



HARVARD Kennedy School

JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

HARVARD JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY

VOLUME 18, 2011-2012



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Send address changes to:

Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy
79 JFK Street
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Or by e-mail to:

hjaap@hks.harvard.edu



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CONTENTS

- 1 **Editor's Remarks**
by Richard Parker
- INTERVIEW
- 3 **How Well Are Blacks Really Doing: A Conversation with Robert Bruce Slater, Managing Editor, the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education**
by Richard Parker
- ARTICLES
- 11 **Remarks on Katrina**
by Mark Morial
- 15 **Rights of Return Means Access to the Ballot, Access to Neighborhoods, and Access to Economic Opportunity**
by Melanie L. Campbell
- 25 **Reawakening Baptist Town**
by Michael Wolking and Ololade Olakanmi
- 35 **The Cradle to Prison Pipeline: America's New Apartheid**
by Bill Fletcher Jr.
- 37 **Political Cynicism and the Black Vote**
by Erica C. Taylor
- 45 **Unions Organizing Cities and a 21st -Century Labor Movement: Implications for African Americans**
by Bill Fletcher Jr.
- 55 **From "Block the Vote" to "Protect the Vote": Historically Black Student Voting Suppression and the Disenfranchisement in Texas**
by Christine D. Saunders and Blake E. Green
- 61 **Prospective Black Presidential Candidates: Can they Win?**
by David C. Wilson

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HARVARD Kennedy School

MALCOLM WIENER CENTER
for Social Policy

EDITOR'S REMARKS

This 2012 volume is a landmark: the twentieth anniversary of the nation's oldest student-run journal of African-American public policy.

When Volume I debuted back in the spring of 1992, there were no guarantees of a second volume or a third—let alone a twentieth. But the editors had their hopes.

The nearly two dozen Kennedy School students who'd created the journal had done so out of a vision: that African-American students and their allies had something important to say and to contribute to the centuries-long struggle for racial equality—and for a new America.

There was a heated presidential race already underway in 1992—between President George H. W. Bush and an upstart Arkansas governor, Bill Clinton. Frankly, no one could tell who'd win that November or what it would mean for black Americans, so the journal's editors audaciously asked William Julius Wilson for his judgment about “Blacks and Coalition Politics in the 1990s”. Concerned no less than now about the prospects for black economic success in post-segregationist America, they also ran major pieces on race and job discrimination and race and banking. (No surprise, racially-determined hiring and lending patterns were discovered, but with some surprising new twists.)

Audiences—at first mainly fellow Harvard students, professors, friends, but then increasingly (and with remarkable speed) journalists, politicians, policy makers, community activities, think tanks, and editorialists all began to discover the journal.

A second volume appeared, a third, pretty soon a tenth, and a twelfth, followed. I joined as Faculty Advisor in 1999, along with Christine Connare as Publisher—and the audience kept growing, moving onto the Internet and going international. Issues covered AIDs and public health, college admissions, issues of black masculinity, strategies for welfare reform, black women and depression.

With increasing editorial range came increased visibility, impact, praise—and perhaps the highest form of flattering praise, mimicry. Today Harvard's Kennedy School of Government publishes nine different student-run journals of public policy, covering Hispanic and Asian-American issues (these two journals launched simultaneously with us), as well as women's, LGBT, African, Middle Eastern, Latin American, Korean subjects.

We hope you enjoy this, our special **20th Anniversary Edition**: it's a retrospective, some of the very best articles we've published in the past two decades.

To it, we've added an exclusive interview with the managing editor of *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, in which we look backward and forward to gauge just where African-Americans stand today in terms of advance educational opportunities and achievements, especially at the graduate school level (including public policy). Find out what we've learned.

Most importantly, welcome to the start of our next twenty years—and thank you! For all the editors and staff of all the HJAAP volumes these past two decades,

Prof. Richard Parker
Faculty Advisor

Martha Foley
Publisher

Chris Fortunato
Dean of Students



HARVARD Kennedy School

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So Just How Well Are African Americans Really Doing Today in the Race for Graduate Education—Especially in Public Policy?

A Conversation with the Editor of *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*

The Harvard Journal of African American Policy was started 25 years ago here at the Kennedy School, not by the School's deans or senior faculty, but by a group of concerned African American graduate students. Their pressing concern then was the ongoing lack of diversity in higher education twenty years after the death of Martin Luther King, both generally and here at Harvard. Other minority students at the School shared their concerns, and from them soon came the *Harvard Review of Hispanic Policy* and the *Harvard Asian-American Policy Review*.

The three journals have since given birth to more—on women's policy, LGBT policy, African and Latin American and Middle East policy. Today the Kennedy School sponsors nine different journals, all student-run, student-edited and student-published—nearly a third of all the student-run journals in all the public policy programs in America. Moreover, the journals—thanks to the Internet—have acquired worldwide audiences and influence. Google, for example, ranks several of the journals as first, second, or third in ranking in their policy field—and across all types of publications, not just student-run.

Richard Parker has been the faculty advisor to the Kennedy School journals for most of that quarter-century—and, like the rest of the School, is tremendously proud of what they and their student editors have accomplished.

In reflecting on those 25 years, one of the things the *Journal* and the Kennedy School wanted to do was look at how African Americans are faring in US graduate education today, particularly in the Kennedy School's particular field of public administration and public policy. So we asked Prof. Parker to talk with Dr. Bruce Slater, the managing editor of *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*.

There have been plenty of articles and reports and books over the past quarter-century on how to teach diversity, how to achieve it in student bodies and faculties, and the language, practices, and policies that encourage or discourage diversity. And we know quite a bit statistically about how minorities are doing at the undergraduate level, thanks to federal reporting requirements as well as greater commitment and sensitivity in colleges and universities themselves. But in graduate education, things are different: for one, information has been unevenly collected so that in fields such as public administration and policy, the actual progress that's been made in terms of diversity among students, faculties, schools, regions, of job placements or of recruitment patterns or anything else isn't clear as in fields like medicine or law or business.

Here's the conversation that resulted:

RICHARD PARKER, KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

So I wanted to start by asking you why that's still true in 2012—why the data are still terribly thin—or unencouraging—about how well African Americans are doing at

the graduate school level, particularly in professional schools such as medicine, business and law—and of course public policy. What’s going on?

BRUCE SLATER, MANAGING EDITOR,
THE JOURNAL OF BLACKS IN HIGHER
EDUCATION

I think generally over the past two decades the progress has been good, but not stellar, especially in the medical schools. Black enrollments overall actually have been rather flat in percentage terms, though in absolute numbers they’ve been rising with graduate enrollments generally. I think there’s certainly been progress in the traditional MA and PhD fields, but I think if you look at the most prominent professional schools—in law, business and medicine—there the enrollment levels and graduation rates over the last 10–15 years are pretty much where they were at the start.

PARKER

In fact, hasn’t your journal reported that African American medical school enrollment actually seemed to have declined over the last decade, from around 7 percent to 6 percent?

SLATER

The percentages vary from one year to the next. The fact is that medical school enrollment has stayed at about 6–7 percent, which is still low.

PARKER

What are law and business school enrollment rates like compared to the medical schools? Are the medical schools the outliers with the lowest enrollments?

SLATER

For MBA programs, black enrollment rates are lower, roughly 4–5 percent. Law schools figures I’ve seen are 8 percent black, along the line of medical schools.

PARKER:

Is it still the case that the professional schools associated with historically black colleges and universities are capturing a disproportionate number of African American students—or are predominantly white schools enrolling more?

SLATER

Well, look—in terms of total numbers it’s clearly the mainly-white schools that enroll more blacks. There are just so many more predominantly white than black colleges with professional schools that the vast majority of black students are in those white institutions.

PARKER

Are there regions in the US where professional schools enroll more black students? I was looking at a list of top enrollment rates, and it seems that schools in Florida in particular have been doing a somewhat better job of enrolling African American students than most. Have Ivy League schools or schools in other regions not been doing as well—or is region not really such a factor? Also, what about gender and race together? I mean, we know women are the majority of enrolled students overall nowadays. Do you think that’s also true among African American students?

SLATER

It’s more so.

PARKER
More so?

SLATER
Yes. Black women far outnumber black men in all graduate programs. It's becoming more and more true in professional schools now as well.

PARKER
Has this been a 60–40 difference—or is it even more than that, or...?

SLATER
In masters degree programs, 70 percent are probably women. Professional schools are less than that, but the trend is definitely towards more and more women.

PARKER
Part of that is as I understand it—and please correct me if I'm wrong—that African American women tend to concentrate in masters programs in education, preparing them for K–12 teaching and administration.

SLATER
You're exactly right. As far as doctorates go, I think the latest figures are something like 39 percent of all doctorates for African Americans are in the field of education, whereas for whites, it's like 18 or 20 percent. And I think that's probably true at the masters level, too.

PARKER
I guess the large and daunting question is why enrollment is not rising, and not just among men? What are the components?

SLATER
Well, I think money is one factor, for sure.

PARKER
Because the cost of graduate education having risen so much in the last 30 years?

SLATER
I think that that's absolutely the issue. Obviously, there is scholarship money available but it's a daunting process to get a masters or a PhD degree. I think money—the cost—scares away a lot of kids.

PARKER
So just the level of potential indebtedness is pretty daunting?

SLATER
Absolutely—especially to people who are more likely than whites to come from middle or lower middle income families. For them it's even more daunting.

PARKER
What about the quality of college education? Is it preparing minority students well for graduate programs? There been progress in terms of college preparation for GREs or LSATs?

SLATER
It's hard to say. I mean, we've tried to do studies in the past, examining issues like race and college grade point averages, or race and GREs or other entrance exams. The data are there that show racial differences on entrance exam scores, but there is very little good data on grade differences, or on how well the kids are doing in undergraduate programs. I'd say just about the gaps in entrance test scores...some of the gaps have remained pretty much the same for years and years, and they're still significant.

PARKER

Twenty or thirty years ago, wasn't there was a lot of debate about the cultural biasing on these tests? Do scholars continue to feel that's a significant issue, or is there a new consensus, or is it still a hotly contested question?

SLATER

I think it's not as big an issue. I mean some people still believe that cultural bias creeps in—but the testing companies have been very aware of that criticism, and they do a lot of work to try to get any cultural biases out of the system. Many of the studies you still see refer to SAT questions that were on the tests 25 or 30 years ago, questions about yachting and things like that.

PARKER

Hopefully, they have gotten rid of those by now.

SLATER

Yes, they have.

PARKER

In terms of just completing four-year undergraduate education, has there been much exit interviewing of students who drop out before completing their degrees, or who take unusually long times to complete? Do we have any sense of what's going on after we've gotten minority students into undergraduate curriculums, or more importantly, into some of these professional schools? Are dropout rates among minorities noticeably different once the students are admitted, or are the data thin?

SLATER

There's a lot of data on undergraduates, but I haven't seen much on graduate or professional school students that's

detailed or rich. Graduation rates for black undergraduates are about 20 percentage points below those of whites nationwide—and that's been the case for quite a while.

PARKER

Overall, isn't the graduation rate going up?

SLATER

It is for all groups, but this racial gap has remained pretty much the same.

PARKER

And does this hold in same-type-school comparisons? I mean across races does this somehow also reflect variation among schools, for example a small college versus enormous university, or almost-open-admission state schools and elite private institutions? Do we see the same sort of variances across the types, or are there any interesting disaggregated trends?

SLATER

Well, there are differences. Some schools do a lot better job graduating their black students than other schools. And then there are some that do much worse than the national average. But generally, nationwide, the trend has been pretty much the same.

PARKER

Derrick Jackson is a highly-regarded black columnist here at the *Boston Globe*, who for a number of years has been publishing annually the school-by-school graduation rates for NCAA black athletes, showing readers which schools are doing better and worse jobs of making sure their star athletes—who bring prestige and pride and often millions of dollars to the schools—are getting good educations. I think there's a consensus that Jackson's publicity has forced a number of the bad

schools to get better and good ones to take their job seriously.

SLATER

The issue of black athletes, their graduation rates and the quality of the college education they receive is a big one. In many cases, money is not a factor for those kids. They're covered by scholarships, and they don't have to worry about that. There's an even bigger problem for the minority students who aren't athletes—or aren't outstanding athletes. Surveys that we've quoted many times—some by Sally Mae or Nellie Mae—show that for the black kids who dropped out of college—I think for 69 percent of them—money was the major factor.

PARKER

With cases now coming before the Supreme Court that, for someone of my generation, look like *Baake 2.0*, what are the implications here for African American enrollments, particularly in graduate schools?

SLATER

I think they're huge. I mean even with *Bakke* and the *Grutter* decision in 2003, the Court reaffirmed that race could be used as a factor in admissions.

PARKER

So we all need to pay close attention to this University of Texas case then.

SLATER

I think if the Court comes out and says that public universities can't use race in admission decisions at all, most private schools will abide by that, just out of fear of future litigation. But studies consistently have long shown that when affirmative action is done by income rather than race that black enrollments fall dramatically.

PARKER

Explain how that works.

SLATER

It works because there are millions and millions of poor white kids. The white poor vastly outnumber the black poor, despite the higher poverty percentages among blacks.

PARKER

What should graduate schools like Harvard's be doing that they're not doing? At the Kennedy School, we've just appointed an associate dean for diversity, yet at the same time, African American enrollment at the School has dropped in the past few years, though our acceptance rates haven't. In fact our African American acceptance rates have remained fairly constant over the last five to seven years, even as our actual enrollment is going down. What seems to be happening is that students who are accepted by us are also being accepted by very strong business or law schools, and they're opting for the career opportunities and higher incomes in law and business rather than public service.

SLATER

The lure of the capital gain...

PARKER

Exactly. They'll say they'd love to do public service, but that MBA or that LLB is going to return twice as much over their lifetimes, and that's difficult to turn down.

SLATER

I think that's probably a major factor.

PARKER

What we've done here at the Kennedy School, and what some other schools are doing, is to increase the number of

joint degrees programs we're offering, so students can get degrees in public policy AND law or public administration AND business.

SLATER

Do those programs take longer to complete?

PARKER

Usually, yes—and it can mean a larger financial commitment.

SLATER

Even so, that does seem like a good strategy, to offer the public policy along with a law or business or medical degree.

PARKER

Are there other innovative things that you've come across at other professional schools that our readers should be aware of, that would strengthen minority enrollments?

SLATER

I'm trying to think...I can't think of anything right off the top of my head for graduate schools. I mean, a lot of these kids have already been through four-year colleges. It's not like they're worried about the campus environment.

PARKER

Would one strategy be to use debt forgiveness as a stronger tool—to offer forgiveness, for example, if you go into public service for X years after graduation, or for X years during a Y-year period. Do you have any sense that that might help minority enrollment?

SLATER

I haven't seen data on it, frankly. We know some about debt reduction programs where graduates agree to teach in a rural

area or sign up for Teach for America or, if they're medical doctors, work in the public health service—that kind of thing. I'm sure these sorts of programs would help. Just the availability of increased financial aid matters. Harvard after all is the richest university in the world.

PARKER

Let me shift a bit here. Why don't NASPAA or APSIA or similar associations of public policy schools do more data collection and analysis on how minorities are faring in their schools? I mean, your journal publishes lots of data on law schools and medical schools and business schools, but public policy schools are a void. Yet **U.S. News & World Report** lists more than 150 public policy graduate programs around the country. To have a data hole that large seems to me to be shocking.

SLATER

Some of the schools I'm sure say they don't have the data, but they all have it.

PARKER

But the federal government doesn't require them to aggregate it at this point? The Department of Education?

SLATER

Not for graduate schools, no. Is there a public policy school association?

PARKER

Actually there are—at least two. I want to give this interview to some of the people on the board of the two largest associations, who might actually put some money and manpower into collecting this data,

because it seems a real error that they don't have or use it.

SLATER

The American Bar Association, the American Medical Association and the Association of American Medical Colleges all produce data by race and publicize it every year, and something like that from the public policy schools would be great. We need to track trends and see what progress is being made or is not being made. If no one's doing it, then you don't really know where you sit.

PARKER

These schools are turning out thousands of MPPs and MPAs every year....

SLATER

It takes willingness among senior people in these organizations to show the commitment to explore these issues and find out where you are, so you can assess your progress. That's why we founded our journal in the first place. We started in 1992, so we're in our twentieth year. Our core idea was that if we publicized data on enrollments and graduation rates, we'd create a worthwhile competitive environment, where the schools would compete to increase their numbers, so they would appeal to more and more minority undergraduate students. We follow the 30 highest-ranked universities and the 35 top liberal arts colleges religiously. Almost all of them have greatly improved their numbers in almost every category since 1992. And a lot of the reason, I think, is because they see what their peers are doing, and they don't want to be regarded as performing less well.

PARKER

Well, in the last few months, Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School has appointed an

African American woman as dean. It seems to me that this is a perfect moment for you to be telling the public policy school associations that it's time to start collecting and publicizing this data.

SLATER:

That makes sense—but it's a major task initially. Reporting the data isn't required by the government, so getting cooperation is not easy for an independent group like us. We've had very good cooperation from people when we ask about undergraduates and race—but when we start asking about faculty and race, we don't get the same amount of cooperation because they're not required to do it anyway. So it becomes more like pulling teeth.

PARKER

Well, don't we need to start, to start someplace and get this out and aired?

SLATER

The fact that people at Harvard are interested in doing it, that's really important. People look at Harvard as the leader, and if the Kennedy School is willing to do it and wants to do it, I'm sure everyone else will do it. Harvard will carry a lot of weight with the other schools.

PARKER

This has all been very helpful, very helpful. Thank you, Bruce.

SLATER

All right, thank you.



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The Center also disseminates this research via publications, instruction in the Kennedy School's graduate and executive education programs, sponsorship of conferences and workshops, and interactions with policymakers, public managers, and other scholars.

More information about the Taubman Center is available at www.hks.harvard.edu/taubmancenter. You may also reach us by phone at 617-495-5140 or by email at taubman@harvard.edu.

Remarks on Katrina

Marc Morial

Speech delivered at the Georgetown University Law Center, Washington D.C., on 12 October 2005.

Today I want to elaborate upon the Katrina Bill of Rights, which the National Urban League began to elucidate in the days immediately after the hurricane. I believe that all of us—businesswomen and day laborers, shrimp boat captains and city dwellers, Black and White, Hispanic and Asian—can and must agree that all the people of the Gulf Coast should be guaranteed the following rights: the right to recover, the right to vote, the right to return, the right to rebuild, and the right to work.

These are not excessive demands, nor are they unfair. They are the basic rights of which the victims of this super-catastrophe should be assured.

First, the people of the Gulf Coast must be guaranteed the right to recover. To do so, they need immediate help to get back on their feet and rebuild their lives. That is why Congress should provide extended unemployment assistance to the half a million hard-working Americans thrown out of a job simply because of a storm.

Beyond unemployment assistance, our elected representatives in Washington should establish a Katrina Victims Compensation Fund. Let us recall that within days after the awful terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Congress passed and the president signed legislation authorizing a 9/11 victims compensation fund, which eventually provided more than \$7 billion in compensation to people affected by 9/11.

As it did then, Congress must take immediate and decisive action to begin helping American citizens whose lives have been disrupted and whose livelihoods have been wiped out by this major national tragedy.

Another part of securing the right to recover is to help heal the wounds which have torn apart the people of the Gulf Coast. Right now, people are angry and suspicious. They have seen the worst and are prepared to believe the worst. So while memories are fresh, we must begin the search for answers. Congress must establish an independent, nonpartisan commission to understand what went wrong in the response to this disaster.

The National Urban League supports this not to point fingers but to understand what happened so we can prepare every city across this nation for a natural disaster or terrorist attack. As a former mayor, I can say that this is critical work.

Second, we need to secure the right to vote for the people of the Gulf Coast. Katrina may have knocked over buildings, but we must not let it weaken the foundation of our democracy. That is why we must ensure that the hundreds of thousands of citizens displaced from their towns, villages, and precincts have full voting rights in their home states. The ballot is the best way to ensure that our displaced citizens have the voice that they want and deserve in the rebuilding of their communities.

Third, we must guarantee to every evacuee and every resident the right to return home. Whether those returning lived in affluent, working-class, or poor sections, no high-minded government officials or private officials should make the decision whether or not to return. All families should have the chance to come back to their hometowns or neighborhoods if they so choose. We need to ensure that home owners have the right to choose whether or not to reclaim property. Washed out or not, these are their homes.

I have no illusions. For many, coming home will be tough. That is why Congress should institute a three-year federal tax holiday for those residents earning less than \$50,000 a year who lived in the region and choose to return. Concerning business, we should say that if they want to enjoy a 50 percent tax holiday, they must pay their workers a living wage, for nothing will do more to lift people out of poverty and help them rebuild than a good job at a good wage.

Fourth, we must ensure that every resident of the Gulf Coast has the right to rebuild and to have a say in what the future of his or her home will be. Everyone needs a voice, and those voices

must be heard. Listening to everybody's voice is the only way we can rebuild the Gulf in a way that does not benefit only the big contractors and real estate developers, in a way that does not divide us but rather unites us, in a way that does not turn New Orleans or Gulfport into a gated community but rather breaks down the barriers to success for all those who live there.

Indeed, rebuilding the Gulf Coast around the principle of equal opportunity for all means that as we rebuild, we must not tear down what has made us strong. We must not pay for Katrina by cutting Medicaid, education, job training programs, increasing Medicare premiums, or gutting rural economic development efforts. Paying for the rebuilding on the backs of those whose lives are already ruined only adds insult to injury.

Instead of burdening those already down and those already out, we should help them get back up and move forward.

That is why we must remove obstacles that can allow a family or a small business owner to put the tragedy of Katrina behind them and allow them an opportunity to rebuild. We must be vigilant in making sure that in the confusion of rebuilding, forces are not allowed to stifle their ability to succeed and that red tape does not restrain our people from thriving.

As soon as possible, I believe there should be a moratorium on collections and deficiency judgments on real and personal properties. We should prohibit negative credit reporting or the omission of negative events from credit scores when the incidents were a result of Katrina.

We should encourage our financial institutions to forebear on loans and mortgages until people can really move back and actually live in their homes. We must protect the people of the Gulf Coast from predatory lenders and those that would use their tragedy for sheer personal benefit. And we should freeze all foreclosure proceedings against property in affected areas for a minimum of twelve months.

The final and perhaps the most important right that every resident of the Gulf Coast must be assured of is the right to work, for there is no better antipoverty program than a good job that pays good wages.

With reconstruction and rebuilding, there will be many, many, many new jobs created in the region, and it is our duty to ensure that these jobs go to people from the Gulf region.

We should give local residents first choice on recovery and reconstruction jobs and first choice on contracts. We should aim for 50 percent of all contracts to be secured by local contractors and 25 percent of all contracts to be secured by minority contractors.

To honor their work, we must ensure that fair wages are paid and fairness in the workplace is upheld.

Ladies and gentlemen, civil rights and equal opportunity are not “red tape” to be cut when times are tough. They are who we are as a nation. They are what generations of Americans fought for. Indeed, our parents and grandparents gave so much to ensure that equal opportunity and civil rights were the fabric of American life.

For that reason, to the President of the United States I say, “Mr. President, I support the idea of your commitment

to a broad rebuilding initiative.

Mr. President, the workers rebuilding the Gulf are heroes. They deserve a fair wage. They deserve a fair shake. I ask you today to do the right thing and restore affirmative action and the Davis Bacon prevailing wage laws.”

Plain and simple: there should be no more federal contracts granted until these guarantees are put back in place.

These guarantees were not waived for 9/11. They were not waived for Wall Street. So I do not think a great nation should waive them when the streets affected are the Main Streets in New Orleans, Gulfport, Biloxi, or St. Bernard Parish. High standards for Wall Street, high standards for Main Street.

Once the rebuilding is finished, we need to have an economy in the Gulf Coast that can sustain good-paying jobs for the people of the region and that will lift this area out of the swamps of poverty.

The Katrina Bill of Rights is not a not a detailed plan, but a set of principles that should guide us as we put back the pieces of this devastated part of our nation. It is a lodestone directing us toward the Gulf Coast we want to build and the nation we want to become.

Keeping us on this path will not be easy. With so many different jurisdictions—from cities and towns to counties, parishes, and states—it will not be hard to lose the forest for the trees. That is why the president and Congress should establish one single authority that will transcend and unify the region’s political borders and direct the rebuilding effort. I envision a Tennessee Valley Authority-style agency. I propose today the establishment of a Gulf Coast Authority with the charge and the power to lead

and implement the Herculean task of rebuilding.

I hope that this Gulf Coast Authority would have a dedicated multiyear budget, for in this current fiscal climate with taxes for the wealthy still being cut and commitments overseas unending, it is critical that we secure funds separate from the federal budget to rebuild these towns here at home.

Talking about the right to a good job and good schools, affordable housing, and priceless legal rights may sound bold to some. After all, some may say, we have many other priorities.

During the ninety-five-year history of the National Urban League and its affiliate movement, we have heard that argument before. But we have never waited. Why. Because expanding opportunity for all must never be an afterthought in this great nation. Because alleviating the poverty of our fellow citizens is a responsibility we must never forget. Because liberty and justice for all is not an empty slogan but rather a pledge we make to our neighbors and our children.

Forty-one years ago, Coretta Scott King called her husband, who was recuperating from a viral fever and exhaustion from hard work in an Atlanta hospital, to tell him that he had won the Nobel Peace Prize.

When Dr. King accepted that prize the following winter, he did so with an unyielding belief in this nation. Even though he was jailed and abused and even though African Americans were being set upon by hoses and dogs, King believed in America. He told the dignitaries in Oslo that he was accepting the prize “with an abiding faith in America and an audacious faith in the future of

mankind. I refuse to accept despair,” he said, “as the final response to the ambiguities of history.”

Today at Georgetown University Law Center, I too refuse to accept despair as the final response to this cruel twist of history.

I refuse to accept that a whole region of a great nation can be written off.

I refuse to accept the poverty and absence of opportunity that were laid bare for the whole nation to see.

I believe that the Katrina Bill of Rights will ensure that we rebuild a treasured part of this nation in a way that lives up to our nation’s highest ideals.

While the days just after Katrina were a painful example of how we do not want our country, our states, and our cities to be run, the years of rebuilding can and must be an example of what we want our nation to become. I thank you, I appreciate you, and I encourage your continued work. The Katrina Bill of Rights, ladies and gentlemen. Let us put the Katrina victims first.

Right of Return Means Access to the Ballot, Access to Neighborhoods, and Access to Economic Opportunity

Melanie L. Campbell

“There is nothing new about poverty. What is new is that we now have the techniques and the resources to get rid of poverty. The real question is whether we have the will.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

ABSTRACT

Over one million people were displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; they are residents of three of the poorest states in the nation—Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. New Orleans represents a microcosm of right-of-return issues for all Gulf Coast residents who were displaced by these storms. This article explores the race, economic, and class divides that appear to be key factors in determining which Gulf Coast residents truly have access to the right of return including: who will have access to a barrier-free ballot to vote in the 2006 New Orleans mayor’s race, who will have access to actively participate and benefit in rebuilding their communities, who will have access to temporary housing to reunite families, and who will have access to the economic opportunities to rebuild their lives.

INTRODUCTION

Today, if you travel to New Orleans and visit what were once neighborhoods where a majority of Black residents lived—New Orleans East, the Lower Ninth Ward, Gentilly, Pontchartrain Park, and Lakeside, to name a few—there are no lights, no running water, and no sewage services. No grocery stores, banks, schools, churches, or gas stations are open; there is just the still and chilling reality of no people on the streets and no children playing in the parks.

What I have discovered in organizing tours of New Orleans is that right of return may simply mean having the lights on and the water running in your neighborhood. But right of return also means temporary housing being made available for residents now who want to return to New Orleans and other parts of the Gulf Coast from which people were displaced.

A vast majority of Black New Orleans residents, many whom were active, engaged voters and a core component of the local and state tax base, is still locked out of New Orleans. Today in New Orleans, those who have exercised their right to return in such areas as the French Quarter and Uptown—mostly White residents—appear to have been able to do so because the city has turned on their lights. Understanding that there are multiple and complex environmental issues as well begs the question why so many Black and poor New Orleans residents have not been allowed to return and be part of the rebuilding process as these complex issues are addressed by federal, state, and local officials.

VOTING ESSENTIAL TO RIGHT OF RETURN

Pre-Katrina, the U.S. Census reported that New Orleans had a population of nearly 500,000. Over 300,000 of those residents, mostly Black residents, were displaced after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city. *New York Times* reporter Clifford Levy stated in his article on 17 November 2005, “since the hurricane, most of the estimated 60,000 to 100,000 residents who have returned to New Orleans are white and middle class, changing the city’s racial composition, which had been two-thirds black” (Levy 2005).

Levy reports that there are roughly 219,000 New Orleans evacuees who are voting age [over the age of 18] and estimates that 70 percent of those are Black, which represents 153,300 Black voters who will not have access to the ballot in the 2006 elections. “This is voter disenfranchisement by attrition,” states Levy.

Louisiana State Representative Juan LaFonta, who represents the Seventh Ward in New Orleans, stated, “The majority became the minority, and the minority became the majority. That changed the whole outlook of the political scene. If you have an election right now, it is going to be some of the people voting on behalf of all the people” (Levy 2005).

The right to vote is arguably the most important right of citizenship in a democratic country. Since the passage of the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1870, Americans have enjoyed the legal freedom to select those in charge of governing the country without regard to race or color. Yet exercising this civil right has been a struggle for Black Americans. Black citizens need courage to stand up to violence and intimidation and the fortitude to confront poll taxes and literacy tests in order to exercise their democratic right to vote.

Yet, the New Orleans mayor’s race of 2006—tentatively rescheduled from its original date of 4 February 2006 to 29 April 2006—is shaping up to be a modern day litmus test, with the poll tax in this case imposed on the victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita will be finding a way to have barrier-free access to the ballot by the government while many are struggling to survive in over 34 states across the country.

The *New York Times* reported that New Orleans residents who wish to vote in the 2006 mayor’s race “will either have to make their way back home to town or rely on absentee ballots, a method of voting that has had a checkered record across the nation in recent years” (Levy 2005).

One obvious solution that seems to be escaping federal, state, and local government officials is that our nation has the ability to resolve the issue of access to the ballot. For example, our military personnel who have been deployed overseas voted in federal, state, and local elections through the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act. In addition, our government found a way to provide access to the ballot for Iraqi citizens living in America and established multiple polling locations all across the country for them to vote for a new leader in Iraq without blinking an eye. Why is it so difficult to provide access to the ballot for American citizens who have been displaced in their own country to vote in a local mayor's race in New Orleans. My analysis is that our government does not have *the will* to do so.

Congress has the opportunity to provide access to the ballot by passing the Congressional Black Caucus Omnibus Bill HR 4197 [the Hurricane Katrina, Recovery, Reclamation, Restoration, Reconstruction & Reunion Act of 2005]. A key provision of the bill is Title VI—Voting Rights, which provides Katrina evacuees the same absentee ballot provisions available to military personnel and authorizes up to \$50 million in grants for restoration and replacement of election supplies, materials, and equipment damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

As the country grapples with ballot access issues, there continues to be growing concern and discontent in the Black community that many victims displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita who want to return to their communities will not have the *access* or the ability to return to their communities based on economic and political realities, as well as the uncertain time frame of how long it

will take to rebuild their communities, lack of economic opportunities, and many other external factors.

One thing that is certain is the impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; the levee breaks in New Orleans neighborhoods such as the Lower Ninth Ward collectively have not only swept away the livelihood of over one million Gulf Coast residents, but also have the potential to substantially change the political landscape, culture, and psyche of New Orleans, the state of Louisiana, and Black politics across the South overnight.

DO RACE AND CLASS STILL MATTER IN AMERICA?

A CBC News article from 5 September 2005 states that “If those forced out of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina end up re-building their lives in new locations, it could be the largest U.S. black resettlement since the Great Migration of the 20th Century lured southern blacks to the North in search of jobs and better lives” (CBC News, 2005).

According to The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, in a national survey conducted on 6-7 September 2005, “the hurricane has had a profound psychological impact on the public. Fully 58 percent of respondents say they have felt depressed because of what’s happened in areas affected by the storm (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2005). In recent years, this percentage is only surpassed by the 71 percent reporting depression in a survey taken just days after the September 11th attacks.”

However, the Pew Research Center survey concluded that:

Overall opinion on this measure obscures a substantial racial divide in

reactions to the disaster. As many as 70% of African Americans say they have felt angry, compared with 46% of whites. Blacks are twice as likely as whites to know people directly affected by the hurricane. Further, seven-in-ten blacks (71%) say the disaster shows that racial inequality remains a major problem in the country; a majority of whites (56%) say this was not a particularly important lesson of the disaster.

The painful images of the New Orleans Convention Center, unfair media coverage showing Blacks looting and Whites finding food, floating dead bodies of poor Americans left for days on the side of the road, in neighborhoods, and on sidewalks and bridges, the separation of families, and images of the innocent faces of thousands of missing children have adversely impacted the psyche of Black America and poor Americans as well. These images further reminded Black America and indeed the nation that the legacy of slavery and the old Southern Confederacy is still with us, when African Americans were treated as less than human. Further, these atrocities and the early media reports continually referring to evacuees as “refugees” in their own country may have further exacerbated this racial divide.

LEVEE BREAKS UNMASK ECONOMIC DEVASTATION IN GULF COAST

The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) provided a very sobering analysis of the economic and racial demographics of the affected areas impacted by Hurricane Katrina.

According to CBPP, “Many Hurricane Katrina victims faced difficult living conditions even before the storm arrived. Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama, are,

respectively, the first, second, and eighth poorest states in the nation. And of the 5.8 million individuals in these states who lived in the areas struck hardest by the hurricane, more than one million lived in poverty prior to the hurricane’s onset. CBPP states that many of the storm victims have little or no resources on which to rely in these difficult times” (Sherman and Shapiro 2005).

CBPP ESSENTIAL FACTS ABOUT THE VICTIMS OF HURRICANE KATRINA: POVERTY AND INCOME IN THE AFFECTED STATES AND COUNTIES

Table 1 shows the poverty rate and median household income in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The table compares the data for these states to the data for other states and the nation (Sherman and Shapiro 2005).

The CBPP further reported that:

The Census data also confirm that African Americans made up a disproportionate share of the hurricane’s victims. About one of every three people who lived in the areas hit hardest by the hurricane were African American. By contrast, one of every eight people in the nation is African American. African Americans living in New Orleans were especially likely to be without a vehicle before the hurricane struck. More than one in three black households in New Orleans (35 percent)—and nearly three in five *poor* black households (59 percent)—lacked a vehicle. Among white non-Hispanic households in New Orleans, 15 percent lacked a vehicle. (Sherman and Shapiro 2005)

Dr. Silas Lee, pollster, communications strategist, and a native of New Orleans, wrote a daunting policy paper, “A

Table 1 — Poverty Especially High and Incomes Especially Low in States Hit Hardest by Katrina

| | Poverty Rate | Rank | Median Household Income | Rank |
|---------------|--------------|-----------|-------------------------|------------|
| Alabama | 16.1% | 8th worst | \$36,709 | 9th lowest |
| Louisiana | 19.4% | 2nd worst | \$35,110 | 5th lowest |
| Mississippi | 21.6% | Worst | \$31,642 | 2nd lowest |
| United States | 13%* | | \$44,684 | |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) for 2004. According to the ACS (which the government uses for ranking states by poverty), the national poverty rate was 13.1 percent in 2004. According to another government survey, the Current Population Survey, it was 12.7 percent. (Sherman and Shapiro 2005)

Haunted City? The Social and Economic Status of African Americans and Whites in New Orleans” (2003). Dr. Lee’s study further reveals the gross economic inequities that exist between Blacks and Whites in the Crescent City.

As a community, the continued social and economic displacement of a disproportionate share of our population [New Orleans] will result in excessive under employment and unemployment, producing on-going economic stagnation.... For example, only 11 percent of the white population in the workforce has an income below the poverty level, compared to 35 percent of the black population. Furthermore, this inequitable distribution in income also impacts civil leadership. Rather than achieving a broader distribution of income, a small controlling oligarchy emerges to position themselves and benefit from the economic and social opportunities intended for a more diverse constituency. (Lee 2003, 8)

Lee’s analysis seems almost clairvoyant to what New Orleans currently faces in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina when he states “As we stand on the crest of this

new century, New Orleans cannot afford to have the failure of inaction, and the weight of its constituencies haunt its potential as a city. Twenty years from now, I wonder, will we still be haunted by the same old challenges?” (Lee 2003, 9).

BLACK LEADERS CALL FOR ACTION BY OUR GOVERNMENT

In the first few days after the Hurricane Katrina catastrophe there was a serious void in leadership and action on the federal, state, and local levels of government and from disaster relief and response agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which is under the Department of Homeland Security, and the American Red Cross.

Many civil rights, civic, labor, business, faith, nonprofit, philanthropic, and grassroots leaders took swift action to provide relief as our nation watched in horror and disbelief as the catastrophic events of Hurricane Katrina and the tragic loss of life and liberties that followed after the levees broke in New Orleans unfolded.

In those critical first seventy-two hours after Hurricane Katrina devastated the

Gulf Coast region, Black leaders and other people of goodwill began to realize that they needed to maintain a sustained relief effort to ensure help arrived to the victims as soon as possible. Grassroots organizations, churches, and other community-based leaders were in the eye of the storm and activated alternative on-the-ground emergency response efforts to address the immediate needs of the survivors in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

Vincent Sylvain, state director, Louisiana Unity Coalition, and a displaced New Orleans resident, has been a leading voice of right of return for all New Orleans residents. Sylvain advocates in a field report to the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation that “all displaced persons should maintain the ‘right of return’ to New Orleans and that a person’s socioeconomic status, class, employment, occupation, educational level, neighborhood residence, or how they were evacuated should have no bearing on this fundamental right. This right shall include the provision of adequate transportation to return to the city by the similar means that a person was dispersed.. Further, there was an urgent need for a collective voice from national Black leadership to speak out publicly and demand timely and aggressive action from the federal government and disaster relief agencies whose mission it is to provide aid to those in need in times of national crisis and natural disasters.

On Friday, 2 September 2005, several organizations joined the Congressional Black Caucus, NAACP, National Urban League (NUL), National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO), Operation Hope, and Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (CBCF) at a press conference that was

covered by over 50 media outlets at the National Press Club. This was one of the first collective voices of national Black leadership convened to publicly urge the president, Congress, disaster relief agencies, and the American people to speed up the disaster relief and recovery efforts now to help the people of the Gulf Coast. Further, the ReBuild Hope NOW Campaign (RBHN) was announced urging African American organizations and others to join the campaign to provide emergency relief and recovery support now. RBHN has been implemented as a coalition campaign for the long-term rebuilding process.

On 14 September 2005, the NUL and NAACP convened a coalition of African American leadership organizations for a meeting at Howard University in Washington, D.C., to address critical issues and challenges confronting the victims of Hurricane Katrina. An African American Leaders Call to Action (AALCA) document was developed to utilize as a public statement demanding action from the federal, state, and local government to speed up the disaster relief, recovery, and rebuilding process. Over forty national African American leaders were in attendance.

The following AALCA action steps and recommendations called for the president, Congress, federal, state, and local government, and disaster relief and recovery agencies to immediately respond to the following eight critical areas of concern:

1. **Ensuring affected families' immediate and long-term right of return to Gulf Coast region**
 - Provide temporary housing at all assets available to federal government, including currently closed military bases in Gulf Coast region.
 - Provide economic incentives for families to return to Gulf Coast region.
2. **Rebuilding and reconnecting families and children**
 - Establish Family Reconstruction Fund (estimated \$100 billion for providing unemployment assistance, job training, school placement, assistance reuniting families, etc.).
3. **Ensuring that local residents have first choice at reconstruction jobs and contracts**
 - Establish Gulf Coast Region Reconstruction Fund (rebuilding homes, businesses, etc.).
 - Establish timeline to rebuild colleges and universities, including historically Black colleges and universities (Xavier University, Dillard University, Southern University in New Orleans, Jackson State University).
 - Set 50 percent residency target goal for all contracts.
 - Set 40 percent minority vendor target for all reconstruction.
 - Place moratorium on all contracts until civil rights provisions can be reinstated (Davis-Bacon Requirements).
4. **Providing physical and mental health assistance**
 - Order the admittance of minority community-based counselors in facilities with evacuees nationwide.
 - Provide health benefits to all affected citizens for a period no less than 24 months.
5. **Monitoring FEMA, American Red Cross, and Salvation Army distribution of resources**
 - Establish a diverse commission to monitor the equitable distribution of relief resources provided by FEMA, American Red Cross, and Salvation Army as well as the equitable reconstruction of the affected Gulf Coast areas.
6. **Providing Legal, Economic, and Voting Protections**
 - Direct Justice Department to immediately review individual cases of arrested and detained individuals.
 - Ensure evacuees immediate ability to vote in state and local elections.
 - Ensure home owners the right of first refusal to reclaim property.
 - Freeze all foreclosure proceedings against property in affected areas for a minimum of twelve months.
 - Build in legal protections against predatory lenders.
 - Institute a prohibition of collections and deficiency judgments on real and personal properties.
 - Institute a prohibition on negative credit reporting or the omission of negative events from credit scores when the incidents were a result of Katrina.
 - Institute a voluntary waiver of late fees or interest on loans made to people in

Katrina-affected areas for a period of at least three months.

7. Securing the environment for future generations

- Develop action plan to secure wetlands in coastal areas of United States.
- Stop rollback/waivers of environmental laws.

8. Develop comprehensive strategy to address poverty crisis in America

ACCESS TO HOUSING KEY TO RIGHT OF RETURN

Key provisions of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) Katrina bill [HR 4197] address many of the access and right-of-return issues for all victims of Hurricane Katrina including a housing and community rebuilding provision (Title IV) providing funding for community revitalization, CDBG Section 108 loan guarantee funds, funding for 300,000 additional tenant-based rental assistance (Section 8), fair housing enforcement, and housing counseling for families in temporary shelters.

Title IV also prohibits placement of persons displaced by Katrina in substandard housing, provides for more vigorous enforcement of Fair Housing laws, gives people displaced by Katrina preference for Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) inventory and foreclosed properties, and establishes a mortgage payment fund for payment of mortgages similar to the fund authorized under Title III for the payment of private health insurance premiums.

In addition to advocating for key national public policy initiatives such as HR 4197 to be adopted by Congress, Black leaders must closely scrutinize and speak out

against any rebuilding plans for New Orleans or any other Gulf Coast community that leaves out Black and poor neighborhoods in their recommendations for rebuilding.

ECONOMIC CATASTROPHE CONTINUES FOR EVACUEES

John Bryant, founder and CEO of Operation Hope, sounded the alarm to the long-term economic disaster that many of the over two million survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are facing. The economic disaster, Bryant warns, could have more damaging effects on their lives than the storms themselves. Bryant has established an “economic triage” (Project Restore HOPE) to assist the survivors. Bryant states in an Operation Hope press statement dated 13 January 2006, “Economic triage is necessary when short term financial aid is simply not enough to stem the flow of economic bad news following a disaster; and ranges from simply helping to arrange the deferment of a payment or set of payments on credit consumer debt and other loans with your lender, to at times, helping to actually restructure a credit or financial relations benefit of all involved.. Bryant reminds the public that many victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita will “require help beyond what FEMA provides through immediate cash payments, including the emergency economic counseling and emergency budget counseling.”

Additionally, in an Operation Hope press statement from 13 January 2006, former Ambassador Andrew Young describes the economic impact of Katrina as having national implications. Young states “the affects of the impact of Katrina is not just felt on a few folks who showed up on television following this disaster. The

effects of this are national, and include all of the shipping that comes down the Mississippi River, spanning from Minneapolis to Tennessee, both agricultural and industrial. All of it requires a functioning port out of the mouth of the Mississippi. We are already seeing the effects of damages on oil and gas prices, and if we don't get this under control, it will damage our larger economy."

CONCLUSION

The catastrophe of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita has challenged America at its core, exposing the face of poverty and the unresolved issues of race and class, as the world watched in disbelief on CNN, BBC, MSNBC, BET, the Weather Channel, Fox, and hundreds of other media outlets. Yet, in this moment of great crisis, Americans also expressed their outrage by opening their hearts, their homes, their wallets, and their communities to the millions of victims impacted by these storms.

The African American community has been reminded of what it took to survive and thrive in spite of the vestiges of slavery, the Jim Crow South, institutional racism, and negative stereotypes such as the ones misrepresenting them as looters, rather than as mothers and fathers, seeking water, diapers, food, clothing, and shelter for their children who had been abandoned by the government in the first seventy-two hours after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans.

These catastrophes require a regional "Marshall Plan" for the Gulf Coast and a comprehensive response that engages the public, private, philanthropic, civic, faith, education, and grassroots sectors in helping to restore a sense of hope and restoration, not only for the victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, but also the nation, to regain a sense of responsibility

for our most vulnerable and precious resources—our children, who are our future, and our elders, who have sacrificed and paid their dues to live in dignity in their senior years.

As I close this article, our nation is celebrating the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who had he lived would have been 77 years old on 15 January 2006. Dr. King's teachings left a blueprint that reminds us that our nation's soul is in peril if we forget about the "least of these" God's children.

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Reawakening Baptist Town

by Michael Wolking and Ololade Olakanmi

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).

Figure 1 — Map of Baptist Town



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, 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

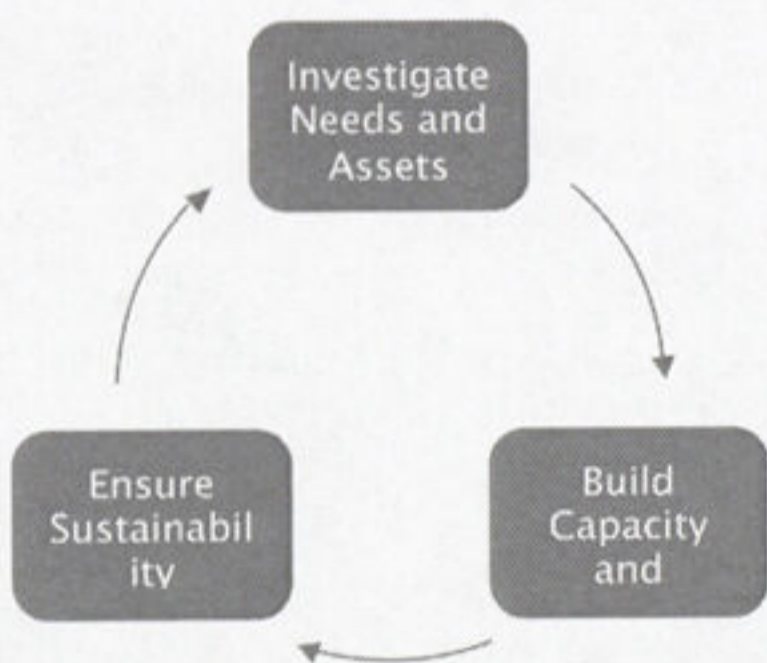
together to develop better homes, clean and safe streets, youth programming, and access to good jobs. Our mission is to work with Baptist Town residents to build locally driven partnerships and solutions that improve the quality of life within Baptist Town and Greenwood. We intend to realize this mission 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

Table 1 — Baptist Town Preliminary Data Findings

| Variable | Data from CDP Survey | Data from 2000 U.S. Census, Tract 9507, Leflore County, Greenwood, MS |
|---|----------------------|---|
| Educational Attainment | | |
| 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% |
| Employment Rate | 31.8% (14 of 44) | 48.7% (in labor force) |
| Homeownership Rate | 31.7% (13 of 41) | 41.7% (owner-occupied units) |
| Civic Engagement | | |
| Church-based | 73.3% (22 of 30) | n/a |
| Non-church-based | 26.6% (8 of 30) | n/a |

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

Table 2 — Baptist Town Sectors and Skills

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

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) 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—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 status¹ 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 predominantly 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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- ¹ 501(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.

The Cradle to Prison Pipeline: America's New Apartheid

by Marian Wright Edelman

Incarceration is becoming the new American apartheid, and poor children of color are the fodder. It is time to sound a loud alarm about this threat to American unity and community, act to stop the growing criminalization of children at younger and younger ages, and tackle the unjust treatment of minority youths and adults in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems with urgency and persistence. The failure to act now will reverse the hard-earned racial and social progress for which Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and so many others sacrificed and died. We must call for investment in all children from birth through their successful transition to adulthood, remembering abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass's observation that "it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

So many poor babies in rich America enter the world with multiple strikes against them, being born without prenatal care, at low birthweight, and to a teenaged, impoverished, and poorly educated single mother and absent father. At crucial points in a child's development after birth until adulthood more risks pile on, making a successful transition to productive adulthood significantly less likely and making involvement in the criminal justice system significantly more likely. Black children are more than three times as likely as White children to be poor and are four times as likely to live in extreme poverty. A poor Black boy born in 2001 has a one-in-three chance of going to prison in his lifetime and is almost six times as likely as a White boy in similar circumstances to be incarcerated for a drug offense.

The past continues to strangle the present and the future. Children with an incarcerated parent are more likely to become incarcerated. Black children are nearly nine times and Latino children are three times as likely as White children to have an incarcerated parent. Blacks constitute one-third and Latinos one-fifth of the prisoners in America, and one in three Black men, twenty to twenty-nine years old, is under correctional supervision or control. Of the 2.3 million people in jail or prison, 64 percent are minority; of the 4.2 million persons on probation, 45 percent are minority; of the 800,000 individuals on parole, 59 percent are minority. Inequitable drug-sentencing policies including mandatory minimums have greatly escalated the incarceration rate of minority adults and youths.

Child poverty and neglect, racial disparities in systems that serve children, and the pipeline to prison are not acts of God. They are a result of America's immoral political and economic choices that can and must be changed with strong political, corporate, and community leadership.

No single sector or group can solve these child- and nation-threatening crises alone, but, together, we all can. Leaders must call us to the table and use their bully pulpits to replace our current paradigm of punishment as a first resort with a paradigm of prevention and early intervention. That will save lives, save families, save taxpayer money, and save our nation's aspiration to be a fair society. Physical and mental health care and quality education cost far less than prisons.

If called to account today, America would not pass the test of the prophets, the gospels, and all the great faiths. Christians who profess to believe that God entered human history as a poor vulnerable baby and that each man, woman, and child is created in God's own image need to act on that faith. The Jewish Midrash says God agreed to give the people of Israel the Torah only after they offered their children as guarantors, deeming neither their prophets nor elders sufficient. It is time to heed the prophets' call for justice for the orphans and the weak. America's Declaration of Independence says, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights." After more than two centuries, it is time to make those truths evident in the lives of poor children of color and to close our intolerable national hypocrisy gap. The world is waiting for America to show whether democratic capitalism is an oxymoron or whether it can work. Our national creed demands it.

All great faiths demand it. Common sense and self-interest require it. And our moral redemption and credibility in the world we seek to lead in compel it.

Ending child poverty is not only an urgent moral necessity, it is economically beneficial. Robert M. Solow, MIT Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics, wrote in the foreword to *Wasting America's Future* that "ending child poverty is, at the very least, highly affordable" and would be a boost to the economy. Healthy Social Security and Medicare systems for our increasing elderly population need as many productive workers as possible to support them. We can ill afford to let millions of our children grow up poor, unhealthy, uneducated, and as dependent rather than productive citizens.

What then can leaders do to help build the spiritual and political will needed to help our nation pass the test of the God of history and better prepare for America's future? What steps can you take to heed Dr. King's warning not to let our wealth become our destruction but instead our salvation by helping the poor Lazaruses languishing at our closed gates? How can our nation use its blessings to bless all the children entrusted to our care and rekindle America's dimming dream?

As U.S. President Barack Obama and the U.S. Congress contemplate ways to stimulate our economy, let them begin by investing in a healthy, fair, head, and safe start for every American child and in measures to ensure a child's successful transition to college and productive adulthood.

*Marian Wright Edelman, whose new book is **The Sea Is So Wide and My Boat Is So Small: Charting a Course for the Next Generation**, is president of the Children's Defense Fund.*

For more information about the Children's Defense Fund, go to <http://www.childrensdefense.org>.

Political Cynicism and the Black Vote

by Erica C. Taylor

ABSTRACT:

African American political behavior is an understudied dimension of the American electorate. In some ways, Black voting behavior and voting frequency parallel mainstream trends, but there are notable differences. These differences are due largely to socioeconomic factors and the troubled history of Blacks in America. The continued inequality among many aspects of Black society, as compared to mainstream society, causes many African Americans to be cynical of American politics and the political system. This article, which uses the terms African American and Black interchangeably, analyzes a regression model that suggests cynicism—and specifically political alienation—may positively affect African American voting behavior. In other words, where there are higher cynical attitudes among Black voters, there is also higher African American voter turnout. The results show a distinct need for innovative efforts to motivate the Black vote.

Voting frequency in America has declined over time, and numerous studies have examined the factors affecting voter turnout. These studies have outlined several variables impacting turnout including socioeconomic deterrents, apathy, and various psychological deterrents such as voter intimidation and the belief that one vote does not make a difference. The same studies define political participation by many components. Though these studies identify a lack of interest in political participation among Americans generally, within the overall decline in American voting frequency is a tendency for an even greater drop-off in African American or Black voter turnout (this article uses the terms African American and Black interchangeably). Historic race relations challenges in the United States along with current racial inequality are likely factors in creating low Black voter turnout.

Historically, tense race relations in the United States have adversely affected African American voter turnout. After the Civil War, relationships between Blacks and Whites were strained in ways that had direct political effects. W.E.B. Du Bois (2003, 42), author of *The Souls of Black Folk*, originally written in 1903, described the effects of societal ills on Black society as “1. [t]he disfranchisement of the Negro, and 2. [t]he legal creation of distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro.” Du Bois believed Whites should grant equal rights to Blacks and accept a new and integrated society. For Blacks, he said, “black men of America have a duty to perform, a duty stern and delicate . . . by

every civilized and peaceful method we must strive for the rights which the world accords to men, clinging unwaveringly to those great words which the sons of the Fathers would fain forget” (Du Bois 2003, 47). Du Bois wanted Blacks to demand what America’s Founding Fathers deemed “unalienable” rights: “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Du Bois 1903, 47). Du Bois’s reflections on Black political participation demonstrate his idealistic view of how African Americans should cooperatively be enthusiastic about taking part in the political process.

African Americans’ forced fight for equality has been long, complicated, and stressed. Strained relationships with mainstream politics have molded Black political behaviors. The teachings of Du Bois—compressed with those of many other Black intellectuals, activists, pragmatics, and organizers—fueled the civil rights movement and the passing of laws that enhanced racial equality such as the Voting Rights Act. These accomplishments, though necessary, are not sufficient to deduce that full racial equality now exists in America. Some patterns still plague the American electorate. A key racial difference between the political activism of the 1960s and today is the trend in African American voting behavior. Specifically, where African American voters perceive there to be a continuous battle for equality they are driven to vote with greater frequency than in situations where African American voters perceive equality to have been achieved.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORY

Contrary to popular belief, Blacks vote proportionately with White Americans even though the Black population is more politically inactive overall by an absolute

count. However, there are differences in which factors prompt the populations to exercise their vote. Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie (1987, 151) conducted a study titled “Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality.” Their multidimensional, comprehensive research examined a large scope of American voter participation, among which was Black political participation. The authors found “blacks...participate less than whites, but not substantially less and they participate roughly equally with whites in the electoral process....When they participate they can be quite active.”

While Verba and Nie attribute low socioeconomic conditions as having an effect on Black voting behavior and political participation, several other studies examine the role of political cynicism and alienation on voter turnout. Robert E. Agger, Marshall N. Goldstein, and Stanley A. Pearl (1961, 493) surveyed a small town in Oregon in 1959 in order to measure cynicism. Their article, “Political Cynicism: Measurement and Meaning,” defines cynicism in a political participation context as political potency, “a feeling that one does exercise some power in the complicated, mass democracy.” They write further, “[i]t is assumed that those people who feel personally impotent tend to place their trust in politicians and the political process while those who feel potent would tend to place their trust in themselves to the derogation of politics and politicians.” In other words, citizens who do not feel they can personally impact the democratic process are more likely to vote in hopes that elected representatives make changes on their behalf and then that they as citizens can begin to change their environment.

Priscilla L. Southwell (2008, 131) further explores this topic in a study of combined

data from the American National Election Study from 1964–2000. She writes, “attitudinal factors” such as cynicism “contribute as much to the explanation of the voting decision as do the standard demographic and contextual explanations of voter turnout.” She describes political cynicism or “distrust” as a dimension of alienation, along with “powerlessness, or inefficacy” and “meaninglessness, or a perceived lack of government responsiveness” (Southwell 2008, 133). The results of a logistic regression show a significant effect, where $p < .01$, of meaninglessness, powerlessness, and cynicism on voting. However, when these variables were run together in the study’s regression model, cynicism was the only dimension found to have a positive (.003) effect on voting (Southwell 2008, 136).

John S. Jackson (1973, 878) directly confronts African American cynicism in his “Alienation and Black Political Participation.” He surveyed nearly 500 African American college students in the late 1960s under a hypothesis that Blacks and college students are typically highly cynical groups. The sample consisted mostly of students attending Historically Black Colleges but also included Blacks attending predominantly White colleges and Blacks not attending college. Jackson found a significant relationship ($p < .001$) between high cynicism and high political activity within this group.

Richard D. Shingles (1981, 77) defines Black consciousness as “the awareness among blacks of their shared status as an unjustly deprived and oppressed group.” He also writes, “the primary reason black consciousness has such a dramatic effect on political participation is that it contributes to the combination of a sense of political efficacy and political mistrust which in turn induces political

involvement.” Using an ANOVA test of national survey data, Shingles (1981, 85) found a significant effect ($p < .001$) of what he calls “High-Initiative Conventional Policy Behavior,” a correlation of internal political efficacy, political trust, and their joint effect.

In another related study, Priscilla L. Southwell and Kevin D. Pirch (2003, 913) found a significant ($p \leq .01$) effect of cynicism and voter turnout among Black respondents only. They conducted a probit analysis of voter turnout based on 1996 and 2000 National Election Study data. In their research, cynicism is defined as “the belief that the government is not producing policies according to expectations” (Southwell and Pirch 2003, 911). The results reveal cynicism has a positive (.169) effect on African American voting behavior and has no significant effect on the full data set or on Whites only.

HYPOTHESIS

Recognizing cynicism’s role in Black voting behavior and voting frequency becomes a key factor in American politics (Southwell and Pirch 2003, 913). Politicians have been accused of ignoring the needs of their Black constituents and in turn these constituents often feel they have little to no influence on the electoral process. This trend is illustrated through the lack of politician interest in fulfilling campaign promises made to predominantly Black communities. The complexity of race relations in America and in American politics needs to be continually studied. African American public opinion is an important part of gauging the sentiments of the overall American electorate.

This article seizes the opportunity to measure cynicism in terms of voting behavior within the Black community,

especially given the context of recent American politics. Specifically, this study tests the following hypothesis: Political alienation, as a dimension of political cynicism, has a positive effect on African American voting behavior.

METHODOLOGY

This study relies on data from the CBS News/Black Entertainment Television (BET) Monthly Poll conducted in July 2004 when George W. Bush was the U.S. president. The Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) collected data from African American respondents through a random-digit dialing national telephone survey. ICPSR (n.d., ii) described this poll as “part of a continuing series of monthly surveys that solicit public opinion on the presidency and on a range of other political and social issues.”

In this study, an ordinary least squares linear regression model was developed from the CBS News/BET data to determine the effect of cynicism on African American voting behavior among registered voters. Only data from respondents who self-identified as registered voters was used. Registered voters were coded (“0” for “not registered” and “1” for “registered”). Respondents’ self-reported voting frequency was used as the dependent variable. The dependent variable was recoded from “never (0)” to “always (4),” with middle options of “seldom (1),” “part of the time (2),” and “nearly always (3).” Several demographic variables were used as independent variables along with a six-question component to measure cynicism similar to the components used by Jackson (1973) and Southwell (2008). The demographics from the data set were given dummy values to represent particular characteristics. Demographic

categories included political philosophy (coded with “0,” “1,” or “2” dummy values for “conservative,” “moderate,” and “liberal,” respectively); education (coded with “0–3” dummy values for “less than high school,” “some college,” “college graduate,” and “postgraduate work or degree”); age group (coded with “0–3” dummy values for ages “18–29,” “30–44,” “45–64,” and “over 64”); income (coded with “0–4” dummy values for “less than \$15K,” “\$15–30K,” “\$30–50K,” “\$50–75K,” and “over \$75K”); marital status (coded with “0” or “1” dummy values for “have been married” and “never been married”); religion (coded with “0” or “1” dummy values for “Protestant” and “not Protestant”); and religious attendance (coded with “0–4” dummy values for “never,” “a few times per year,” “once or twice per month,” “almost every week,” and “every week”).

Cynicism was determined by analyzing survey responses to the following paraphrased questions: Is the country on the right track or going in the wrong direction? (0=wrong direction, 1=right track); Do you believe George W. Bush was legitimately elected in 2000? (0=no, 1=yes); What are your feelings toward the George W. Bush administration? (0=angry, 1=dissatisfied but not angry, 2=satisfied but not enthusiastic, 3=enthusiastic); Do you approve of the job George W. Bush is doing? (0=no, 1=yes); Do you feel that the voting fiasco in Florida in 2000 is likely to affect the Black vote? (0=less likely, 1=no difference, 2=more likely); Do you feel that there are some people who purposely try to discount and/or restrict the Black vote? (0=probably not, 1=probably so).

There are notable limitations of relying on the CBS News/BET Monthly Poll. Particularly, dependent variable bias is

Table 1 — Key Percentages for Dependent and Control Variables

| Variable | Key Percentage |
|-------------------|----------------|
| Voting Frequency | 69.8% Always |
| Registered Voters | 88% Registered |

Table 2 — Key Percentages for Selected Independent Variables

| Independent Variable | Key Percentages |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Political Philosophy | 27.2% Liberal, 20.9% Conservative |
| Education | 31.7% High School Grad, 26% Some College |
| Age Group | 41.8% Age 45–64 |
| Income | 54.9% \$15,000–\$50,000 |
| <i>Right Track/Wrong Direction</i> | 93.2% Wrong Direction |
| <i>George W. Bush Legitimacy 2000</i> | 88.9% Bush Did Not Win Legit |
| <i>Bush Administration</i> | 50.5% Dissatisfied, But Not Angry |
| <i>George W. Bush Job Approval</i> | 88.5% Disapprove |
| <i>Florida 2000</i> | 49% More Likely |
| <i>Discount Black Vote</i> | 73.5% Probably So |

Note: Italicized variables indicate cynicism components

possible because voting frequency was self-identified and the percentage of respondents who identified as “always” voting is subsequently skewed. Additionally, measuring cynicism is not an exact science and the proffered measures of cynicism and alienation are derived from previous works that do not take into account the 2008 and 2010 national election activity. Finally, the notion of cynicism is highly subjective, even in the face of academic definitions. Nonetheless, this study is important because it provides insight into how to better understand the viewpoints of the Black voting base.

RESULTS

The regression model reveals a statistically significant effect of cynicism on African American voting frequency. Table 1 displays voting frequency and registered voter percentages. Table 2 displays key percentages found in respondent data for the independent variables. As seen in Table 3, the model supports the hypothesis that political cynicism positively affects African American voting behavior. The data shows that most African Americans are politically cynical, which is consistent with previous literature. However, only two of the cynicism components (questions concerning Florida in the 2000 election and the discounted Black vote) loaded significantly with positive effects

Table 3 — The Effect of Cynicism on Voting Frequency Among Blacks Linear Regression

| | B | SE | β |
|--------------------------------------|-------|------|--------------|
| Voting Freq. (Constant) | 2.421 | .239 | |
| Demographics | | | |
| Political Philosophy | -.047 | .045 | -.037 |
| Education | .092 | .029 | .128* |
| Age Group | .281 | .037 | .288* |
| Income | .072 | .028 | .104* |
| Marital Status | .074 | .074 | .038 |
| Religion | .011 | .079 | .005 |
| Religious Attendance | .043 | .023 | .067 |
| Cynicism | | | |
| Right Track | .021 | .163 | .005 |
| Bush Administration | .015 | .048 | .012 |
| Bush Job Approval | .027 | .120 | .009 |
| Alienation | | | |
| Bush Legit 2000 | -.137 | .113 | -.047 |
| Florida 2000 | .225 | .057 | .139* |
| Discount Black Vote | .233 | .070 | .117* |
| <i>N</i> =708 | | | |
| <i>R</i> ² =2 | | | |
| <i>Adjusted R</i> ² =.185 | | | |
| <i>F</i> =13.310* | | | |
| * <i>p</i> <.05. | | | |

on voting frequency. Yet both of these components have a strong correlation ($<.01$) to the George W. Bush 2000 election legitimacy question. Collectively, these three components capture what previous literature classified as political alienation—one dimension of cynicism. The remaining cynicism components used in this model potentially capture “powerlessness” or “meaninglessness” according to the Southwell (2008) definitions. Therefore, this research not only supports the hypothesis but also affirms literature indicating political alienation determines voting preferences for African Americans and increases Black voting behavior.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study support a conclusion that there is a clear sense of cynicism among African Americans. The results also show a prevalent sense of political alienation within that cynicism, which translates to some sense of helplessness within the Black community that it has little impact, if any, on American democracy. Because this alienation has been shown to have a positive effect on African American voting behavior, these cynical perspectives need to be considered when developing strategy to affect Black voting outcomes. Strategy respecting the tumultuous history of Blacks in America may be a good place to start because the hope for things greater, equal, and fair has motivated and mobilized the Black electorate previously to change its voting trends.

Starkly, the presidential election of 2008 and the midterm elections of 2010 have shown an interesting narrative. There has been a sharp increase in Black voter mobilization, enthusiasm, and participation followed by a return to the status quo

described in literature. The Pew Research Center states, “the levels of participation by black, Hispanic and Asian eligible voters all increased from 2004 to 2008, reducing the voter participation gap between themselves and white eligible voters. This was particularly true for black eligible voters. Their voter turnout rate increased 4.9 percentage points, from 60.3% in 2004 to 65.3% in 2008, nearly matching the voter turnout rate of white eligible voters (66.1%). . . . Nearly all (95%) black voters cast their ballot for Democrat Barack Obama” (Lopez 2009). However, early reports from the 2010 elections show that Blacks were much less enthusiastic in most states.

The election of President Barack Obama is likely an outlier occurrence given the compounding literature showing the standard of cynicism among Black voters remains relatively consistent. Significant change may be possible; however, it would require a permanent catalyst to be created to increase Black voter participation and overcome the previous trends from 2004. Perhaps more Black political candidates could offer Black voters greater options, possibly reducing the level of cynical thinking and alienated perspectives. Or, evolving study in this area could address a Black population of actual documented frequent and non-frequent voters to gather a more realistic determination and comparison of cynicism on voting behavior. Further, a generalized cynicism index could be developed to standardize study and measurement in this area. Finally, the effects of an African American president and his efforts and image among Blacks might be used to derive effects on cynicism.

What becomes clear is that cynicism in the Black community cannot continue to

be the key motivating factor in voting if African Americans truly wish to have their voices heard in national politics. This study is critical in Black political awareness and in the decision to establish a Black political identity moving forward. Something must be done about a distinct portion of the American electorate that continuously feels excluded from national political processes. As the American electorate continues to change, continued and more robust studies will undoubtedly be welcomed.

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Unions, Organizing Cities & a Twenty-First Century Labor Movement:

Implications for African Americans

Bill Fletcher, Jr.

There are two noteworthy facts regarding the state of labor unions today that, at first glance, may seem unrelated. First, since the mid-twentieth century the percentage of workers represented by labor unions has dropped significantly, from slightly above 35 percent in 1955 to approximately 12 percent in 2008 (Bureau of Labor Statistics). The causes of this relative decline range from the growth of the workforce itself, to the inability (and often unwillingness) of organized labor to keep pace with—and concretely address—changes in the workforce and the changes in capitalism. Second, African Americans workers are—as a percentage of the African American population—more unionized than anyone else (approximately 15 percent of African Americans are unionized) (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education 2006) and tend to be more pro-union than other sectors of the population. The relationship of these two facts will be a theme running throughout this article, and the strategic implications for both organized labor and Black America will be explored.

ORGANIZED LABOR'S CRISIS

The crisis facing organized labor is one that goes well beyond the actual numbers. In the late 1940s the leaders of organized labor, in response to the Cold War 'imperative' to purge the Left, ousted more than one million members from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (Foner 1974). This great purge eliminated the 'soul' from the ranks of organized labor. The unions (and unionists) that tended to be the most aggressive and those which tended to take the stronger stands against racism, were eliminated as a result of their refusal to bow to the Taft-Hartley Amendments to the National Labor Relations Act that restricted Communists from holding union office.

Also, during the late 1940s, organized labor turned away from a program of expanding President Roosevelt's New Deal, particularly with regard to national health care. A systematic caving in took place whereby unions focused on negotiating bilateral benefits agreements with employers rather than building the sort of national coalition needed to bring about the expansion of what has come to be known as the "social wage." The negative implications of this choice would become very evident in the 1980s and 1990s, but at a point when unions represented more than one third of the workforce and when larger non-union employers were often offering semi-comparable

benefits to workers as a way of staving off unions, they were not yet apparent.

The leadership of organized labor, particularly with the founding of the AFL-CIO¹, believed that they had established a permanent place at the table of national decision-making. Despite the decreasing percentage of workers represented by unions, this shrinkage was only marginally evident until the late 1970s. For many union leaders the situation appeared to be a blip on the screen rather than indicative of a deeper problem.

The combination of the purge of the Left, along with the related self-delusion that organized labor had a permanent seat at the table, caused a turn away from what is often referred to as “movement-building,” i.e., the efforts to build a transformative social movement(s) to alter the political-power balance in the USA. The extent to which leaders of organized labor, such as the AFL-CIO’s first president George Meany, thought of movement-building or social transformation, was more in the context of lobbying the political party establishment rather than changing the balance of power. An implication of this was that organized labor, rather than being or becoming a hub for social movement activity, became an institution preoccupied with fighting for both respectability and stability. At a point when the Black Freedom Struggle was gaining steam—in the form of the Civil Rights Movement (1950s–1960s)—organized labor’s ossification and inability to look beyond its own institutional boundaries imperiled its own future.

THE CRISIS FACING BLACK AMERICA

Beginning with World War I, the African American² population in the United States began a geographic shift from rural to urban centers and from the South to

the Northeast, Midwest and the West Coast. The Great Migration, as this movement has come to be known, was driven, ironically, by much of what drives people to migrate to the USA: to seek refuge from oppression (in the case of African Americans, attempting to escape Jim Crow segregation in the South) and to seek economic opportunity. With regard to the latter, the demand for labor in the manufacturing sector catalyzed the movement of hundreds of thousands of African Americans out of the South as well as the movement of West Indians (soon to become African Americans) from the Caribbean.

The massive introduction of African Americans into manufacturing presented a major challenge for organized labor. Hitherto, organized labor in the USA had largely been racially segregated, with African Americans, Latinos, Asians and Native Americans generally excluded from the ranks of the formal movement. With the exception of Left-led labor formations, e.g., the Industrial Workers of the World, and some industrial unions, such as the United Mine Workers of America³ and independent unions formed largely on the basis of race or nationality⁴, organized labor in the USA was largely white. Yet with the introduction of African American and Chicano/Mexicano workers, particularly into manufacturing, a profound organizing dilemma befell organized labor. As the 1919 Great Steel Strike proved, with the introduction of African American strikebreakers, organizing without challenging the color line in these new industries was a recipe for disaster.

Thus, it came to pass that by the 1930s African Americans, Chicanos/Mexicanos, and, on the West Coast particularly, Asians, proved to be central to the success

or failure of organizing the mass production industries. This unionization, generally speaking, if not led by the Left, resulted in some cases in an improvement in living standard, but not an end to segregation in the workplace. In general, the Left took the lead in challenging racial discrimination in the workplace, including, as was the case with the Packinghouse Workers Union, challenging hiring practices on the part of employers.

The purge of the Left from the CIO and the merger of the AFL and CIO did nothing to improve the condition of workers of color. Black workers, in particular, faced the end of World War II and the period up through the beginning of the Korean War, in economic distress. Though it is true that there was economic growth among all sectors of the country after World War II, it was also the case that this growth was uneven racially. African Americans were not major beneficiaries of the legendary post World War II G.I. Bill, and in many cases were displaced from work by returning white veterans. Organized labor tended not to take up the challenge of responding to this crisis any more than it took up the challenge of defending the rights of women who were displaced by returning World War II male veterans.

By the 1950s a new challenge was becoming apparent. Automation and mechanization was spreading outside of agriculture and beginning to have a significant impact on manufacturing. Despite continued growth in the economy, African Americans found themselves falling behind. Low skilled jobs were being eliminated but this was not accompanied by the exit of African American workers toward so-called middle income jobs. It was more evidence of growing structural unemployment.

This situation helps to explain the principal demand/slogan of the famous 1963 March on Washington: *Jobs & Freedom*.

Again, most of organized labor refused to acknowledge either this or the impact of suburbanization, with the flight of white workers and the white professional-managerial strata from the cities and into the areas ringing the major urban centers. The absence of a social movement response by organized labor meant that the fight for jobs and freedom had to be shouldered first and foremost by African Americans, and increasingly by other people of color. Independent organizations came on the scene, sometimes workplace-based and other times community-based, in order to organize a challenge to an increasingly ominous tendency.

The Vietnam War held off some aspects of the decline noted above, but with the 1973–4 recession, the changing nature of the US economy and its impact on African Americans became quite apparent. By the mid 1970s the outlines of what noted scholars Bennett Harrison and Barry Bluestone were to describe as *de-industrialization* could be seen on the US landscape (Bluestone and Harrison 1982). Irrespective of one's acceptance of the term, what was unfolding was a hollowing of the US cities, the heart of major manufacturing. Given the urbanization of Black America, this hollowing had a dramatic impact on the economic stability of African Americans and set the stage for the polarization of wealth that we see both in the USA in general and also within Black America. The jobs that gave a major section of Black America a middle income living standard, evaporated over time with neither a replacement being introduced nor an elevation

of African American workers into higher income employment. The fissure within Black America, all too apparent by the late 1990s and early 2000s with the Michael Jordans, Bill Cosbys and Oprah Winfreys, on the one hand, and the Black structurally unemployed former auto and steel workers on the other, can be traced to this period.

Once again, organized labor had no real program to address this crisis, either at the general level or with regard to the African American worker. To the extent to which there was a program, at least during the 1970s and 1980s, it was largely focused on economic protectionism—specifically, “Buy American” campaigns—rather than a comprehensive look at the economic foundations of the USA. The racial differential between what was transpiring for white workers vs. African Americans was largely ignored, except and insofar as people of color-based organizations called attention to the scope of the problem.

THE CITIES

From the 1950s through the 1970s the main trend in evidence with regard to the cities was that of suburbanization. White working and professional-managerial people, through the assistance of the growth of the interstate highway system, the automobile industry, low cost oil, the GI Bill and the growth in private home construction were leaving largely ethnic enclaves in the cities and moving further and further from urban centers. The cities seemed to be imploding, with the loss of employment and their tax base. In some cases, entire sections of cities crumbled altogether coming to resemble the ruins of post-World War II Berlin, e.g., the South Bronx (New York). And, in other cases, certain cities were largely

abandoned by the white establishment altogether, e.g., Camden (New Jersey); East St. Louis (Illinois).

An economic turnaround became noticeable in the 1970s with the growth in importance of what came to be known as the *F.I.R.E.* (Finance, Insurance & Real Estate) sector of the economy. The cities became targets for the growth of this sector and with that a transformation in the look and purpose of the cities. It was at this moment that the notion of *gentrification* became a point of discussion on the US scene.

From the 1970s and continuing through today, one witnesses an ominous racial and class ‘cleansing’ of the cities, with an overall demographic transformation. Ghetto areas have become targets for new development. Poorer sections of the working class, irrespective of race or ethnicity, are finding it increasingly difficult to live in major urban areas and, following a trend that arose in the 1980s, are moving further from the cities, often into so-called ‘dead cities.’⁵ In this respect the USA is coming to resemble the European model where the working class lives outside of the cities, and the cities are largely the homes for the upper echelons of the professional-managerial strata and the capitalists.

The response by organized labor to this tendency has been rather anemic. As its members, in many cases, have moved to the suburbs, the question of the future of the cities has not been center stage for them. While, on the one hand, unions based in particular cities will continue to focus on the politics of that city—specifically at election time—this issue has become less and less relevant to a membership base that while working in an urban center, lives elsewhere. Insofar as

unions have not been expanding their membership bases within cities, there is, therefore, a disconnect between the issues facing the cities and the priority issues of suburbanized members.

INDEPENDENT WORKERS ORGANIZATIONS

In response to both the fact that the formal union movement has devoted insufficient attention and resources to organizing new members and, in addition, has no real program for the redevelopment of major urban centers for the working class, new forms of working class organizations have emerged. These independent organizations (independent in that they tend not be affiliated with organized labor) have most immediately responded to the growth in the immigrant workforce, both documented and undocumented. Yet their growth speaks more generally about the absence of an organized movement presence to address the changes underway in US cities.

Most of these independent workers organizations, e.g., the Miami Workers Center, CAAV (in New York), Tenants and Workers United (Alexandria, VA), have located themselves among the poorer sections of the working class, whether immigrant or non-immigrant. Additionally, their principal support comes from the foundation world, which contrasts with a membership base found among labor unions. This factor is of critical importance since it speaks to the limits of actual independence for these organizations (given that most are 501©(3) organizations, i.e., tax exempt, tax deductible charities that cannot participate in partisan political activity and have a limit on the amount of lobbying that they can do).⁶

The additional factor, with regard to these independent working class organizations, is that with the exception of the building trades/construction industry, there are few such organizations that explicitly focus on African American workers.⁷ Thus, we face another paradox. African Americans are disproportionately unionized, yet most unions pay insufficient and non-specific attention to the crisis of the cities or to a program of organizing Black workers. At the same time, independent working class organizations by and large do not target African American workers and there have been few successful efforts arising on their own out of the Black working class in the recent past.⁸

STRATEGIC OPTIONS FOR THE UNIONS

In the face of the crisis exemplified by declining union density (the proportion of workers represented by unions), greater rhetorical attention, and eventually substantive attention was turned to unionizing unorganized workers. Among those who paid any attention to this matter there has tended to be either a “hot shop” organizing approach, or a strategic, generally sectoral approach. The hot shop approach refers to organizing any potential target where there seems to be interest and the potential to win. Such an approach pays no attention to the history and base of the union, but simply looks for victory.

The strategic, sectoral approach tends in the direction of organizing by industry. Thus, a union might be organizing either an entire industry, e.g., health care, or a segment of it, e.g., nurses. The thinking here is that by organizing the entire industry or industrial sector, greater power can be won and thus influence the conditions of those unionized since wages

have been taken out of competition between employers.

What has been missing, however, is the recognition that the power to influence the conditions under which workers work concerns not only what takes place in the workplace, but also what is happening in the broader geographic context. Thus, a heavily unionized city, for example, will be one where there will tend to be greater levels of social services and funds devoted towards human needs. The cumulative impact of a union presence brings with it a degree of power that may not correspond to what exists in the industry as a whole.

During the mid-1990s, the AFL-CIO attempted to rehabilitate an approach to organizing that has, in the past, shown promise. The notion was called "Geographic Organizing," which called for the organizing of a city by several different unions. The most advanced articulation of this was the Stamford, CT organizing effort, known in union circles as the "Stamford Project."⁹ This project brought together multiple unions, but also additional resources from the national AFL-CIO to address community issues. In that sense, the unionizing of workers was envisioned as part of a larger effort to address economic justice and economic development. Unfortunately, this project was terminated, in part due to disagreements among affiliates of the AFL-CIO as to whether geographic organizing should be pursued (i.e., was a distraction for sectoral organizing).¹⁰

The Stamford project came closest to the strategic option which, along with sectoral organizing, could show promising results. Yet even here the project did not go far enough in exploring the development of a *class movement* which,

for purposes of this paper, would have great relevance to the Black worker.

To develop a class movement, organized labor would need to look at cities not only through the lenses of economic justice and economic development, but see itself as a component of a larger movement to change the power relationship for working class people in that city. In other words, labor unions cannot do it alone. This is the fundamental difference with the Stamford project. In the case of Stamford, it is true, that the unions looked for allies, yet the project of organizing was driven by the unions rather than as part of a larger bloc.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH (PART I)

Organized labor, if it wishes to rehabilitate itself as a component of a larger labor movement, must recognize that it operates on a global battlefield and, as such, must learn to practice genuine labor internationalism. Some unions are getting, at least partially, in the swing of this through cross-border initiatives. Yet such initiatives remain largely at the realm of what one could reference as a *counter-corporation* rather than as a working class movement. That is, they focus on a short-term pragmatic basis for unity, rather than a basis for unity or solidarity founded upon long-term strategic interests.

The other major component, and the focus for this paper, is domestic and this is where targeting the cities could be the basis for renewal. In early 2007, over twenty independent working class organizations, such as the Miami Workers Center, formed a collaborative called the "Right to the City" Network.¹¹ This initiative aims to create a framework to address the urban crisis, including addressing issues previously mentioned in

this paper, e.g., gentrification. Whether it will be successful is too early to determine, but what is worth noting is the absence of labor unions from this alignment. It appears that the founding organizations lacked the confidence that there were unions that could and would actively embrace the framework of Right to the City. While such a lack of confidence may be well founded, it is nevertheless a stinging indictment of the current state of organized labor that such a conclusion could be drawn.

The Right to the City network is attempting to fill a void that organized labor and other social movements have left in their failure to develop a comprehensive approach to the cities. Yet, and with all due respect to these organizations, they lack the scale to, by themselves, catalyze an urban movement (though they can certainly contribute to the building of one). For that reason, the energy and intellect of the Right to the City Network, irrespective of the future of the formation itself, needs to fuse with that of organized labor in order to build the sort of pro-working class, and anti-racist urban movement so badly needed. The urgency of such an effort can be established by examining the post-Katrina disaster on the Gulf Coast, and specifically within New Orleans.

The basis for the Katrina disaster in the draining of funds from the public sector over a number of years, along with the incompetence of the Bush administration is legendary. The transformation of New Orleans post-hurricane, however, is the focus here. The demographic shift, both with respect to race and class has, quite apparently, played itself out in city elections. Though there is a Black mayor (who is pro-corporate and had never been seen as a voice for the Black

community), the city council is no longer in the hands of African Americans. The poor have largely been removed from the city, and the city's decisions—with the active collaboration of the federal government—to demolish public housing, points in the direction of the lack of intention to ever have the poor return to the city. The vision for the 'new' New Orleans, however, is one that is absent the poor and the Black. The destruction of the Teacher's Union, privatization, and the use of undocumented workers under horrendous conditions, all speaks to a vision of New Orleans derived from a neo-liberal economic scenario rather than one based upon the needs and desires of the people who once lived in that city.

Community-based organizations in New Orleans have been attempting to fight on behalf of the survivors and evacuees, struggling to raise national awareness to the racial and class cleansing that has taken place. Their calls have received limited attention. Some informal and semi-formal networks have emerged to give support to those on the ground struggling around the post-Katrina crisis. Organized labor has offered charitable assistance, including funds for the rebuilding of housing. What is missing, though, is a social justice movement approach to addressing this crisis, an approach that not only mobilizes the people of New Orleans, but mobilizes their supporters—particularly within Black America—nationally to demand that a pro-people approach be taken toward redevelopment.

The situation in New Orleans is typical of what is happening in many other US urban centers. It is only the tip of the larger iceberg. In that sense, one can learn from the approaches that have been taken

that these do not equate into the building of a movement, even when they do help to address the immediate needs of those in struggle.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH (PART II)

A different strategic approach to the urban crisis, from the standpoint of social movements, is summarized in the notion of “working people’s assemblies.” The basic idea draws both from US history (such as the work of the Knights of Labor during the nineteenth century) as well as experiences in other countries. Working class organizations within a specific geographic area, such as cities and counties, would engage in a process of internal and multi-lateral discussions leading to an assembly or congress in order to delineate a working people’s program of action for that specific geographic area.

What is different about a working people’s assembly from the myriad of coalitions that have come into existence over time is that it emphasizes a discussion both within and between organizations about the key issues facing working people in that geographic area. It is not limited to discussions at the top between leaders, but rather suggests engaging the members of such organizations, including but not limited to labor unions, independent working class advocacy groups, consumer groups and tenant associations, in a dialogue regarding the future. Specifically, what is a pro-working people’s agenda for that geographic area? What would that geographic area look like if that agenda were actually implemented? And, finally, how should one go about advancing such an agenda, i.e., what organizational vehicle(s) will be necessary in order to build the political and economic power of working people?

Were organized labor to introduce such an approach to addressing the crisis of the cities it would at one and the same time lay the foundation for actually organizing—and unionizing—workers in the cities, and also build a foundation for a different level of power for working people. Engaging other working class organizations would, if successful, result in the creation of a bloc or strategic alliance that could be mutually supportive. Thus, unions taking on a particular employer could count on community-based or constituency-based organizations to come forward in support. Community-based organizations tackling matters such as unemployment and gentrification, could count on the support, including resources, from labor unions.

For African Americans such a bloc would be of great significance. A working people’s agenda will not come to fruition if it does not tackle matters of race and the racial divide. While there would certainly be efforts by some in such a process to ignore race in the name of unity, every issue that afflicts working people has within it a racial bent, whether it is a differential in health care; housing; education; jobs; or transportation. In that sense the proverbial call of AFL founder Samuel Gompers for ‘more’ for working people is simply not enough.¹² While working people need more schools and more health care, they equally need to ensure that such education and health care is provided fairly. If not, the same problem that confronted the CIO in the 1930s will reappear in the twenty-first century, i.e., an overall improvement in conditions while still split by a racial differential in treatment.

Moving towards working people's assemblies will necessitate:

(1) A transformation in the strategic outlook of organized labor. Unions in cities and counties are often organized into central labor councils. For many of the unions there is the assumption that this is the only sort of working class organization that is necessary—if even on narrow pragmatic grounds such a point of view falls on its face.

(2) A linkage between independent working class organizations and unions. As noted earlier, as important as the Right to the City network and similar such local initiatives are, they do not have the scale to catalyze an urban movement. Yet they are based within sectors of the population all too often overlooked by organized labor and other social movements. Specifically, they tend to reach out to the poorest sections of the working class. They are, therefore, absolutely essential for a new urban movement.

(3) The organized presence of African Americans and a corresponding 'Black agenda'. US history demonstrates time and again the tendency to not only ignore the racial differential, but to also take for granted the participation of African Americans in progressive social movements. In order to avoid this, an independent and clear Black presence must exist that ensures that the needs and demands of the African American are not overlooked or given second place. In that sense, no one can be relied upon to advance the Black agenda—which, in its essence, tends to be the most pro-democratic agenda—except Black people themselves. This takes nothing away from other social movement allies but rather holds that one must participate in one's own emancipation.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

African Americans can be a major source for the revival of a labor movement in the USA. Organized labor can be a component in this same revival. Yet for both to happen, a different strategic framework needs to be introduced than the one existing within both of these respective social movements.

For African Americans, there must be the greater recognition of the significance of class both within Black America, as well as globally. The notion of a common, all-class Black unity is historically dated. While there remain certain key points of unity for all or most African Americans given our shared experiences with white supremacist oppression, it is also the case that Black America is undergoing some very profound changes. The elimination of legalized segregation brought with it the elimination of a visible and common enemy. The willingness of corporate America to open its ranks to *some* Black Americans as well as the growth of a Black elite, have changed the way that Black America looks at itself.

Organized labor faces possible extinction as a social movement unless it introduces a radically different analysis and practice. The potential source of its renewed growth can be found in the cities, not just in terms of numbers but in terms of the social struggles that can introduce new vitality. This means that organized labor must look to create a new social bloc that wins greater power for working people. Such a bloc is not the same thing as winning allies for the existing union movement. It is more about uniting with partners in the forging of a common program and common action. The results could very well be a different power dynamic than we have experienced, and

one that has broader implications than reserved only for cities.

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(ENDNOTES)

¹ The CIO would merge with the American Federation of Labor in 1955 to form the AFL-CIO.

² By which we mean the descendants of slaves; Cape Verdeans who came to the USA as free people; and the West Indian immigrants who began moving to the USA in the early part of the twentieth century

³ Industrial unions would organize workers in entire industries rather than by craft.

⁴ In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century it was not uncommon to find unions that were exclusively Black; Chicano/Mexicano; or Asian. In Hawaii, for instance, there were entire labor federations exclusive to particular ethnic groups.

⁵ A term that became popular in the 1980s to describe smaller cities that have been largely abandoned by industry but have not been able to develop as upscale suburbs. Such cities tended to be dependent on one industry or employer. When abandoned, these cities tended towards collapse. Housing, therefore, would tend to be cheaper though there would be little, if any, livable employment.

⁶ It also speaks to the reality that these formations are not competitors with

organized labor, but can conceivably operate alongside or, ideally, in concert with the union movement under different conditions.

⁷ Black Workers for Justice, based in North Carolina, is a major and important exception to this. They have, since the early 1980s, been a voice in the community and the workplace for economic and social justice and have, on occasion, partnered with unions on specific campaigns.

⁸ The Black working class has a long history of independent organization, though generally such organizations have been formed to address issues within the formal union movement. The National Negro Labor Council, formed in 1951, was the first major post World War II effort. Such organizations were significant forces into the late 1970s. Remaining today is the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and the A. Philip Randolph Institute, along with several Black caucuses in different unions. With the noted exception of Black Workers for Justice, however, there are few independent Black working class organizations.

⁹ See, for example, Greg Donaldson, "With Justice for All?" *Fast Company*, August 2000, <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/38/mcalevey.html>.

¹⁰ As a federation, the AFL-CIO is very influenced by the views of its affiliates. Additionally, the leadership style of AFL-CIO President John Sweeney is such that it emphasizes consensus and lack of open struggle. In effect this meant that rather than a public discussion of the merits of geographic organizing, the program largely vanished.

¹¹ Information regarding this network can be obtained by writing to: Right2City@tides.org.

¹² Gompers is often misquoted as suggesting that all that organized labor wanted was 'more' or everything. Although this writer is no fan of Gompers it is important to note that he was, instead, attempting to suggest that there needed to be different priorities for society, such as fewer prisons and more schools. He was not suggesting some sort of social hedonism.

From “Block the Vote” to “Protect the Vote”: Historically Black Student Voting Suppression and Disenfranchisement in Texas

Christina D. Sanders and Blake E. Green

INTRODUCTION

Voting, arguably the most important and precious right in a democratic society, is an essential one that every citizen has, and, if eligible, should not be denied under any circumstances. Despite that fact, our country’s history has shown the opposite. A consistent pattern of voter oppression, suppression, and intimidation has poisoned the American electorate since the beginning days of the union. This type of suppression can be most often traced to women, communities of color, particularly those communities in the South, and young people.

Blatant disenfranchisement of students’ voting rights is still prevalent in the United States, especially for students of color. Instances of voter suppression and intimidation have been consistently ignored with the intent to render young voting blocs impotent. In this case, we examine the past and present state of the right to vote for students at Prairie View A&M University, a historically black university in Texas.

Prairie View A&M University

According to its Web site, Prairie View A&M University, a historically black university founded in 1876, is the second oldest public institution of higher learning in the state of Texas. The university was created by the Texas state legislature under a land grant, which provided funding to create a school for “colored youth” that would serve as a training ground for black educators. The legislature established that the university would operate under the governance of Texas A&M University, the state’s first and oldest public institution. Since its inception, Prairie View has experienced immense growth—from a student body of less than 50 students to a fully accredited university with over 8,000 students and over 50,000 graduates.

Waller County

According to the Waller County Web site, Waller County is located approximately forty-five minutes north of Houston. It has four major Texas communities: Hempstead, Prairie View, Waller, and some parts of Katy. The county’s historical significance stems from serving as a medium of transporting products and goods from Houston to other cities in Texas and eventually to other states. In addition to a few

plantations in the area, cotton and cattle were the mainstays of the county's economy in the late 1800s, which brought many African Americans to the county. The current population of Waller County is over 35,000, including the students residing on Prairie View's campus. The ethnic composition of the county is in dramatic contrast to the largely African American demographic of Prairie View A&M University. County officials feared that students would have the power and influence to drastically change the outcomes of the county elections. Greater still was their fear that a day might come when student voting power would be great enough to elect a student representative or alumni as a county official.

The Voting Rights Act

On its Web site, OurDocuments.gov recounts the events preceding President Lyndon B. Johnson's passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Throughout 1964, African Americans across the country held demonstrations to protest methods that were employed to rob them of their right to vote. Violence ensued in response to the demonstrations, including the murder of voting rights activists in Mississippi and attacks on marchers in Selma, AL. The Voting Rights Act, implemented specifically to protect African Americans against the lingering injustices of Jim Crow laws, ended voting discrimination in the form of poll taxes, literacy tests, White primaries, and other tactics used to render impotent the African American electorate.

Many obstacles to voting are present in the Waller County election processes that ignore the very essence of the Voting Rights Act. Evidence of the county's noncompliance has accrued over the years as we have constantly seen Prairie View

students entangled in legal battles and protesting the actions of Waller County community members who are maintaining a system that disobeys the Voting Rights Act and consistently seeks to oppress the votes of the Black student electorate of Waller County.

BLOCK THE VOTE

Prairie View was one of the first groups of students to take a case of student voter suppression to the U.S. Supreme Court. This federal case, *Symm v. United States* (1979), serves as a landmark for student voting rights protection. In a 25 January 2008 letter to Christopher Coates, acting chief for the voting section for the Department of Justice, Senior Counsel Marcia Johnson-Blanco, voting rights project for the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law, wrote that despite key laws and policy measures such as the Voting Rights Act and Help America Vote Act, Prairie View students have experienced disenfranchisement resulting in legal battles dating back to the 1970s.

Symm v. United States was the first legal battle for the Prairie View students. The case involved LeRoy Symm, tax assessor-collector of Waller County, in which students were given a questionnaire (see appendix) that required them to answer specific questions before being allowed to register to vote. The primary concern with the questionnaire was that it unfairly interrogated Prairie View students, and the interrogation seemed to be limited to the students and not all residents of the county. The district court found that Symm's registration practices violated the Twenty-sixth Amendment and permanently prohibited him from using the questionnaire. This landmark case led to the elimination of the questionnaire for

the students from Prairie View. Furthermore, this case demonstrated how Prairie View students chose not to settle for the prescriptions for voting as were created by the county officials. Instead, they rose with conscience and determination, and paved the way for future students by demanding equality and fairness when exercising their democratic voting rights.

Prairie View A&M students Versus Oliver Kitzman, Waller County District Attorney

The 2000 presidential elections convinced many Americans that the system of voting was broken, as illustrated by the various debates over "dimpled" and "pregnant" chads. However, what the country largely ignored was the major abuse of power and total disregard for voting rights for students that would soon occur in Prairie View, TX. In March 2004, Prairie View students were wrongfully informed that they could not vote in Waller County because they were not permanent residents of the county (PFAW). Students from the university were denied the ability to register and vote at their campus addresses. This incident involved the then-district attorney Oliver Kitzman, who "published a letter in a local newspaper accusing unnamed citizens of 'feigned residency'" (Cave 2004). Kitzman warned that any "illegal voting" would lead to a 10-year prison sentence and a \$10,000 fine. Despite this intimidation, students fought back. As Cave relates, the students protested by marching through the town on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, followed by a Rock the Vote rally in support of the students. Cave continued, "The next day, under pressure from state and federal authorities, Kitzman settled a voting rights lawsuit filed by the students and issued a public apology."

Suppression of student voting did not end with this case, however. The ballot for the general election of 2006 included a black candidate for Waller County district attorney. The candidate, Morris Overstreet, campaigned heavily on Prairie View's campus and its surrounding Black communities. Black Youth Vote, a youth-focused program of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, worked in conjunction with campus leaders and was able to successfully register an estimated 2,200 students at their Prairie View A&M University address in Waller County.

However, on the day of the election, each of the estimated 2,200 students was not listed as registered when they went to the polls to cast their vote. In fact, the authors, as Black Youth Vote! Texas, representatives, saw that those students were turned away and did not get the chance to participate based on the fact that they were not on the voting rolls.

In the winter of 2006–2007, both the local KBTX news station and *The Houston Chronicle* reported that the Waller County Commissioners Court had closed the county elections office following the efforts of the Black leadership in Waller County, along with community activists, who sought an investigation concerning possible voter disenfranchisement of the Prairie View A & M University students. According to Helen Erikson in a 22 December 2006 *Houston Chronicle* article, Justice of the Peace DeWayne Charleston was so outraged, he was prepared to walk 111 miles to Austin to protest what he said were criminal violations in the 7 November 2006 election in the county. Erikson also noted that the state did launch an investigation of voting records at the Waller County election office, in

response to claims of student voter disenfranchisement.

Attempts were made to contact the Waller County Elections Office for answers only to find out that everyone who had previously worked in the office had been fired and the office was closed. County officials made it clear that no questions would be answered until the investigation was completed. Voter intimidation and suppression has often gone unnoticed. However, Steven Carbo, senior director of the Democracy Program at Demos, is certainly aware of the challenge, as quoted in a 6 November 2006 Demos press release.

It's unfortunate that in 2006 we need to be so concerned with potential threats to an individual's right to vote from partisan operatives. But with so many documented cases of suppression and intimidation in 2004, and recorded abuses already this year in primary elections, we must be as vigilant as ever.

What are the expectations for an election in 2008? What protections or policy changes could serve in protecting the Black student vote in Texas?

PROTECT THE VOTE

THE CALL FOR GREATER PROTECTION, EXTENSIONS OF VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Help America Vote Act

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA), enacted in 2002 by Congress, requires that voters that have registered to vote, but whose names do not appear on the voting rolls, be allowed to vote using a provisional ballot (Weiser 2006, 1–3). However, despite the enactment of HAVA, there still remains a strong possibility that votes will not be counted. In the case of the Prairie

View students, HAVA could be a measure that would be arguably ineffective. For instance, in 2006 when the students were not on the county's voting rolls, HAVA protections would have allowed the students to vote but would not have guaranteed that their votes would count. The act does not provide that provisional ballots necessarily be counted since it gives discretion to the states to be executed in accordance with state law. While there may be several reasons provisional ballots are counted, it is most common when the election is contested. In this sense, greater protections must be taken especially when hundreds of students are disenfranchised even after they followed the entire process through election day.

Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Prevention Act

The People for the American Way Web site outlines the Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Prevention Act of 2005, sponsored by U.S. Senator Barack Obama (D-IL). The bill would make it a federal crime to use dishonest or deceptive practices that disenfranchise voters. The legislation has been approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee and is currently pending before the full Senate. It is imperative that this bill becomes law in time for the 2008 elections. This would serve as an essential component to deterring attempts to suppress the African American student vote in Texas. Even more, this legislation would offer greater strength for states and citizens in upholding the Voting Rights Act and all amendments to the Constitution that guarantee this right for all Americans.

Still, there are additional measures that can be taken through alternative policies that would provide greater protections for

many disenfranchised communities, particularly that of students. These alternative measures can be found in some states and others should be recommended for implementation at the federal level.

Election Day Registration

The organization Demos, A Network for Ideas and Action, supports a Web site that explains the concept behind election day registration (EDR), which is often referred to as same day registration. The program, currently operating in seven states—Maine, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Idaho, New Hampshire, Wyoming, and Montana, allows eligible voters to register and cast their ballot on the same day. Demos reports that for the past twenty-five years, states using EDR have had consistently higher voter turnout, including the 2004 presidential race, in which voter turnout in EDR states was on average 12 percent higher than in non-EDR states. In fact, the Prairie View students who were turned away from the polls in 2006 would have been able to vote had Texas utilized EDR.

Polling Locations at Universities

Just as the campus of Texas A&M University has polling locations, there should be a polling location on the campus of Prairie A&M University. With thousands of students that are eligible to vote on one campus, measures should be taken to place a polling location on the campus for increasing student turnout and protecting the student vote.

Conclusion

Prairie View A&M University is listed as the #9 Worst Place in America to Vote (Abramsky 2006). Abramsky goes on to say that Prairie View A&M University is a Black school in the heart of east Texas,

where the local leadership has, over many decades, worked to deny the students' claims to being full-time county residents and thus eligible to vote. This article highlights a sad reality of how discrimination in America ushers itself from generation to generation to deny rights to targeted groups of American citizens.

In a 6 February 2004 New York Times article, Yolanda Smith, executive director of the NAACP branch in Houston, said it best when she stated that the threat of jail time for voting was "a fear no student should have to go through." The African American student vote has been attacked in Waller County for generations. There must be greater protections in place for the students as we embark on one of the most historical presidential elections for African Americans. Students have rights and their voices must be heard. Progressive measures such as election day registration, passing the Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Prevention Act, and simply placing a voting booth on campus would dramatically increase turnout and protect the Black youth vote in Waller County, TX.

APPENDIX

Below are the questions that were placed on the questionnaire provided by the *Symm v. United States* Supreme Court case.

- Are you a college student?
- If so, where do you attend school?
- How long have you been a student at such school?
- Where do you live while in college?
- How long have you lived in Texas?
- In Waller County?

- Do you intend to reside in Waller County indefinitely?
- How long have you considered yourself to be a bona fide resident of Waller County?
- What do you plan to do when you finish your college education?
- Do you have a job or position in Waller County?
- Own any home or other property in Waller County?
- Have an automobile registered in Waller County?
- Have a telephone listing in Waller County?
- Belong to a Church, Club, or some Waller County Organization other than college related?
- If so, please name them:
- Where do you live when college is not in session?
- What address is listed as your home address with the college?
- Give any other information which might be helpful.

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¹ A provisional ballot is where a voter claims to be registered, but whose name does not appear on the list of registered voters. The person completes a provisional ballot, and once his or her voter registration status is confirmed, the ballot is counted after the election (Texas Secretary of State, 2008)

Prospective Black Presidential Candidates: Can They Win?

David C. Wilson

This paper was originally presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, April 13, 2007. Comments and paper requests can be submitted to dcwilson@udel.edu.

INTRODUCTION

There are few empirical studies focusing on the public's perceptions of hypothetical Black presidential candidates (Sigelman and Welch 1984), and none examining their viability: whether or not a Black candidate can win.¹ In part, this is due to the limited number of presidential contests in which there are Black candidates to consider, coupled with the belief that after the 1980s, Black presidential candidates have not received serious consideration in terms of primary support or campaign contributions. However, the current political climate presents both a new political reality for African Americans, as well as a new pool of experienced Black presidential prospects.

The current political situation in the United States is ripe for a Black presidential challenger. Illinois Democratic Senator Barack Obama is among the top contenders for the Democratic nomination, and there are a number of Black political figures being mentioned as future leaders in their parties, both Republican and Democrat, and male and female. The public reports an overwhelming willingness to vote for a Black candidate if nominated by their party (Bardes and Oldendick 2006), and at least among Democrats, there appears to be some broad acceptance of Black candidates. For instance, during the 2004 presidential campaign, a June 2003 Gallup Poll found the public supported activist Al Sharpton (who is Black) more than it did Wesley Clark (a White retired army general). Thus, based on current political signals, prospects for viable Black presidential candidates appear positive.

However, the perceived racial realities of Black Americans paint a different picture. There are discouraging reports about the deepening pessimism and alienation of African Americans (Bobo 2001; Cose 1993; Hochschild 1995). For example, Dawson's (1994) Black politics survey of 1993 found African Americans report high levels of cynicism and frustration with America. In the survey, 81 percent of Blacks believed that "American society owes Black people a better chance in life than we currently have." The study also reported that 50 percent of African Americans believed it was time to support a separate national political party. Studies by the Gallup Organization (2004)

also support a pessimistic view. In 2004, African Americans reported less positive views of Black-White relations than Whites, they were more likely to believe that race relations will always be a problem, they were more pessimistic about job and housing opportunities and educational opportunities for their children relative to Whites, and they were more likely than Whites to believe discrimination and racial profiling exist.

The climate in America is both ripe for political success for Black candidates, and at the same time, African Americans feel their opportunities for fairness and equality are still limited by race. These competing realities call for a renewed attention to the political climate for Black presidential candidates. In this paper, the author questions how perceptions of viability are influenced by voter race, political party affiliation, localized context, and/or perceptions about race relations.

These questions are important because they help understand the prospects of current presidential candidates like Barack Obama. As a Black candidate, his perceived racial background will bring about expectations and stereotypes related to other Black political figures, including past candidates. During the primary season, the electorate tends to vote for candidates who have a strong chance of winning in November; thus candidates who are perceived as less viable start off at a disadvantage. Even more problematic are factors (e.g., race, sex, handicap status) that the candidate cannot control but that influence perceptions of viability in presidential primaries. In these cases, the candidate and his or her public relations staff must find ways to direct attention back to relevant candidate issue positions and objective qualifications.

Focusing on issues of race relations is a common strategy for Black candidates, especially in the context of larger Black populations (Bobo and Gilliam 1990). Yet this strategy can backfire if negative perceptions about race in America correlate with beliefs about the inequality of the political process. Blacks, particularly preadult Blacks, are shown to be less efficacious and trusting of the political system (Abramson 1983) and may therefore be less inclined to believe that Black candidates can win in presidential primaries or elections. As a result, a more negative outlook on racial matters translates into weaker perceptions of Black candidate viability, which in turn can translate into fewer financial contributions from potential supporters, less attention overall, and eventually fewer votes.

If perceptions of race relations are associated with perceptions of candidate viability, then candidates would do well to promote the positive rather than the negative aspects of race. A negative approach may also backfire if the racial negativity is too overt and events of the recent past are ingrained in the minds of the public. This would mean that civil rights era candidates who promote messages around the victimization of Black American and highlight historical injustices would be at a disadvantage while more mainstream post-civil rights era or even moderate Black candidates might have an upper hand, at least with the mass public. For now, however, the concern is for what, if any, empirical differences exist in perceived viability, the factors that influence these differences, and why.

POLITICAL VIABILITY AND PERCEPTIONS OF RACIAL REALITIES

Perceived candidate viability is critical to a candidate's ability to win his or her party's nominations (Bartels 1988). Voters use a number of factors, including viability, to decide which candidate they will vote for. However, because voters cannot digest all of the information about each candidate, their positions, and their chances of winning, they use shortcuts (Ferejohn and Kuklinski 1990), particularly in low-information elections (McDermott 1997, 1998). These shortcuts mostly consist of party identification and other individual character traits, but can also include seemingly less relevant factors such as candidate race, gender, incumbency status, and physical attractiveness, which can bias electoral outcomes (Krebs 1998; Sigelman et al. 1995; Sigelman, Sigelman, and Fowler 1987; Terkildsen 1993).

Candidate race can be a particularly problematic factor because of the vulnerability of Black candidates to stereotypes (McDermott 1998). Black candidates are more likely than White candidates to be described as liberal, empathetic to the poor, more compassionate to disadvantaged groups, and more concerned with racial issues such as civil rights (McDermott 1998; Sigelman et al. 1995). Historically, the fact that African Americans have needed federal protection simply to vote barely speaks to what the actual candidates have had to endure. The first Black presidential candidate, Shirley Chisholm, had to endure both intra- and interracial derogation (McClain, Carter, and Brady 2005), and to date, Black candidates still face uphill, racially charged battles in elections at the gubernatorial and senatorial levels. Thus, race plays an

important role in the perceived viability of candidates, especially in presidential elections.

Although viability seems to be the relevant factor in electoral politics and voting behavior, research on Black candidates has almost exclusively focused on voter intentions: namely, whether the public is willing or reluctant to vote for Black candidates (Sigelman and Welch 1984). There are two problems with this direction. First, respondents have become less overt in their responses to racial questions. Providing the socially desirable response to racially sensitive questions is now the norm (Schuman et al. 1997). Second, by failing to find voter bias against Black candidates, studies often conclude that candidate race is less important to voting behavior. Indeed, the skewed reports on willingness to vote for historically underrepresented candidates may shed light on whether questions regarding willingness to "vote for" should still be an area of focus. Figure 1 shows the historical trend in response to the public's willingness to support a hypothetical Black candidate.

Survey variables measuring likely vote intent (i.e., willingness to vote for a Black candidate) toward Black candidates have reached such a skewed distribution that support could be considered unanimous (Bardes and Oldendick 2006).² It's likely that respondents face social pressure to say they would vote for Black or female candidates due to social desirability factors. However, they should face less pressure to report whether they believe the candidates would win in presidential campaigns because neither optimism nor pessimism are necessarily undesirable responses. As a result, one might expect that there would be no differences between Blacks and Whites in their

reported willingness to vote for Black candidates, but there would be likely differences in their beliefs about a Black candidate's chance of winning.

POLITICAL AND RACIAL REALITY

The political reality framework posits that there is a disproportionate political reality as it relates to equal treatment and equal representation. The disproportionate setting can be real or perceived, is assumed to be based on group membership, and is systemic rather than episodic. Thus, individual political attitudes and behaviors are influenced by a system of perceived unfairness which seemingly results in the unequal distribution of political resources (Abramson 1983; Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Emig, Hesse, and Fisher 1996; Howell and Fagan 1988).

Past studies examining the political reality model have mainly focused on differences between Blacks and Whites. There is evidence that the political reality model may explain differences in Black Americans' political attitudes, particularly on trust and efficacy (Abramson 1983; Howell and Fagan 1988), and political behaviors (Bobo and Gilliam 1990). However, these studies either assume that there are racial differences in perceived political realities or they focus mainly on "political empowerment" (i.e., actual political representation) as a proxy for political reality.

For most Black Americans, their racial reality is their political reality. Those who perceive the environment to be more racially negative should be less likely to believe that Black presidential candidates would win in either primary or presidential elections. A negative racial reality would be characterized by pessimism about Black-White relations, mistrust, perceptions of racial discrimination, and

negative beliefs about prejudice. Given the pessimism and deeply rooted cynicism, distrust, and perceived unfairness related to the national political system (Bobo 2001; Cose 1993; Dawson 1994; Hochschild 1995), the author expects African Americans to be less optimistic than Whites about Black candidate viability. And although Black representation may be stronger in more localized contexts (e.g., cities, counties, or states), at the national level history shows that Black presidential candidates are less likely to be seen as viable presidential candidates, much less win the party's nomination (McClain, Carter, and Brady 2005).

Black presidential candidates have been more prominent in the Democratic Party. Many might believe the party would only have a greater proportion of Black candidates if they are viable; however, given the unsuccessful experiences of past Black Democratic challengers, many Democrats may believe that Black (and likely women) candidates are more symbolic than viable. Thus, the political reality for Democrats should be a heightened awareness of racial problems in the United States—particularly among Black Democrats—and a more pessimistic outlook on race relations. As a result, Democrats should be less likely to perceive that Black candidates would win, even though they are front and center in the party.

There is not much empirical evidence regarding Black candidate support within the Republican Party. However, high-profile Black Republicans who are sometimes mentioned as prospective candidates (e.g., Alan Keyes, Condoleezza Rice, and Colin Powell) tend to have strong ties to government and the military and thus have institutional and political credibility. Therefore, if the

Republican Party nominated a Black candidate for president, the nominee would likely be someone who shared the moderate to conservative views of the party. The relatively small number of Black Republicans would then likely support the candidate that the majority of Republicans, who are largely White, would support. Thus, the author expects Republicans to be more likely than Democrats to believe a Black candidate could win.

Contextual characteristics related to race, such as neighborhood racial composition, have also received considerable attention in racial attitudes literature (e.g., Gay 2004; Oliver and Mendelberg 2000).

Assuming that, en masse, Blacks tend to be more pessimistic about racial realities in America, the aggregate effect should trickle down to individuals who live among greater numbers of Blacks.

According to the political reality model, living among more Blacks should lower perceptions of the perceived viability of a Black presidential candidate. However, this relationship should be mediated by perceptions of race relations because it is the aggregate pessimism regarding race rather than simply living among more Blacks that is the determining factor.

The author defines “racial reality” as the perception of race relations in the United States. Assuming the American public sees race when they see a Black political candidate, it is likely public views on race relations are in fact related to views about the (Black) candidate. When it comes to Black candidates, broad perceptions of race relations encompass the subrealities (social, economic, educational, employment, etc.) of race through notions of equality and fairness. Given Blacks’ skepticism about the decline of racial negativity (Bobo 2001; Gallup 2004;

Schuman et al. 1997), the author expects Blacks to have more pessimism about race relations and thus be less likely than Whites to believe that Black presidential candidates would win in an election.

DATA AND VARIABLES

In July of 2005, along with the Gallup Organization, the author collected data to address questions regarding hypothetical Black candidate viability. Respondents for the study come from the Gallup Poll Panel (GPP) representing broad and diverse segments of the U.S. population. GPP members are recruited by random-digit dialing (RDD) and are asked to complete two to three surveys per month, although the upper limit is rarely reached. The GPP has been shown to provide similar results to Gallup’s national RDD studies. The survey methodology consisted of a disproportionate stratified RDD telephone survey of GPP members. In an attempt to sample approximately equal numbers of Blacks and Whites, the Black population in the GPP was oversampled. The final sample contains 603 (59 percent) Whites and 423 (41 percent) Blacks. In terms of gender, 614 (60 percent) respondents are female and 412 (40 percent) are male. The gender-race composition breaks down as follows, 354 (34.5 percent) White females, 260 (25.3 percent) Black females, 249 (24.3 percent) White males, and 163 (15.9 percent) Black males. The overall sampling error for the study is ± 3 percent.

The primary dependent variable in this research is the concept of viability. The measure of viability in this research results from questions about whether or not respondents thought Black and female candidates could win in a presidential election. The author included preliminary analyses of the items about

female candidates to provide a comparative group to Black candidates. First, respondents were asked whether they were willing to vote for Black/female candidates, and then they were asked whether they thought the Black/female candidates would win. The questions were asked as two adjacent items (“vote for” and “will win”) per set (“Black candidate” and “woman candidate”). The items are listed below.

Black Candidate Set

If your political party NOMINATED a Black person for president in 2008, would you VOTE for him or her if they were qualified for the job, or not? (1=Yes, would vote for him/her, 0=No, would not vote for him/her)

If a Black candidate were RUNNING for president in 2008, do you think he or she would WIN, or not? (1=Yes, would win, 0=no, would not win)

Female Candidate Set

If your political party NOMINATED a woman for president in 2008, would you VOTE for her if she were qualified for the job, or not? (1= Yes, would vote for her, 0=No, would not vote for her)

If a woman candidate were RUNNING for president in 2008, do you think she would WIN, or not? (1=Yes, would win, 0=no, would not win)

In an attempt to cancel out the effects of question order, the gender and race item sets were randomly ordered. Thus, a random half of respondents answered the female candidate set first, and others were asked the Black candidate set first.

Perceptions of perceived racial realities were measured by five questions gauging

respondents’ beliefs and opinions about Black-White group relations. The exact question wording for the items are listed in the Appendix.

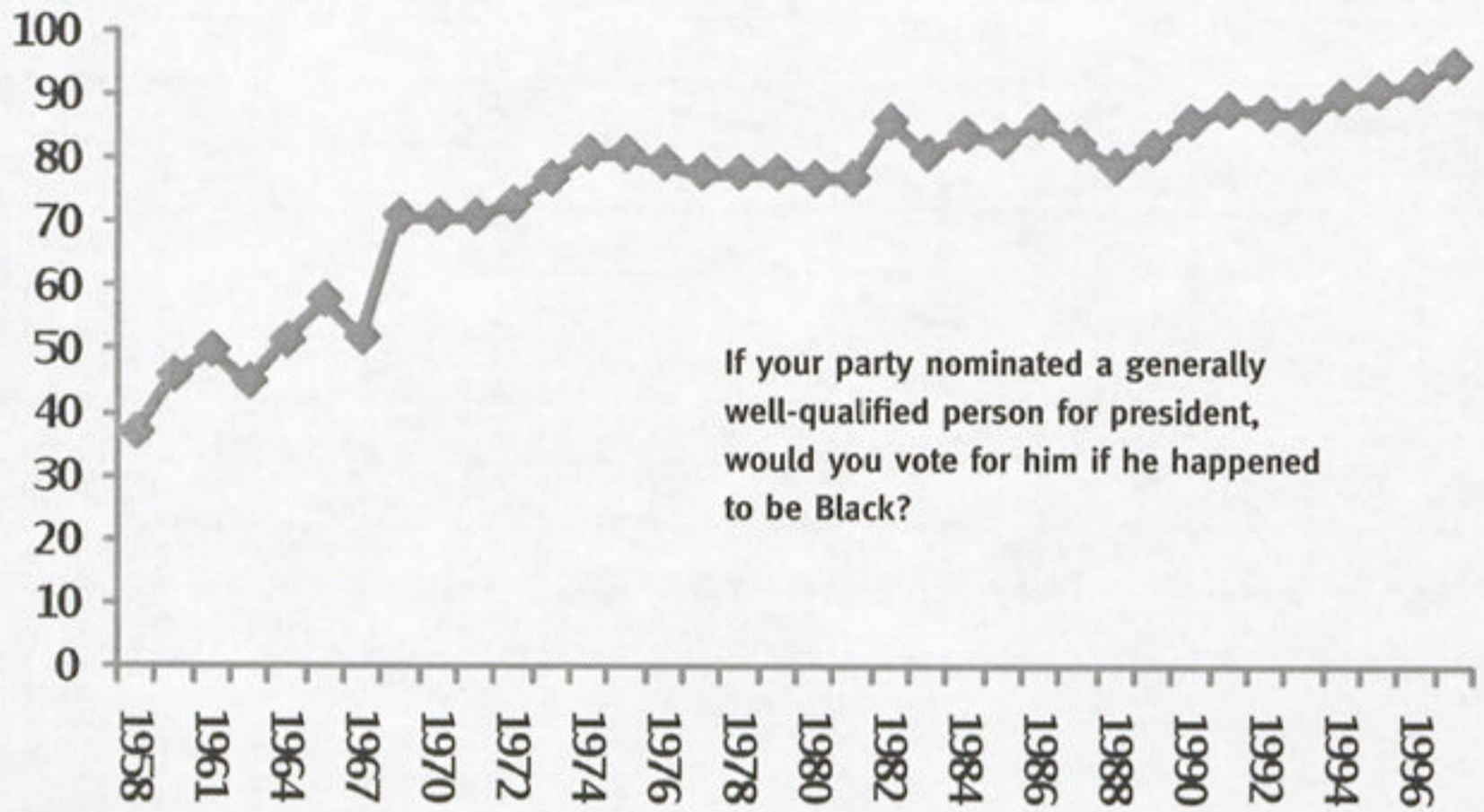
Respondent demographics were collected by self-reports. Respondent gender, race, education, and age were self-reported.³ Respondent political party identification was also self-reported, with three categories: Democrat, independent, and Republican. Local Black context is operationalized as the percentage of Blacks in the areas where respondents live. Percentages were based on statistics from the Census Bureau and were appended to the data by the respondent’s self-reported five-digit zip code.⁴

RESULTS

Tables 1 through 3 summarize the relationships between target candidate (Black candidate and female candidate), vote support (would vote for), and perceived viability (would win). Each table shows the difference across vote support and viability per target candidate, as well as the gap between the two items referencing candidate characteristics. The tables present the relative differences in political support levels between Black and female candidates, and the proportional differences within candidates. The cell statistics are the total sample percentages and the total sample sizes for each bivariate cell.

Public support for female and Black presidential candidates is both high and roughly equal although statistically different. However, perceptions of viability exhibit much larger differences. These results are shown in Table 1. Female candidates are perceived as having a greater chance of success than Black candidates by 14 percentage points. This can be gleaned from the column labeled

Figure 1. Trend in Public Opinion Support for a Hypothetical Black Presidential Candidate



Sources: Gallup and National Opinion Research Center

Note: The wording of the question has varied over time, using labels like "a Black man," "Negro," and more recently "African American."

Table 1. Political Support and Viability by Target Candidate: Overall Sample

| | Presidential Candidate | | Gap |
|----------------|------------------------|-------------|--------|
| | Female | Black | |
| Would Vote For | 94% (1,016) | 98% (1,010) | 4% * |
| Would Win | 40% (963) | 26% (962) | -14% * |
| Difference | -54% * | -72% * | |

Notes: Values in parentheses represent the total N size for the contingency values; significance based on independent and paired samples z-tests; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

Table 2. Political Support and Viability by Target Candidate: Across Race

| | | Respondent Race | | Gap |
|------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------|---------|
| | | White | Black | |
| Female Candidate | Would Vote For | 92% (598) | 96% (418) | 4% * |
| | Would Win | 37% (560) | 45% (403) | 8% ** |
| | Difference | -55% ** | -51% ** | |
| Black Candidate | Would Vote For | 97% (594) | 97% (416) | 0% |
| | Would Win | 32% (558) | 19% (404) | -13% ** |
| | Difference | -65% ** | -78% ** | |

Notes: Values in parentheses represent the total N size for the contingency values; significance based on independent and paired samples z-tests; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

Table 3. Political Support and Viability by Target Candidate: Party Identification

| | | Respondent Party ID | | Gap |
|------------------|----------------|---------------------|-----------|---------|
| | | Republican | Democrat | |
| Female Candidate | Would Vote For | 86% (267) | 97% (543) | 11% ** |
| | Would Win | 34% (251) | 45% (523) | 11% ** |
| | Difference | -52% ** | -52% * | |
| Black Candidate | Would Vote For | 97% (265) | 97% (540) | 0 |
| | Would Win | 39% (251) | 20% (521) | -19% ** |
| | Difference | -58% ** | -77% ** | |

Notes: Values in parentheses represent the total N size for the contingency values; significance based on independent and paired samples z-tests; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

Gap. Also, Black candidates have more to overcome in perceived chances of victory. While 98 percent of respondents say they would vote for a Black presidential candidate, only 26 percent believe a Black candidate would win, a difference of 72 percent. Alternatively, 94 percent of respondents say they would vote for a female presidential candidate, and 40 percent believe she would win.

The results show equal support, but different perceptions of viability. A Black candidate is perceived as having a lower chance of victory than a female candidate if nominated for the presidency in 2008. The next sections examine the extent to which individual background factors might help account for differences in public opinion toward prospective female and Black presidential candidates.

Table 4. Perceived Race Realities for All Respondents and Across Race and Political Party Identification

| | Perceived Racial Realities | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| | Mean Perceptions of Black-White Relations | % Saying Blacks Have "Too Little" Influence | % Saying They Don't "Trust" the Opposite Race | % Saying Race Is Discrimination Factor | % Saying "Whites Are Extremely Prejudiced Toward Blacks" |
| | BLKWHT | BLKLTL | BWTRST | RACEMTRS | WHTPREJ |
| Overall | 3.45 (1,018) | 60% (1,018) | 26% (989) | 27% (1,006) | 19% (1,002) |
| Race | | | | | |
| Black | 3.34 (420) | 81% (419) | 39% (405) | 59% (409) | 28% (409) |
| White | 3.53 (598) | 45% (599) | 17% (584) | 6% (597) | 12% (593) |
| Difference | 0.193** | 36%** | 21%** | 52%** | 16%** |
| Party ID | | | | | |
| Republican | 3.67 (265) | 34% (267) | 20% (263) | 11% (265) | 7% (268) |
| Democrat | 3.33 (545) | 73% (545) | 30% (524) | 38% (536) | 25% (533) |
| Difference | 0.334** | 39%** | 10%** | 27%** | 18%** |

Notes: Values in parentheses represent the valid N sizes for the groups on the left; significance based on independent samples t-tests for means and z-tests for proportions; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01. Exact question wordings can be found in the Appendix.

The tables in the next two sections are transposed for comparison purposes. For these tables, the target candidates are listed on the rows and the respondent characteristics are listed across the columns. This method allows for direct comparisons across demographic categories.

RESPONDENT RACE

Table 2 shows differences across Blacks and Whites in terms of vote support and chances of victory for both female and Black candidates. The results show no differences across race in terms of

support but show significant differences in viability.

Blacks are more likely than Whites to perceive that a female candidate would win: a difference of 8 percent. However, Black respondents are less likely than Whites to perceive that a Black candidate would win—a difference of 13 percent. Similarly, for a female candidate, Blacks and Whites do not vary in their difference scores (overall difference = 4 percent; i.e., the difference between vote support and viability). Yet, for a Black candidate, the change in difference scores is large (13 percent). These results highlight the

Table 5. Logistic Regression Estimates of the Effect of Perceived Racial Realities on Black Presidential Candidate Viability Controlling for Race

| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | Black | White | Black | White | Black | White |
| Demographics | | | | | | |
| Sex (male=1) | 0.06 (0.29) | 0.08 (0.20) | 0.04 (0.29) | 0.04 (0.04) | 0.07 (0.31) | 0.05 (0.21) |
| Age (in years) | 0.00 (0.01) | -0.00 (0.01) | 0.00 (0.01) | -0.01 (0.01) | 0.00 (0.01) | -0.01 (0.01) |
| College Educated | -0.41 (0.29) | -0.23 (0.20) | -0.48 (0.29) | -0.26 (0.20) | -0.38 (0.31) | -0.31 (0.21) |
| Racial Context | | | | | | |
| % Black Population | -1.1 (0.47)* | -0.66 (1.0) | -1.0 (0.47)* | -0.36 (1.0) | -0.94 (0.49) | 0.24 (1.1) |
| Party ID | | | | | | |
| Democrat | | | -0.20 (0.21) | -0.25 (0.30) | -0.04 (0.45) | -0.18 (0.31) |
| Republican | | | 0.69 (0.56) | 0.40 (0.29) | 0.68 (0.59) | 0.38 (0.30) |
| Racial Realities | | | | | | |
| BLKWHT | | | | | 0.10 (0.16) | 0.25 (0.12)* |
| BLKLTL | | | | | -0.69 (0.36) | 0.10 (0.22) |
| RACETRST | | | | | -1.1 (0.37)** | -0.53 (0.29) |
| RACEMTRS | | | | | -0.52 (0.30) | 0.11 (0.43) |
| WHTPREJ | | | | | 0.06 (0.40) | -0.78 (0.40) |
| Constant | 1.0 (0.56) | -0.35 (0.40) | -0.95 (0.66) | -0.36 (0.46) | -0.36 (0.97) | -1.2 (0.66) |
| N | 345 | 479 | | | | |
| Δ in Model R ² | - | - | 0.018 | 0.026** | 0.102** | 0.046** |
| R ² | 0.037 | 0.007 | 0.055 | 0.033 | 0.157 | 0.079 |

Notes: The N size for Blacks and Whites in the analyses are respectively 345 and 479. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01. Exact wording of the racial realities items can be found in the Appendix.

perceived racial differences in political realities: Blacks are more optimistic about the prospects of a female candidate than they are about a Black candidate. Blacks appear still to believe candidate race has negative consequences in politics.

PARTY IDENTIFICATION

In terms of party identification (party ID), Table 3 reports the differences in political support, across target candidate, and across party membership. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to vote for, and perceive as viable, a female candidate; yet, with a Black candidate, Democrats and Republicans report equal levels of vote support and differ dramatically in their perceptions of viability mainly because Republicans are more likely than Democrats to believe that a Black candidate would win in a presidential election.

Further analyses examining the race by partisanship interaction show White Democrats are more likely than Black Democrats to believe a Black presidential candidate would win. Twenty-five percent of White Democrats said that a Black candidate would win, compared to 17 percent of Black Democrats (percent difference = 8 percent, $p < 0.05$). Among Republicans, there were no significant differences in perceived viability for a Black candidate. Thirty-nine percent of Whites and 33 percent of Blacks (percent difference = 6 percent, n.s.) believed that a Black candidate would win.

PERCEIVED RACE RELATIONS AND BLACK PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE VIABILITY

There are five measures of perceived race relations (i.e., racial realities). The five measures focus on general perceived relations (BLKWHT), whether Blacks

have “too little” influence (BLKLTL), racial mistrust (BWTRST), whether an individual perceives race as a factor in discrimination (RACEMTRS), and perceptions of Whites’ prejudice toward Blacks (WHTPREJ). The BLKWHT measure is coded so that higher values indicate more positive race relations, and all of the other variables are dummy coded so that positive values indicate more negative racial perspectives. The results are compared across race and party ID, and are shown in Table 4.

On all five measures, Blacks report more pessimism—negative racial reality—than Whites. The largest differences between Blacks’ and Whites’ perceptions are in the issues of perceived Black influence (BLKLTL: percent difference = 36 percent, $p < 0.01$) and perceptions about race as a likely discrimination factor (RACEMTRS: percent difference = 52 percent, $p < 0.01$). The results support the expectation of racial differences in racial realities.

Table 5 also shows differences in racial realities across party ID. Since most of the Democrats in the sample were Black—56 percent of Democrats are Black and 43 percent are White—it is not surprising that Democrats are more pessimistic about race relations than Republicans. This might partially explain why Democrats are less likely to perceive Black candidates as likely to win (see Table 3) in a presidential race.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF PERCEIVED VIABILITY OF BLACK PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

Moderated multiple logistics regression (MMLR) analyses (see Stone-Romero and Anderson 1994) were used to analyze the hypothesized relationships with perceived candidate viability.⁵ The results, shown in Table 5, are presented separately for

Blacks and Whites. The coefficients represent the effects of each variable on perceived viability, with signs indicating the direction and asterisks indicating significance levels.

Perceived race relations account for the majority of the differences in perceived viability for Black presidential candidates, especially among Blacks (D in $R^2 = 0.102$). Blacks who live in areas with greater Black populations are less likely to believe that a Black candidate would win a presidential race; however, once racial realities are considered, the Black population effects disappear. This pattern is an example of a mediation effect (Baron and Kenney 1986), and supports the idea that the effects of population on viability are due to the perceptions that exist within the community rather than the actual proportion of Black people who live in the community. After controlling for sex, age, education, and Black population size, party identification has no significant effect on perceived viability for either racial group.

Of the racial reality measures, only positive perceptions of Black-White relations (BLKWHT) are associated with positive perceived viability among Whites, and negative self-reports about interracial mistrust (RACETRST) are associated with negative viability among Blacks. Those Whites who perceive a Black candidate could win have more positive perceptions of race relations. This suggests that Whites may use a general assessment of general group relations in their assessment of Black candidate viability. Blacks on the other hand may make a single group assessment—those with less trust toward Whites are less likely to believe a Black candidate could win.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results paint a picture of the obvious—that perceptions of the viability of Black presidential candidates are related to race. What is most telling about the findings presented here are the differences in how Blacks and Whites interpret the viability of Black candidates. Blacks tend to view viability of Black presidential candidates in terms of trust, with less trust equating to less optimism, whereas Whites tend to view viability in terms of racial optimism, with more positive perceptions of race relations translating into greater optimism for Black candidates. The final picture is one of a glass half-empty, or half-full.

Black presidential candidates are constantly faced with a double-edged sword regarding how to best market themselves. They can either be a Black politician, or a politician who happens to be Black. Either way, they are likely to be stereotyped from the start (McDermott 1998), and framed by the media as politicians who either do or do not know their political identities. What Black candidates can count on is that people will, in part, view their viability in relation to some aspect of race relations; especially by Blacks who live in areas more heavily populated by Blacks. This is something that White candidates have to worry about less.

The key for a prospective Black presidential candidate for 2008, such as Obama, would be to continually promote an American identity and tout the merits of the electoral system to the public. This essentially means persuading Blacks that they can trust Whites and trust the political system to work for them, and persuading Whites that race relations are good, but not perfect, and that they will continue to get better. Unfortunately, the

results of the last two elections, as well as Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, do not bode well for this prescription. There is still a sting from the 2000 election (Herron and Sekhon 2004), high Black Democratic turnout in 2004 did not translate into a Democratic victory, and Blacks and Whites have different opinions about who's to blame for the negative events surrounding Hurricane Katrina (Dawson, Harris-Lacewell, and Cohen 2005).

Yet future primaries and presidential elections may turn out differently due to a new nonhypothetical Black presidential candidate (Obama) and other Black political figures running for high profile offices. Aside from the vice presidency, presidential candidates typically spawn from senatorial and gubernatorial positions. Although unsuccessful in 2006, Lynn Swann (Pennsylvania governor), Michael Steele (U.S. senator from Maryland), Ken Blackwell (Ohio governor), and Harold Ford (U.S. senator from Tennessee), or others like them, may potentially bring new political prominence to both parties while simultaneously increasing the pool of prospective Black presidential candidates. Couple these recent campaigns with current high-profile Black political figures such as Barack Obama, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, and Deval Patrick, and there exists a new image of Black presidential prospects: one characterized by political figures who are less activist or demonstrative and more experienced in institutional politics and electoral governance.

The data presented in this paper highlights the need to delve into the factors related to the perceived viability of historically nonrepresented groups vying for the presidency. This study attempts to look at how candidate characteristics such

as race influence Black presidential candidates' perceived chances of success. The results point to the need for new Black presidential candidates who can appear both viable and electable, and who have a track record of winning.

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(ENDNOTES)

¹ Endnotes

¹ Researchers (e.g., Bartels 1988 and Abramson et al. 1992) have made a distinction between the two concepts of *viability* and *electability* based on the context of the presidential campaign: nomination process (*viability*) and general election (*electability*). For the purposes of this research, I will use *viability* because no Black candidate made it past the nomination process and also because the measures in this study explicitly incorporate the idea of a nominee.

² Schuman et al. (1997) characterize questions about voting “for a Black candidate” as a way to measure attitudes toward nondiscriminatory political choices and believe such questions should be considered targeted principles of equal treatment.

³ Respondent education was recoded from a six-point ordinal (less than high school, high school, some college, trade/tech/vocational training, college graduate, and post graduate) to a dichotomous (1=college/post graduate, 0=all others) variable. While a purposefully reduced level of measure may be inappropriate, the rationale for this change was mainly for parsimony of interpretation (i.e., uncertainty over midpoints), and analysis revealed no differences between the two measurement levels.

⁴ The zip-related percentages are based on the 2004 American Community Survey (ACS).

⁵ The use of zip code aggregate level data in any individual level analysis is risky due to violation of the “independent errors” assumption. Thus, the estimated regression effects are based on the maximum likelihood estimation technique in the non-linear model logistic link function within the HLM software. This technique is appropriate for multi-level data with dependent variables having binary outcomes (Raudenbush et al. 2004).

APPENDIX. PERCEIVED RACE RELATIONS ITEMS

(*BLKWHT*) Would you say relations between (read and rotate A–D) are very good (5), somewhat good, neither good nor bad, somewhat bad, or very bad (1)?

(*BLKTL*) Some people think that certain groups have too much influence in American life and politics, while other people feel that certain groups don’t have as much influence as they deserve. I am going to read you a list of groups. For each one, please tell me whether that group has too much influence, just about the right amount of influence, or too little influence. The first group is (Blacks). Would you say they have too much influence, just about the right amount of influence, or too little influence?

(*BWTRST*) Do you feel you can trust most (White/Black) people, or not?

* Blacks’ trust of Whites, and Whites’ trust of Blacks.

(*RACEMTRS*) If you were treated unfairly in a particular situation, for example by a store clerk or a stranger on the street, would you generally think that your race had something to do with it, or not?

(*WHTPREJ*) How prejudiced would you say Whites are towards Blacks? Would you say they are not at all prejudiced, slightly prejudiced, or extremely prejudiced?

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Author Biographies

*Bill Fletcher, Jr. is a long-time labor and international writer and activist. He is the Executive Editor of the Black Commentator (www.blackcommentator.com), a Senior Scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies, and co-founder of the Center for Labor Renewal and the Black Radical Congress. He is the immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum. Fletcher is the co-author, with Fernando Gapasin, of the forthcoming book: **Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path Toward Social Justice** (University of California Press). He can be reached at papaq54@hotmail.com.*

Christina D. Sanders is the coordinator of Black Youth Vote! Texas, a voter empowerment component of the Houston Coalition on Black Civic Participation that seeks to register, educate, and mobilize black men and women aged 18–35. Christina has served as a guest panelist alongside Dr. Cornell West of Princeton University for the Tavis Smiley Foundation National Leadership Institute, as a youth voting commentator on CNN Radio, and as an advocate of youth voting issues in Houston/Harris County, TX.

Sanders, a native of Houston, TX, is a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., holds a bachelor of arts degree in political science and is a master of public administration candidate with a public policy focus at Texas Southern University.

Blake E. Green is the assistant state coordinator of Black Youth Vote! Texas. Blake is a native of Houston, TX. He holds a bachelor of business administration degree in management, and is a candidate for the master of business administration degree at Texas Southern University. He is a member of the National Black MBA Association and the Association for Financial Professionals.

David C. Wilson, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the Departments of Political Science and Internal Relations and holds joint appointments in the Department of Psychology and the Black American Studies Program at the University of Delaware. He specializes in research methods, political psychology, and American politics, including topics related to voting and elections, public opinion, racial attitudes, workplace politics, and survey research.

Wilson has presented scholarly papers to the American Political Science Association, the Midwest Political Science Association, the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, the Urban Affairs Association, and the American Association for Public Opinion Researchers. He has also authored research in Public Opinion Quarterly, the Journal of Applied Psychology, Personnel Psychology, and the Gallup Management Journal.

Wilson earned his bachelor degree in government from Western Kentucky University and multiple masters degrees—an M.P.A. (public policy and administration) and M.A. (political science)—and a Ph.D. in political science from Michigan State University.



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