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AND METROPOLITAN AFFAIRS

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The Black Church Culture and Politics in the City of Detroit

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Introduction

African-American clergy, and in some cases church members, play a central role in civic affairs in the city of Detroit. A number of public opinion surveys reveal that religious organizations are sites where political education takes place. As Table 1 shows, in 1968, 32 percent of black respondents who attend church reported hearing from speakers who were running for public office. An almost identical percentage is found in 1992, 35 percent report hearing at least one announcement or talk about the presidential election at their church or place of worship. Finally, a 1998 pilot study shows that 23 percent reported attending a political meeting where Jesse Jackson was the keynote speaker. It should be noted that Detroit responses are close to the national norm. In 1984, 35 percent of blacks in a national survey reported hearing political announcements at their church or place of worship, and in 1992-93, 35 percent reported engaging in discussions about politics at their place of worship. Hence, in the city of Detroit and the nation approximately one-third of blacks are in religious organizations where political matters are discussed.

The role of clergy in the civic affairs of the city extends beyond educating citizens about political matters; a number of clergy have run for public office, and some have won. In 1925, the Rev. Robert Bradby, pastor of Second Baptist Church, ran unsuccessfully for a Common Council seat; the same would be true in 1947, for Rev. Charles Hill of Hartford Memorial Baptist Church (City Council).¹ However, Elvin L. Davenport, a black pastor with relatively quiet support from Baptist clergy, was elected in 1957 to Detroit Recorder's Court, he served there until retired he in 1977.² By 1965, one pastor was on Common Council, Nicholas Hood II, the pastor of Plymouth United Church of Christ. He served on the council from 1965 to 1986. After retiring from the ministry and city council, his son, Nicholas Hood III, succeeded him as church pastor and council member. Nicholas Hood III is currently serving on the council. John Peoples, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church (now called Cosmopolitan Baptist Church), served one term on the council, 1982-86. This was also the case with Keith Butler, pastor of Word of Faith Christian Center, who served from 1990-94. Essentially, at least one black clergy person has served on the city council since 1965.

Mayors Coleman Young (first African-American mayor of the city, 1973-1993) and Dennis Archer (1993-2001) recognized the significance of clergy as political leaders. Young formally addressed the Council of Black Baptist Pastors, and Young, while upset about their unwillingness to support his casino projects, (calling it a "debating society") nonetheless respected black pastors.³ He credits church leaders for mobilizing volunteers who patrolled city blocks to ensure that arson fires were minimal on Devil's Night (the night before Halloween). Mayor Young appointed the President of the Council of Black Baptist Pastors, Rev. Charles Butler, to the Police Commission, and Archer followed suit by appointing Rev. Edgar Vann to the Police Commission. Mayor Archer's ecumenical council consisting of clerical leadership is kept informed of important policy initiatives, and their advice is sought on pressing policy issues. Finally, Mayor Archer has a church liaison that often attends religious functions as his representative, if indeed a request has been made and if the Mayor deems it important that someone attends the activity.

In addition to the activism of clergy, some church activists participate as campaign workers, others as poll watchers, and most vote in elections, and as stated, about one-third talk about politics at their place of worship. It is not at all surprising that religion and politics mix in the city of Detroit. Verba et

al. find that African Americans are more likely than Latino Americans and Anglo-Americans to report a church setting as the place where political information is received.⁴ And yet, it is no small matter that almost one-third of African-American Detroit residents are exposed to church-based political communication, given Robert Putnam's recent work showing a steady decline over the past three decades in religious as well as political activism⁵

An underlying theme in this paper is that church-based political activism grew out of a historical struggle for racial justice that cast some clergy and their congregations in the middle of the fight. Moreover, today, about one-third of the city residents are in churches where they expect to be engaged in some form of political discourse. Equally important, religious organizations provide a place where people can volunteer time, energy, talent, and money to work on political matters. This paper briefly discusses the historical evolution of church-based politics in the city of Detroit. It describes one outgrowth of this involvement; the creation of church-based political action committees that are active during electoral campaigns. Attention is focused on the Black Slate Committee and the Fannie Lou Hamer Political Action Committee during the 2000 national election. These grass-root/church-based political action organizations are registered with the Bureau of Elections in the Michigan Department of State. Both rely mainly on volunteer help during electoral campaigns. Theoretically, both argue that they articulate the concern of the poor and the powerless, and they do so by maintaining a protest racial ideology—mainly that of Black Nationalism. The paper concludes by focusing on challenges confronting church-based political action committees. Major problems confronting such grass-root organizations are finding volunteers, raising money in off-election years, and avoiding being used by a more powerful ally, the Democratic Party.

The Role of the Black Church in Detroit⁶

Four interrelated reasons help explain how some black churches became involved in electoral politics. First, a ward-based election system decentralizes political power. Coleman Young felt that the non-partisan ward system hurt the chances of any mayor to centralize power and rule effectively, in his autobiography he states:

The revised city charter, while increasing the power of the mayor in some respects, disabled me in other ways. Detroit's non partisan system of electing councilmen-at-large designed in reaction to the Democratic machines that Richard Daley and other city bosses built around the ward systems by which municipal voting patterns can be localized and manipulated through the partisan efforts of city employees-has come to mean, in effect, that we have an extra nine would be goddamn mayors sitting up there in the City-County Building (recently renamed the Coleman A. Young Municipal Building).⁷

Thus unlike the powerful Cook County Democratic Party machinery that was so effectively used by Richard Daley (Chicago) at the height of his political career, Detroit has a more pluralist political culture which makes it difficult for the mayor of the city to use patronage and the prestige that comes with the office to determine how governmental resources are allocated. This has no doubt allowed politically astute pastors such as Nicholas Hood II and Nicholas Hood III to be one of the many voices in the political process. The political involvement of clergy was also molded in a political environment that includes large automotive companies, unions, and black militants.

The large automotive companies—Ford, General Motors, and DaimlerChrysler—significantly affect the decision-making agenda of elected officials and citizens and, therefore, are the second factor that impacts the involvement of black church leaders. Thomas Sugrue writes that corporate executives and managers who controlled the city's industry had a disproportionate influence on the city's development in the post World War II era because of their economic power.⁸ A single corporate decision could affect thousands of workers, and the introduction of new technologies and decisions about plant size, expansion, and relocation affected the city's labor market and reshaped the economic geography of the Detroit region.⁹ Yet, it was during the migration of African Americans from the rural south to the urban north following the First World War that one began to observe the role of black ministers as political leaders within the black community, who interacted with both political and economic powerbrokers. Robert Bradby of Second Baptist Church, the most influential black pastor in the city in the 1920s, had many connections to powerful whites; one in particular was to Henry Ford.¹⁰ Bradby's importance to Henry Ford was based on his ability to recommend "very high type fellows"—those who were not black militants.¹¹ Ford also tapped St. Matthew's Father Everard Daniel and the Reverend William Beck of Bethel A.M.E. A recommendation from either Bradby or Daniel was considered tantamount to joining Ford's payroll, and historian David Levine speculates that many blacks joined Second or St. Matthew's "with an eye to secure a job at Ford."¹²

Thus, it is not surprising that in the early 1920s and 1930s, prominent church leaders, such as Robert Bradby, Everard Daniel, and William Peck were against unions. Black pastors were not operating in a vacuum; the racism that existed within the plants in Detroit made their task easier.¹³ Actually, black workers became more militant in the 1930s and 1940s. Blacks formed their own internal black groups to combat racism, voted against the Ford's choice for mayor in 1931, and threatened to conduct a wildcat strike at the Dodge Chrysler plant in 1943.¹⁴ In the end, the increasingly militant behavior of black autoworkers made it difficult for pastors like Bradby to maintain a lid on black economic and political aspirations.

Yet, the presence of organized unions is a third deciding factor that contributed to black pastors and churches becoming involved in political matters. Blacks, who were members of the United Auto Workers (UAW) and members of churches, were instrumental in moving black church leaders to support unions.¹⁵ The relationship that developed between black churches (those who have union members) and the UAW forged political activism among African Americans. Large black churches in Detroit, with greater resources, had become highly politicized during the 1930s mainly because more African Americans became members of the UAW.

The relationship between clergy and Henry Ford therefore began to wane as the unions began to penetrate the black community. Nathaniel Leach remembered a split that developed within Second Baptist Church between Bradby (head pastor) and Rev. Charles Hill (associate pastor) over the church's role in unionization in the 1940s. Leach stated, "Rev. Bradby was hired by Ford, and he could not afford to displease Ford. Therefore, he tried to be neutral. However, Hill courted the organization. But that became sort of a split because people sprang up all over the city [blacks became more supportive of unionization]. And this sort of left Bradby to slip down and cause him to lose power."¹⁶

However, during the New Deal era, black clergy along with the union activists were beginning to become actively involved in recruiting blacks to register to

vote and switch their partisan allegiance from the Republican to the Democratic Party. According to Rich, black leadership switched its allegiance for several reasons including the Depression, Democratic Party support for unionization, and the party's rhetoric of equal treatment for workers.¹⁷ Once church-based mobilization happened, political activism became the norm with respect to church life for many blacks, particularly those attending large churches where politics was discussed by both the pastor and members of the congregation.

The emergence of a black political consciousness during the Civil Rights and Black Power era is the fourth factor contributing to the political involvement of black clergy. In the 1960s, racial bullet voting was prevalent, and it became clear to black activists that white voters, despite the increase in the black population, would not support black political candidates for the Common Council.¹⁸ The failure to elect a black to the 1965 city council primary election led to a proposal by the Interdenominational Ministers' Alliance (IMA), a group of black ministers, to boycott white candidates in the general election.¹⁹ In addition to the IMA's proposal, Rev. Albert Cleage (known before his death as Jaramogi A. Agyeman) proposed a "Vote Black" campaign.²⁰ Even before the Black Vote Campaign, which produced the *Black Slate Digest*, a weekly newsletter, Rev. Cleage established a publication called *Illustrated News* in the late 1950s. The *Black Slate Digest* was an outgrowth of the *Illustrated News*. The goal of both publications was to educate black citizens about political matters. Additionally, the *Black Slate* was designed so that citizens could make an informed choice at the polls. The *Black Slate Digest* is still in circulation. Citizens are given information about the policy positions of candidates and/or elected officials, exposed to editorials about pressing community matters, and provided a listing of endorsed candidates. Black citizens are made aware of the Black Slate because the list is often published in the Michigan Chronicle, a newspaper with a wide black readership; it is also published in the Michigan Citizen, a grassroots newspaper, and it is placed in barbershops, beauty salons, and black churches that are supportive of the endorsed candidates.

It should be noted that Coleman Young cites Rev. Cleage, as being one of the earliest supporters of his first mayoral campaign.²¹ In addition to the Black Slate, the Council of Black Baptist Pastors, consisting of 300 members that meet regularly, at least once a month, is viewed as a viable interest group in the city. As stated earlier, Coleman Young saw the Council of Black Baptist Pastors as a formidable political organization. This is best illustrated in the 1989 mayoral election. David Crumm, Detroit Free Press religious writer reports that in 1989, Young was trailing in public opinion polls 47 percent to 37 percent to Tom Barrow; this was before the Baptist revival season.²² During this season, Young appeared in numerous packed churches, linked arm in arm with Aretha Franklin and the Rev. Jesse Jackson to quote the Bible and to sing, "We Shall Over Come."²³ After the revival season, Barrow fell at the polls, 56 percent to 44 percent and subsequently lost the election.²⁴ The Council of Black Baptist Pastors does not always speak with one voice. In the early stages of the 1993 mayoral race, Charles Adams, pastor of Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, which has a large upper-middle class, African-American membership, openly criticized the Archer candidacy. Adams viewed Archer in 1993 as a candidate beholdng to the white power structure; and in contrast, the Rev. Jim Holley, pastor of the Historic Little Rock Baptist Church and president of the Council of Black Pastors (1992-1995), openly supported Dennis Archer.²⁵

Under the leadership of Rev. Jim Holley, pastor of the Historic Little Rock Baptist Church, the council moved away from explicit endorsing and slating of political candidates. Holly had met with the IRS on several occasions and came

away with an agreement in which the council would no longer get involved in “politics.” Instead there was discussion of setting up a separate organization to comply with IRS regulations.²⁶ The council rejected this plan because members felt that the overall purpose of the organization was fellowship as opposed to politics. Under the leadership of Rev. Edgar Vann, Jr., (1995-1998), in an effort to move black citizens from “the feeling of being permanently disengaged from the system,” a political awareness ministry was used to attack this perceived problem.²⁷ At Vann’s church, some members were taught how to use the new computerized voter machines. In addition, at Rev. Holly’s church, until the state disallowed the practice, an employee at Little Rock Baptist Church registered citizens to vote.

Although the election of Coleman Young and the subsequent election of Dennis Archer as mayor of the city have effectively integrated blacks into city government, some church-based organizations continue to have a protest ideology—a belief that they must be the political voice of the black poor and powerless. Hence, for some activists having a black administration does not necessarily denote articulation of the interest of the poor. This is a concern given empirical research showing that the poor are less likely to be members of city churches where political discourse occurs.²⁸ In addition, the voice of the poor may have always been low on the agenda of some church activists according to work by Wilbur Rich and Thomas Sugrue. Rich states, “Whereas the clients of the labor unions and the black middle class were being elected and appointed to offices, the poor struggled with poverty and the police. After the riot in 1967, that dialectical tension was brought to the forefront. Members of the black working class and poor felt that the ‘established leadership had not adequately addressed the problems of downtrodden ghetto dwellers.’”²⁹ Black clergy were considered a part of that “established leadership,” therefore churches were criticized for neglecting the needs of the poor and working class. Sugrue maintains that the alienation of black poor within black civil rights groups began during the Second World War and continued into the Cold War era.³⁰ The Detroit NAACP is cited as an example. In the late 1940s, it purged many of its more militant members, among them former Branch President Rev. Charles Hill who left under a cloud of suspicion for his activism and his refusal to sever ties with Communist-front civil rights organizations.³¹ Sugrue also states that by the late 1950s and early 1960s groups like the Urban League and the NAACP in conjunction with powerful local black ministers worked to improve the status of skilled and white-collar workers. Hence, little effort was put into getting jobs for the unemployed and improving the working conditions for the unskilled.

Speaking on Behalf of the Black Poor

The Black State Political Action Committee (BS-PAC) and The Fannie Lou Hamer Political Action Committee (FLH-PAC), two separate church-based political action committees, seek to speak on behalf of the poor and powerless during electoral campaigns. Both PACs are affiliated with churches that strongly adhere to a Black Nationalistic theology. Essentially both PACs have leaders that endorse the idea that blacks should not trust white political leadership, that blacks should have knowledge and pride of their African past, and that blacks need to develop independent political organizations that articulate the interest of the poor. Both of these church-based political action organizations are registered with the Michigan State Department’s Bureau of Elections as political action committees. Finally, each seeks to provide opportunities for those who would not normally be involved in the political process to become activists. This is partially accomplished because the Michigan Department of State requires political committees to receive contributions from at least 25

individuals. It is also accomplished because each PAC engages in political endorsements of candidates, which requires using volunteers or paid individuals to get the word out to citizens about whom to support and vote for on Election Day. We now turn our attention to these church-based organizations by briefly discussing the church life surrounding both PACS; we then focus on the political activities of these groups in the context of the 2000 presidential election and conclude by discussing criticisms and challenges confronting these two church-based political action committees.

Black Slate, Inc.

As stated, the Black Slate has its genesis in the 1960s. At the time, black power activists such as Malcolm X, H. Rap Brown, and Stokely Carmichael were arguing that too few black pastors were involved in the struggle for racial justice. Grace Boggs, a long-time resident and activist in the city of Detroit, states that at the start of the civil rights movement, black pastors and other black leaders were not ready for a Black Power Movement that would challenge white supremacy.³² By the mid 1960s, Albert Cleage, founder and pastor of the Central Congregational Christian Church (1953), began preaching a series of sermons centered on the idea that Jesus was a black revolutionary messiah whose primary objective was to construct a black nation. Cleage in 1966 changed the name of the church from Central Congregational Christian Church to the Shrine of the Black Madonna. With this too, came the unveiling of a Black Christ painting in the church to drive home the message that “within the child born of a Black Madonna is a new Messiah only waiting to discover their inner divinity.” Church leaders and members feel an obligation to “transform the spiritual emptiness, economic powerlessness and social disorganization which has plagued the black community.” The Black Slate is part of a number of efforts by the Shrines of the Black Madonna, also located in Atlanta and Houston. The Shrines of the Black Madonna Web site show the religious institution as having bookstores, community service centers, technological centers, a Beulah Land Farm Project, and educational centers. Essentially, this church seeks to create oppositional institutions that are independent of the white power structure.

The late Jaramogi A. Agyeman in 1992 (Albert Cleage) echoes this point in a written sermon entitled the “The Pentecost Experience,” he states:

We are black. We are oppressed. ... You do not realize that this world in which you live is organized. It is not run on automatic. We don't have anything to do with running it.... The system is an enemy system.... Our struggle for survival requires recognition of the fact that we are outside of the system and that we must build counter-institutions of our own.³³

The Black Slate, Inc., became an official independent political action committee in the State of Michigan in 1977; its identification number is 002961-1. As an independent political action committee, it raises and spends money on behalf of political issues and political candidates that are running for public office. It must also file campaign statements with the Bureau of Elections, showing receipts, contributions, expenditures, and a balance statement. Table 2 shows a summary of the activity of the committee between 1994 and 2000. The BS-PAC generates a slate of endorsed candidates that is the result of committee meetings, analysis of candidate positions, and the past voting record of candidates. Endorsed candidates pay a fee to have their name placed on the slate; fees range from \$500 to \$1,500 depending on the

office being sought. In the past the Black Slate has endorsed Coleman Young; Sharon McPhail; mayoral candidate John Conyers; a US congressional representative; Carl Levin, a US Senator; Barbara Rose Collins, former congressional representative; Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, a US House of Representative member; and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, 1984 democratic presidential candidate. As an aside, the Black Slate committee disagreement with the Dennis Archer administration led to an attempted recall petition drive in 1998-99, which failed largely because of improper ballot signatures. Nonetheless, the Black Slate committee voiced its opposition in both the *Black Slate Digest* and the *Michigan Citizen*. In a special April 1999 edition of the *Black Slate Digest*, it was asserted that Mayor Dennis Archer had refused to remove snow from neighborhoods, campaigned against black majority ownership of at least one casino, and had supported Republican Governor Engler's efforts to take over Detroit Public Schools. In essence, he was a black mayor who was failing to represent the interest of the black community.

The Campaign Finance Statements during the 2000 election cycle reveal that the Black Slate PAC rented space at the Shrine of the Black Madonna. Although the Black Slate has a Black Nationalist ideology, the ideology is pragmatic. The BS-PAC accepted \$7,500 from the Democratic Party State Central Committee in October 2000; this money was to assist the political action committee in getting its message out to potential black voters. The Democratic Party may have given the Black Slate money because of its prior and present endorsement of progressive black and white democrats. For example, at the state level in the 2000 electoral campaign, the Black Slate endorsed judges Fitzgerald and Robinson for the Michigan Supreme Court; both are white Americans, who also received endorsement from the Michigan State Democratic Party. The Slate also endorsed Kwame Kilpatrick for the Michigan House of Representatives, and his mother, Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, for the US House of Representatives. This is not surprising since both are members of the Shrine of the Black Madonna church. Being a church member does not provide one with a free endorsement. The Kilpatrick for United States Congress PAC paid \$1,500 in July 2000, for an endorsement fee. In comparison, The Committee to Elect Kwame Kilpatrick paid \$600 for an endorsement in the fall 2000 campaign season. The federal (Carolyn) Kilpatrick for Congress PAC was of great help to the Black Slate committee. It gave \$4,320 to the BS-PAC during the election cycle. In comparison the state (Carolyn) Kilpatrick for Congress PAC gave \$1,500 to the Black Slate PAC.

The Black Slate committee used much of its monies for political advertising. The Black Slate committee, which has a call-in talk radio show every Wednesday and Thursday evening on WHPR paid for political commercials on July 7, and it paid for other radio ads to the African-American Chamber of Commerce in Detroit throughout the electoral campaign. What is significant about radio ads and the talk show is that this political communication outlet provides opportunities for people to call in, listen, and/or talk to other listeners, friends and family about issues being raised. A cursory analysis of the callers suggests a grassroots following, who are supportive of grassroots Black Nationalism issues. Callers tend to be upset with city services, the Archer Administration, and in general are distrustful of big government—city, state, and federal—since all are controlled by the white power structure. Nonetheless, there is still ironically low-level support for civic involvement, or better yet, agitation.

The BS-PAC gave individuals chances to get involved in the electoral cycle by having a fundraiser at the Masonic Temple on July 27, an event where \$6,870 was raised. On July 28, \$1,000 was paid for a political ad to appear in the

Michigan Chronicle, and the committee paid \$819 on the same day to the *Michigan Citizen*. This committee also rented telephone lines from Ameritech so those potential voters could be called and encouraged to vote for endorsed candidates. While no records could be found for 2001 that showed expenditures for poll workers, in the past the Black Slate committee had paid individuals to work as poll workers on the day of the general election. In the final analysis, the Black Slate committee spends most of its efforts providing political information to voters and attempting to get them to turn out on Election Day.

The Fannie Lou Hamer Political Action Committee

The Fannie Lou Hamer Political Action Committee (FLH-PAC) is an outgrowth of political activities at Fellowship Chapel. The Rev. James E. Wadsworth Jr. founded Fellowship Chapel United Church of Christ in 1981. He was involved in the struggle for racial justice through his involvement in the NAACP and as chairperson of the 13th Congressional District democratic organization. Rev. Wadsworth's commitment to political involvement was also part of the church culture at Fellowship Chapel. Each member that joined the church attended a "New Members" class every Sunday for several months. Particular attention was devoted to the Amistad story, a story of 53 Mendi captives from Sierra Leone who rebelled on the slave ship, Amistad, in 1839. This was done to drive home the point that African Americans had to engage in political struggles as Africans to gain respect and recognition from white America.

Rev. Wadsworth established the Political Education Committee (PEC) at the church in the 1980s. The purpose of the PEC was to educate church members on the importance of political involvement and the impact on their lives. Wendell Anthony, the current pastor of the church, became pastor of the church in December 1986, shortly after the death of Rev. Wadsworth. Rev. Anthony states that the idea of forming a church-based political action committee that would be involved in the entire electoral cycle began to rescind with him in 1989. Through his involvement with Rev. Wadsworth, he attended a number of political meetings in which he would represent Rev. Wadsworth, then chairperson of the 13th Congressional District democratic organization. It was through this involvement that Rev. Anthony developed the idea of creating a formal political action committee. Rev. Anthony believes naming the PAC after Fannie Lou Hamer was appropriate because she gave everything for the cause of black Americans. According to Rev. Anthony, this PAC has a black political consciousness.

I have always been a student of Christian history, and as a civil rights activist, I am one who is always looking for a way to bridge our history with our present. I look for those nuances in individuals, for example, our men's choir is called the Paul Robeson Chorale; Paul Robeson was a strong solid civil rights social activist and that is what men want to be, as Fannie Lou Hamer was a woman as you know, who was very socially active who sacrificed her life for this cause, she was a Mississippi freedom fighter, working with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and going to the convention in '64 and not being given a seat and just making that statement, "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired."⁴

In 1993, the Fannie Lou Hamer Political Action Committee filed a statement with the State of Michigan's Bureau of Election's Disclosure Division as a non-partisan political organization. The organization's identification number is 5059365. The overall purpose of the FLH-PAC is to endorse political candi-

dates, to provide political information to prospective voters, and to encourage voter registration and turnout. It also provides opportunities for volunteers to work as poll workers, drive voters to the polls, work at the polls, and in some cases to participate as delegates at local, county, state, and national party conventions. The Fannie Lou Hamer Political Action Committee has its own separate mailing address and treasurer who monitors contributions and expenditures by the PAC. The FLH-PAC is also registered as a federal PAC. The PAC accepts money from political candidates and from political organizations and other community-based organizations.

Table 3 shows a summary of state activity of the FLH-PAC from 1994 to 2000. In the 2000 campaign, the PAC spent a great deal of money on voter registration and voter education. For example, in the 2000 election campaign, \$2,000 was spent on radio advertising to WJLB, 98.0 FM, in an effort to increase voter turnout among young listeners. This effort was coordinated with the Detroit Chapter of the NAACP. The slogan, "Take Your Soles to the Polls" was played on various radio stations, written about in the *Detroit News* and *Free Press*, announced in area churches, and shown on billboards across the city. Mayor Dennis Archer, Detroit City Council, and the Wayne County Commission endorsed this campaign, which started on Mothers Day, Sunday, May 14, 2000. More than 200 churches in the Detroit metropolitan community conducted voter registration drives on Mothers Day; including Fellowship Chapel, Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, and Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

The fact that leadership from the FLH-PAC (both state and federal) may have worked with the NAACP to increase voter interest is partially explained by the fact that the PAC is part of an organizational network, as illustrated in Table 4. Wendell Anthony is pastor of Fellowship Chapel, president of the NAACP, and founder of the FLH-PAC. In addition, the past executive director of the NAACP, John Johnson, directs the PAC and is a member of Fellowship Chapel. The PAC also benefits because several members of the executive committee of the PAC are themselves ministers, this is the case of Rev. Martin Bolton, Imam Abdullah El-Aim, the Rev. Tony Curtis Henderson, and the Rev. Robert Smith Jr.

The Detroit NAACP Executive Board, too, consists of prominent political leaders such as US House of Representative Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, who was encouraged to run for Congress by Rev. Wendell Anthony in 1996. Both the NAACP and the FLH-PAC endorsed her candidacy and encouraged voters to support Kilpatrick who ran against then incumbent Barbara Rose Collins, who at the time was endorsed by the Black Slate. It should be noted that Collins, like Kilpatrick, is a member of the Shrine of the Black Madonna. The FLH-PACs endorsed and encouraged voters to support Kilpatrick in the 2000 election cycle, which she won without much difficulty.

The Fannie Lou Hamer PAC has been somewhat more successful than the Black Slate in getting contributions from PACs associated with interest groups that support mainly Democratic Party voter mobilization drives. For example, in the 2000 election campaign, the American Federation of State, County, Municipal Employees of the AFL/CIO national office contributed \$5,000, and the Michigan Democratic Party contributed \$7,500. Part of the success of the Hamer PAC is partially explained by the fact that its founder, Wendell Anthony, was a strong Clinton-Gore supporter. Records from the 1996 and 2000 campaign seasons from the Federal Election Commission reveal that either through Anthony's own contributions as a private citizen, as president of the NAACP, or founder of the FLH-PAC, the Clinton-Gore team received financial support and endorsements. Thus, the Hamer PAC is much more of a political realist about politics. Both Clinton and Gore made several stops to Detroit

during the 1996 and 2000 presidential campaign seasons, moreover both the FLH-PAC and the NAACP contributed to either the Clinton or Gore presidential campaigns. The PAC also spent money on fundraisers, the printing of slate cards, hiring poll workers, and renting buses so that people could be driven to the polls. In any event, the Fannie Lou Hamer Political Action Committee, in conjunction with efforts by the NAACP and other political groups and elected officials, were able to increase voter turnout in the city from approximately 33 percent in 1996 to 48 percent in 2000 among registered voters.

Political Criticism

Not everyone is happy with the work of church-based political action committees. Bill Johnson an African-American editor at the *Detroit News* wrote a critical essay on August 29, 1997, entitled, "Why Should Detroit Candidates Pay for PAC Endorsements?" In his essay, he argued and named the FLH-PAC as an example of an organization that forces candidates to pay for an endorsement that rarely results in the promised outcomes, e.g., higher voter turnout. As far as Johnson is concerned, the FLH-PAC only represents the interest of its founder, Rev. Wendell Anthony, and of those who share an ideology of Black Nationalism.³⁵

In addition, some clergy, such as Rev. Holley of the Historic Little Rock Baptist Church, do not think that church-based political action committees are a positive thing because they do not have 100 percent integrity because they charge candidates for endorsement. Holley states that whenever money is exchanged, there is a problem. He went on to state that when a pastor endorses a candidate, the pastor is informing the congregation that this person has an investment in the community. Holley, much like Johnson of the *Detroit News*, believes that PACs should not charge for an endorsement. Nevertheless, Holley does believe that pastors should be politically informed and engage in political activities that will best serve the black community.³⁶ Rev. Hood III, pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church also does not believe in church-based political action committees because it is necessary to keep clear the separation between church and state, particularly in a church that has a long history of political involvement:

The definition of political action committee as I understand it has to do with a forum where people contribute to it and agree to make decisions to support candidates, we do not have anything like that in this church. We are considered, probably, a very political church. But we do not have what I consider any formal or informal political action committees. I surmise that part of the reason why we don't have any formal or informal political action committees in the church is that the church has a history of elected officials and involvement ties, the last three consecutive pastors; Horace White, the pastor back in the '40s, actually served in the state legislature for a term, was also very involved in the initial organizing of the United Auto Workers. As I understand there is a photograph in the Solidarity House of him... on the wall, some of these guys, among others, were beaten up, for going out with some of the Ford workers who wanted to organize, along with Charles Hill from Hartford (Baptist Church). And then my father is my immediate predecessor, he served on the City Council for 28 years, and now I'm in my seventh year on City Council. And so the church has a history of elected participation by its ministers, and because of that, to offset any negative criticism, within the church that the church is "too political" we are actually, I would say less overtly politically than most churches in Detroit.³⁷

Do the Black Slate and the Fannie Lou Hamer PACs Increase Volunteerism among the Poor?

Given the criticism of church-based political action committees and the caution echoed by Rev. Hood III, one must ask the question of whether or not such organizations actually increase volunteerism. The Black Slate committee and the Fannie Lou Hamer Political Action Committee attempt to convert, what Robert Putman calls, “social capital” into potential volunteers by producing church-based political communities that have a high degree of social trust, group identity and pride, and, equally important, a commitment to black political advocacy. While we do not have any data to support our claim, we posit that both PACs are probably most successful at increasing political interest among Black Nationalists and Pan-African political activists, two groups of activists who already have heightened group consciousness. Yet, pragmatism guides the behavior of Black Nationalists in both groups. As stated, both PACs have received money from the state central committee of the Democratic Party. In addition, in 1997, Rev. Anthony reversed his previous opposition to the city of Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer and announced that the Fannie Lou Hamer PAC would support him in his re-election bid. Finally, Al Gore, a centralist democrat, benefited from the volunteers who worked for the FLH-PAC or the NAACP given the support of Gore by Wendell Anthony.

The political actions of these two church-based political action committees may not be in vain. U.S. Representative Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick has sought to represent the poor in the halls of Congress. In the 105th Congress, she sponsored and co-sponsored legislation to improve the economic and social conditions of blacks residing in central cities and other urban communities. Representative Kilpatrick was also the primary sponsor of legislation that provided opportunities for low to moderate-income people to own homes. This legislation was critical for the 15th Congressional District since only 40 percent of the residents in the district are homeowners. Additionally, over 35 percent of the families in the district are classified as being in poverty. It should be noted, too, that Representative Kilpatrick is highly ranked among watchers of congress. In January 2000, *Roll Call* newspaper named Congresswoman Carolyn Kilpatrick to its list of future Capital Hill Leaders.³⁸ Voters also see Kilpatrick as a viable candidate; in the 1996, 1998, and 2000 general elections, she received over 86 percent of the vote and was the only congressional candidate to receive PAC contributions in her district.

Challenges Confronting the Black Slate and FLH-PAC

A major challenge confronting church-based PACs is their reliance on a small volunteer staff in an era when people are less likely to engage in volunteer work. The fact that some of the leaders may be called to be active in church and political works could be taxing. Both PACs may wish to engage in fundraising activities in non-election years to raise money to hire fulltime staff persons whose primary responsibilities would be to raise money, keep a close watch on changes in reporting procedures by the state and federal election commissions, and to write position papers on policy issues. Such papers could be the basis of questions asked during political forums, which have been used in the past to quiz candidates seeking endorsements from the PACs. Having a permanent staff would institutionalize the PACS and potentially shield them from criticism that these organizations have no true vision outside that of their leadership. Moreover, a permanent organization that operates during non-election years could also engage in political education activities to increase

interest in politics among the uninformed and the poor. Certainly, media ads are a start, but the sponsoring of recreational sporting events, dance parties, poetry slams, gospel choir events, essentially, social events where blacks gather is a way to raise the consciousness of people whom the PACs seek to influence. Having a call-in radio talk show is also an effective means to reach people, as is the *Black Slate Digest* publication.

The FLH-PAC, should capitalize on its early history, the endorsement of two women candidates, McPhail for mayor and Kilpatrick for Congress, which demonstrates a commitment to having black women as elected public officials. The FLH-PAC thus could use the extensive church network that comes from those involved in the NAACP to recruit more women volunteers. These women volunteers could provide the PAC with people who would be in contact with individuals who are in both formal and informal support networks at the grassroots level. Another challenge is increasing the involvement of the poor in the electoral process. Doing so will be a difficult challenge. Again, only about 35 percent of blacks are exposed to political messages at their place of worship. Convincing other black pastors and citizens that having faith means working in the political vineyard must be done if indeed both PACs would truly involve those who are sick and tired of being sick and tired. This point is critical because while the NAACP voter registration drive was relatively successful; the Black Slate committee was not formally involved in the process, nor were former NAACP activists Rev. Jim Holley or Nicholas Hood III. In the future, a much more coordinated, citywide political education project could significantly increase voter interest and mobilization.

The final challenge confronting both PACs is avoiding the risk of being perceived as being a client of centralist in the Democratic Party. Although the Democratic Party is strongly supported by black voters (over 95 percent of Detroit voters cast ballots for Democrats in the 2000 election), this party works hard to distance itself from radical blacks, largely so that potential white voters do not leave the party or split their tickets. National party leaders, such as former President Clinton, openly criticized Louis Farrakhan, the organizer of the Million Man March in 1993, which was attended by people such as Dennis Archer, the Mayor of Detroit. In addition, even, when Wendell Anthony went to Florida and Washington following the 2000 national election returns to protest against what he perceived as unfair treatment of black voters, Al Gore, who received the majority of black votes in Florida, was not supportive of such protest efforts. Thus, in the end, grassroots PACs with a Black Nationalist ideology have to find a way to balance the reality of electoral politics—mainly winning elections—with its commitment to be the voice for the poor and powerless. Doing this requires, yes, taking money from the Democratic Party, but it also means fighting to ensure that history does not repeat itself. Henry Ford controlled black pastors in the 1920s and into the 1930s; FLH-PAC and the Black Slate committee must stay on their guard to ensure that they are not captured by a more powerful ally—the Democratic Party. This might be done by organizations such as the Black Slate and the Fannie Lou Hamer PAC working closely together during election campaigns and even during non-election seasons. The sharing of information, ideas, and even volunteers could help these groups along with the NAACP and the Council of Black Baptist Pastors to form an informal network that could provide the basis for mobilizing the poor. In addition, these grassroots organizations may wish to work closer with union organizations; this too would give them access to resources that could be used in their struggle to represent the poor.

Upon reviewing the standard definition of political action committees, it is concluded that urban-based political action committees provide social capital

as opposed to monetary capital to candidates and campaigns. Additionally, in their focus on specific issues that affect their communities, they would be more appropriately called *Political Acuity Committees*. They bring with them a social history of the communities from which each evolved. As stated, urban-based political action committees *should* form an umbrella community organization from which each can draw upon the experiences of the other. One of the skills that these PACs have developed certainly has to be their ability to evaluate the commitment that candidates have toward the black poor and the black community in general. This information could be published in a newsletter to assist voters in determining how to evaluate political candidates. Moreover, these PACs could formally recruit potential officeholders, offer training on how to run a successful campaign, and work with desired candidates. Again, this information could be published and shared with community activists and leaders. Unless church-based political action committees have more coordinated efforts, they will continue to have an uphill battle in maintaining their political independence and being an effective voice for the powerless.

Endnotes

1. Cara L. Shelly, "Bradby's Baptists: Second Baptist Church of Detroit, 1919-1946," *The Michigan Historical Review*, 17, 1(Spring 1991), 19 and Coleman Young and Lonnie Wheeler, *Hard Stuff: The Autobiography of Coleman Young* (New York: Viking, 1994) 94.
2. See Henry Pratt with Ronald Brown, forthcoming, *Churches and Urban Government: Detroit and New York: 1895-1994*, Chapter 8, Personal interview with Charles Butler, Pastor of Detroit's New Calvary Baptist Church, December 5, 1996, by the late Henry Pratt.
3. Personal interview with Coleman Young, with Sabrina Williams and Ronald E. Brown, June 17, 1998.
4. Sidney Verba, Key Lehman Schlozamn, Henry Brady, and Norman Nie. "Race, Ethnicity and Political Resources: Participation in the United States". *British Journal of Political Science* 23 (1993), 453-497.
5. Robert D Putnam. *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 45, 70-71.
6. This section of the paper is significantly influenced by Ronald E. Brown and Sabrina Williams, "African-American Church-Based Political Discourse and Political Mobilization," paper delivered at the 1997 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association Meeting, Sheraton Washington Hotel, August 28-31, 1997, and Chapter 2 of Sabrina Williams' dissertation, *Church-Based Civic Awareness and Political Participation in the City of Detroit*, Wayne State University, 1999.
7. Coleman Young and Lonnie Wheeler, *Hard Stuff*, 316.
8. Thomas J. Sugrue, *The origins of the urban crisis: race and inequality in postwar Detroit*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 11.
9. *Ibid*, 11.
10. Cara L. Shelly. "Bradby's Baptists 17."
11. *Ibid*, 17.
12. *Ibid*, 17.
13. August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).
14. Charles Denby, *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1978) 100-101; Carla L. Shelly, *Bradby's Baptists*, 18.

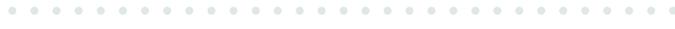
15. Elaine L. Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community, 1918-1968*. (Detroit, MI. Detroit Urban League, and Wayne State University Press, 1994).
16. *Ibid*, 97.
17. Wilbur Rich, *Coleman Young and Detroit politics: from social activist to power broker*. (Detroit, MI.: Wayne State University Press, 1989).
18. Williams, Sabrina. *Church-Based Civic Awareness and Political Participation in the City of Detroit*, dissertation. See Chapter 2.
19. Rich, *Coleman Young and Detroit*, 78.
20. Rich, *Coleman Young and Detroit*, 79, and Grace L. Boggs, *Living for change: an autobiography*. Grace Lee Boggs; foreword by Ossie Davis. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 118-124.
21. Coleman Young and Lonnie Wheeler, *Hard Stuff*, 199.
22. See Pratt with Brown, Chapter 8, and David Crumm, "Secret sermon helped end Ford site battle", *Detroit Free Press*, October 17, 1991, 12A.
23. See Pratt with Brown, *Churches and Urban Government* (forthcoming), Chapter 8, and Crumm, 12A.
24. See Pratt with Brown, forthcoming, Chapter 8, and Crumm, 12A.
25. See Pratt with Brown, forthcoming, Chapter 8.
26. See Pratt with Brown, forthcoming, Chapter 8.
27. Kevin Fobbs, "Community concerns: Getting out the vote still ranks high in community awareness," *Detroit News*, July 29, 1998, detnews.com/1998/9807.
28. See Ronald E. Brown and Sabrina Williams, "African-American Church-Based Political Discourse and Political Mobilization."
29. Wilbur Rich, *Coleman Young and Detroit politics*, 81.
30. Thomas J. Sugrue, *The origins of the urban crisis: race and inequality in postwar Detroit*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 171.
31. *Ibid*, 175.
32. Grace L. Boggs, *Living for change*, 117.
33. Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, "The Pentecost Experience (Part III): The Struggle for Enlightenment the Healing Ministry of the Church," in *Review, Tribute and Conclave '95 Edition*, 5/1 (August/September 1995). Shrine of the Black Madonna Cultural Center and Book Store, 42.
34. Interview with Rev. Wendell Anthony, August 14, 2000.
35. Bill Johnson, "Why Should Detroit Candidates Pay For PAC Endorsements?" Friday, August 29, 1997, *Detroit News*.
36. Interview with Rev. Jim Holley, August 11, 2000.
37. Interview with Rev. Nicholas Hood III, August 20, 2000.
38. See www.rollcall.com, January 2000.

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Appendices



Racial Attitudes in Fifteen American Cities, 1968.

In the last year or so have, you attended a civil rights meeting at a church or place of worship?

34% reported yes

National Black Election Panel Study, 1984 and 1988.

Have you heard any announcements or talks about the presidential election at your place of worship so far this year?

35% reported yes

1992 Racial Attitude Survey, Center for Urban Studies, Wayne State University.

During the last presidential election, did you hear any announcements or talks about the presidential election at your church or place of worship?

35% reported yes

1992-93 National Black Politics Study.

In the last two years, have discussed political issues or matters at your church or place of worship?

35% reported yes

1998 Black Church Pilot Study, Center for Urban Studies, Wayne State University.

In the last two years, have you spoken in support of a political candidate in your church or place or worship?

20% reported yes

In the last two years, have you attended a meeting at your church or place or worship where Jesse Jackson was the keynote speaker?

23% reported yes

1998 Detroit News Religion Public Opinion Survey.

The sermon or message you hear during religious services is very or somewhat important.

100% reported yes

Table 1

Public Opinion Attitudes toward Religion and Politics in Detroit Metro Area and Nation, 1968-1998

Table 1 Sources:

Racial Attitudes in Fifteen American Cities, 1968. Campbell, Angus, and Howard Schumann, 1968. Second ICPSR version. Conducted by University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, Survey Research Center, Ann Arbor, MI; Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research

National Black Election Panel Study, 1984 and 1988. James Jackson. Conducted by University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, Research Center for Group Dynamics, Ann Arbor, MI; Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research.

1992 Racial Attitude Survey. Lee Sigelman, Timothy Bledsoe, Susan Welch, and Michael W. Combs, Center for Urban Studies, Wayne State University.

1992-93 National Black Politics Study. Michael Dawson, Ronald Brown, and James Jackson, ICPSR version. Chicago, IL. University of Chicago, Detroit MI, Wayne State University, and Ann Arbor, University of Michigan.

Black Church Pilot Study. Ronald Brown, 1998 conducted by the Center for Urban Studies, Wayne State University.

1998 Detroit News Religion Public Opinion Survey.

	Total Receipts	Total Expenditures	Debts & Obligations	Ending Balance
1994*	0.00	0.00	0.00	21,726.05
1995	0.00	0.00	0.00	17,927.67
1996	19,300.00	1,531.09	0.00	12,417.78
1997	0.00	2,907.39	---	7,201.00
1998	18,450.00	33,274.57	0.00	8,523.31
1999	15,772.00	15,336.52	0.00	941.52
2000	9,800.00	5,776.09	0.00	4,544.41

Table 2

Black Slate, Inc. Political Action Committee

Information is taken from the www.sos.state.mi.us/ Michigan Department of State, Elections Bureau, October Tri-annual CS statements. *No statement is reported for October 1994. The year-end figure is from the July Tri-annual 1994 statement. The October numbers are used because it reflects activity for an entire fiscal year.

	Total Receipts	Total Expenditures	Debts & Obligations	Ending Balance
1994	31,680.00	23,711.25	0.00	13,128.92
1995	3,942.32	4,136.23	0.00	5,972.85
1996	49,752.00	40,304.00	0.00	19,286.00
1997	34,403.00	36,404.39	5,000.00	5,200.22
1998	26,224.30	26,874.23	5,000.00	1,563.21
1999	0.00	27.15	5,000.00	576.45
2000	39,915.00	13,489.01	2,500.00	32,361.32

Table 3

Fannie Lou Hamer Political Action Committee

Information is taken from the www.sos.state.mi.us/ Michigan Department of State, Elections Bureau, October Tri-annual CS statements.

