashion and reformulate desegregation and racial-balancing measures implemented prior to the rulings.

The following key points addressed are critical to formulating a deeper understanding of the way in which school districts across the country can proceed

with desegregation and racial-balancing methods and will help elucidate the likely legal direction that will guide the outcomes of education-equity cases brought before the courts (and especially the Supreme Court). There are a few questions that must be asked, and honestly answered, by school districts, communities, attorneys, and others involved in the process of desegregating schools or addressing education-equity issues.

- What are the educational issues the district is seeking to address, that is, achievement gap; overrepresentation of minority students in special education classes/underrepresentation of minority students in gifted/honors/advanced placement courses; overrepresentation of minority students subject to disciplinary measures such as suspension and expulsion, and so on?
- What, if any, is the direct connection or link between the educational issues the district seeks to address and the racial composition of the school?
- What are the methods or policies implemented by the school district to address the educational issues involved?
- What are the methods or policies implemented by the school district to address the racial-composition issues involved (i.e., the racial imbalance in district schools)?
- How do these issues line up with the Supreme Court's handling of notions of diversity, diversity as compelling interest, and the ways in which schools can go about fostering the diversity held acceptable?

This article is couched within the context of *de jure* segregation as the primary cause of many of the educational inequities that manifest themselves in school districts across the country. The basis for

this assertion lies in the plethora of social science research that speaks to the detrimental effects of past segregation such as discrimination in housing policy that relegated minorities to low-income, racially homogeneous neighborhoods, which meant that, outside of busing policies, these children were relegated to segregated schools. Such schools had historically proven to be sub-par in terms of the quality of educational experience of their attendees. Moreover, in some states where school funding structures are based on property tax,<sup>8</sup> property-poor neighborhoods often struggle to raise money to adequately fund schools, thus resulting in substandard equipment and learning resources such as computers and books (West and Peterson 2007). Janet Gillespie, director of programming at Community Change Inc., a Boston-based organization that advocates for racial justice, asserts that schools with a majority of students of color tend to be under resourced. She describes school facilities, libraries, teachers, and curriculum as part of those resources that are substandard in schools with a majority of students of color (Barned-Smith 2009). Moreover, mounting social science evidence shows an increase in segregation in areas previously making progress toward full integration, thus heightening the urgency of the discourse on the use of race-conscious policies in these contexts (Orfield 2009).

Specifically, a critical disconnect exists between the goals of desegregation (where race-conscious policies may be allowable) and racial balancing (where race-conscious policies are more than likely found to be unconstitutional) as put forth by parties filing education-equity lawsuits. This difference emerges primarily in the construction of remedies.

This difference is critical in that the goals of “diversity” or “racial balancing” entail different methods as well as different outcome expectations than the goals of desegregation. The goals of desegregation are remedial in nature and seek to utilize evidence of what has taken place coupled with social science evidence on the effects of past circumstances to devise meaningful and effective solutions that will help to reset the balance between those who have been historically disadvantaged by law and those who have not.

The Supreme Court’s 2007 decision in Seattle and Louisville, as evidenced by Chief Justice John Roberts’s statement below, seeks to adhere to the ideals embedded in the Constitution, specifically the notions of equality and the aversion to preferences for any individual or group as well as the use of measures that single out any race. Thus the question becomes whether there exists some way to reconcile the egalitarian ideals of the Constitution with the necessity to address the current effects of past adulteration of the very ideals the Supreme Court seeks to maintain. The current trend indicates that a paradigm shift is taking place and at speeds faster than anticipated by those seeking to maintain race-conscious policies and initiatives. Indeed, the starkly direct wording of Justice Roberts’s opinion that “the way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race”<sup>9</sup> evidences an intention for the Court to lean more toward preservation of constitutional ideals. The fact that Roberts’s statement comes only four years after the *Grutter* decision, which upheld the affirmative action admissions policy of the University of Michigan, gives heightened significance to former Justice Sandra Day O’Connor’s

prediction that “25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interests approved today.”<sup>10</sup> In fact, the current Supreme Court<sup>11</sup> seems intent on bringing her statement to fruition much sooner. The nature of the decisions in Seattle and Louisville effectively assume a level playing field and cast the initiatives implemented by both school districts as in direct contravention of notions of justice under the Constitution. Moreover, it indicates that constitutional ideals of equality and aversion to discrimination or preferences under any circumstances supersede the intent to utilize race-conscious remedies as tools for restoration for the effects of segregation and discrimination (unless utilized in cases where *de jure* segregation was found, and even then, the measures must pass the strict scrutiny test).

This trend is due to both a shift in ideology directly resulting from changes in the composition of the Supreme Court, as well as an overall national trend in which desegregation cases and implementations of racial-balancing measures face heavy push back by those disputing their necessity and/or benefit to those groups who justify such measures for remediation of past societal marginalization in various sectors of society. This push back makes the success of such cases increasingly difficult, especially when such cases emphasize the racial-balancing aspect of their initiatives. Moreover, the holdings in such cases are becoming much more nuanced. Thus sweeping policy changes (i.e., *Plessy*’s “separate but equal”<sup>12</sup> versus *Brown*’s reversal of that policy) are far less common, and instead cases are being decided on matters of detail; clear statements of legality are becoming increasingly complex.

## DESEGREGATION OR RACIAL BALANCING? ARE REMEDIES FOR THESE IDEALS DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED?

Diversity has often been heralded as the primary impetus for desegregation. Several scholars point to social science research that touts the benefits of learning in a diverse environment. Indeed, Lee Bollinger, former University of Michigan president and current president of Columbia University, explains the importance of achieving the goal of diversity. Bollinger, who was named in the Supreme Court affirmative action cases of *Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger*, states that “building a community of diverse learners who will thrive together and teach one another” is one of the most important goals of diversity in the learning environment (Bollinger 2007). He also asserts that such diverse learning environments achieved by affirmative action measures are the best way to prepare future leaders to learn to lead in an increasingly globalized world. Even in its *Brown* decision, the Supreme Court called education “the very foundation of good citizenship” and “a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment.”<sup>13</sup>

Patricia Gurin et al. (2004) echoed that sentiment. They emphasized the notion that experiences with diversity educate and prepare citizens for a multicultural democracy. In their study, which focused on the multicultural experience at the undergraduate level, they found that positive educational benefits of racial and ethnic desegregation depended on real integration of children from different backgrounds and concluded that higher-education institutions must create

educational programs that bring diverse students together meaningfully so that they may learn from each other (Gurin et al. 2004, 32). Indeed, such positive experiences with individuals of different backgrounds, scholars argue, promote cross-racial understanding and reduce prejudice and bias. James Anderson and William Trent (2008) also posit that the actual interaction of students is what is critical in determining any benefits to desegregation. John Yun and Michal Kurlaender (2001) assert that even students recognize the benefits of learning in diverse environments.

Despite the scholarly analysis on the benefits of diversity, parties to consent decree cases all too often focus primarily on the act of “racial balancing” and do not pay enough attention to the meaningful interaction of students of various backgrounds as well as the very real social and developmental detriments faced by students in segregated schools. In a report to the Supreme Court in the Seattle and Louisville cases, social scientists concluded that (1) racially integrated schools provide significant benefits to students and communities; (2) racially isolated schools have harmful educational implications for students; and (3) race-conscious policies are necessary to maintain racial integration in schools (Orfield et al. 2008). These social scientists concluded that an overwhelming amount of scholarly data indicates that school boards have a compelling interest to promote racial integration and prevent racial isolation through choice-based school assignment policies that consider race as a factor.

The deficits of racially isolated schools have been documented in studies that have demonstrated that schools with higher percentages of minority students

have fewer educational resources—such as larger class sizes, inadequate facilities, and lower per-pupil spending—as well as the fact that curricular resources—including honors and advanced placement courses—are not equally available at schools serving large percentages of minority students (Orfield et al. 2008, 10). As a result of the aforementioned teacher and resource disparities, educational outcomes for students in racially isolated schools suffer.

Gary Orfield asserts that strong evidence exists of “instructional techniques that increase both the academic and human relations benefits of interracial schooling” (Orfield 2001, 9). Essentially, if school districts are hoping to encourage policy makers to shift thinking toward the benefits of diversity as one of the leading catalysts for school desegregation, then the justification for any kind of plan implemented by a school district to reach those ends must be educationally based and academically grounded. The question, then, turns to how to construct an academically sound plan that would allow for the use of race for the ends of achieving “academic equity” as opposed to a generic conception of diversity for diversity’s sake or merely for the sake of racial balancing, which the Seattle/Louisville decision struck down.

This is especially important due to the Supreme Court’s focus on the status of the remedy employed as “narrowly tailored.” Narrow tailoring mandates that any remedial measures implemented must be specifically applicable to the set of aims to be achieved. Thus in cases where racial segregation is the problem to be remedied, any solutions implemented must closely adhere to the goal of achieving desegregation. However, to avoid the crosshairs of the debate on the

constitutionality of using race-conscious policies, proponents must closely link such desegregation measures to strong social science evidence that links desegregation with increased educational outcomes and experiences for the group in question. Indeed, this article argues that the emphasis should be placed not on the racial-balancing aspect, but on the access-to-quality-education aspect that requires that certain factors be fulfilled if a school district is to achieve its goal of providing quality education for all of its students.

This notion transcends the likely discussions of racial preference that potentially hinder progress in these districts and certify such measures as valid because they do not create a disparate impact on any particular group but instead have equal impact regardless of the group in question. Simply put, race takes a backseat to discussions of effectiveness of measures designed to enhance educational outcomes.

In the Court’s majority opinion in the Seattle/Louisville cases, the justices found that the school districts’ race-conscious policies were not sufficiently tailored to justify the use of race as a means of desegregating the schools. The Court’s opinion stated that “simply because the school districts may seek a worthy goal does not mean they are free to discriminate on the basis of race to achieve it, or that their racial classification should be subject to less exacting strict scrutiny.”<sup>14</sup> It is at this point that social science research is critical to illustrate the actual detriments to children’s educational experiences and outcomes from having attended segregated schools. Decision makers in the Seattle and Louisville school districts could perhaps have benefited from more closely analyzing

the purpose of the techniques they employed and more obviously linking the purpose of their race-conscious techniques to the broader goals of academic achievement and enhanced educational experience for students. However, since the school districts (particularly in Seattle) were not found to have intentionally discriminated in the past (Louisville was found to have attained unitary status—discussed more below—some years prior), this would have proven to be a difficult argument to make.

Another factor that complicates decision making in consent decree cases that deal with issues of racial imbalance is the Court's practice of looking to intent when determining whether a school district must be held responsible for racial discrimination and whether measures are necessary to remediate effects of past discrimination, as opposed to closely examining the current and lasting effects of institutional racism that have worked to disadvantage underrepresented students. Laurence Parker et al. (2007) assert that courts have consistently taken desegregation cases out of historical context and have built their own "parallel constitution," which amounts to a total misunderstanding of the purpose of racial segregation. This article argues that the courts have not necessarily created a "parallel constitution," but, in attempting to adhere to the original ideals of the Constitution, are effectively limiting the ways in which historically marginalized groups can be restored from past violations of those constitutional ideals. Essentially, in an effort to turn the page, many children in districts with equity issues are being left behind and the tools to be employed to help remedy the initial

disadvantages of historic discrimination are being systematically limited.

In a 1994 case, *People Who Care v. Rockford Board of Education*,<sup>15</sup> a district judge found—by inference from disparities in educational achievement between White and minority students and from the failure of the school board in the Rockford, Illinois, school district to take effective measures to prevent individual public schools from becoming all White or all minority—that the school board had indeed engaged in intentional racial discrimination. The board did not appeal the decision, but findings of intent are not always so clear-cut and often skew the actual scope of desegregation cases.

Indeed, when courts look to intent, they often ignore the lasting effects of historical segregation, not just on the racial composition of schools, but also in terms of the holistic viewpoint of all of the attendant characteristics that accompany segregation—less funding for school materials, lower pay for teachers, low-quality school facilities, and the social science research that shows that learning in a diverse environment is more beneficial to students (Gurin 2004). Instead, most of the focus has centered mainly on racial balance, and courts have become increasingly suspicious of initiatives that engage race-conscious policies in the absence of clear-cut cases of previous intentional *de jure* segregation. In the legal arena, intent is oftentimes difficult to prove, mainly because (historically) plaintiffs had to prove that the school district intended to discriminate against African American students. After the initial rounds of desegregation litigation, findings of intent were increasingly difficult, and focus shifted to examination of the remedies school districts employed



to correct issues of segregation and racial imbalance.

### EXAMPLES IN SMALL URBAN SETTINGS

Small urban communities serve as highly illustrative backdrops for the challenges facing school districts under consent decrees. Champaign, Illinois's Unit 4 school district was under a court-mandated consent decree for several years before the decree expired in July 2009. The historical atmosphere of the Champaign community is critical to understanding how the amalgamation of factors ultimately led to a lawsuit against the Unit 4 school district. According to U.S. Census data from 2000, Champaign has an estimated population of 67,518 people (U.S. Census Bureau n.d.). Demographically, the population is as follows: 73.16 percent White; 15.62 percent Black; 6.83 percent Asian; 0.03 percent Pacific Islander; 0.24 percent Native American; and 1.94 percent from other races. Hispanic or Latino of any race make up 4.03 percent of the population. These numbers help to shed light on the issues faced by the different ethnic groups represented in the district, as well as the different socioeconomic groups with stakes in district affairs. Data that breaks down the location of predominantly Black housing versus predominantly White housing statistics show a heavy concentration of Black families residing north of University Avenue, with University Avenue serving as the colloquial dividing line between north Champaign and the University of Illinois campus. Thus it follows that the neighborhood schools on Champaign's north side are racially identifiable as Black schools.

The court-mandated consent decree in Champaign brought about larger discussions of historic racism and segregation with the effects still present and manifesting in a lack of trust between parents and community members with regard to schools, teachers, and administrators. In board meetings post-implementation of the consent decree, parents discussed their own experiences with racism and discrimination in the very schools their children now attended. Indeed, Judge Joe Billy McDade, presiding judge for Unit 4's consent decree, emphasized the necessity of trust if the district was to move forward and successfully tackle the mandates of the consent decree (McDade 2006).

As introduced earlier, the city of Rockford, Illinois, faced similar issues with regard to racially identifiable schools in its School District No. 205. Like Champaign, Rockford comprises a relatively small, urban area with a history of racial segregation in the community and schools. At the time litigation took place in Rockford's school district in the 1970s, minorities made up approximately 15 percent of pupils. However, several elementary schools had more than 70 percent minority enrollment, and one had more than 90 percent.<sup>16</sup> When the plaintiffs filed suit against the board of education, they charged that the board had intentionally discriminated against Black and Hispanic students. The 1974 case was a continuation of the *Quality Education for All Children, Inc. v. School Board* case.<sup>17</sup> Subsequent to that case, the court found that the Rockford School District No. 205 school board failed to take effective measures to prevent individual public schools from becoming all White or all minority and that the board had engaged in intentional

racial discrimination. After the 1974 case, the district adopted a plan involving voluntary transfers and educational enrichment. However, racial imbalance persisted even after measures were put into place.

Thus, *Coates v. Illinois State Board of Education* ensued, which discussed the continued imbalance.<sup>18</sup> Despite alleged discrimination claims, plaintiffs settled with the board, and the court entered the settlement agreement as an injunction. Under the consent decree, the board was to establish three magnet schools and several magnet programs, and another fifteen schools were designated to house supplemental programs for disadvantaged minority students. The proceedings in Rockford and Champaign have taken place in various school districts across the state and country. They highlight a critical aspect of the consent decree process that often results in decades of litigation—remedy construction.

### REMEDY CONSTRUCTION

The process of constructing the consent decree in a way that actually addresses the issues that warranted judicial involvement is fraught with myriad complexities that make it one of the most tedious challenges facing school boards, communities, and the courts. Unitary status is usually required in order to end court involvement in a school district's desegregation plan. Unitary status is achieved when the school district has eliminated all vestiges of the old racially segregated school system. Unitary status is judged in terms of such a finding in extracurricular activities, transportation, administrative staff assignment, relative quality of education, faculty assignment, facilities and resources, and student assignment.

With regard to remedy, a finding of unitary status for a school district requires a district court to determine (1) whether the district has demonstrated compliance with the Constitution and with existing court orders; (2) whether the district has shown that it has eliminated, to the extent practicable, all vestiges of past discrimination; and (3) whether the district has demonstrated its good-faith commitment to the whole of the decree and to those provisions of the law and the Constitution that predicated the initial judicial intervention.<sup>19</sup>

School districts, communities, and other stakeholders in consent decrees must operate within the framework of the standards that determine a district's unitary status. As indicated above, first, remedies devised in consent decree cases must, above all, contain measures that are in line with constitutional mandates, particularly the Fourteenth Amendment's due process and equal protection clauses. Second, in addition to the constitutionality of measures implemented by consent decree mandates, the district in question must have demonstrated that it has eliminated, to the extent practicable, all vestiges of past discrimination. This requirement can become murky when parties involved are required to interpret what exactly constitutes a "practicable" extent. This requirement calls into question the role and scope of the district's ability to eliminate vestiges of past discrimination.

Drafters of the consent decree face the question of where to draw the line between remediating vestiges of past discrimination to a practicable extent and going beyond in remedial measures in such a way that it actually discriminates against other students currently in the district. This is especially critical post

Seattle/Louisville. Given the Supreme Court's decision in this case, any measures that are not clearly linked to specific educationally based outcomes may fall under the same category as those from the Seattle/Louisville case in which they were found to be insufficiently tailored to the ends desired. The third requirement, a finding of good-faith commitment to the whole of the decree, speaks to the issues of trust that must be worked out particularly in communities with strong histories of segregation and discrimination. This notion must undergird any consent decree if any progress is to be made toward remedying some of the current issues faced by the school district.

In Florida's Pinellas County case,<sup>20</sup> initiated in 2000, in order to rectify the racial imbalance of the county's schools, the court itself imposed race ratios. According to the directive, school populations could not contain more than 30 percent Black students or less than 3.1 percent Black students in senior highs, 5.6 percent Black students in junior highs, and 9.1 percent Black students in elementary schools (Pinellas County Schools n.d.). Later the ratios were amended to reflect the greater density of Black population in the southern part of the county and to limit the distances students would be bused.

The court-ordered plan of busing students within the county and shifts in school attendance zones to meet race ratios formed the basic system of student assignment that has been the status quo for three decades. The greater burden of busing fell to Black families, whose children were more often bused out to more predominantly White schools. In recent years, those ratios have been altered to accommodate for changes in

the demographics of the communities affected by the desegregation plan.

The Reagan administration's first desegregation suit took place in Bakersfield, California. At the time in 1964, school districts were segregated *de jure* and minority children were actually bused across town to attend segregated schools (in contrast to students being bused to *desegregate schools*, which was the remedy that became popular with the advent of desegregation litigation). The Bakersfield consent decree of 1984<sup>21</sup> was admittedly weak, particularly because it merely required Bakersfield to establish a series of magnet schools intended to induce voluntary transfers and thus desegregation (Moss 1986). This remedy was problematic primarily because the court's ruling in the case was simply to assert that mandatory busing was unacceptable.<sup>22</sup> This assertion in 1978 was contrary to Supreme Court decisions that stated the opposite, that is, *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, which stated that desegregation plans "cannot be limited to the walk-in school"; thus busing may be ordered unless "time or distance of travel is so great as to either risk the health of the children or significantly impinge on educational process."<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, this case highlights the difficulties with prescribing remedies for desegregation cases, primarily within the purview of consent decrees. In Bakersfield, the remedies were not far-reaching enough. The Bakersfield school district had an enrollment of more than 19,000 students. However, the district employed a voluntary desegregation plan as opposed to a mandate, and this proved to be highly ineffective. Of the 19,000 students enrolled in the district, the plan accounted for only 248 transfers

to the magnet school during the first year of the plan's implementation.<sup>24</sup> At the end of the second year of the plan's three-year lifespan, one out of every four schools in the district was still not within plus or minus 20 percent of being racially representative of the Bakersfield public school population, that is, 25 percent of the schools had student bodies with either less than 23 percent White students or greater than 63 percent White students, given a White population of 43 percent.<sup>25</sup>

Thus the Bakersfield voluntary plan was highly ineffective and in direct contravention with the Supreme Court's decision in *Green v. County School Board* (1968).<sup>26</sup>

The court held in *Green* that "if there are reasonably available other ways, such for illustration as zoning, promising speedier and more effective conversion to a unitary, nonracial school system, 'freedom of choice' must be held unacceptable."

Thus we have a shift in the scope of remedies available to school districts facing desegregation. The notion that school districts implement voluntary policies was struck down by the *Green* decision, hence ushering in an era of mandates by which districts had to abide in order to stay within what was judicially allowed in desegregation cases.

Moreover, remedies can go in the opposite direction as well—going too far in efforts to reach desired ends. In Rockford, as a result of findings of intentional discrimination, the district entered into a complex consent decree in 1994. However, the decree included such provisions as racial quotas for cheerleaders, super seniority for minority teachers, and what were deemed unrealistic goals for closing the gap between Whites and minorities in test scores, and limits on the number of minority students who could enroll in remedial classes.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the

magistrate judge referred to the ambitious consent decree plan as a "utopian" project and stated that he had warned against "ambitious schemes of social engineering."<sup>28</sup> Clearly, this case puts forth an example of a consent decree that was considered by many to have overstepped its bounds from the remediation of past wrongs to blatant efforts to completely reconstruct the very fabric of the Rockford school district.

Champaign's Unit 4 school district, while having voluntarily entered into its consent decree in 2002, has certainly not escaped the difficulties that accompany the development and implementation of remedies to address the district's many problems. For example, the district implemented a "Controlled Choice" plan as one of the primary vehicles for eliminating the racial imbalance amongst its elementary schools. Controlled Choice provides parents in the district, within certain parameters, with the opportunity to choose the schools their children will attend (Champaign Unit 4 2005). The Controlled Choice plan came under some criticism partly from parents who did not get their first or perhaps second preference for their children's school. Criticism also conceivably came because of the plan's implementation largely as a measure to racially balance schools and also because there was no finding of intentional discrimination on the part of the school district, a measure that would come under heightened suspicion post Seattle/Louisville. Despite this fact, the plan has been largely hailed as successful in establishing racial balance in most of the district's elementary schools. It is unclear, however, how long these measures will be remain in place unchallenged.

Concomitant with discussions of remedies are the issues that arise in determining the standards of successful implementation of measures to address district issues. The desire of parents and community members is not solely for their children to attend a racially balanced school. Their desire is for their children to attend high-quality schools. This point directly nullifies the notion of placing more emphasis on the racial-balancing aspect and instead targets those key underlying issues that have plagued segregated schools. This nuanced distinction carries significant weight in how parties will approach a consent decree; when these factors are considered, they may find that they are able to devise helpful and effective measures while still remaining within the bounds of the Constitution.

For example, in an October 2006 plaintiff response to the Champaign Unit 4 board's report on the consent decree target and steps, plaintiffs discussed what they deemed as the district's failure to address key issues in several specific educationally related areas such as academic achievement, enrollment and attendance, gifted and talented programs, special education, student discipline, staffing and hiring, information technology, alternative programs, and controlled choice, among others.<sup>29</sup> For example, within the achievement category, plaintiffs allege that the district relies on an inappropriate standard to articulate its progress in student achievement at the elementary school level—Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (Champaign Unit 4 2005, 4). Plaintiffs argue that AYP is a minimal standard under No Child Left Behind and stretches to 2014. Therefore, it should not be the measure of what they determine to

be the district's greater obligations under the consent decree.

Plaintiffs argue that because of the usage of AYP as opposed to another standard more appropriate to the district's unique achievement gap issues, the district's report on academic progress did not address the fact that 54 percent of African American students in the district were "Academic Warning or Below for third-grade reading; 58% were at that lowest category in eighth-grade reading and that there has been a downward trend in course grades since 2003."<sup>30</sup> It stands to reason that if the district misidentifies or mischaracterizes the progress being made in certain sectors, actual disparities and issues that still exist within the district will be overlooked, thus the remedies in place are not actually rectifying concrete problem areas within the district that just so happen to involve a disproportionate amount of a certain racial or ethnic group.

Thus plaintiffs identified a two-stage problem: (1) the initial disadvantages of having racially imbalanced schools because those racially identifiable schools had substantially less access to quality resources, teachers, funding, etc., and (2) once schools have been desegregated, the need to examine the experience of certain groups within those schools and determine if students are now exposed to a high-quality and meaningful educational experience. It would appear that they still face challenges that could be attributable to previous historical disadvantages and those challenges manifest in disciplinary inequities, academic achievement gaps, and other factors identified particularly in the Champaign case.

Given the rulings in Seattle and Louisville, districts must understand that racial

balance alone is insufficient to warrant the use of race-conscious policies. Indeed, Justice Clarence Thomas made clear in his concurring opinion that remediation for racial imbalance and remediation for segregation should not be conflated. Remedial measures for racial imbalance are constitutional only to the extent that they seek to rectify past *de jure* segregation. In such cases, race-conscious policies serve a compelling state interest. However, racial imbalance is not necessarily a result of past *de jure* segregation. Also, racial imbalance, Justice Thomas argued, contains no remedy because racial balance will change due to many factors such as changes in demographics and changes in housing patterns. Thus racial balancing takes place on an indefinite basis with no concrete culpable party and no definable end point.<sup>31</sup>

To avoid the pitfall of basing measures primarily on racial balance, petitioners can argue for mechanisms that seek to rectify inequities in academic access and quality of educational experiences. For example, a mechanism other than AYP that seeks to change Champaign Unit 4's achievement standard to track academic progress for the lowest achievers of the district is not specific to race. Instead, a target group has been identified as having the most dire need of measures that will increase academic achievement so that the group is at least on par with its peers. The suggested policy implementations to address equity issues avoid discussions of racial discrimination by focusing only on students most in need. If the district is serious about addressing stark inequities in the educational experiences of some of its students, these measures are necessary to get to the root of the problems in an effective manner.

The critical component that is necessary in order for this method to be successful lies in the faithful use of solid social science research to support the basis of any remedies implemented. For example, the climate study administered by psychologist Mark Aber in Champaign Unit 4 illuminated several issues that had been expressed by parents but never officially codified in the form of a study that would explain what was going on in the district. The study sought to capture the perceptions of the Champaign community concerning school climate and explored several themes including the importance of fairness in discipline and academic matters (especially concerning race), the need to address racial inequities, beliefs about why some students perform poorly, and the importance of community and parent participation in schools' decision-making processes (Aber et al. 2001, 8). The study served as a useful point at which the linkages between racial inequities and educational outcomes could be addressed thus lending possible solutions. It also included the voices critical to the successful implementation of a consent decree: parents, teachers, community members, and administrators.

### IMPACT OF RECENT SUPREME COURT RULINGS

Seattle and Louisville proved to be the latest battleground for those advocating for race-conscious school assignment policies and those against such policies in the absence of compelling state interest. Indeed, Chief Justice Roberts, in the Court's ruling in Seattle and Louisville, held that compelling interest for diversity in higher education was insufficient justification for districts' use of racial classifications in student assignment plans. This decision abrogated an earlier

decision reached in *Comfort v. Lynn School Committee*,<sup>32</sup> which found that diversity as a compelling interest for race-conscious school assignment policies was acceptable.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in *Seattle/Louisville*, Justice Roberts concluded that the school districts in both cases failed to show that use of racial classifications in their student assignment plans was necessary to achieve the stated goal of diversity. More specifically, Roberts asserted that decisions reached in *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger* referred specifically to diversity in higher education and thus did not apply in the K-12 context. He further asserted in the *Seattle/Louisville* decision that race was not considered as part of a broader effort to achieve “exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, unlike in *Grutter*, race was the primary factor that determined admission to a particular school, not one of many factors.

This point highlights an important issue in the results of desegregation cases and the direction such cases will take in the future. This article argues the existence of a disconnect between the desires and grievances of parties seeking to utilize race-conscious policies and the race-neutral ideals espoused by the Supreme Court. This disconnect undergirds many of the tensions and dissatisfaction that accompany education-equity cases in which the courts are brought in to oversee the implementation of remedies to address plaintiff grievances. Namely, the end goal for plaintiffs in school desegregation cases is, arguably, not diversity. The popularity of the diversity argument may make it more difficult for plaintiffs to get the sorts of remedies they seek—remedies that look to address decades of unequal treatment that has manifested itself in the

educational setting. Thus this discontinuity interferes with what remedies are sought and what measures courts are willing to allow.

More simply put, the disconnect centers specifically on remedy on two fronts: (1) addressing and remediating the current effects of past discrimination, which is done by enactment of policies that seek to correct those manifestations and restore students to the position of where they would have been had they not been victims of *de jure* segregation and discrimination; and (2) ensuring that all students garner the benefits that accompany a *quality* educational experience (i.e., including the ability for all students to partake in the educational benefits of diversity). Both of these factors have very different legal ramifications in terms of what can be done on behalf of the “wronged” party.

The Seattle school district never legally operated segregated schools, and it classified students as “White” or “non-White” using race as a “tiebreaker” to allocate slots to particular high schools.<sup>35</sup> Thus utilization of race-conscious remedies served no compelling state interest (because there was no previous *de jure* segregation). Thus the Court struck down the district’s use of race. The Jefferson County (Louisville) district was subject to a desegregation decree until 2000 when the district court dissolved the decree after finding that the district had eliminated all vestiges of prior segregation to the greatest extent practicable.<sup>36</sup> Thus race-conscious measures were found to be insufficiently tailored to the goals of diversity stated by the school district. Essentially, both school districts argued that the race-conscious measures were used to promote racial diversity, avoidance of racial isolation, and racial

integration, but in the absence of previous *de jure* segregation the Court deemed these reasons insufficient.

Specifically, the Court's decision characterizes the problems in both school districts as problems of separation of children based solely upon race and iterates that this legal separation based on race was the crux of the *Brown* decision.<sup>37</sup> The holding further relies on the remedial opinion that *Brown* was intended to prevent states from "according differential treatment to American children on the basis of their color or race," and that, therefore, school districts were required to achieve a system of determining admission to public schools on a non-racial basis.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, this ruling complicates the intent and goals of consent decrees that seek to remediate past racial discrimination in the absence of clear-cut evidence of past *de jure* segregation. In the case of Champaign, the district uses a race-conscious Controlled Choice plan to racially balance schools. While race is not the only factor (the district's Family Information Center, which oversees school assignment, looks at other factors such as sibling school assignment and distance), it is still used to ensure that no single school exceeds the racial fairness guidelines. However, these measures open themselves to challenges on their constitutionality due to the lack of firm grounding supporting the legitimacy of such measures in the absence of a previous finding that the Unit 4 school district admitted liability for segregation in the past.

Indubitably, however, social science research has played a substantial role in the initiatives implemented by Unit 4. The district commissioned an education-

equity audit that illuminated the disparities in the quality of education experienced by the district's African American students and thus had laid the foundation to begin devising solutions to address these issues. This fact differs from what took place in Seattle's and Louisville's school districts. Neither school district sufficiently tied its race-conscious assignment plans to any "pedagogic concept of the level of diversity needed to obtain the asserted educational benefits."<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Unit 4 is not only addressing issues of racial balance, it is addressing key issues that have resulted in lower educational experiences for the district's African American students, and the policies implemented can be closely linked to the interests of ensuring that all students within the school district have access to a quality education.

Essentially, the argument surrounding consent decrees and ensuring that the remedies implemented are narrowly tailored to suit the needs of the school district is this notion of the purpose for the measures to be instituted. Anderson and Trent (2008) argue that districts must make educationally relevant grounds for any race-based policy implementations for institutions and any kind of desegregation plan must be educationally and academically based. They further asserted that sociologists fail to maintain any difference between segregation and integration. Lawyers for the school board in the Seattle and Louisville cases also drew this distinction. They claimed that the desire to integrate public schools is not the constitutional equivalent of seeking to maintain a segregated system and that there is a fundamental difference between using race to segregate a system and using it to integrate one.



Undoubtedly, there exists a tension between the Supreme Court's adherence to its ideals and the remedial goals of school districts seeking to both redress past harms as a result of either indifference or outright collusion with segregation practices and eliminate any current vestiges of past discrimination. If the goal is to remediate past wrongs as a result of *de jure* segregation, it is difficult to construct remedies without the consideration of race, particularly because race played a central role in the construction and carrying out of the original wrongs committed in school districts grappling with segregation issues. And moreover, because it is an almost Sisyphean endeavor to seek to eliminate manifestations of discrimination in every aspect of the educational experience, this tension will surely become even more pronounced as schools, following the Seattle and Louisville decisions, grapple with mechanisms to decrease segregation, enhance diversity, and remain within the purview of the Constitution.

Thus, in the current landscape of desegregation cases and consent decrees addressing racial imbalance and other issues, disputes have largely been in opposition to the means (remedies) employed to reach the desired ends. If the end is desegregation, then race-conscious policies are more likely to be held acceptable by the courts. However, if the ends deal more with educational equity, achievement gaps, disparities in student treatment, and so on, then parties to consent decrees must be ever vigilant that any remedial measures are specifically tailored to address the specific issue at hand so as to avoid charges of discrimination and unconstitutionality. Most importantly, the goal must not be racial balancing for the sake of racial balancing.

All measures must be linked to some aspect of increased educational quality for school members and should be transferable to any race or class of students. This is the only way to ensure that future cases can avoid the pitfalls of defendants in Seattle and Louisville and leave some opening for progress in the quest for high-quality education for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, or class.

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<sup>1</sup> *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1* 551 U.S. 701 (2007)

<sup>2</sup> *Meredith v. Jefferson County Bd. of Educ.* 551 U.S. 701 (2007)

<sup>3</sup> *Brown v. Bd. of Educ. of Topeka, Kansas* 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

<sup>4</sup> *Regents of the Univ. of Cal. v. Bakke* 438 U.S. 265 (1978); *Grutter v. Bollinger* 539 U.S. 306 (2003); *Gratz v. Bollinger* 539 U.S. 244 (2003)

<sup>5</sup> The Fourteenth Amendment allows for the use of race as a factor when there is a “compelling interest narrowly tailored with strict scrutiny.”

<sup>6</sup> See *Freeman v. Pitts* 503 U.S. 467, 494 (1992)

<sup>7</sup> *Brown v. Bd. of Educ. of Topeka, Kansas* 349 U.S. 294 (1955); *Brown* (1954), see 3.

<sup>8</sup> Illinois is one example of a state that utilizes property tax as the primary measure for school districts to raise money, thus property-rich areas are able to raise large amounts of school funds on relatively low taxes, while property-poor areas must implement higher taxes with fewer returns.

<sup>9</sup> *Parents* at 2768. See 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Grutter*. See 4.

<sup>11</sup> Since the writing of this article, the composition of the Supreme Court changed with Justice David Souter being replaced by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, who was appointed by President Barack Obama in 2009.

<sup>12</sup> *Plessy v. Ferguson* 163 U.S. 537 (1896)

<sup>13</sup> *Brown* at 493. See 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Parents* at 2765. See 1.

<sup>15</sup> *People Who Care v. Rockford Bd. of Educ.* 851 F.Supp. 905 (N.D. Ill. 1994)

<sup>16</sup> *People Who Care v. Rockford Bd. of Educ. School Dist. No. 205* 961 F.2d 1335 (7th Cir. 1992)

<sup>17</sup> *Quality Education for All Children, Inc. v. School Bd.* 362 F. Supp. 985 (N.D. Ill. 1973)

<sup>18</sup> *Coates v. Illinois State Bd. of Educ.* 559 F.2d 445 (7th Cir. 1997)

<sup>19</sup> *Missouri v. Jenkins* 515 U.S. 70, 89 (1995); *Freeman v. Pitts* 503 U.S. 467, 494 (1992); *Lee v. Etowah County Bd. of Educ.* 963 F.2d 1416 (11th Cir. 1992)

<sup>20</sup> *Crowley v. Pinellas County School Board No. 50 2008-CA-007579*

<sup>21</sup> *United States v. Bakersfield School Dist.*, No. CV-F-84-39 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 25, 1984)

<sup>22</sup> *Bakersfield*. See 21.

<sup>23</sup> *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Bd. of Educ.* 402 U.S. 1 (U.S.N.C., 1971)

<sup>24</sup> See First Annual Report of the Bakersfield City School District. In *United States v. Bakersfield City School Dist.*, No. CV-F-84-39 (E.D. Cal. Nov. 30, 1984) report filed pursuant to consent decree.

<sup>25</sup> See 24.

<sup>26</sup> *Green v. County School Bd.* 391 U.S. 430, 441 (1968)

<sup>27</sup> *People Who Care v. Rockford Bd. of Educ.* 111 F.3d 528 (7th Cir. 1997)

<sup>28</sup> *People Who Care* at 534. See 27.

<sup>29</sup> *Sa'da and Tyjuan Johnson v. Bd. of Educ. of Champaign Unit School District No. 4*. Report to Court of Collaboration Plan. Champaign, IL, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> *Sa'da and Tyjuan Johnson*. See 29.

<sup>31</sup> *Parents* at 2773. See 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Comfort v. Lynn School Comm.* 418 F.3d 1 (1st Cir. 2005)

<sup>33</sup> Parents of elementary school children brought actions against multiple education defendants, including the school district and city, challenging the constitutionality of Massachusetts's Racial Imbalance Act and the school district's desegregation plan, which took race into account when determining a student's ability to transfer out of a neighborhood school. The Court held that the race-conscious policy was closely tailored to the school district's compelling interest.

<sup>34</sup> *Parents* at 330. See 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Parents* at 2741. See 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Parents* at 2741. See 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Brown*. See 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Brown* at 2761. See 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Parents* at 2755. See 1.

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## Exposure to Community Violence and Social Capital: African American Students in the Critical Transition to High School

by Desmond U. Patton and David W. Johnson

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### ABSTRACT

This article describes how exposure to community violence affects vulnerable minority adolescents' access to institutional resources and social supports embedded within organizational ties to teachers and school personnel at the secondary school level. This article utilizes an extended case method drawing on a large qualitative sample of public school students from demographically high-risk categories for exposure to community violence. The case studies provide compelling evidence of hypothesized *indirect* effects of exposure to community violence, that is, of the potentially harmful effects of exposure to community violence on students' networks of both informal social relationships and organizational ties.

### INTRODUCTION

Previous research has linked exposure to community violence with a range of negative outcomes for minority youth in poor, urban communities (Bell and Jenkins 1993; U.S. Office of the Surgeon General 2001; Bowen and Bowen 1999). The definition of "exposure to community violence" varies, however, depending on the specific researcher's discipline and research agenda (Woolley and Patton 2009). This study defines exposure to community violence as youth experiencing, witnessing, or hearing about violent events that took place in their neighborhood or school. Previous research on the effects of exposure to community violence has largely focused on measuring the direct negative effects of individuals' exposure to community violence on individuals' psychosocial functioning (e.g., effects of witnessing, hearing about, or participating in violence on aggression, cognitive performance, etc.). A robust empirical literature

attests to the harm associated with the direct effects of such exposure on adolescents across a range of social domains, including schools (Mazza and Overstreet 2000). However, much less attention has been given to examining possible indirect effects of exposure to community violence.

Hypothesized indirect effects of exposure to community violence include harm to the social mechanisms mediating the relationship between exposure to community violence and developmental outcomes, such as prosocial functioning and adequate or high academic performance. Previous research suggests that substantial unexplained variability in coping strategies exists among adolescents who have been exposed to community violence (Ozer 2005). To date, however, research has not identified or sufficiently described the specific social mechanisms that may help explain variability in coping response and attendant variation in the distribution of negative effects on academic performance associated with exposure to community violence. The research reported here specifically examines how exposure to community violence affects low-income, minority students' access to social resources within the context of urban public high schools. It is hypothesized that students' organizational ties—the relationships that connect them to institutional actors such as teachers and school counselors—function as an “action-formation mechanism” (Hedström and Swedberg 1998) mediating the potential impact of a particular constellation of circumstances, beliefs, and opportunities for action (e.g., exposure to community violence) upon outcomes of interest (in this instance,

primarily academic engagement and achievement).

This article discusses the implications of social capital theory, which argues that social resources are embedded in networks of social relationships, for research on the effects of exposure to community violence among poor, minority, urban adolescents. Employing an extended case method approach (Burawoy et al. 1991; Burawoy 1998), this article utilizes longitudinal qualitative data on a group of low-income, minority high school students in the Chicago Public Schools to identify and describe both direct and indirect pathways by which exposure to community violence negatively affects vulnerable adolescents' access to institutional resources through its impact on students' opportunities to form and maintain strong relationships to teachers in the high school context.

## EXPOSURE TO COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

Community violence is a social phenomenon that adversely impacts youth from poverty-stricken neighborhoods (Morenoff et al. 2001; Massey 2001). Specifically, adolescents, males, members of nondominant race/ethnicity groups, and low-income individuals have a higher probability of being exposed to violence (Bell and Jenkins 1993; U.S. Office of the Surgeon General 2001; Bowen and Bowen 1999). Most research on community violence examines actual rates of violence in neighborhoods, focusing primarily on the structural causes for higher rates of crime and disorder.

## Psychological and Physiological Perspectives on Exposure

Consequences associated with community violence exposure have been studied from psychological and physiological

perspectives and are well documented (Harding 2008). Psychologists have emphasized the negative developmental sequelae associated with community violence (Mazza and Overstreet 2000; Spencer 2001; Osofsky 1999). For example, witnessing or becoming a victim of community violence has been linked to increased risk for depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), aggression, drug use, and low self-esteem (Gorman-Smith and Tolan 1998). Chronic and acute exposure to community violence has been linked to maladaptive coping strategies such as hypervigilance and heightened arousal states (Spencer 2001; Margolin and Gordis 2000). S.L. Berman and colleagues (1996) conducted one of the few studies that examined how exposure to community violence influences individual coping styles. They found that negative coping styles of individuals exposed to community violence were associated with PTSD symptoms, while positive coping styles, including high self-concept, academic achievement, and adaptation to environment, were not associated with PTSD symptoms.

Additional research has examined physiological responses to exposure to community violence. Douglas Massey (2001) developed a biosocial model that explores the physiological responses of youth exposed to neighborhood stressors, including community violence. Massey has argued that long-term, repeated exposure to community violence produces harmful physiological effects, including persistently elevated allostatic responses to perceived external threats (cf. McEwen and Lasley 2002). Allostatic response, Massey observes, is characterized by increased glandular production, which releases adrenaline and

adrenocorticotrophic hormones that create persistently high levels of arousal and limit the physiological resources available to the body. Allostatic load can influence cognitive functioning by inhibiting the formation of connections between neurons in the brain and by impairing memory. Individuals in a depleted state struggle with discouraging or frustrating tasks and perform poorly on intellectual tasks. Adolescents who are exposed to community violence, particularly repeatedly and over time, may exhibit physiological symptoms associated with elevated allostatic loading, potentially leading to the development of negative attitudes about school as they struggle with otherwise routine academic tasks.

### **Community Organization Perspectives on Exposure**

Research on the effects of exposure to community violence has also been conducted from a social organization perspective. Scholars of twentieth century urban poverty, including Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton (1993), developed a number of widely applied theories of urban poverty that focused broadly on the effects of concentrated poverty and social disorganization of neighborhoods on community functioning. William Julius Wilson (1987) argues the deindustrialization of U.S. cities during the 1970s and 1980s produced endemic unemployment among formerly working-class African Americans. Over time, persistent economic marginality, joblessness, and increasing social isolation brought on by the flight of a Black middle class to the suburbs concentrated poverty in poor Black neighborhoods. The concentration of poverty in these communities, Wilson argues, exacerbated their economic social isolation, cutting them off from both employment opportunities and processes

of socialization linked to middle-class work habits and socially desirable behavior (Wilson 1987; Sampson 2001). Similarly, Massey and Denton (1993) posited a causal relationship between economic deprivation and social disorganization. In their view, the downward shift in the distribution income among racial minorities, coupled with the persistence of profound racial segregation in U.S. cities, led to an increasing geographic concentration of poverty. As in Wilson's account, Massey and Denton argue that the geographic concentration of poverty ultimately incubated and reinforced pathological behaviors that came to be associated with social disorganization, particularly petty and violent crime.

While social disorganization theories suggest that concentrated poverty creates and exacerbates conditions conducive to high crime rates, more recent scholarship has attenuated this link somewhat, arguing instead that the relationship between poverty and community violence is mediated through community-level collective efficacy (Sampson 1999; Sampson 2001). Collective efficacy is defined as "social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good" (Sampson 2001). When collective efficacy is present, Robert J. Sampson and others argue, youth in poor neighborhoods are able to capitalize on strong, supportive relationships with adults. However, the argument runs, the presence of violent crime in low-income, minority communities undermines the social organization of neighborhoods, undercutting the potential for building strong relationships as individuals respond to victimization and violence by becoming wary and distrustful of one

another. Research in this vein has shown that, in low-income, minority communities characterized by high levels of violent crime, residents isolate themselves and restrict their interactions with neighbors, resulting in weak social networks and a lack of cooperative behavior (Harding 2008).

Psychological and physiological responses directly harm the individuals so affected. At the community level, social disorganization theory and the recent focus on collective efficacy suggest that the distrust and unease produced by victimization and exposure to community violence undercut basic sociability in poor, urban communities, reducing interaction between neighbors and, in theory, weakening the informal social networks that undergird cooperative behavior and collective action (Harding 2008; Sampson 1999). Missing from this discussion, however, is an examination of how individuals' informal social networks and their connections to community organizations and state institutions, which continue to penetrate and operate within poor and socially isolated communities, are affected by exposure to community violence. Social capital theory provides a critical framework for examining how exposure to community violence affects vulnerable adolescents' opportunities to form and maintain organizational ties that link them to the resources within the public high schools that constitute crucial buffers against the negative effects of exposure to community violence on academic performance and achievement.

### **SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY**

Careful review of the theoretical literature on social capital suggests that it is necessary to examine the effects of community violence exposure on both



formal and informal networks, as well as on individuals' access to social resources linked to their quotidian participation in common organizational contexts (Small 2009; Adler et al. 1987). In addition to exploring the direct negative effects of community violence exposure on individual psychosocial functioning, research must also examine the theorized production of indirect negative effects of community violence exposure on individuals' connection to and participation in organizational contexts, which putatively link them to social resources. Previous research suggests that few organizational contexts will be as pervasive or as important for adolescents exposed to community violence as schools (Ozer 2005). Although the overlapping contexts of neighborhoods, families, and peer groups exert interrelated pressures on crucial developmental outcomes among urban minority youth (Rankin and Quane 2002), direct observation and study of exposure to community violence in the school context provides a crucial test of theorized mechanisms that link direct and indirect exposure to community violence with diminished access to social resources. Social capital theory provides a rich theoretical and conceptual framework for considering how community violence exposure affects African American access to social resources within communities and schools.

### **Social Capital: Embedded Resources**

The core insight of social capital theory is that non-material resources are embedded within clusters or networks of social relationships that reciprocally shape their accessibility and utility for individuals and groups of social actors. Conceptually, therefore, social capital theory directs attention to the mutually constitutive

links between non-material resources (e.g., information, advice/guidance, emotional support, etc.) and the social relationships within and through which these resources are provided, accessed, and received. Its broad applicability is both a strength and a weakness; uncritical usage across multiple domains has produced widespread imprecision in its use and has at times perpetuated a functionalist logical circularity in its arguments (Portes 1998; Lin 2001a; Lin 2001b; Kadushin 2004). The explanatory power of social capital theory relies on its careful specification as narrowly bounded within the social relations and social networks that give rise to it (Lin 2001b). Definitions of social capital are the subject of considerable disagreement in the literature; a number of key issues are highlighted in these conversations. In particular, debate on the definition of social capital has explored the function of social capital and its connection to structures of relations between social actors (Coleman 1988; Coleman 1990); the nature and meaning of group membership and social solidarity (Bourdieu 1986); and the dynamic, interrelated processes of capital production and activation at the individual and group levels (Lin 2001a; Lin 2001b).

Following Nan Lin (2001b), this article treats social capital theory as a variant of a broader class of capital theories. Lin defines capital, as a concept, as "*investment of resources with expected returns in the marketplace*" (2001b, 3, *italics original*). As such, *capital* represents resources, "invested and mobilized in pursuit of a profit"—in short, as "a goal in action" (Lin 2001b, 3). The concept of capital, therefore, links two related processes: first, the production or modification of a resource; and second, the deployment of

that resource in pursuit of profit (Lin 2001b, 3). The theory of social capital, as Lin observes, elaborates the notion that “capital is captured in social relations” and that “its capture evokes structural constraints and opportunities,” in addition to “actions and choices on the part of the actors” (2001b, 3). As such, Lin (like Mario Luis Small, 2009), suggests that social capital itself “is best understood by examining the mechanisms and processes by which embedded resources in social networks are captured as investments” (2001b, 3). Rather than positing only abstract definitions, such an approach ties the conceptual formulation of social capital to the concrete mechanisms and social processes it anticipates and describes.

### **Network Formation: Organizational Embeddedness**

Small also observes theoretical convergence, noting that social capital theorists generally agree that social capital refers, rather succinctly, “to resources people derived directly from their social ties” (2009, 8). However, as Small critically notes, despite this convergence, much less attention has been given to the question of how individuals form the social ties that provide access to socially embedded resources. Small argues strongly that without understanding the mechanisms underlying tie formation, we cannot adequately understand the creation of network inequality; and “without knowing how network inequality arises,” he continues, “developing the means to reduce it becomes impossible” (2009, 10). Elaborating an underdeveloped emphasis on the context in which social networks are formed and social capital generated and deployed, Small argues that “how a person forms and sustains a tie”—with particular emphasis on the organizational

or institutional context in which those ties arise and either persist or wither—has profound implications for the social capital to which individuals have access (2009, 10).

Small’s emphasis on understanding the context of social network formation, and particularly, the institutional context within which organizational ties (i.e., ties between individuals and key institutional actors) are formed and maintained, is salutary and directs attention to the role of localized, regular participation in community institutions as a source of both direct and indirect, material and immaterial resource acquisition, particularly in poor communities (Small 2009; Adler et al. 1987). As Small observes, the organizational embeddedness approach to social capital “links . . . micro-level processes” of social interaction and network formation “to the macro-level structures”—the community organizations and institutional actors—“that ultimately affect them” (Small 2009, 190).

Small’s “meso-level approach to social inequality” suggests that, in order to answer specific empirical questions about the effects of community violence exposure on individuals’ access to resources, it is necessary to consider how individual social networks are putatively disrupted by the maladaptive coping strategies, hypervigilance, and aggressive behavior associated with direct exposure. Researchers must also consider how processes of tie formation—the development of individual social networks but also particularly the establishment and maintenance of organizational ties that connect individuals to institutional actors and resources—are affected, not only among those directly exposed, but also among those peripherally connected to violent community contexts. In order to

examine how exposure to community violence affects vulnerable adolescents' access to social capital within the school context, we now turn to analysis of two empirical case studies.

### DATA ANALYSIS: EXTENDED CASE METHOD

This article utilizes an extended case method (ECM) approach (Burawoy et al. 1991; Burawoy 1998), drawing on a large qualitative sample of public school students from demographically high-risk categories for exposure to community violence. ECM is a methodological framework that describes the particular interplay between close, ethnographic study of particular cases and the larger theoretical issues that often motivate and shape them. In part, ECM requires the researcher to “specify some *particular* feature of the social situation that requires explanation by reference to particular forces external to itself” (Burawoy et al. 1991, 9). Theory plays a central role: “rather than theory emerging from the field” inductively, as in the case of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), here, “what is interesting in the field emerges from our theory” (Burawoy et al. 1991, 9). ECM uses empirical work as the crucial leverage in an ongoing process of “rebuilding theory.” ECM seeks to “improve theories by turning anomalies into exemplars”—by revising, rather than rejecting, theories in the face of contradictory evidence (Burawoy et al. 1991, 10).

Close reading of the existing empirical literature on exposure to community violence, in conjunction with a careful review of social capital theory above, suggests the falsifiable proposition that the effects of exposure to community violence on vulnerable adolescents' access

to social resources in the school context are mediated by the organizational ties that link students to institutional actors, institutional resources, and external social supports.

This article examines two case studies of African American students in close detail, drawing on a rich archive of qualitative data for each case, as crucial tests of the theoretical propositions suggested above. Unlike traditional quantitative analysis, the objective is not to reject the null hypothesis within a predetermined confidence interval or p-value; two cases, no matter how thoroughly analyzed, would hardly suffice for this purpose. Instead, the objective of this analysis, consistent with the aims of ECM, is to utilize the careful study of these cases to leverage a process of strengthening existing theoretical approaches to understanding how social risk (exposure to community violence) operates on and through the networks of social and organizational ties to create particular outcomes for vulnerable populations. This research, therefore, represents an iterative step in an incomplete, ongoing process of describing the structure of social inequality in order to identify and assess opportunities for intervention with vulnerable populations therein.

### Sample and Methods

This article analyzes two case studies based on data collected as part of a longitudinal, multi-method research study examining students' transition from elementary to high school in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). All identifying information—names of students, teachers, schools, neighborhoods, etc.—has been removed and replaced with pseudonyms. Where quotations are included, they are reproduced verbatim

from taped interviews with students during eighth grade. The two cases were selected to maximize the theoretical range in the data (Small 2009), creating analytical contrast between students with comparable levels of exposure to community violence, but seemingly divergent coping experiences and trajectories. The two African American students, Marcus and Shonta, were recruited to participate in the study during the spring of the 2007-2008 school year when they were in eighth grade. The case studies presented below combine rich qualitative data on students, teachers, and schools; data gathered through biannual surveys of all teachers and students in CPS in sixth grade and up; and district-wide administrative records.

Qualitative data was gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with seventy-two students between May 2008 and February 2009, first in four public elementary schools and later in five public high schools, at multiple time points across the transition from eighth to ninth grade. We slightly oversampled for Latino students since this population of students is growing annually in CPS. Using eighth grade Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) math scores, we also oversampled for middle-achieving students, excluding all students in the “academic warning” category and most from the “exceeds” category. Middle-achieving students make up the vast majority of students in CPS and represent an important target for school choice policies.

Our qualitative data was analyzed using typological analysis (Hatch 2002; Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). Interviews were transcribed and entered into an ATLAS.ti qualitative software program. Transcript quotes were then labeled according to five broad, general themes related to school

choice: high school choice decision making, school involvement in choice process, family and friends involvement in choice process, information about selected high school, and high school applications. This process facilitated data management allowing us to easily sort and retrieve data for further analysis. Working with general themes individually, we coded transcript excerpts inductively for emerging patterns. After codes within themes were developed, we then created data displays (Miles and Huberman 1994) summarizing each case along several relevant factors. These tables allowed us to see trajectories within cases, patterns across cases, and relationships between the factors we examined. The case studies presented and analyzed below are not representative of patterns across cases within the qualitative data; rather, each case provides a critical test of the theorized mechanisms linking the students’ exposure to community violence to their academic engagement and performance through the relative weakness or strength of their organizational ties (relationships to teachers).

Marcus and Shonta attended Barnhill Elementary School and are current sophomores at Rollins High School. Both schools are located in Glenwood. Over the last three decades, Glenwood has experienced declining population, deterioration of aging housing stock, and economic and commercial decline. According to 2000 U.S. Census Bureau data, African Americans made up nearly 98 percent of the total population; unemployment in the area was measured at nearly 12 percent (nationally, in 2000, unemployment was at just 4 percent). More than 40 percent of Glenwood residents lived below the federal poverty line in 2000 (compared to just over 11 percent

nationally), while more than 30 percent earned less than \$10,000 annually. Crime has increased with the rise in poverty. According to the Chicago Crime Commission, much of the Glenwood area is contested gang territory, divided among Black Disciples, Black P Stones, Conservative Vice Lords, Gangster Disciples, and Rubenites (Kirby et al. 2006).

### **MARCUS: FEAR AND LOATHING IN ORGANIZATIONAL TIES**

Marcus is a quiet, thin, Black teenager. His hair is braided tightly; his braids hang almost to his shoulders and frame his face. The braids move gently with his head as he speaks; he tugs absently at a braid now and again while he talks. Marcus isn't quite shy, but he speaks slowly and softly, often giving only one- or two-word answers to interviewers' questions. During eighth grade at Barnhill Elementary School, Marcus seemed to keep to himself a lot at school. He perked up noticeably when asked about after-school activities; he played basketball regularly with a team at the local park district and in eighth grade described trying out for a park district baseball team. Marcus referred in vague ways to hanging out with friends after basketball practice, but it's clear from the beginning that he spends much of his waking time outside school on various basketball courts and in the park across the street from his family's apartment.

#### **Family**

Marcus lives with his mother, father, and his sister, who is seventeen and a junior at Rollins High School. Marcus has three other siblings—an older sister, twenty-two, who is a student at a local college; a brother, eighteen, who lives with his family on and off; and a younger brother,

six, who lives with his father's family. His family lives in a plain, four-story, red brick apartment building on a major thoroughfare, overlooking a large municipal park. Barnhill, the elementary school where Marcus and his siblings attended eighth grade, is less than two blocks away on a side street; the building and parking lot occupy almost an entire city block. A block east from Marcus's apartment, abandoned properties and vacant lots outnumber occupied houses; an aerial view of the neighborhood gives the distinct misimpression of expansive lawns. The view from the sidewalk is clearer—broken glass, trash, rusted appliances, and abandoned cars fill the lots. Many of the houses are partially boarded up. On the surface, the literal and figurative topography of the Glenwood neighborhood echoes key themes of social disorganization, neighborhood disorder, and the challenges of building and sustaining collective efficacy in poor and socially isolated communities.

#### **Barnhill Elementary School**

The student population at Barnhill largely reflects the community it serves. The student body is entirely African American; more than 90 percent of Barnhill students meet the federal criteria for free and reduced-price lunch. The school is spacious and well-lit; hardwood floors look worn, but polished. The hallways at Barnhill are decorated modestly; there are a few banners hung along the walls (one that alternates plastic triangles at intervals, one reading "do your best," and the next reading "on your test"). A bulletin board outside the main office (announced by a small sign over the door) gives a breakdown of the school's reading and math test scores. During the 2006-2007 school year, slightly more than

two-thirds of Barnhill eighth-graders met or exceeded state standards in reading, compared to nearly 80 percent of students in the district as a whole. Just over half of Barnhill eighth-graders that year met or exceeded state standards in mathematics, compared to more than 70 percent of all students district-wide.

### **Eighth Grade: Getting By and Getting Over**

#### *Motivation and Aspirations*

Marcus was first interviewed in the spring of 2007, while he was an eighth-grader at Barnhill. When asked that spring how he felt about school, Marcus explained to an interviewer that school was just “okay.” He complained quietly that some students in his class were disruptive; he suggested they’re more interested in attracting attention to themselves than in doing well. Marcus told an interviewer toward the end of eighth grade that his motivation for working hard and staying out of trouble was his mother. “She wants me to graduate [eighth grade],” he explained. His older sister, then a junior at Rollins High School, where Marcus would attend the following year, had a history of school failure, according to Marcus—multiple trips to summer school; retained on two separate occasions in elementary school; and a generally difficult path to high school. “[My mother] don’t want me to do... to go [my sister’s] way,” he told an interviewer that spring.

#### *Grades and Attendance*

Marcus wasn’t exactly defensive, but seemed to withdraw a bit when asked about his grades during eighth grade. He explained that he doesn’t feel as though he’s doing as well in school as he could. He admitted that he doesn’t think he

really had any goals for himself this year, beyond graduating and avoiding summer school. Although Marcus claimed to do his homework regularly and even described most of his classes as “pretty easy,” his grades indicate he was struggling to pass eighth grade. By the end of the year, he had missed more than a week of school; he said he was sick often, but that, more than once, he had simply woken up late and decided on his own not to go. But he still had fewer than the nine unexcused absences that would automatically trigger a summer school enrollment. Marcus’s scores on statewide achievement tests at the end of eighth grade put him at the bottom of the “meets standards” category in both reading and math. Although not below norms, technically, Marcus’s scores suggest he was relatively poorly prepared for ninth grade, but not dramatically more so than his eighth-grade peers at Barnhill.

#### *Engagement*

Marcus described math as his favorite class in eighth grade. He described to his interviewer how his teacher helps students who don’t understand, going over difficult problems a second time. But Marcus complained that other students often make it difficult to pay attention, both during math lessons and in other subjects. He objected to what he perceived as preferential treatment from the teacher given to girls in the class. Marcus was quietly proud during his eighth-grade interview; he told his interviewer, he’s “never failed, never been suspended, [and] never gone to detention” during elementary school.

#### *Relationships*

Marcus had mixed feelings about his eighth-grade teacher, Ms. Winston. When

asked by an interviewer to rate her on a scale from one to ten, Marcus soberly offered “six.” When pressed, he explained that his fourth-grade teacher, Ms. Billings, was a ten; “she was the best teacher I had,” Marcus explained quickly, “she was just the best.” Although Marcus seemed to appreciate Ms. Winston’s teaching style—at various points he praised her clear explanations, her willingness to go over material more than once, and her ability to make some kinds of work fun—he complained that she shows favoritism toward girls in the class, suggested she calls on girls more often, and even accused her of giving one girl in particular inflated grades because “she’s her favorite.” When asked by his interviewer whether he would ever talk with Ms. Winston about a personal problem or go to her for help if he were in trouble, he emphatically said no. If he needed help, Marcus explained, he could go to his friends or talk to Ms. Billings again.

Ms. Winston’s own evaluation of Marcus echoed a good deal of Marcus’s own self-perception. She observed that much of the work in her class is challenging for Marcus. She expressed frustration at his frequent inattentiveness, going so far as to suggest that Marcus was rarely engaged in lessons or class activities. Ms. Winston contradicted Marcus on whether he does his homework, suggesting that he virtually never completed homework assignments and frequently came to class unprepared. Ms. Winston indicated in eighth grade that she wasn’t aware of any emotional or family problems that might be affecting Marcus’s work in school; however, as noted above, Marcus suggested he wouldn’t share such things with Ms. Winston regardless. Ms. Winston observed that Marcus did not seek additional help from her in class

when he struggled with material, although she noted that he rarely missed a day of school. When asked in eighth grade, Ms. Winston indicated that she thought there was a significant chance that Marcus might have difficulty adjusting socially and academically to high school, and that it was somewhat likely that he would drop out without graduating. Although she also suggested he might go on to college, she ranked his academic skills and motivation as below average, despite giving comparably higher marks for his social skills and home support for learning.

### *Graduating Eighth Grade*

During eighth grade, Marcus told his interviewer that he’s satisfied with passing his classes; he feels successful just getting by. By district standards, however, his performance in eighth grade was marginal; despite missing comparatively less school than his peers, reportedly doing his homework, and by his accounts working hard to pass his classes, Marcus’s academic performance in eighth grade was poor. Although he was allowed to participate in the eighth-grade graduation ceremony at Barnhill, he eventually failed eighth grade and was sent to summer school as a condition for moving on to ninth grade the following fall. In short, although Marcus expressed confidence in his own abilities, his eighth-grade teacher, his eighth-grade test scores, and his report card raised some doubt about his self-assessment and suggested a greater underlying vulnerability belied by his quiet confidence.

### **Ninth Grade: Absent Without Leave (AWOL)**

Marcus began ninth grade fresh off his experience in the district’s Summer Bridge program. Although required to

attend summer school classes, Marcus did not participate in any of the additional programs offered at Rollins to prepare incoming freshmen for high school. When asked why he didn't participate in Freshman Connection or the student orientation for incoming ninth graders, Marcus shrugged and said he didn't know he had to sign up for them, and so he didn't. As in eighth grade, Marcus described spending most of his free time with friends, playing park district basketball.

During the first month of ninth grade, Marcus's interviewers discovered that he was missing school with alarming regularity. Marcus's ninth-grade teachers initially seemed unaware, and an administrator at Rollins suggested that he might have transferred. Eventually, after repeated efforts to contact his parents, Rollins staff initiated truancy proceedings; before the paperwork was completed, however, an administrator reached Marcus's mother by phone. Marcus was back in school the next morning.

By the time Marcus returned to school in late October, he had missed more than three weeks of school consecutively. Marcus's English teacher, Ms. Farrell, who was hired in November after a probationary period as a long-term substitute, had never even met Marcus when he "returned" to her class. As a result of his absences and missed work, Marcus had an F in every class at the end of the first semester. When interviewed in November, Marcus explained to his interviewer that he stayed away from school for nearly a month in order to avoid an upperclassman at Rollins who beat him after school one day in September and then continued to threaten him at school. Marcus recounted the initial incident:

I was walking with my friends to the house and there was a dude—he came up and he was talking. I don't remember what he said, but he just hit me. Then we were boxing and stuff. After he was done, he said he was gonna drop me and all that stuff. I told one of my friends—well, the friend I was walking with—[and] he was like, "Don't mess them with them; they try to fight anybody for no reason." So, I was just like, "forget it."

Marcus explained that, after the initial incident, he talked to the dean of students at Rollins, Mr. Henry, who told him to come directly to him with any problems he had with the boy in the future. Instead, Marcus explained, word got around that he had talked with Mr. Henry about it. Marcus described how the boy found him again after class the next day:

I told [Mr. Henry], and they called dude and all that . . . I was coming out of [class], and he was waiting for me. He came up to one of the guys and told one of the guys that they were gonna come up after school and get crackin' [start a fight]. "We gonna beat up dude [Marcus]."

Marcus told his interviewer that he went back to Mr. Henry, who told him to call his mother and go home. Marcus did as he was told, catching a ride home with a friend. "They said a fight happened after school," Marcus offered weakly, "but I don't think it was him. They said it was some girls." After the second incident, when he was threatened, however, Marcus stopped attending school. He began staying home to avoid running across the boy and his friends at Rollins. Marcus tricked his mother into believing he was going to school each morning—getting up, putting on his uniform, and heading



out the front door with his backpack. Marcus described how he waited outside for his mother to catch the bus to work before slipping up the back staircase and back into the apartment.

When Marcus returned to Rollins in late October, his teachers had largely forgotten him. His English teacher, Ms. Farrell, was pleased to finally meet him; his algebra teacher, Mr. Richards, was less excited about having Marcus in his class again. Marcus's attendance continued to be sporadic, although he was now regularly in the school building each day, if not in class. A plan to have his attendance monitored daily was discarded when administrators discovered that Marcus was signing in at the attendance office each day but cutting classes and playing basketball in the school gym for hours on end.

In November, a close friend of Marcus's and a fellow student at Rollins was shot and killed after school, less than a block from Marcus's family's apartment. Marcus explained to an interviewer that, since the shooting, a lot of students at Rollins had begun wearing pictures of the slain student on chains around their necks at school. Marcus told an interviewer that, since the shooting, he's been worried about safety. Although he feels safe in school, he worries about what happens when he leaves to walk home. Marcus said that he's been concerned since his friend's death about:

Hanging out around the wrong people. People—like they said be close to your enemies, they are far from your friends, cause your friends stab you in the back.

In the wake of the shooting, Marcus seemed increasingly withdrawn from school. His attendance continued to be

poor, partly reflecting his willingness to skip school on days when he didn't feel like going, but also as a function, he explained, of his desire to stay out of trouble. Marcus's performance at school continued to suffer because of his sporadic attendance. When Marcus was interviewed again in December, he explained how his relationships with teachers, Mr. Richards in particular, had soured. Marcus complained that Mr. Richards picked on him, singling him out unfairly for reprimand. Marcus described how his interactions with Mr. Richards led him to give up on his class work:

I be paying attention sometime, but [Richards] just turn on me. He just get me all mad, and [I] say forget it—I'm not doing this [work] no more . . . cause, I was doing this work one day, [and] then I got up to sharpen the pencil. There were so many people up, and they weren't even doing nothing—they were just up walking around . . . and [Richards] was like [to Marcus] "why are you up?" He just started talking to me . . . and I was like, "I am trying to sharpen my pencil so I can do your work." He said "sit down; you don't need that pencil sharpened. You know you aren't gonna do nothing." [And] I was like "aight, I'm not gonna do nothing then.

By the end of the first semester, Marcus was regularly cutting his algebra class to avoid Mr. Richards. When asked, Marcus explained to an interviewer that he never talked to Mr. Richards about why he was absent from school during October or about how to get caught up on the work he missed in the class. Remarkably, the animosity Marcus expressed toward Mr. Richards turned out to be mutual. In casual conversation between classes in

early December, Mr. Richards told one of Marcus's interviewers that Marcus's attendance was so bad, he had no hope of passing ninth grade, no matter what he did. Mr. Richards explained that Marcus's problem, in his view, was the same as a lot of young Black men's:

They don't see education as a priority. They don't think it's important for them to be here every day. And up, the higher up you get in education, the more important that is, but really, it's important in kindergarten, too.

Mr. Richards viewed Marcus's attendance as not only problematic because it meant that he didn't understand material covered during classes he'd missed, but also because he saw Marcus's behavior as an expression of Marcus's poor values and lack of commitment to education. Mr. Richards went on to explain to an interviewer that he doesn't give make-up work to students who are absent or hold tutoring sessions for kids who miss class. "Pretty much," Mr. Richards explained, "you can give them work, but they ain't gonna do it. You can tell them show up, pay attention, but they not trying to pay attention to that right now." In the absence of any knowledge about why Marcus missed school in the fall, Mr. Richards constructed a narrative for Marcus—one that cast him as disinterested, unmotivated, and disruptive and missed the vulnerable and frightened young man. Mr. Richards's interpretation of Marcus's behavior became the basis for a contentious relationship; twice during the spring, as a result of arguments with Mr. Richards during class, Marcus would be suspended—missing first two and then an additional three days of school as punishment.

By the end of ninth grade, Marcus earned F's in every academic subject except social studies, where he somehow managed a D. Marcus missed a total of thirty-six and a half days of school and was absent from his algebra class more than thirty times—during many of these classes, he was in fact in school, but playing basketball or trying to sneak into other classes to prank substitute teachers. During the spring, although he attempted to complete a credit recovery program that a Rollins administrator enrolled him in, Marcus earned just one credit toward graduation during his freshman year. Over the summer between ninth and tenth grade, Marcus took a summer school course in algebra, again to make up the missed credit, which he also failed. He continued to struggle through the first quarter of tenth grade, earning D's in all of his classes, except English, in which he had an F.

### SHONTA: TRAGEDY AND MOTIVATION IN TWO ACTS

Shonta is a shy, heavysset Black student. Also a student at Barnhill Elementary School when she was recruited to participate in the study, Shonta developed a friendly relationship with her interviewer quickly. As an eighth-grader, Shonta was a student in Ms. Bradford's class, across the hall from Marcus in Ms. Winston's room. Shonta has struggled throughout her life with health problems; she has a heart condition that sometimes keeps her out of school. Despite her flagging health, Shonta is an enthusiastic student and talked openly about her deep concern about her performance in her eighth-grade classes. In eighth grade, Shonta had a small group of very close friends—a mixture of girls and boys with whom she hung out after school and on weekends. In eighth grade, Shonta

explained to her interviewer that she saw herself as generally a better student in comparison to her friends. She explained that she made better grades than her friends, observing that some of them were already skipping class in eighth grade.

### Family

Shonta lives with her grandparents and three younger siblings just a few blocks west of Barnhill. Shonta's mother plays a passive role in her life. For example, her mother may take her to school in the morning or give her advice on boys and the importance of completing school, but this appears to be rare. Shonta spends a lot of time talking about an older sister, Monique, who is currently a freshman at the University of Illinois, Springfield. Like Shonta, Monique attended Barnhill and Rollins and had a strong academic career. Shonta is very excited about high school and dreams about attending college. Shonta's dream is to attend the University of Illinois, Springfield, her sister's college. Shonta plans to get there by coming to school every day and completing all assignments.

### Eighth-Grade Year: Academic Behaviors and Thinking about High School

In her eighth-grade year, one of Shonta's eighth-grade teachers suggested that she has average academic and social skills and average motivation. By the end of eighth grade, Shonta's grades were average. She had a few A's but her GPA was mainly composed of B's and C's. Like many students at Barnhill, Shonta did not study for tests or quizzes but usually completed homework assignments and held very high expectations. Yet, unlike many students, Shonta started staying after school to get additional help from her teachers. Shonta suggested that her classes were easy and that she had little trouble

following the subject matter. However, Shonta admitted to not being focused while sometimes struggling to pay attention because she was talking with her classmates. Shonta's inability to pay attention at times had a temporary effect on the amount of effort she put into class. When Shonta noticed her grades slipping she began staying after school. Shonta missed several days due to her illness, but managed to catch up with her peers by collecting and completing all missed assignments. Shonta spent about forty-five minutes a day on homework, completed all homework assignments, and put a lot of effort into her class assignments. Shonta commented, "I want to be somebody, and I don't want to be the flunky that can't keep up with the work." Shonta has high expectations and was not satisfied with her grades.

### SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

Over the course of eighth grade, Shonta developed a strong relationship with her eighth-grade teacher. Shonta was in a self-contained classroom, which meant that she had one teacher for the duration of the school. Shonta first connected with her teacher through learning. For Shonta, the school day was fun and engaging as the teacher often joked with students and made the material relevant to their daily life. Shonta also thought her teacher was fair and treated everyone equally. Shonta drew closer to her teacher as her illness became more serious. Shonta felt that her teacher was understanding and even offered to pray with her after class.

### FEELINGS OF SAFETY

Shonta described her neighborhood as dangerous but she felt safe at school. There were few security guards at Barnhill, and so at times the fighting could be a bit nerve-racking for Shonta.

However, Shonta had grown up with most of the students at Barnhill, which prevented her from feeling any real danger. The perception of danger in the neighborhood was a different story. As a precaution, Shonta's grandparents drove her to school every morning and only allowed her to walk home from school with a large group of friends. In looking to the future, Shonta was also aware of the reputation of Rollins as being a violent school but she was not focused on that. Leaving eighth grade, Shonta felt confident that she'd do well at Rollins and had little concern for her safety.

### **Ninth-Grade Year: Violence and the Transition to High School**

In the fall of her ninth-grade year, Shonta quickly realized the differences in safety between Barnhill and Rollins. Shonta pointed out that there were more security guards at Rollins than at Barnhill and a number of gang fights every day. However, Shonta felt relatively safe at Rollins at the beginning of the semester. By the end of the first semester, things changed quite a bit for Shonta. Within one month, Shonta's best friend and fellow Barnhill alum was murdered on his way home from school. Two weeks later, another close friend was shot several times in a gang-related drive-by as he was leaving school; he survived. Shonta was now terrified to come to school. She stopped walking home from school with her friends, thought twice before leaving her house in the evening, and often had nightmares about being killed. Needless to say, Shonta's exposure to violence drastically altered her perception of safety in the neighborhood and at school. Shonta stated her friend's death has had an impact on her concentration in school.

When my teacher told us and I saw the news last Friday all I could think about was Chris because his desk was right next to mine. When I would get ready to do my work then all of a sudden I would think about Chris then I just started crying. I just go to the bathroom, but then I come back and I still feel sad about it.

Shonta began to question her high school choice and her friendships after her second friend was shot.

I wondered if I should be at this school. Should I hang out with these friends?

However, rather than interpreting her sudden ambivalence toward her friends and classmates at school as a cue to withdraw from the situation, Shonta decided to use these tragedies as motivational tools for getting good grades so that she can join her sister at the University of Illinois, Springfield.

### **FRESHMAN YEAR ACADEMIC BEHAVIORS**

One might assume that Shonta's perception of school safety would have a lasting impact on her academic performance. On the contrary, Shonta was having her best academic semester to date. Shonta was working hard in her classes, spending about an hour a night on homework, and earning a 3.1 unweighted GPA, which placed her in the top 10 percent of her class at Rollins. Shonta's motivation to do well in high school has been reflected in her academic effort. For example, Shonta was doing extra credit in the classes that were more challenging and would stay after school to receive additional tutoring. In addition, Shonta has developed stronger study habits and studies with peers. Shonta also received the honor of being admitted into the National Beta

Club for her academic achievement. In addition to the Beta Club, Shonta is also a member of the Garden Club, which is sponsored by her math teacher. However, absences remain a struggle for Shonta. She missed several days of school due to her illness but remained faithful with catching up on all missed assignments. Shonta's English teacher agreed with her assessment, "Shonta does everything I ask her, sometimes a little late, but she understand[s] it and completes it almost all the time." More specifically, Shonta's teacher stated that "she's always engaged with the class material and always comes to class prepared." The teacher did, however, point out that Shonta has had emotional problems that have affected her schoolwork.

### FRESHMAN YEAR STUDENT/TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

Shonta received a lot of support and guidance from teachers during her first semester of freshman year. Shonta's freshman seminar teacher is a friend of the family and has been particularly helpful around building study and organizational skills. Mr. Joe, Shonta's math teacher, was an anchor for Shonta when she missed school due to her heart condition. Mr. Joe would come to school early to help Shonta catch up on missed assignments. Shonta had an equally strong relationship with her English teacher. Ms. Putnam described Shonta as "a great kid who is very independent, funny and smiles a lot. I love seeing her every day." Shonta cultivated a relationship with her English teacher because she found the material to be new and engaging. For example, Shonta learned how to write poems, a concept that was new to Shonta before entering Ms. Putnam's class. When Shonta struggled to keep up with the assignments she missed

during her illness, Ms. Putnam was right there providing her with the extra credit work she needed to raise her English grade. In a teacher interview, Ms. Putnam described Shonta as one of the only students in her class who had the possibility of attending college. As such, Ms. Putnam spent more time with Shonta to help her meet her personal goal. Ms. Putnam also believed that Shonta's funny, caring, and jovial demeanor made her a more enjoyable student to teach.

Shonta had a tumultuous freshman year that was filled with personal tragedy. Given this emotional strain, one might expect Shonta to have had an equally challenging academic year. In the face of tragedy, Shonta was able to maintain above-average grades, join after-school activities, and come to school on a fairly consistent basis. Shonta leveraged her strong personal drive and her relationships with teachers in order to pull through her tough first semester.

### DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The two cases described above provide a rich portrait of how exposure to community violence affects students' access to social resources through its effects on their opportunities to form and maintain organizational ties linking them to teachers and institutional resources. We propose three broad-based policy recommendations for leveraging the strength of the African American community to address community violence and poor academic achievement.

First, our findings suggest the importance of both concrete resources and direct service provision to support adolescents and their families in coping with community violence. However, we interpret the evidence from these case studies as also

supporting a more specific call for the creation and maintenance of programs and initiatives that support local institutional actors' (e.g., churches, schools, nonprofits) efforts to develop innovative approaches to broadening and deepening the networks of formal and informal social support for vulnerable African American adolescents. Future research must attend to the indirect pathways along which exposure to community violence operates that interfere with students' ability to form and maintain strong relationships with teachers and school personnel. This article suggests that these relationships may lead to additional resources and support for students, which in turn shape students' opportunities to be academically successful.

An analysis of Shonta's case suggests that among other factors that potentially help to buffer urban youth against the serious negative repercussions of exposure to community violence may be the existence and operation of close, caring relationships with teachers and school staff at the high school level. Explaining the formation and maintenance of these strong, supportive relationships is difficult and complex; within the context of this analysis, the multiple factors underlying the development and persistence of Shonta's strong and effective organizational ties (or Marcus's failure to form such ties) are hopelessly confounded. However, supporting the development and maintenance of these institutional ties is strongly supported from this data.

Second, taken with previous research on the multiple challenges facing adolescents exposed to community violence, these case studies also indirectly suggest that high levels of community violence exposure among African American high

school students also pose serious challenges for teachers. The cases reviewed here provide some preliminary evidence for the proposition that supporting teachers—perhaps through training on the specific risks, effects, and coping strategies associated with exposure to community violence and their respective effects on students' academic achievement and relationships with adults—may also help to buffer African American adolescents from some of the more powerful negative effects of exposure to community violence.

One limitation of this study is that it is impossible without further data and more extensive analysis to determine whether and how additional factors such as gender, style of self-presentation, perceived level of motivation, and level of academic achievement may have influenced their teachers' willingness to provide each of them with additional resources and support. The marked contrast between Shonta and Marcus's experiences suggests that these and other factors may be profoundly important in shaping how teachers respond to students' needs, particularly in the wake of exposure to community violence. This research suggests that the intersection of gender, self-presentation, and academic achievement may have interconnected effects on teachers' responsiveness to students' perceived needs.

Third, there is great promise in focusing on developing interventions to support the formation of organizational ties. Although a good deal of empirical research supports the claim that relationships and social trust are key to effective secondary education (Bryk and Schneider 2002; Allensworth and Easton 2007), more research is needed to specify how to encourage and support teachers and

school staff in forming and nurturing these relationships with teachers, particularly among students like Marcus whose maladaptive coping behaviors occasionally place him at odds with teachers who would have helped but, more often, simply remove him from the scene altogether. The findings presented here support the general proposition that efforts to develop programs at the community and school level, which support the creation and maintenance of organizational ties between vulnerable adolescents and institutional actors (e.g., teachers, school administrators, etc.), have genuine promise in mitigating some of the most severe and preventable forms of racialized disadvantage conferred upon African American adolescents as part of the persistent legacy of White supremacy, racial segregation, and institutional racism that still shapes the contours of the American urban landscape.

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## Rethinking Prisoner Reentry in Harlem

by Kate Krontiris and Christopher Watler

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### ABSTRACT

This article profiles a local reentry collaborative based in New York City's Harlem neighborhood. It examines this initiative in the context of prison reform efforts currently underway in New York State. After briefly summarizing historical patterns of incarceration in the state and

the effects on primarily Black and Hispanic urban neighborhoods, we discuss how the Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force is using the principles of problem-solving justice to reduce recidivism and improve public safety.

While spending six and a half years in prison for selling drugs, Andres Idarraga began to read voraciously. He eventually started tutoring other students in GED preparation and completed college courses by correspondence. In a recent interview, he shared his story.

While I was teaching and reading, I internalized, very deeply, a framework that was almost delusional at the time. This was that a person can accomplish absolutely anything, regardless of the circumstances, if he or she works hard enough. I remember applying to Brown University from my prison cell and the guards would see my mail with "Brown University" on it. They would look at me like, "This kid is delusional. What is he thinking?" But I had this firm belief that I was talented and I could get into college if I applied myself. I think many people who have grown up in disadvantaged circumstances have developed an ingrained, perverted mentality that they can't do something, or that they can't have certain experiences because they are reserved for more privileged people. (Krontiris 2009)

After some time at the University of Rhode Island upon release, Idarraga was accepted to Brown University, where he completed his bachelor's degree. He is now a second-year law student at Yale. While his story is unique, he is also an example of the wealth of human capital that lives behind bars in the United States.

This article will focus on the New York State story of prisoner reentry reform, highlighting recent improvements to the system of parole and corrections. It will concentrate on an innovative, state-funded effort in Harlem, where a diverse group of stakeholders put their ideas and resources together to improve the process of return for people coming back from prison and attracted federal funding from the U.S. Department of Justice to support their efforts. As many scholars have noted, incarceration is among the most pressing civil rights issues of our time. Fortunately, around the country, there are numerous noteworthy examples of reentry, where community members are working alongside probation, parole, and police officers to help reentrants successfully, sustainably, and safely reintegrate.

### THE NEW YORK STORY

New York has historically played a central role in the national debate about crime in America. The 1973 Rockefeller Drug Laws, which passed amid growing concern about rising crime and drug use, were among the harshest drug sentencing laws in the country when enacted. They helped to fuel an unprecedented growth in the number of persons incarcerated in the state. The mandatory minimum sentences for small amounts of heroin and cocaine (and originally marijuana) drastically reduced judicial discretion and effectively increased the power of prosecutors. The charging decisions of the prosecution in drug cases became the key determinant of whether a defendant would serve a minimum of fifteen years in prison. Consider the following:

- Between 1973 and 1998, the state's prison population grew by 400 percent, from 13,800 to just over 68,000 (Weiskopf Consulting Services 1999).

- As of March 2008, there were more than 42,000 men and women on parole in New York State (New York State Division of Parole 2008a; New York State Division of Parole 2008b).

- Half of all prison releases in the state return to New York City (New York State Division of Parole 2008b).

According to a Pew Center on the States report, males ages twenty to thirty-four are incarcerated at a rate of one in thirty, while African American males in the same age group have the highest rate of incarceration, one in nine (Warren 2008). The impact of New York's move to increase its prison population was disproportionately felt by African American residents. African Americans currently comprise 17 percent of the state's population (U.S. Census Bureau 2008), yet represent 51.5 percent of the state's 60,000-person prison population (New York State Department of Correctional Services 2009). A 2001 report from the Prison Policy Initiative says that people of color account for 87.6 percent of the growth in New York's prison population since 1970 (Wagner 2001).

In 2007, state governments spent \$44 billion on corrections costs, up 127 percent from 1987. Comparatively, state spending on higher education grew by only 21 percent during the same period (Warren 2008). For poor urban communities, the ancillary costs of incarceration are high, making it difficult to support needed expenditures in health, education, housing, and social services when so many dollars are committed to prisons and jails.

Because prison plays such a major role in the life opportunities of African American males in New York State, with profound

implications for Black families and neighborhoods, reforming corrections policy is critically important. The case for reform has been made on moral and pragmatic grounds. For some, reform is a social justice issue. These advocates point to the long-term impacts of incarceration not only on individuals, but also on families and communities. For others, reform is necessary for practical reasons, including the fact that the cost of incarceration is unsustainable, especially in the face of a growing body of evidence showing that alternatives to incarceration are not only cheaper, but also more effective at reducing recidivism. One examination by the Legal Action Center found that New York could save more than \$89,000 per second-time, nonviolent, felony offender by providing community-based treatment instead of jail (Legal Action Center 2008). An evaluation of New York State drug courts found that drug court participants had lower rates of recidivism one year after program participation (Rempel et al. 2003).

New York began to chart a new course in 2004 when it was selected by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) to participate in the Transition from Prison to Community (TPC) initiative. The TPC model of managing offenders emphasizes local- and state-level collaboration, better offender risk assessment, and graduated responses to criminal behavior. It seeks to improve better outcomes for persons returning from prison, reduce recidivism, and increase public safety (National Institute of Corrections n.d.). Several initiatives are currently underway in New York as part of the TPC effort, including:

- A statewide, cabinet-level reentry task force to coordinate policy and practice among various state agencies.

- The implementation of an actuarial evidence-based risk and need assessment tool to guide decision making around offenders for probation and parole divisions.
- The creation of transitional accountability plans for all released individuals to support better preparation pre-release.
- The attendance of inmates at their parole hearings four months prior to a potential release date to allow more time for reentry planning.
- The implementation of a statewide cognitive behavioral therapy program that assists high-risk offenders in addressing their criminal thinking patterns and behaviors.
- The development of correctional facility reentry units that will allow returning offenders to better prepare for release closer to their home. These units also invite community-based programs into the facility to engage offenders pre-release.
- The development of a graduated response policy for the Division of Parole that reduces returns to prison for low-risk offenders through targeted responses to noncompliance that are community-based and supported by research.

In addition to the statewide efforts described above, in 2007, the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services funded reentry task force programs in several high-need counties throughout the state. Led by local prosecutors or county executives, the task forces manage select high-risk offenders returning to their jurisdictions. In addition to parole officers and local law enforcement, each task force includes representatives from county social services, drug treatment providers, local clergy, and other perti-

ment services. Each task force seeks to build local partnerships that address the range of challenges facing returning offenders, including finding and maintaining employment and housing, drug and mental health treatment, and family services. Nowhere in New York are these challenges more pronounced than in Upper Manhattan.

### CRIME AND PAROLE IN UPPER MANHATTAN

The birthplace of the Harlem Renaissance, Harlem has long been recognized as a national center for Black intellectual, spiritual, political, and artistic endeavors. Alongside Harlem are several other neighborhoods—Inwood, Washington Heights, and East Harlem—that have become important communities for many new immigrants from the Dominican Republic, the Caribbean, and Central America, among other places. Together, these neighborhoods comprise Upper Manhattan. Geographically, this is the area north of 96th Street on the East River side and north of 110th Street on the Hudson River side, extending to the uppermost tip of the island. According to the most recent American Community Survey (2006-2008), there were 585,911 people living in this zone, representing 36 percent of the total population of Manhattan (New York City Department of City Planning. n.d.). These are primarily neighborhoods of color; Hispanics comprise 49 percent of the population, followed by African Americans (33 percent), Whites (26 percent), and Asians (4 percent) (note that the Census allows you to choose more than one category, accounting for the totals above 100 percent).

Almost 50 percent of households in Upper Manhattan have a total yearly

income of less than \$15,000. In comparison, this figure is 17 percent for New York City as a whole. Median household income in Upper Manhattan is about \$33,811, compared to \$50,403 in New York City as a whole. For families below the poverty line, between 34 to 37 percent are headed by a single female in Upper Manhattan; this rate is 29.5 percent for the whole of New York City (U.S. Census 2008). Upper Manhattan has historically had and continues to experience higher unemployment rates, lower high school graduation rates, older and more degraded housing stock, higher rates of child abuse, and more pronounced negative health conditions overall.

While in the last ten years, New York City has experienced a dramatic decrease in major crimes, the neighborhoods in Upper Manhattan continue to experience a disproportionate amount of crime in comparison to the rest of the borough.

- **Murders.** Precincts in Upper Manhattan had approximately eight murders per 100,000 people in 2007 (using 2006 population estimates) compared to two murders per 100,000 in all other Manhattan precincts (from New York Police Department crime statistics in 2007).

- **Rape.** While Upper Manhattan precincts displayed approximately twenty-six rapes per 100,000 people in 2007, the rest of Manhattan had eleven rapes per 100,000 people (from New York Police Department crime statistics in 2007).

- **Robbery.** Upper Manhattan precincts experienced 384 robberies per 100,000 people in 2007, compared to 237 robberies per 100,000 people for the rest of Manhattan (New York Police Department 2007 (from New York Police Department crime statistics in 2007)).

In 2006, according to the New York City Criminal Justice Agency, there were 38,710 prosecuted arrests in Upper Manhattan police precincts—46 percent of the Manhattan total (New York City Criminal Justice Agency 2006). Indeed, arrestees in Upper Manhattan have deeper and more serious criminal justice involvement than those in the rest of Manhattan.

- For 2006, 49 percent of arrestees in Upper Manhattan had prior convictions, compared to 40 percent in the rest of Manhattan.
- For 2006, 34 percent of arrestees in Upper Manhattan had priors at the felony level, compared to 25 percent in the rest of Manhattan.

If we focus more specifically on trends of people returning to Upper Manhattan from prison or jail, we find a disproportionate story yet again. One statistic puts this in sharp focus; if you stroll down the mere seven blocks of Lexington Avenue between 126th Street and 119th Street in East Harlem, one in twenty men you pass will have been incarcerated, with a vast majority of them having served (or currently serving) time on parole (Moore 2007). An additional 900 people who live in the zip code surrounding this area were admitted to the city's jail system in 2007, compared to 633 people per zip code citywide for the same year (Moore 2007; City of New York Department of Corrections n.d.).

Parole statistics tell a similar story. Of all people released to parole supervision in Manhattan, *half* return to Upper Manhattan, approximately 2,200 people per year. Compared to other parolees in Manhattan, Upper Manhattan parolees are older; less likely to be engaged in support programming, especially mental

health counseling; more likely to be unemployed; more likely to have a history of violent offending; and, although they stay out longer once released, are more likely to have a history of parole violations. Once they are released, it is not very likely that they will successfully reintegrate into their communities. The Center for Court Innovation recently conducted an evaluation of Manhattan parolee outcomes. Among those persons released between 2001 and 2008, within three years following their release from prison, 62 percent had been rearrested, 52 percent had been reconvicted, and 32 percent had their parole revoked (New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services 2009). This body of statistics shows that Upper Manhattan parolees typically have a deeper involvement in and longer history with the criminal justice system and explains why the Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force was created.

#### LOCAL INNOVATIONS: THE UPPER MANHATTAN REENTRY TASK FORCE

In October 2007, the Center for Court Innovation, in partnership with the New York City Mayor's Office, convened the Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force, based at the Harlem Community Justice Center. The Center for Court Innovation functions as the court system's independent research and development arm, creating demonstration projects that test new ideas. In addition to operating community, drug, mental health, domestic violence, and reentry courts in New York City, the center also disseminates the lessons learned from its innovative programs, helping criminal justice practitioners around the world launch their own problem-solving experiments.

The Harlem Community Justice Center is one such demonstration of problem-solving justice in action. Begun in 2000, the Justice Center is a community-based court that seeks to address housing, juvenile delinquency, and reentry challenges in East and Central Harlem. Since 2001, the Justice Center has operated an innovative parole reentry court in partnership with the New York State Division of Parole. From this established program, the Justice Center has generated strong and beneficial relationships not only with the state's primary agency responsible for reentry, the Division of Parole, but also with local service providers, precinct commanders, faith leaders, and grant funders.

Starting with this network, the Justice Center invited eighteen organizations to join the task force, including city, state and community-based organizations. Senior administrators participated from the following eighteen agencies:

- New York State Division of Parole
- New York State Department of Correctional Services
- New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services
- New York State Office of Mental Health,
- New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas
- New York County District Attorney's Office
- New York City Housing Authority and Department of Homeless Services
- New York City Department of Probation and Corrections
- New York City Police Department
- New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
- New York State Office of Mental Health

- New York City Criminal Justice Coordinator's Office
- John Jay College Prisoner Reentry Institute
- The Doe Fund
- Center for Employment Opportunities
- The Fortune Society
- Greenhope Services for Women, Inc.
- Exodus Transitional Community

The task force has since grown to include a number of additional partners, including the Harlem Business Alliance, the state's agency for Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities, and United States Probation. The New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services provides \$100,000 annually to fund the task force, supporting the work of a task force coordinator in particular.

The task force seeks to achieve two broad goals: (1) enhance public safety; and (2) reduce recidivism among parolees returning to the Upper Manhattan neighborhoods of East and Central Harlem, Washington Heights, and Inwood. To achieve these goals, the task force engaged in a comprehensive needs assessment process, investigating reentry from all possible angles. The methodology for this investigation included brainstorming sessions among task force members, individual interviews, and focus groups, site visits to model reentry programs, a review of current literature, and data collection and analysis of current crime and reentry trends in Upper Manhattan.

While not surprising to reentry practitioners, the key findings of this assessment process should be noted.

- Enhanced coordination between local police precincts and parole bureaus to

proactively respond to high-risk persons on parole is needed. This is especially true in precincts where reported crime is higher, more persons with multiple convictions are arrested, and high concentrations of persons on parole reside.

- The public is generally unfamiliar with the reentry process, the role of relevant agencies, and the experiences of persons leaving prison. The public stigma attached to persons reentering the community often blunts efforts to develop progressive policies and local programs that enhance public safety. Promoting a broader public understanding of reentry and the potential role that the public can play in fostering effective reentry practice is critical.
- Access to a living-wage job and a defined career path is essential for a reentrant's short- and long-term success (Visher et al. 2008). Employment and overall economic viability are important ways to encourage pro-social behaviors and positive relationships. Despite this fact, and the desire of many reentrants to work, there still exist many barriers to employment for persons with a criminal conviction. Key among these barriers is the stigma of a criminal conviction and the resulting discrimination faced by reentrants from employers who are unaware of the law and, more importantly, how their business can benefit from hiring pools that include qualified candidates with a criminal conviction record.
- Reentrants need increased access to local services, including aggression management therapies, drug treatment services, housing assistance, and local employment services.
- Persons returning from prison often lack a rich social network of relationships

that support desistance from crime, sobriety, gainful employment, and access to services. This state of diminished social capital limits reentrants' ability to address their needs. Civic engagement and education through community service is a powerful way to encourage the development of productive social capital for reentrants.

At all points throughout the needs assessment process, one theme was repeated consistently from everyone from agency decision makers to parolees returning home: *something needs to be done to improve discharge planning in New York State*. Pre-release case planning and case management have a significant impact on the success of an inmate's reintegration.

Upon completion of the assessment, the task force devised seven recommendations for change, targeted specifically to enhanced collaboration between police and parole, community outreach and education, workforce development, accessing services, civic engagement, discharge planning, and housing. Both the needs assessment and strategic plan documents were widely publicized and circulated, and a blog was started to publicly communicate the goals, achievements, and plans of the task force. This past year, the task force has begun implementing three of the seven recommendations and plans to commence the other four in coming years.

Motivating the task force process was a commitment to the concept of problem-solving justice developed by the Center for Court Innovation. It is the idea that the justice system should not just process cases, but also actively seek to have a positive impact on defendants, victims, and crime-plagued neighborhoods. The

center had already successfully applied problem-solving justice principles to the development of the state's first and only parole reentry court. A component of the Harlem Community Justice Center, the Harlem Parole Reentry Court was started in 2001 in partnership with the New York State Division of Parole. The court helps parolees from the Harlem community who have been imprisoned for nonviolent, drug-related offenses make the transition from life in prison to responsible citizenship. To promote accountability, participants are required to return to the court frequently to meet with case managers and parole officers and appear before a judge, who closely monitors their compliance with court orders. The task force work offered another opportunity to test this approach and the following core principles of problem-solving justice.

### Enhanced Information

Better staff training about complex issues—like domestic violence and drug addiction—combined with better information about litigants, victims, and the community context of crime can help improve the decision making of judges, attorneys, and other justice officials. High-quality information—gathered with the assistance of technology and shared in accordance with confidentiality laws—can help practitioners make more nuanced decisions about both treatment needs and the risks individual defendants pose to public safety, ensuring offenders receive an appropriate level of supervision and services.

In the work of the task force, this principle had two applications. The first was in respect to the broad picture of reentry in Upper Manhattan. In order to make any decisions about how to enhance reentry locally, the task force needed

to compile information that had not previously been collected in one place to provide key contextual information, including community demographics, crime trends, and findings from focus groups and stakeholder interviews. The strategy of engaging senior government administrators as task force members helped to provide access to information that was not publicly available.

Enhanced information about individual reentrants is also critical to the task force model. In considering how future task force interventions might use enhanced data to drive individual responses to offending, the Justice Center's parole reentry court model served as an important template. In this model, there are case planning meetings between parole officers, social service staff, and a judge, so as to pool relevant information about how particular parolees are faring. It is a helpful guide for how police, parole, and nonprofits might be able to collaborate on wraparound case management services for and supervision of high-risk parolees.

### Community Engagement

Citizens and neighborhood groups have an important role to play in helping the justice system identify, prioritize, and solve local problems. Actively engaging citizens helps improve public trust in the justice system. Greater trust, in turn, helps people feel safer, fosters law-abiding behavior, and makes members of the public more willing to cooperate in the pursuit of justice (as witnesses, jury members, etc.).

The work of the task force started from the very beginning with a robust community engagement strategy. Task force staff members went to neighborhood precinct council and community board meetings,



which are local governance structures that allow for exchange between community members and police precinct commanders or local elected officials, to better understand local public safety concerns. This allowed the task force to recruit community members for focus groups, to disseminate information about its work, and to solicit feedback. Often, upon presenting the plans of the task force, meeting participants would come forth with helpful insights or suggest key individuals who could offer deeper experience with the issue. Task force staff also met with elected officials representing the area and other key leaders. Since Upper Manhattan is a service-rich environment, task force staff made a point to gauge the opinions, needs, and suggestions of local service providers, many of which have been serving the reentrant population for decades.

Community engagement is an ongoing effort of the task force. It is important that community members and other key stakeholders receive regular information about its progress and feel connected to the effort. A completed needs assessment report was circulated to the very people who had offered their insights, not only allowing them to see previously unavailable information about reentry in their own neighborhoods, but also helping to build trust in the credibility and intentions of the task force.

A final crucial component of community engagement was the creation of *Re-thinking Reentry*, the blog of the Upper Manhattan Reentry task force. From the beginning, task force staff emphasized the use of “Web 2.0” tools to the greatest extent possible. The blog is a way to inform a broader community (both in Upper Manhattan and nationally) about how the process is unfolding,

creating transparency in operations. It also helps to shape the message of the task force and to share success stories from other jurisdictions. In addition, the blog offers regular information about funding opportunities, original interviews, and links to new research and helpful resources.

### Collaboration

Justice system leaders are uniquely positioned to engage a diverse range of people, government agencies, and community organizations in collaborative efforts to improve public safety. However, they often fail to do this well. By bringing together justice partners (e.g., judges, prosecutors, attorneys, probation officers, court managers) and reaching out to potential stakeholders beyond the courthouse (e.g., social service providers, victims groups, schools), justice agencies can improve interagency communication, encourage greater trust between citizens and government, and foster new responses to problems, including new diversion and sentencing options, when appropriate. As previously mentioned, the task force recruited representatives from organizations that had a strong stake in improving the process of return. Importantly, those engaged were in positions of decision-making authority within their agencies, so that the task force would have leverage to implement the ideas that it devised. Not only did this unique structure allow the task force to understand what was working in reentry and what was not during the assessment process, it also had the secondary benefit of networking task force members.

However, this process was not without challenges. Getting and keeping senior agency leaders engaged is challenging work, since there are many other

demands on their time and attention. The task force addresses this challenge in two ways. First, it uses task force meetings as focused and lively brainstorming sessions, where participants are asked to contribute their ideas and opinions to problem solving on relevant topics. Second, it has broadened the membership of the task force to include more local nonprofit and treatment providers. It has also helped that funding entities are increasingly requiring organizations to demonstrate that they are actively involved in local collaborative efforts. For example, a major source of federal reentry funding, the Second Chance Act, requires local jurisdictions seeking funds to already have in place a task force or local collaborative that is addressing reentry.

### Individualized Justice

Using actuarial, evidence-based risk and needs assessment instruments, the justice system can link offenders to individually tailored community-based services (e.g., job training, drug treatment, safety planning, mental health counseling) and better allocate supervision resources to high-risk persons. Task force investigation discovered research showing that evidence-based interventions targeting reentrants with a high risk of committing new crimes result in better outcomes for both the reentrant and the community. In fact, this same research shows that directing greater supervision and requirements to low-risk offenders can actually worsen outcomes, increasing both noncompliance and returns to prison (Solomon et al. 2008). The task force is designing a high-risk offender case management pilot program. This effort will focus on one police precinct in East Harlem where large numbers of parolees return and will utilize an actuarial risk and needs assessment tool similar to the

one being implemented statewide. The pilot will also help to test new ways for local law enforcement to work collaboratively with parole and community providers to improve outcomes for high-risk parolees.

### Accountability

The justice system can send the message that all criminal behavior, even low-level misdemeanor crime, has an impact on community safety. By insisting on regular and rigorous compliance monitoring, as well as clear consequences for noncompliance, the justice system can improve the accountability of offenders. It can also improve the accountability of service providers by requiring regular reports on their work with participants.

A key challenge for any task force is to create shared responsibility for reentrant outcomes. While parole officers supervise most reentrants once they are in the community, the success of parolees rests in large part on how well their time in prison was spent changing their criminal thinking and reducing risk factors. It is also essential that the discharge planning process include a sharing of relevant information between corrections and parole staff, as well as the development of pre-release plans. The task force brings together information about risk and need for each high-risk reentrant and works to ensure access to needed services. The task force model also promotes a higher degree of transparency and accountability among its partners. Where, before, a parole agency worked with an individual high-risk parolee with limited assistance from local law enforcement or community programs, now all of those players are at the table. When a problem arises, everyone knows about it and can work together to solve it.

## Outcomes

The active and ongoing collection and analysis of data—measuring outcomes and process, costs and benefits—are crucial tools for evaluating the effectiveness of operations and encouraging continuous improvement. Public dissemination of this information can be a valuable symbol of public accountability. One of the most interesting innovations under development from the task force is a “community reentry scorecard,” which would track key indicators of safety, support, and services for a select group of high-risk persons on parole. The task force would produce an annual scorecard report on statistics such as technical violations, convictions for new crimes committed by persons on parole, the number of parolees accessing drug or mental health treatment services, and the number of parolees entering the shelter system from prison. The scorecard would document both successes and challenges for the community itself to review. With the support of research staff at the Harlem Community Justice Center, this data would also be tracked alongside the outcomes of other county reentry task forces throughout the state, allowing Upper Manhattan’s work to support, draw from, and inform to the work of colleagues statewide.

## CONCLUSIONS

One last thing I want to re-emphasize is the power of small, consistent, disciplined steps. Creating the big picture in your mind and believing it will materialize, all the while taking the concerted daily actions necessary to make it so, is very powerful. Consistency and discipline make up for many, many things in our lives.

—Andres Idarraga (Krontiris 2009)

This article has traced the development of the Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force in the context of reentry reform efforts in New York State. The development of the task force followed a problem-solving justice strategy that emphasizes collaboration, enhanced information, and better outcomes. As states across the country continue (and in some cases, begin) to address the challenges of successful reintegration of persons leaving prison, new stories of success will no doubt emerge.

New York has realized many of the unintended consequences of the prison boom. The large number of people with a criminal conviction has created an offender class that is segregated from mainstream life. Many leave prison unprepared for life outside of a prison cell, where they have to make decisions on their own, find work, and deal with the pull of old acquaintances and bad habits. For African American New Yorkers, the effects of the prison boom have been devastating. The economic, social, and psychological impacts of this era on the African American family and community will reverberate for generations.

The challenge now is to put in place the policies and programs that will promote public safety and recovery for the men and women leaving prison. To do this, it is necessary to reinvest a portion of anticipated corrections savings into local initiatives that promote economic development, pro-social family life, and health and wellness, especially in those communities most impacted by the incarceration boom.

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## Social Capital and Political Advocacy for African American Health

by Lorraine Dean and Keon L. Gilbert

Lorraine Dean is a doctoral candidate in society, human development, and health at the Harvard School of Public Health. She examines the role of social capital on the health outcomes and behaviors of Blacks in Philadelphia using multilevel modeling and geocoding. Her previous qualitative and quantitative research as a U.S. Fulbright Scholar in Venezuela and at the University of Pennsylvania has focused on cancer preventive behaviors, mistrust of the health care system, and cultural models of prevention for minority populations.

Keon L. Gilbert completed his doctor of public health in behavioral and community health sciences at the University of Pittsburgh in 2009. He holds a master's degree in African American studies and public affairs from Indiana University and a bachelor of arts in biology from Wabash College. His key research interests include the application of quantitative and qualitative methods to eliminate health disparities using community-based participatory research as his primary approach.

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### ABSTRACT

Social capital in the African American community has been leveraged to address health disparities directly while building political advocacy around activism on the

social causes of health disparities like racial residential segregation. Because race is a social construct, health disparities between African Americans and White Americans reflect the embodiment of social inequalities. The embodiment of inequality framework is important to researchers and policy makers in building social capital for political advocacy around African American health issues. We offer suggestions to policy makers about wielding social capital around health issues that are important to the African American community.

### INTRODUCTION

Social capital, or the concept that social relationships can create a form of capital, has been foundational to successful strategies for bettering communities all across the world. In fact, Robert Putnam, a leading authority in social capital research, has found that “much evidence suggests that where levels of capital are higher, children grow up healthier, safer and better educated, people live longer, happier lives, and democracy and the economy work better” (2007).

Social capital may be considered the ecological analog to individually based social support and is considered a social determinant of health and health behaviors. Unlike social support, which is interpersonal and operates at the individual level, social capital is about resources embedded within groups, that is, it is a collective-level construct that applies to social and physical resources available to groups, organizations, and communities. In essence, it is the *product* of social networks and relationships at a meso and macro level, not the actual networks or relationships themselves. Consequently, social capital indicators typically capture social participation and

social engagement, collective efficacy, perception of community-level structures or characteristics, trust, reciprocity, and social cohesion (Putnam 2007).

Social capital builds on the basis of the geographical location of group members or on the basis of the shared function of group members. Collective efficacy is one such mechanism by which to examine a group's collective competence and capacity to aggregate and use its resources to respond to current and future demands (Lochner et al. 2003). However, collective efficacy may be undermined by the concentration of economic disadvantage, racial segregation, family disruption, and residential instability (Sampson et al. 1999; Sampson et al. 1997).

Public health researchers offer the following suggested mechanisms by which social capital may be related to health outcomes or health policy making: (1) diffusion of information about health-promoting behaviors; (2) maintenance of health behavioral norms or deterrence of risky behaviors through informal social control; (3) promotion of access to services; (4) affective support or other psychosocial pathways that act directly or indirectly; and (5) empowerment to engage political policies that impact community health (Berkman and Kawachi 2000; Kawachi and Berkman 2001; Kawachi et al. 2007). Additionally, public health researchers have suggested that social capital may impact mental health through an interaction between race, psychological sense of belonging, and neighborhood economic deprivation. Feelings of freedom, safety, and stability, which are determined in part by informal social control and social cohesion, may be conducive to cognitive and emotional

well-being (Almedom and Glandon 2007, 294).

Social capital in the African American community has been leveraged to address health disparities directly while building political advocacy around activism on the social causes of health disparities like racial residential segregation. Activism in the early twentieth century sought to establish African American communities culturally, economically, politically, and socially. The broader African American community as a form of resistance to discrimination has led to various methods to affirm a sense of African American humanity formally and informally. African American activism has led to legislative achievements, like the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which gave African Americans the right to be counted as a voting member of society, thereby extending an opportunity for African Americans to have access to both bridging and linking social capital. The formation of mutual benefit associations, fraternities, sororities, African American women's clubs, community-based organizations, churches, mosques, schools, and businesses serves as a type of formal community and collective efficacy building to overcome institutional racism (Fairclough 2001; Jalata 2002), which is linked to health. In fact, institutional racism in the form of racial residential segregation has led to impoverished communities and increased risk for acute and chronic disease. Residents of these neighborhoods are more likely to experience violence, chronic stress, and the lack of community infrastructures to promote healthy behaviors such as physical activity, which lead to negative outcomes such as cardiovascular disease, depression, cancer, and sexually transmitted diseases (National Medical Association 2007).

Social capital and policy action around health has historical roots for the African American community. For example, in the early twentieth century, African American political reformers equated the struggle to secure health care with the struggle to secure political rights (Judson 1999). When African Americans in Atlanta were excluded from the health care system due to persistent segregation during the anti-tuberculosis movements in the early 1900s, African American communities formed free mobile health clinics and organized community cleanups, which pressured city officials to improve sanitary conditions in African American neighborhoods. African American female groups like the Neighborhood Union, which partnered with the White voluntary group, the Anti-Tuberculosis Association (ATA), became political mediators between African American and White communities by building social capital around health advocacy and establishing powerful institutions around health services and health campaigns (Judson 1999). Around that same time, the African American ATA joined with Booker T. Washington's effort in 1915 to promote the public health needs of African Americans during National Negro Health Week. In joining together under this cause, African American leaders used social capital as a way to confront the politics of racism and segregation that led to unhealthy living conditions for African Americans (Judson 1999).

While social capital has had positive effects, its effects are not good in all cases. For instance, social exclusion may occur when members of one group build exclusive connections to which other members of the group do not have access. Also, the process of building or acquiring

social capital may impose excessive demands on group members and reinforce deleterious behaviors that define group membership (Hawe and Shiell 2000; Portes 1998).

Although social capital is in decline, it is still present in U.S. populations (Putnam 2007; Putnam 1993; Putnam 1995). The measures used in the current literature suggest that African American communities have lower social capital than that of other racial groups, particularly White Americans. Yet, the current literature does not suggest clear reasons as to why such differences in social capital exist. Further, social capital's links to health policy are largely anecdotal and undocumented in research. The purpose of this article is to use findings from public health research studies to provide a context for understanding social capital's role for African American health policy action.

### **SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE CONTEXT OF EMBODYING INEQUALITY**

Differences in the health of African Americans and White Americans reflect social differences in the ways African American communities interact with and are treated by American society (Krieger 2000). Institutional, structural, and individual racial discrimination toward African Americans as a vestige of U.S. slavery have been foundational to the social and economic inequalities in work, wealth, income, education, housing, and overall standard of living, which underlie disparities in health (Krieger 2000; Jones 2000). Thus, it is essential to consider the ways in which African Americans embody these social and economic inequalities and to think through what implications this has for social capital research (Krieger 2005). Viewing social capital research on health through the lens of embodiment

requires examining how current and past events influence African American health dynamically—how macro-level (society, community), meso-level (organizations), and micro-level (individuals) factors operate as part of the process that explains how social elements “get under the skin” (Krieger 2005).

The important element of the embodiment of inequality may help explain how African Americans’ abilities to build connections have been framed by historical and contemporary elements that are unique to the African American community. It is likely that the embodiment of inequality influences the way that African Americans exhibit “bridging social capital,” or building resources that are exclusively available to members of certain groups who are similar to each other with respect to social position and identity (Kim et al. 2006); “bonding social capital,” or building relationships of respect and mutuality with people who are unlike in terms of sociodemographic characteristic; and “linking social capital,” or establishing norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across power or authority gradients in society (Szreter and Woolcock 2004). All of these forms of social capital are important to health and health advocacy. But the embodiment of inequality has been unaccounted for in social capital measures and analytical frameworks.

### **RACE, HEALTH, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL**

The absence of the embodiment of inequality framework may serve as a clue to explain the irreconcilable findings about social capital’s association with health in African American communities and populations (see Table 1). Findings reveal that social capital is a successful

strategy for influencing African American health in many cases. These findings also reveal that this particular influence of social capital on health looks different from the influence of social capital on the health of other racial/ethnic groups, particularly White Americans.

For example, the positive association between bonding social capital (Kawachi et al. 1999) and self-rated health (Kim et al. 2006) is weaker for African American women than women of other races. Another study shows that social mistrust is significantly linked to higher mortality rates for White Americans and for African Americans (Kawachi et al. 1997). However, this same study shows that when comparing African Americans and White Americans at equal levels of poverty, the effect for African Americans is attenuated. These findings may be an indicator that something is lacking in our understanding of social capital for African Americans.

In other cases, increased social capital among African Americans appears to lead to poorer health outcomes. K.D. Hart finds higher mortality rates among African Americans who had more contact with other African Americans at school, in their childhood neighborhood and current neighborhoods, and at church (Hart 1997). However, this study did not control for sociodemographic differences among study participants, which may mean that the effects of income or intergenerational and current poverty may drive this finding (Hart 1997). Also, results from Hart’s work may miss the daily experiences of racial discrimination that African Americans experience in multiple areas that may lead to both acute and chronic health conditions (Feagin 1991).



Table 1. Selected studies on social capital and health of African Americans.

Authors	Social Capital Element Measured	Target Group	Embodied Inequality Element Measured	Health Outcome	Findings
Kawachi et al. (1997)	Social mistrust	African American and White adults	Poverty	All-cause mortality	Social capital's protective effects were smaller for African Americans compared to White Americans.
Mitchell and LaGory (2002)	Individual community participation, trust, and bridging ties	African American adults	Residential segregation	Mental distress	Higher bonding social capital leads to greater mental distress, while bridging social capital is protective.
Hutchinson et al. (2009)	Neighborhood livability, trust, neighborliness, feelings of belonging	African American and White adults	Residential isolation	All-cause mortality	African Americans living in mostly African American, low social capital neighborhoods have lower mortality than African Americans living in White, low social capital neighborhoods.
Powell Hammond et al. (2009)	Neighborhood social cohesion	African American adult men	Racial discrimination	Depressive symptoms	Social cohesion buffers negative mental health effects of discrimination.

Research by Carey Usher Mitchell and Mark LaGory has shown that among African American women living in impoverished areas with high residential segregation, mental distress increases with higher bonding social capital, whereas the presence of bridging social capital (bonds between persons that cut across social class and racial lines) is protective against mental distress (2002). Another study by Rebecca N. Hutchinson et al. finds lower mortality rates among African Americans living in predominantly African American neighborhoods with low social capital in comparison to the mortality rates of African Americans living in predominantly White neighborhoods with low social capital (2009). These studies demonstrate the importance of accounting for the products of inequality, such as residential segregation and social exclusion, in order to understand the relationship between social capital and health.

Among the few research studies that are available to help us understand the relationship between social capital and health, one particular study effectively explains the concept of the embodiment of inequality and highlights how social capital may be used to combat the effects of inequality. Recent work by Wisdom Powell Hammond et al. shows that when neighborhood cohesion is high for African American men, racial discrimination has no effect on depressive symptoms (2009). But when cohesion is low, increased experiences with racial discrimination are associated with increased depressive symptoms. The findings suggest that neighborhood social cohesion acts as a buffer from the negative mental health effects that are an embodied form of racial discrimination for African American men.

#### Table 1 — Selected Studies on Social Capital and Health of African Americans

These findings may partially explain why social capital's effect on health for African Americans seems to be less than social capital's effect on the health for other racial/ethnic groups. One possible explanation may be that African American social capital dually functions to buffer against existing racism and to promote health. The energy and resources tied to social capital may be split between these two functions, causing social capital to be effective in fulfilling these functions but less efficient than if social capital either solely combated racism or solely promoted health. In the case of a dominant racial group, all of the resources and energy afforded by social capital would go to promoting health, but this is not so for African Americans or those who have faced continuous, large-scale institutional discrimination. In these findings, the context of social inequality also emerges as a salient factor in understanding the role of social capital on health.

#### **SOCIAL CAPITAL AND HEALTH ADVOCACY IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY: THE CASE OF AIDS/HIV**

A prime example of how social capital has been used to engage African American community members in political activity is also an example of why the embodiment framework is important to community organizing and action. The HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States has unveiled the most stark health disparities between people of color and the majority (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2009b). African American communities have been reluctant to confront the HIV/AIDS epidemic for at least three reasons: stigma, marginaliza-

tion, and denial. Arguably, it was not until the media framed HIV/AIDS as an issue of inequality and health disparity that African American national leaders and groups began to give it major attention (Stanback Stevens 2009), highlighting how the framework of embodying inequality is relevant to policy action. The HIV/AIDS advocacy on the part of African American communities shows both the successes and failures of how social capital has impacted health and health policy. Particularly, social capital as exhibited through unification of African American civic organizations contrasts social capital in African American churches around HIV/AIDS.

On the one hand, African American leadership has come together to advocate for HIV testing and safe sexual practices. For instance, the African American civic organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), nationally addressed the disparities and inequities in HIV/AIDS when it began its 2006 convention with the national president and chairman getting a rapid HIV test. This highly visible advocacy move helped fuel other African American organizations to rally around HIV prevention and push for public funding to address the issue for African American communities in particular. Their actions laid the foundation to draw attention from national organizations like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which launched a \$10-million, five-year partnership with fourteen of the nation's leading African American civic and health organizations to form the *Act Against AIDS Leadership Initiative*. This collaboration relies on the strength, reach, and tradition of these organizations to increase disease prevention and health

promotion strategies in African American communities in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2009a). National collaboration seeks to build communities in diverse ways to attempt to correct the history of social injustice as experienced by African Americans. This initiative is a single example of how African American organizations and institutions can impact factors like poverty, lack of health care access, and lack of media representation to advocate for social change. However, this initiative is not enough. This effort, like many, fails to provide sustainable strategies to ensure health initiatives remain, even in the absence of federal funds.

On the other hand, African American churches, which are seen as a major source of social capital for African American communities by promoting political advocacy (McKenzie et al. 2002; Harris-Lacewell 2007), have been reluctant to address the growing epidemic of HIV/AIDS in America. This may be due to a reluctance to advocate safe sex over abstinence or possibly due to the African American church's complex relationship with men who have sex with men, who are at high risk for HIV/AIDS across all racial/ethnic groups (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2009c). The African American church's failure to galvanize political action around HIV/AIDS is an impediment to dealing with health disparities. Lack of action has fueled poor prevention and health promotion information dissemination, as well as a disempowered community.

The lack of effective treatment and prevention efforts for all communities has called into question community activism to effectively advocate for community-

based, culturally relevant, ecologically dispersed, and responsive interventions that have adequate and sustained funding (Roe et al. 2004). A focus on structural interventions is needed to redress the multiple sources that contribute to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which implicates the use of linking social capital. Linking social capital focuses on vertical interactions across formal and institutionalized power or authority structures in society (Szreter and Woolcock 2004; Poortinga 2006). National, state, local, and organizational-level policies are needed to influence the reduction of new HIV cases in America. It is imperative that African American communities find multiple strategies to advocate for policy changes that will directly impact their communities.

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The strategy of wielding social capital has successfully promoted health and well-being in African American communities. However, the full potential of social capital on outcomes, such as those in health, may be veiled due to the inadequacy of existing indicators to capture the unique ways in which African Americans have built solidarity and trust in U.S. institutions. The comparatively lower social capital that studies find in African American communities may be due to a history of social exclusion by mainstream White American culture. Or it may be that social capital in other groups is exceptionally high, and that Black communities avoid extreme levels of social capital as a protection against potential deleterious effects of excessive social capital. Or it may be that the current measures of social capital may lack the proper framework that is culturally relevant for African Americans.

In response to persistent social and economic exclusion—historical and contemporary forms of racism rooted in social inequality that have led to intergenerational poverty and that have slowed economic and social mobility—African American communities have leveraged social capital to cope, survive, and triumph.

We are not suggesting that the aforementioned mechanisms through which social capital operates to affect health are different for African American communities than for any other racial/ethnic groups. Instead, we argue that the unique historical, social, and cultural aspects of African American communities warrant exploration of the unique ways in which social capital may manifest itself in African American communities. Thus, social capital measures may need to be culturally tailored. What is needed, for African American culture especially, is a framework that incorporates the ways that Blacks have created social capital to deal with the physical embodiment of the unique social conditions under which African Americans in the United States have lived.

The embodiment of inequality framework is important to policy makers in building social capital for political advocacy around African American health issues. In that light, we offer some suggestions to policy makers about wielding social capital around health issues that are important to the African American community:

- **Grow collective efficacy by encouraging formal and informal connections between African American organizations with organizations of other racial/ethnic groups.** Biracial cooperation is central to the pursuit of social justice in America. The founding of the Niagara Movement

in 1905 and subsequently the NAACP in 1909 are examples of the need for interracial collaboration and action. Similar to how the African American ATA worked alongside White organizations to elevate the importance of African American health needs, building social capital in a multiracial context can be powerful. Policy makers should encourage collaboration of African American civic and special-interest groups with other racial/ethnic groups. In doing so, policy makers can build awareness and exposure around African American health issues while expanding African American linking and bridging connections. Building multiethnic groups around a specific health issue can reduce social exclusion that is at the root of some health disparities.

- **To gather support for health issues by the African American community, frame African American health needs in the context of inequality.** As with the African American anti-tuberculosis movement and the current HIV/AIDS prevention movement, African American leaders and communities have had successful health campaigns in response to health issues that are framed in inequality. Framing a health issue in the context of inequality requires addressing the roots of that inequality, like structural and institutional forms of racism. Factors like impoverished communities, lack of access, and unequal media representation of African Americans need to be addressed alongside health issues. In seeking policies to support around health, policy makers should only support policy measures that incorporate both resources for addressing health issues directly (like issues of access) and resources for addressing the underlying cause of those health issues (like neighborhood-level factors). For example, a policy measure

around smoking prevention and cessation should include strategies to reduce the disproportionate amount of advertising directed toward African American neighborhoods.

- **Provide funding for additional opportunities to build collective efficacy and social cohesion for African American communities around health policy issues.** If social capital really does have “double duty” for African Americans, in the sense that it is being used both as a response to inequality and as a means for promoting health, African American communities may need more opportunities to build social capital. Policy makers could help by earmarking funds specifically for health programs in African American communities and for African American organizations; however, these funds should be routed to sustainable programs that include an evaluation component. For example, programs designed to eradicate HIV/AIDS health disparities are often funded for two to five years. Programs should be funded beyond short-term grants to avoid duplicative efforts every few years and to capitalize on the momentum that existing programs have gained. Having evaluation for these programs can help policy makers and funders decide which programs warrant continued funding and can help establish a body of research on best practices around using social capital in health advocacy.

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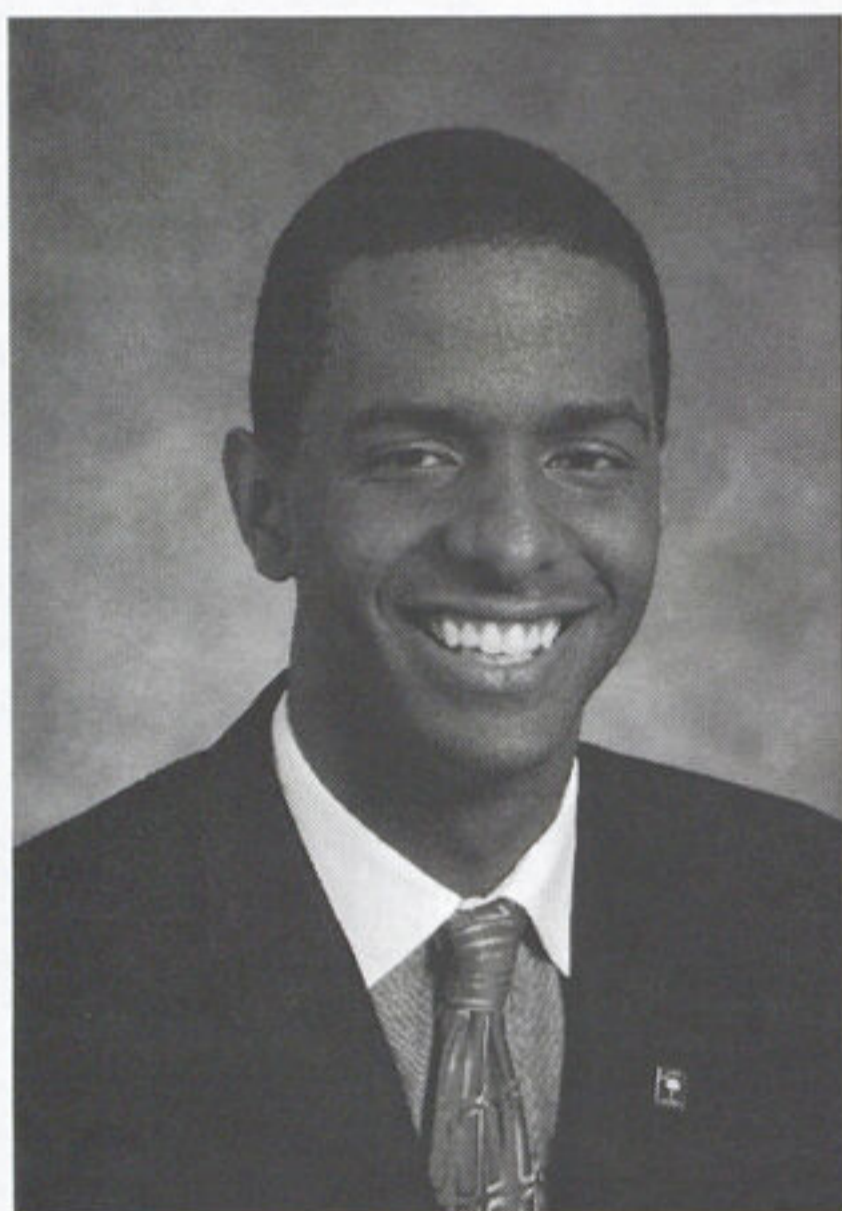
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## Race, Identity, and Politics: An Interview with South Carolina State Representative Bakari Sellers

*Interviewed by Jarrod F. Loadholt*



In June 2006, at age twenty-two, Bakari Sellers was elected to the South Carolina General Assembly, becoming one of the nation's youngest elected officials. In addition to serving in the General Assembly, Sellers currently serves as vice chairman of the South Carolina Democratic Party and is a Democratic Leadership Council Fellow.

Jarrod F. Loadholt of the *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy* interviewed Bakari Sellers on 5 January 2010.

Jarrod F. Loadholt is a master of public policy candidate at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and a juris doctor candidate at New York University School of Law.

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HJAAP

**Why did you choose to pursue a career in public service?**

SELLERS

I ran for public office because I wanted to be a voice for positive change in my community and in South Carolina. In my campaign, we were able to build hope and excitement, which coming from a district facing the challenges that my constituents face, getting them hopeful and excited about their futures was the most memorable experience of my campaign. I represent a poor, predominately African American rural district beset by a host of challenges that I felt were not being adequately addressed by my predecessor. Though clichéd, I thought, if not now, then when? And if not me, then who?

HJAAP

**Describe your role with the state party. Why did you pursue that post and what do you intend to do as vice chair of the state party?**

SELLERS

My role is one that I hope allows me to better position the state party to pursue a more moderate stance on South Carolina's policy challenges while also ensuring that the party presents viable candidates for local and statewide offices. I'm currently on a forty-six-county tour across the state where I have taken it upon myself to create my own message on where I think the South Carolina

Democratic Party should go. Some may find issue with my vision for a more centrist state Democratic party, but in all honesty, you cannot win in South Carolina unless you move to the center.

HJAAP

**What are your proudest accomplishments thus far?**

SELLERS

I would have to say that being able to land a spot on the House Judiciary Committee is one of my proudest accomplishments. It's probably the second most powerful committee in the South Carolina General Assembly behind the Ways and Means Committee. Roughly one-third of the legislation that comes through the House is reported out of the Judiciary Committee, so I am afforded countless opportunities to shape the future of the state of South Carolina. As far as legislation or policy issues that I have advocated for, they include starting a conversation on instituting a state minimum wage [above the federal minimum wage] in South Carolina, curbing dropout rates, and encouraging more efficiency and transparency in state government.

HJAAP

**More so than any other, the 2008 Democratic primary exposed and aggravated generational fault lines within the Black community, especially within the African American political class. What are your thoughts?**

SELLERS

I find issue with the premise of your question as I did not think that there was much of a "generational divide." I think there was more of a divide between members of the "Black leadership class"

and, to a much lesser extent, the rest of Black America. Much of the mainstream media failed to make that distinction. Even among the leadership class you did not see the generational divide that some commentators attempted to portray, as many of your veterans from the civil rights movement like my father, founding member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee activist Cleveland Sellers, Julian Bond, and Reverend Joseph Lowery sided with President Obama early in the campaign, while many others like Andrew Young and John Lewis sided with Hillary Clinton. This looked more like a genuine difference in opinion than a so-called "generational divide." African Americans are not a monolithic voting bloc, and we showed that to be true during the 2008 Democratic primaries.

HJAAP

**What's your take on "post-racialism?" Is it a political reality?**

SELLERS

When you talk about post-racialism, I'll start with the famous W.E.B. Du Bois quote that the divide of the twentieth century was the divide of the color line, but I would take his quote a bit further by saying that the divide of the twenty-first century is that of the haves and the have nots. I often make the argument that poor Blacks and poor Whites face many of the same challenges, but we cannot ignore the clearly racialized dimensions of poverty and inequality across this country, and particularly in South Carolina.

When I take a break from legislative session and I walk outside of the State Capitol Building in Columbia, the Confederate battle flag is staring me in the face. So, if "post-racialism" means that race somehow no longer matters in this

country, then I think we can all agree it's total fiction because we all know that race still matters. It certainly still matters in political campaigns. If the term signifies an attempt to get beyond stereotyping, then I welcome it, but I doubt that this is what the users of the term actually mean.

HJAAP

**What recommendations do you have for African American politicians as they navigate the thorny intersection of race and identity?**

SELLERS

For elected officials that have to navigate this intersection of race, identity, and politics, I would advise that they acknowledge the broad-based challenges that a lack of economic and educational opportunity poses to people of all races in order to build the political coalitions to actually do something about poverty and inequality while being honest about the undeniable overlap between race and inequality in this country.

HJAAP

**Do you believe that President Barack Obama has been “mainstreaming” many of the domestic policy challenges facing the Black community?**

SELLERS

I could think of no other way to govern, as he's president of the United States and not the president of Black America. This “mainstreaming” you speak of sounds like it's a product of political necessity, and I would expect nothing less out of the president. Perhaps no president faces the set of challenges that President Obama is facing, so somehow targeting one particular group of constituents for political attention given the scope of the president's agenda would seem to me to

be beyond the pale of what we should expect from a responsible executive.

HJAAP

**If you share the president's view, how do you reconcile a de-racialized policy agenda with his more direct overtures to a host of other “identity coalitions” such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community concerning “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” and the Defense of Marriage Act and the Latino community regarding comprehensive immigration reform?**

SELLERS

I do not think he has given any group special attention per se as much as he is allowing a more inclusive set of stakeholders to help shape his administration's policies, which include many of the identity interest groups. The fact that some members of the Congressional Black Caucus—seasoned politicians in their own right—have found issue with his approach, I think, possibly speaks more to some of their own political motives than it does to the president's treatment of issues important to the African American community. This kind of evenhanded treatment of ethnic interest groups is allowing the president sufficient political space to pursue an agenda that I think will benefit Black Americans.

HJAAP

**What are the implications of this approach?**

SELLERS

As far as the implications of this approach, I think it is part and parcel of governing. You have to couch the issues of your constituents in terms relevant to others, and I would imagine that any African American elected official must be willing to provide for

non-African American constituencies. If he is successful in overhauling our health care system or in creating a more consumer-friendly financial services industry, Black Americans will benefit, so it would seem to me that the implications of this approach bode well for African Americans despite criticisms to the contrary.

HJAAP

**Speak to the need, if any, of majority-minority districts given the emergence of more “mainstream” Black candidates like President Obama. Forecast the role of ethnic political interest groups like the Congressional Black Caucus and the NAACP in a post-racial, post-civil rights era.**

SELLERS

Majority-minority districts remain a necessity, particularly in the South, because without them we would not likely have had advocates like South Carolina Congressman Representative James Clyburn—without the Voting Rights Act’s majority-minority districts. The benefits of having someone like Congressman Clyburn are clear as he provides a political voice to countless African American South Carolinians who may otherwise not be fully represented by other members of our congressional delegation. Let us not forget the intangibles here as Congressman Clyburn provides a sense of hope for the future of this state and our nation for many African Americans in his district, and he is a role model for state and local leaders like me who are in his district. More tangibly, he has provided federal resources that have helped improve the quality of life for all South Carolinians. Truth be told, you would likely find similar stories from Mississippians about Congressman Bennie Thompson or

North Carolinians about Congressman G.K. Butterfield and many other members of the congressional Black and Hispanic caucuses, many of whom are products of majority-minority districts.

HJAAP

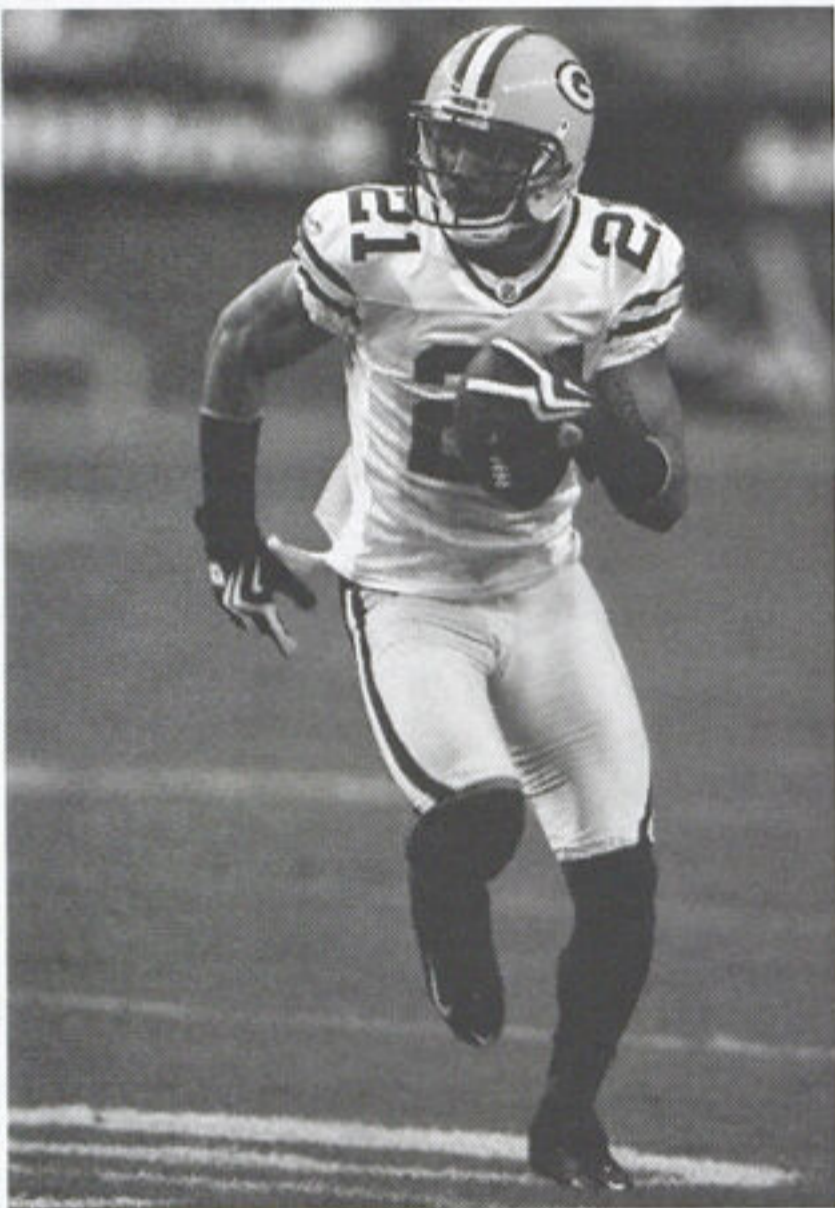
**What advice would you give to African American statewide candidates?**

SELLERS

The best advice would be to understand the political environment within which they operate. The Barack Obamas and [Massachusetts Governor] Deval Patricks are anomalies, so their experiences may be of limited use to other African American statewide candidates. That said, candidates should run the kinds of races that will make them successful in their states. I think Harold Ford’s 2006 Senate race in Tennessee is a good example of an African American statewide candidate running a solid race that was shaped by that state’s political culture. Understand the issues and voter values that drive turnout, effectively raise the money it takes to message around those issues, and build your candidacy and campaign organization around them. Most importantly, candidates must do this in a manner that demonstrates that they can effectively lead on issues both within and outside of the African American community. If African American statewide candidates can do this, they will continue to chip away at the glass ceiling.

## On Giving: An Interview with Charles Woodson

*Interview by Fatina Abdrabboh*



Charles Woodson is a pro-bowl cornerback for the Green Bay Packers of the National Football League (NFL). An alumnus of the University of Michigan, Woodson has been the recipient of numerous accolades including the prestigious Heisman Trophy, six NFL pro-bowl selections, two all-pro selections, the defensive rookie of the year award in 1998, the Jim Thorpe award, and most recently, the 2009 Associated Press NFL defensive player of the year award.

Recently, Woodson donated \$2 million to the University of Michigan's C.S. Mott Children's and Women's Hospital, a 1.1-million-square-foot hospital scheduled to open in 2012.

Fatina Abdrabboh interviewed Charles Woodson on 5 January 2010.

Fatina Abdrabboh is a graduate of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Her current research focuses on relations between African Americans and Arab Americans in her native Detroit, Michigan.

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HJAAP

**Choosing a charity to donate to is not a simple decision. What motivated you to donate \$2 million to the University of Michigan hospital?**

WOODSON

What motivated me most to donate is life. You see, you are either growing or you are dying. I feel like the older I am getting, I am growing. Different things mean different things to me now. At this point in my career and my life, I have a great deal of money and success. My profession is going strong. I therefore feel like it is the time now to definitely help others in some sort of way. That is why I decided to donate. My time to give back is now and so is my time to help. I am growing.

HJAAP

**Some have described your gift as "heroic." Do you feel this is an accurate assessment?**

WOODSON

I think the word "hero" is a little strong. There are so many more people who are really heroes in this picture. The doctors and nurses are heroes. They are the people in the trenches; I am here to help them and others. I am not the hero but a small part of a bigger picture.

HJAAP

**Do you think other wealthy athletes and entertainers should be encouraged to give back?**

WOODSON

I will not judge anybody for what they do or do not do. What I did is not what everybody is going to do. It is everybody's right. If people took the time to sit down and look at life the way I do, they may make similar decisions. If they do not do so, that is fine too. If you are someone who has been blessed with the amount of money I have made, and if in your heart you feel it to give, then do it! If not, that's fine, too. For me, none of this I have done is for notoriety, and it is not for fame. I did it because I wanted to, and I felt it was the right decision for me.

HJAAP

**Which has been more meaningful to you, making money or giving? Why?**

WOODSON

Without a doubt, giving is the most meaningful thing to me. I have been blessed with a great athletic talent to make money. I am blessed to be part of the process that involves the research and the help that my donation is being devoted to. It has the potential to help many people and to be a breakthrough. There is nothing that can amount to the satisfaction that gives me—nothing in the world.

HJAAP

**What would you like to see happen with your donation?**

WOODSON

Help out those most in need ultimately. The women, men, and of course the kids. Again, for me, this was a simple decision,

one that felt natural to me. I know it will be used to help make someone else's life better.

HJAAP

**Looking ahead, are there any charities that you have not supported but would like to in the future?**

WOODSON

This is the tip of the iceberg; what I gave is just a start. I by no means will end with only that donation. I will continue to support in every way I am able. I am so humbled by everything and want to give back.

HJAAP

**Is there anything you'd like to add?**

WOODSON

Yes, I consider so many things to be my privilege, for example, being interviewed by the Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy. These things energize and motivate me. I promise to provide another interview when I am not in season!

## Forging a New Path to Power: The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama (Doubleday, 2009)

by Gwen Ifill

Reviewed by Ashley Farmer

Ashley Farmer is a doctoral candidate in African and African American studies at Harvard University. A historian, her dissertation focuses on Black women's articulations of Black power politics and ideology.

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As the title of this book suggests, journalist Gwen Ifill believes that America entered a new age where the relationship between race, gender, and politics is fundamentally different. Ifill believes that U.S. President Barack Obama's campaign and election transformed how American society understands the relationship between race and politics. Obama's unique campaign and unprecedented victory has led popular scholarship to characterize him as "the chosen one," quantifiably different from all Black politicians who have come before him. In *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama*, Ifill's primary goal is to challenge this particular characterization of Obama. She argues that Obama's election was not a singular political

phenomenon but rather that he is part of a growing pool of new Black politicians who, unlike their predecessors, do not practice race-based politics. Accordingly, the Obama campaign is not the singular focus of this work. Ifill's political history instead traces the contours of African Americans' increasing involvement in electoral politics over the last fifty years. This broadened temporal frame undergirds the primary argument of the book, that the Black politicians of the civil rights movement paved the way for the "breakthrough" generation of younger Black politicians to enjoy success in mainstream politics.

Ifill explores this primary argument in detail in her second chapter, "The Generational Divide." Interviewing prominent civil rights leaders turned politicians including Andrew Young, Joseph Lowery, and Jesse Jackson Sr., Ifill explores their understanding of Black politics and Obama in light of their experiences with segregation and gerrymandering. From these interviews she concludes that these political elders have a drastically different view of electoral politics. The civil rights generation gained the support of majority Black districts by promising increased rights in ways that appealed to African Americans. However, these elders recognize that district lines have been redrawn and the younger generation must be more universally appealing to an increasingly diverse electorate. This is the key, Ifill argues, to understanding the different strategy and success of the new generation of politicians including Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, Washington, D.C., Mayor Adrian Fenty, and President Barack Obama. Through quantitative analysis of generational differences, Ifill concludes that Obama's election does not represent a post-racial moment in American

politics. Rather, it is that the younger generation of politicians, including Obama, has come to understand that running on a platform based on race cannot win the popular vote. In Ifill's work, this generational distinction is the key to understanding the seemingly different political personas of younger Black politicians; it also accounts for the widespread Black political support for Hillary Rodham Clinton because the older generation did not believe Obama could win with such a race-neutral approach. Ifill's interviews and narrative in this chapter effectively resurrect the political voices of the civil rights movement and reinsert them into current discussions of Black politics to show their influence on the current political environment. In so doing, she casts Obama as unique to American politics because of his political strategy not his race.

The chapters that follow alternate between in-depth narrative interviews of Black politicians and contextual analyses of race, gender, and politics. In Chapter 3, Ifill introduces Barack Obama as a candidate who was successful because he acknowledged race but refused to be defined by it. Instead, Obama revolutionized the world of Black politics by "appealing to black voters with the same arguments used to convince white ones" (63). In Ifill's eyes, this new approach to race and politics is what made Obama's campaign a breakthrough moment in American politics.

Narrative style gives way to a contextual analysis in later chapters including "The Race-Gender Clash" and "The Politics of Identity." In "The Race-Gender Clash," Ifill explores the complexities and social implications of the Clinton/Obama primary race. She argues that race and gender bias

presented formidable hurdles to both candidates. Ifill surmises that Clinton was able to use gender bias to her advantage, claiming discrimination when it was advantageous and citing a level playing field when she wanted to seem on par with male candidates. This leads her to conclude that Clinton's near miss at a presidential campaign solidified the possibility of a White woman holding any political office in the United States because Obama could not manipulate racial issues in a similar fashion. Ifill is correct in pointing out the multiple forms race and gender bias takes on the campaign trail. However, she seems to overlook the fact that Obama used well-fashioned rhetoric to position himself as a descendant of the civil rights generation and of the founding fathers depending on the racial diversity of the audience he was addressing. This leads her to unsurprisingly conclude that racism is the most significant hurdle in electoral politics today without fully investigating how Obama's refashioning of his racial identity can complicate this argument.

Ifill's chapter on identity politics is the most interesting and analytically sound. Arguing that the demand for racial authenticity is the most volatile theme in Black politics, Ifill explores how Black politicians must navigate being "too Black" or "Black enough" in their bids for office. Using the Obama campaign as an example, Ifill explores points of racial contention like Rev. Jeremiah Wright's comments, the Philadelphia race speech, and Obama's open pondering of race in his autobiography to assess the usefulness of engaging in debates about racial authenticity for this younger generation. In the end, she determines that American society is not at a point where young Black candidates can ignore issues



of race. Yet she leaves the reader wondering how her analysis can lead to conclusions about the extent to which this new generation should acknowledge issues of race or appeal to Black communities in elections.

The remaining chapters detail the rise of young individual politicians. These newcomers include Louisiana House Speaker Pro Tempore Karen Carter Peterson, Newark Mayor Cory Booker, and Alabama Rep. Artur Davis. These chapters serve as interesting and important insights into the changing political landscape at the local level. In each interview, Ifill is careful to remind the reader that these new leaders owe their success to the civil rights generation. With these intimate portraits of young Black politicians, Ifill subtly proves that the generational shift in Black politics, though propelled by Obama's election, encompasses more than just the office of the president.

By the end of the book, the reader finds that a singular candidate like Obama or a single victory like his 2008 presidential campaign is not "the breakthrough" Ifill refers to in the title of her work. Rather it is a new mode of thinking among Black politicians that privileges coalition building and an expanded electoral base over the conventional definitions of Black leadership to which they are indebted. This is Ifill's primary contribution to the new scholarship on Obama and shows her journalistic skill as she effectively repositions the historical significance of the Obama presidency. Ifill's attempt to contextualize Obama in the larger picture of electoral politics is a novel analysis of the Obama campaign. However, readers may take issue with her claim that Obama's election was but a "ripple" in the growing pond of Black politics as it downplays the signifi-

cant hurdles he faced in his accent to the presidency.

Finally, students of American and African American politics may find more questions than answers in Ifill's work. What are the qualifications for being part of the breakthrough generation? What does this breakthrough in political thinking mean for American politics more broadly? Her impressive array of interviews and seamless narrative style make the reader feel as though he or she is reliving the last fifty years of politics in the Black community, yet leaves one wondering what to conclude about the vast amount of information that Ifill provides. Furthermore, her conclusions about the intersection of race and politics neglect several important factors, namely an analysis of race and politics that moves beyond the White/Black racial binary. Multiracial coalitions and a minority voting base were created by the civil rights generation and were critical to the success of Obama as Asian Americans voted overwhelming for him in the 2008 election. Nevertheless, Ifill's book is a noteworthy interjection into discussions of Black politics as it reminds readers that African Americans have long been chipping away at racial barriers in politics and that no one, not even Obama, can break through these barriers on their own.







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