The Paradox of Ambition

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Abstract

The last three election cycles suggest that we may be experiencing a surge in black political ambition. Barack Obama’s historic election is sandwiched between the failed efforts of people like Denise Majette, Harold Ford Jr., Artur Davis, and Kendrick Meek. Combined with the Cory Booker’s senatorial run, scholars have argued that there is a need for a reevaluation of black political ambition (Smith 2009) and a new classification for black politics itself (Gillespie 2009). If we are experiencing a genuine emergence of a new ambitious breed of black politicians, then the paradox of ambition – that black electoral success is detrimental to black agenda setting – would suggest that we may also be experiencing a major abandonment of black politics. This paper begins to investigate this possibility in terms of individual bill sponsorship for black members of Congress from 1947 to 2010.
In the first 132 years (1870-2002) of black Americans serving in Congress only three sitting black members of Congress (MCs) voluntarily left their seats to pursue higher office: Yvonne Burke, Harold Washington, and Alan Wheat. Five black MCs have left Congress to pursue higher office over the past nine years: Denise Majette, Harold Ford Jr., Barack Obama, Kendrick Meek, and Artur Davis. Although only one of these five candidates was successful, Obama’s election as president is safely described as “kind of a big deal.” Smith (2009) argues that this apparent surge of black candidates for statewide office suggests a new structure of ambition, and political scientists and pundits alike have asked what these newly ambitious black politicians might portend for black politics (Bai 2008; Ifill 2009; Gillespie 2010). In this chapter I investigate the potential consequences of having more ambitious black representatives in Congress.

Beginning with the first big-city black mayors in Gary and Cleveland, each major advance in black electoral success has been accompanied by both declarations of rebirth and eulogies for the death of black politics (Nelson and Meranto 1977; Preston 1987; Smith 1990; Gillespie 2009). These constant reincarnations of black politics focus primarily on questions of electoral strategy, and they try to infer policy consequences from those electoral strategies. The basic idea is that achieving higher levels of electoral success necessarily requires a greater ability to attract white voters. McCormick and Jones (1993) argue that campaigns that are most effective at attracting white electoral support will tend to involve some level of “deracialization” – black candidates will deemphasize policy issues that directly appeal to either race or the (potentially controversial) concerns of black voters. Given the prominence of this concept in the black politics literature, there has been surprisingly little work that seeks to make connections between deracialized campaigns and deracialized governance. I begin to fill in that gap by asking, “are ambitious black MCs less active in black agenda setting?”

The “death of black politics” interpretation of black electoral success can be thought of as a paradox of ambition: black electoral success is detrimental to black agenda setting. I conclude that both the death and rebirth of black politics might be overstated. Using data on the biographical features of black MCs throughout the history of Congress I show that there are relatively few changes observed over time. However, there is evidence to suggest that black MCs with Ivy League
pedigrees are a relatively recent development; black Ivy Leaguers are more likely to be ambitious; Ivy Leaguers and ambitious black MCs are less active in sponsoring legislation that commemorates or celebrates black achievements; but the Ivy Leaguers have a strong commitment to fighting against explicit racial discrimination. These findings support two overarching points: debates on the death or rebirth of black politics cannot be premised upon real changes in black representation; to the small extent that black representation has changed, the consequences of those changes are ambiguous.

The rest of the chapter proceeds in five sections. Section 1 elaborates on what a paradox of ambition is conceptually and offers hypotheses to guide the empirical investigation. Section 2 briefly describes how the data on biographies, ambition, and bill sponsorship were collected. Section 3 explores whether the nature of black representatives has changed and how these changes relate to ambition. Section ?? presents the results on the relationships between biography, ambition, and black agenda setting. Section 5 concludes with a discussion of how this preliminary research fits into a broader understanding of the role of black MCs in black agenda setting.

1 A Paradox of Ambition

As stated above, black MCs must attract white votes to secure any higher level of office. Ambitious black MCs want to establish cross-over appeal by showing that their policy interests and expertise extend beyond the parochial issues of their black constituents. We should observe ambitious black MCs developing legislative portfolios with both offense and defense in mind. Offensively, these MCs should sponsor bills that create a reputation for addressing some set of problems that are important for the intended non-black voting audience. Defensively, black politicians want to avoid a legislative record that potential challengers could racialize and/or portray as narrowly geared toward “black special interests.” The consequence of these offensive and defensive considerations is that ambitious black MCs should be less active in furthering a black issue agenda.

There are three key claims embedded in the paradox of ambition. First, there is a connection between presentation of self and legislative behavior. Second, ambitious MCs should behave differently than their non-ambitious colleagues. Third, white voters are more likely to support a
black candidate that is racially neutral. There is support for all three claims in the literature. Fenno (1978) argues that we cannot understand what happens in Congress unless we consider how members present themselves to constituents back in the district. Mayhew (1974) simplifies the argument even further by placing reelection at the center of congressional motivations. Both of these works touch on the same central idea: the necessity of reelection forces MCs to consider how their legislative behavior will be interpreted by voters. As a result, MCs strategically shape that interpretation. Sulkin (2005) makes this connection between elections and behavior explicit through her research on issue uptake – incumbent MCs introduce bills on the policy topics of their electoral challengers. Recent studies have shown that MCs use visual images in their advertisements to signal their legislative commitments (Sulkin and Swigger 2008); MCs campaign on the issue priorities they establish through bill sponsorship (Sulkin 2009); and MCs alter the policy priorities of their bill sponsorship when new constituent concerns are introduced by redistricting (Hayes, Hibbing and Sulkin 2010). Sulkin’s research provides strong, consistent evidence that members’ choices of how to construct legislative portfolios are heavily influenced by how they want to present themselves to voters. The argument about a paradox of ambition applies that insight to a multiracial audience.

Herrick and Moore (1993) are interested in how political ambition shapes legislative behavior. They argue that MCs who are progressively ambitious – those who are seeking some higher office – seek to create broader reputations to appeal to the larger electorates they will have to face. Using data on bill introductions and floor activity, Herrick and Moore (1993) find that ambitious MCs are indeed more active. They sponsor more legislation and give more speeches than their unambitious counterparts. Black MCs not only have to appeal to a larger audience, but they also have to account for the broader range of concerns that a racially diverse electorate might have. The last claim is whether these broader appeals have any effect. Griffin and Flavin (2007) show that white constituents are more likely to hold black representatives accountable for being ideologically out of step, so there is certainly a problem to overcome. However, Hajnal (2007) uses data on black mayors to demonstrate that white attitudes towards black leadership do change in response to the reality of governance. Basically, establishing a strong reputation as a race neutral candidate can help black MCs to overcome white voters’ negative stereotypes about black leadership. The
paradox of ambition offers a hypothesis that is firmly rooted in the literature: Ambitious black MCs will sponsor fewer black interest bills than non-ambitious black MCs. The next three sections are devoted to providing a test of this hypothesis.

2 Data

In her examination of recent events in black politics Ifill (2009) makes the point that has seemed to become the conventional wisdom: black politicians today are just different from their predecessors. Despite the warning in Gillespie (2009) that there is diversity among the group that she calls the “third wave” of black politics, the popular imagination has envisioned a cadre of Barack Obamas and Cory Bookers who are presenting a radically distinct approach to black political leadership. This perceived difference is at the core of this study of the paradox of ambition. If we are experiencing the genuine emergence of a new ambitious breed of black politicians, then the paradox of ambition would suggest that we may also be experiencing a major abandonment of black agenda setting. This section addresses those concerns by focusing on two related questions: 1) Are there changes in black MCs’ educational, political, and professional backgrounds that are associated with a rise in ambition; and 2) how do these backgrounds and ambitions shape black agenda setting through bill sponsorship? Finding answers to this second question should provide a clear test for our hypothesis.

In order to explore changes in black leadership over time I began with biographical data on MCs collected by McKibbin (1997). This data set provides variables for a range of individual characteristics for all members of Congress from the 1st to the 104th Congress. Using the Congressional Biographical Directory and the biographical sketches from the Office of the Clerk’s “Black Americans in Congress” website, I was able to expand the biographical data up to the 111th Congress. These data provide measures of educational, professional, and political backgrounds for the analysis that follows. I also used these data to construct my measure of ambition. Following the logic of Herrick and Moore (1993), MCs were coded as ambitious if they ever seriously considered a run for higher office. In the case of black MCs, higher office includes running for mayor of a big city, such as Chicago. “Seriously considered” is based on press reports that a black MC has formed some sort of exploratory committee for a given position. Lastly, the coding is retroactive, so if a
member considers higher office once, then they are coded as ambitious for every year prior to and every year after the actual expression of ambition.

Finally, I needed a measure of black agenda setting. Since I am interested in measuring individual contributions to a black agenda, I use bill sponsorship as the measure of agenda setting. The Congressional Bills Project provides sponsorship data for all MCs from 1947 to 2010. I coded all of these bills for whether or not they addressed black issues. Based on the concept of “pragmatic black solidarity” developed by Shelby (2005), I define black issues as policies that attempt to fight racism and/or promote racial justice in the United States. In a less abstract sense, black issues must satisfy at least one of the following conditions:

1. **Anti-Racist**: Policies that erect legal protections against racial discrimination and remedies for the negative effects of past discrimination. Hate crime legislation, civil rights bills, the voting rights acts, minority set asides, and affirmative action are all examples of this criterion.

2. **Cultural**: Cultural policies are those landmarks, commemorations, holidays, and monuments that celebrate black achievements and history while simultaneously undermining negative racial stereotypes of inferiority.

3. **Social Welfare**: Social welfare is limited to policies which explicitly address some crucial racial disparity. “Crucial” disparities are of two kinds: disparities that are caused by structural inequality/institional racism – think of wealth gaps or persistent urban poverty; and disparities that perpetuate the stereotypes that reinforce racial inequality – mass incarceration would be the clearest example.

Throughout the paper, whenever I speak of black issues I am referring to a policy idea that meets at least one of the criteria outlined above.\(^1\) In what follows I show many descriptive statistics, and the specific methods used to generate a table/figure are discussed within the context of that particular point.

### 3 Biography and Ambition

Educational backgrounds are the first area to explore for changes in black politicians’ paths to Congress. Figure 1 plots the total number of black MCs for each Congress and the number of those MCs who have received at least an undergraduate degree. There is almost a complete overlap with:

\(^1\)A longer discussion of these criteria and the coding can be found in Platt (2008).
Figure 1: The Ubiquity of College Degrees: This plot compares the total number of black MCs in Congress to the number of black MCs with at least an undergraduate degree.
between the two lines because a college education has been a basic attribute for black MCs since Oscar De Priest. The more plausible claim is not that black MCs have changed over time in terms of obtaining college degrees but that those degrees now come from more elite institutions than in the past. Figure 2 addresses this claim by plotting the proportion of black MCs who received their degrees from historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) versus those whose degrees came from an Ivy League institution.  

Figure 2: HBCUs vs. the Ivy League: This plot shows the proportion of black MCs with college degrees who attended HBCUs compared to the proportion who attended an Ivy League institution.

Prior to the 91st Congress there are too few black MCs for proportions to provide much substantive meaning. It is also not surprising that black MCs prior to the 91st Congress would overwhelmingly be alumni of HBCUs; the plot simply illustrates the

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2The denominator for these plots is the number of black MCs with a college degree, not the total number of black MCs.

3Harold Ford Sr. was the first black MC (in the 94th Congress) who could have even attended college after the 1954 Brown desegregation decision, and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. was the first post-reconstruction black MC who was not born in the south.
limited options of the Jim Crow south. The rise of southern black MCs in the 103rd Congress has helped to sustain the proportion of HBCU graduates between 0.4 and 0.5. Black Ivy Leaguers are rare and recent phenomena. Only seven black people with undergraduate degrees from an Ivy League school have ever served in Congress.\(^4\) On one hand, observers are correct in pointing out more black MCs with such an elite pedigree. Whether these seven MCs constitute the beginning of a trend or behave differently than other black MCs is a question to address later.

Figure 3: The Relative Stability of Black MCs with Advanced Degrees: The plot on the left shows the proportion of black MCs with college degrees who went on to receive an advanced degree. The plot on the left shows the proportion of black MCs with an advanced degree who have a JD.

(a) Advanced Degrees

(b) Law Degree

![Graphs showing the proportion of black MCs with advanced degrees and law degrees](image)

Based on the plots in Figure 3, it is not obvious that there has been a change in black MCs’ educational attainment over time. Since William Dawson, college-educated black MCs have usually gone on to earn an advanced degree. We see in Figure 3(b) that there is greater diversity in the types of advanced degrees earned since the 91st Congress. There is some evidence to suggest that the 103rd Congress began a slight resurgence in the proportion of lawyers, but these gains are fairly modest. Based on the descriptive statistics, there is little to suggest a broad transformation in black

MCs’ paths to political leadership. The handful of Ivy Leaguers presents the only exception.\footnote{An objection could be made that it is more appropriate to view this data by cohort rather than Congress. It is not clear that plots by cohort tell any alternative stories to those presented above. Given that black MCs tend to enter Congress as either single individuals or in large clumps during three periods, plots by cohort are not very informative.}

Now that we have explored changes in the educational backgrounds of black MCs, our attention turns toward their professional pursuits prior to joining Congress. Figure 4 uses a stacked plot to demonstrate the relative proportions of black MCs who worked in business, education/professions, and law respectively. The green shaded region underlines the point from Figure 3(b): a plurality of black MCs were lawyers prior to entering public life. This is hardly surprising, since most elected officials have some background in law. Perhaps what is most interesting about Figure 4 is the relatively large proportion of professional backgrounds that fall outside of business, education,
general professions, and law. A brief perusal of the data suggests that there is a relatively large segment of black MCs who have always been involved in public life. For some this meant a career in civil service, but for others (for example Harold Ford Jr. and William Clay Jr.) this means that they are professional politicians. As we observed for educational backgrounds, there is not much in Figure 4 to suggest the emergence of new paths for black politicians to take toward Congress.

Figure 5: Elective and Legislative Experience: This plot shows the proportion of black MCs who held a prior elective office (red circles and solid line) and served in a state legislature (blue cross and dashed line).

Legislative experience is the last area to examine for changes in the backgrounds of black MCs over time. Unlike education or occupation, there does appear to be an upward trend in the proportion of black MCs with experience in state legislatures. After a trough between the 90th and 93rd Congresses, Figure 5 shows dramatic growth in the pool of legislative experience possessed by black MCs. There is a particularly strong surge with the creation of southern majority-minority districts that led to the large cohort of black MCs in the 103rd Congress. This sort of trend fits in
well with the supply-side explanation of black representation in Canon (1999). In terms of holding prior office, we see a similar surge in the 103rd, but office-holding was already fairly common among black MCs. We can draw some tentative conclusions from this descriptive exploration of biographical data. First, there have not been large-scale changes in black MCs’ educational profiles in terms of earning either bachelor or advanced degrees. Second, the distribution of occupations among black MCs is also relatively stable over time. They tend to be lawyers, educators, and professionals. Third, black MCs who were undergraduates at Ivy League schools is a category that did not exist prior to the 102nd Congress. Fourth, black MCs now enter the chamber with more legislative experience at the state level. These last two developments will be further explored to see how they could shape legislative behavior.

Figure 6: Black Progressive Ambition, 89th-111th Congress: The plot shows the proportion of black MCs who demonstrated progressive ambition at any point during or after their tenure in Congress. Prior to the 89th Congress there were not cases of demonstrated progressive ambition by black MCs.
I am interested in how changes in the biographies of black MCs are reflected in levels of ambition and types of bill sponsorship. Figure 6 shows the proportion of black MCs in each Congress who demonstrated progressive ambition. The twin peaks in the 108th and 109th Congresses suggest that notions of a more ambitious class of black politicians are not wholly fictional. However, the peaks in the 93rd and 103rd Congress reiterate that these recent changes are not entirely unprecedented. Indeed, the pattern from Figure 6 suggests a connection between ambitious politicians and general surges in the number of black MCs. Between the 90th and 93rd Congresses the black delegation grew from seven to sixteen members. This growth reflected the new electoral opportunities available in the wake of the gains of the civil rights movement. Similarly, creating majority-minority districts in the south prior to the 103rd Congress allowed ambitious black state legislators to move into Congress, and some of these politicians attempted to use their congressional seats as stepping stones to still higher offices. The high levels of black ambition in the 108th and 109th Congresses can perhaps be explained by the trend noticed in Figure 2 – the introduction of Ivy League-educated black politicians.

In her typology of black politicians, Gillespie (2009) argues that a group of “Ivy League Upstarts” are characterized by broad crossover appeal and relatively weak ties to a traditional black political establishment. Due in part to their elite educations, these black politicians are viewed as having longer career trajectories than becoming entrenched incumbents within the House of Representatives. Using a logistic regression, I explore the relationship between an Ivy League education and progressive ambition. The dependent variable is dichotomous for whether or not an MC displayed progressive ambition, and key explanatory variables were an Ivy League education and whether an MC had served in a state legislature. There were additional controls for party, attending an HBCU, serving in the Senate, and being a lawyer. Rather than showing the full table of coefficients, the key results are presented in Figure 7. The figure is a bar plot of the predicted probabilities for a baseline black MC, a black MC who graduated from an Ivy League school for undergrad, and a black MC with prior experience in a state legislature. Figure 7 lends support to the argument in Gillespie (2009). Black politicians with an Ivy League education are far more

6The baseline is a non ivy educated, non-state legislator, non-lawyer, Democrat in the House who did not attend an HBCU.
Figure 7: Ivy League Education, Legislative Experience, and Ambition: The bar plot compares the predicted probabilities for whether a black MC will be ambitious. Moving from left to right the bars represent the baseline, an MC who went to an Ivy League undergrad, and an MC with state legislative experience. The difference between Ivy League and the baseline is statistically significant.
likely to demonstrate progressive ambition than those without such elite credentials. Looking at the underlying data, only two of the seven black Ivy Leaguers in Congress have not shown any progressive ambition to this point: Sheila Jackson-Lee and Robert Scott. Whether individuals’ latent ambition leads them to pursue elite credentials or elite credentials create more opportunities to explore one’s ambitions is beyond the scope of this paper. The point is simply that black MCs with Ivy League educations are a relatively new development, and that development has real consequences for the behavior of these politicians.

4 The Costs of Ambition

Now that we have seen some evidence of a relationship between education and ambition, the last task is to explore how these biographical features shape agenda setting behavior. In particular, I am interested in whether a black MC’s background and ambition are related to the number of black issue bills he/she sponsors. Figure 8 shows that the answer to that question is mixed. The bar plots are the first differences from a regression of the annual number of black issue bills introduced by a member on the key biographical features. We do not see strong support for the hypothesized paradox of ambition. Instead, there is no difference between ambitious black MCs and their counterparts in terms of introducing black issue bills overall (Figure 8(a)), anti-racist black bills (Figure 8(b)), or social welfare black bills (Figure 8(d)). However, to the extent that ambition matters for black agenda setting, Figure 8(c) shows that the impact is negative. Ambitious black MCs introduce fewer bills that celebrate and commemorate black achievements. Many of these cultural black issues are geared toward localized constituencies (naming post offices for example). A rational, ambitious black politician should not waste resources cultivating a constituency he already represents; instead the focus should be on what will appeal to the larger constituency that he is seeking in the future. This result for cultural bills fits that logic. The results illustrated by Figure 8 constitute weak support for a paradox of ambition. Ambitious black MCs are not detrimental to black agenda setting in all cases, but when ambition matters it is a detriment.

7There are also controls for ideology, majority status, party, freshman status, total number of bills introduced, the south, and the senate. These were multi-level regressions that allowed the intercept and the coefficient for ambition to vary by year. Tables of these results are in the appendix.
Figure 8: Mixed Evidence for a Paradox of Ambition: The bar plot shows the first differences calculated from a regression of black issue sponsorship on biographical attributes. Bars that are filled in with blue represent statistically significant differences while clear bars are insignificant.

(a) All Black Bills

(b) Anti-Racist Black Bills

(c) Cultural Black Bills

(d) Social Welfare Black Bills
Figure 8 also displays an interesting divergence based on MCs’ undergraduate educations. The emergence of black MCs with Ivy League educations was one of the only changes in the backgrounds of black representatives since Oscar DePriest, and this emergence is related to the latest wave of ambition. The effects of elite educational credentials on black agenda setting are less dramatic. Ivy League MCs introduce more anti-racist bills, fewer cultural bills, and are indistinguishable for the introductions of social welfare bills and the total number of black issue bills. Conversely, an HBCU education told us more about historical constraints and region than it revealed about larger changes in black representation. Black MCs who graduated from HBCUs introduce fewer social welfare bills, which makes them less active agenda setters overall as well. Otherwise, they are no different than other black representatives. Lastly, the results seem to endorse having more black representatives with prior legislative experience. Experienced black legislators introduce more black bills overall and they have a particular focus on black social welfare issues. Perhaps MCs who come from state legislatures already have an issue identity based on responsiveness to (presumably) black constituencies on the state level; they may have the legislative skills that allow them to be more active in certain areas; and they can possess a higher level of policy expertise than those without prior legislative service. All of these potential advantages could add up to greater sponsorship of black issue bills. There were only two major changes in the nature of black representatives in the modern Congress: elite college educations and state legislative experience. Figure 8 demonstrates that these developments do not fit cleanly in the death or rebirth categories of black politics.

5 Conclusion

In response to the 1989 elections of black candidates in majority white districts, Smith (1990) argued that these newly ambitious black candidates marked the death of black politics. His point was that these candidates lacked any meaningful connection to a strong black issue agenda. Proclamations of the death of black politics are premature. Yes, there are tradeoffs between advocating a black agenda and pursuing higher elected office. Ambitious black MCs are not as active in promoting the cultural aspects of the black agenda. However, there is not much evidence that an entirely new type of ambitious black politician is emerging. There is truth to the “Ivy League Upstart” category
defined by Gillespie (2009), but it is not clear that a huge wave of these politicians are poised to sweep through the Congressional Black Caucus. These results suggest restraint from the exultation of birth announcements and the grief of obituaries. At the very least, we should wait to see who eventually replaces some of the aging members of the CBC (Charles Rangel, John Conyers, Maxine Waters, Jim Clyburn, John Lewis, Danny Davis, and Frederica Wilson are all over seventy) and if Terri Sewell’s educations at Princeton and Harvard align her more with Sheila Jackson-Lee or Denise Majette.

While we are waiting to see how those scenarios play out, there are avenues for further research. Given that the nature of black representatives has not changed a great deal over time, what explains the attention to these supposedly new style black politicians? Future studies should examine other aspects of black MCs’ presentations-of-self and how those aspects are related to media coverage. Gillespie (2012) discusses this idea as part of her elite-displacement theory – black challengers try to create dissimilarities between themselves and the old guard despite their shared elite status. We can expand that idea by employing text analysis of floor speeches and other public displays to get a fuller view of how black MCs seek to shape their images. One of the reasons we see this constant reincarnation of black politics is because of a focus on electoral outcomes. As Walters (1992) argues, the ability of black politicians to accrue larger percentages of the white vote is not black politics. We should stop thinking about phases of black politics in these terms. Instead, part of the larger project is to define stages of black politics in terms of policy and agenda setting. Rather than looking at electoral outcomes, the focus will be on the issues that dominated the black agenda. We will enter a new phase of black politics as the types of issues on the agenda change. Lastly, there is more to explore with the paradox of ambition. Ambition also poses a danger to black agenda setting because of the institutional power that is lost when black MCs abandon their seniority to pursue higher office (Gerber 1996). In future work I will include committee power as part of the analysis of the costs of black ambition.

These are all part of a larger investigation of the role that black representation has played in black agenda setting over time. The paradox of ambition is about how members behave when faced with potential electoral constraints. The broader aim is to explain how congress institutionally
constrains black representation as an agenda setting strategy. Black representatives are a small minority in Congress, so they will always have to operate within the limitations of their collective power. Understanding that operation for black agenda setting can teach us about how other racial/ethnic minorities succeed or fail in democratic legislatures and how issue-based constituencies work more generally. For black politics, the paradox of ambition raises the fundamental question of whether political incorporation was the just reward of hard fought struggle or a mess of pottage.
Appendices

A Regression Tables

Table A-1: Relationship between Biography and Ambition

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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
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B General Guidelines for Coding Black Issues

- The underlying principle is to define what a black agenda would look like in the absence of some corporate entity that can clearly speak for all black people or a consensus that emerges out of some form of black unity. Given that premise, Shelby (2005, 151) argues, “Black politics is instead about identifying, correcting, and ultimately eliminating race-based injustices.”

- In practice this means:

  1. Obviously, any policy that actively fights against racial discrimination – at home or abroad – is included on the black agenda.

  2. Explicit racial set-asides, funding, affirmative action, etc. are included because they share the premise that black people experience a variety of disadvantages that are not entirely of their own making, so the government should play some role in eliminating these racial inequalities.

  3. Commemorations are included because they emphasize the positive contributions of black Americans to the nation’s development and they counter racist ideals of black inferiority.

  4. Racial disparities that are caused by structural inequality/institutional racism would be considered part of the black agenda.
Table A-2: The Consequences of Ambition

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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Black Bills</th>
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<th>Social Welfare Bills</th>
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<td>(0.149)</td>
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<td>(0.235)</td>
<td>(0.501)</td>
<td>(0.496)</td>
<td>(0.312)</td>
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<td>Percent Black</td>
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<td>0.862</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td>0.078</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.164)</td>
<td>(0.360)</td>
<td>(0.455)</td>
<td>(0.211)</td>
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<td>Number of Bills</td>
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<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.053</td>
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5. Racial disparities that perpetuate the stereotypes that reinforce racial inequality would be considered part of the black agenda.

6. There must be strong arguments that conservative policies do not contribute to institutional racism in order for them to be included on the black agenda.

- In general, targeted jobs credits for hiring the “economically disadvantaged” are included under the social welfare criterion. These policies are aimed at increasing employment among the poor. Although the programs are universal and not specific to black people; black American’s disproportionate representation among the poor means that they could particularly benefit from such programs. Given that black poverty and unemployment are important elements of stigmas of black Americans as lazy and irresponsible, these targeted job credits meet the standards for black issues.

- In general, enterprise zones are included under the social welfare criterion. The idea is that these policies seek to provide economic development to distressed areas – in which black people are disproportionately represented. Ghetto and rural black poverty stigmatize black people as lawless, lazy, irresponsible, immoral, etc., so the alleviation of such conditions fits within the definition of a black issue.

- In general, job training programs that are aimed at specific groups other than minorities or the poor are not included as black issues. Given that there are already targets in mind for these policies, it is hard to argue that black people as a whole have an interest in ensuring that this particular subset of the black population receives benefits. By the same token, policies targeted primarily to areas impacted by base closings or globalization are not included as black issues.

- In general, creating specialized positions to handle “minority affairs” are included under the anti-racist criterion. These posts are created to remedy past and/or prevent future instances of racialized disparities in the provision of services/benefits. Basically, they are institutional safeguards against racial injustice.

- In general, bills that oppose affirmative action and set aside programs are in direct conflict with the anti-racist criterion. Admittedly, this is somewhat of an ideological judgement. Conservatives argue that opposing affirmative action is in the interest of racial equality. However, given the consistently high levels of support for affirmative action by black public opinion, I side with the view that opposition to affirmative action should not be included as a black issue.

- In general, punitive policies against the apartheid regime in South Africa are included under the anti-racist criterion. These policies fall under the category of fighting against racial injustice both at home and abroad.

- In general, jobs programs that are not targeted to a particular non-black group (ie. veterans, homemakers, displaced factory workers) are included as black issues under the social welfare criterion. These policies have the potential to disproportionately benefit black Americans who suffer from higher rates of unemployment. Most importantly, black poverty and unemployment serve to stigmatize black people, so all black Americans have an interest in supporting policies that work to curb poverty and increase employment.
In general, requiring that government agencies/boards be representative of the community, particularly in terms of minorities and the poor, is included as a black issue under the anti-racist criterion. These policies are aimed at allowing black people to have a greater say in the programs that actually affect them within their own communities. As with “minority affairs” positions, the aim is to remedy past and/or prevent future instances of racialized disparities in the provision of services/benefits or the impact from decisions.

In general, efforts to create higher benefit levels for state implementation of social welfare policies that fit within black issues – unemployment compensation, AFDC payments, etc. – are included under the social welfare criterion. Aside from the justification of the original programs on grounds of fighting stigmatizing poverty, the federalization of policy implementation has deep roots in black freedom struggles going all the way back to anti-lynching as a mechanism to counteract the racist/discriminatory practices of given states.

In general, policies geared explicitly to solving problems of unemployment fit under the social welfare criterion. The same justification for jobs programs applies to programs that extend/increase unemployment compensation programs/benefits.

In general, universal cash transfers such as the earned income tax credit, guaranteed income, and/or negative income tax are included as black issues under the social welfare criterion. Such programs follow the same logic as full employment policies in that they alleviate poverty without attaching a stigma of undeserving poor or otherwise reinforcing negative stereotypes of black inferiority.

In general, efforts to curb health disparities are only included if these disparities are linked to unequal/discriminatory treatment. Although a variety of health outcomes are the result of issues that would be included under the criteria, most health disparities are not stigmatizing in and of themselves. As such, medicaid, universal health care, etc. are not included as black issues.

In general, immigration reforms are only included if they are linked to unequal/discriminatory treatment against some black group – Africans, Haitians, etc. Otherwise, it is unclear that black Americans should have any collective interest in the distribution of quotas for immigration policy. Unless there is an argument that such quotas are racially discriminatory, then these reforms cannot be viewed as fighting racial injustice.

In general, education policies that target the poor/disadvantaged and/or minorities are included under the social welfare criterion. These policies are included because they attempt to address a variety of educational disparities that stigmatize black Americans as being intellectually inferior and/or academically lazy.

In general, providing health care for poor people, such as through extensions of medicaid, are not included as black issues unless such aid is explicitly targeted toward some stigmatizing condition. Infant mortality is one example of such a condition. The basic justification is that a lack of access to health care and/or health insurance is not clearly attached to any sort of racial stereotypes.

In general, lowering or seeking exemptions for the minimum wage are not included as black issues. Given that living wage provisions are included under the social welfare criterion as
an important tool in eliminating ghetto poverty, it would be contradictory to also include provisions that lower the minimum wage.

- In general, increasing the minimum wage and establishing a living wage are included under the social welfare criterion under the same logic as a guaranteed income.

- In general, policies relating to organized labor, collective bargaining, etc. are not included as black issues because organized labor has been far from an unambiguous supporter of black people. More importantly, these labor issues do not produce any rationale that would justify the participation of black people who are not interested in unions.

- In general, providing reduced/free child care to poor families is included as a black issue under the social welfare criterion. Free/reduced child care allows families to seek more employment opportunities, dealing with the negative stigmas associated with poverty and unemployment. Additionally, the achievement gaps in education begin prior to kindergarten, so early child development services would help to combat stigmas of black intellectual inferiority.

- In general, tuition assistance and/or scholarships targeted at low-income students are included under the social welfare criterion because such programs can address both the stigmatizing problems of educational achievement/attainment and the poverty associated with not having a college education.

- In general, gun control policies are not included as black issues because stereotypes of black criminality are not necessarily tied to guns per se. Indeed, stricter penalties for gun crimes would seem to be counterproductive for the goal of finding ways to decrease levels of black incarceration.

- In general, “tough on crime” policies are not included as black issues. Even though such policies can often improve the quality of life for poor inner city residents, they also contribute to high rates of black incarceration. The quality of life issue does not necessarily add to negative racial stigmas; however, black incarceration furthers the stigma of black criminality. As a result, I lean towards preventing the larger stigma by excluding these anti-crime policies.

- In general, omnibus crime bills are coded as black issues if they contain any of the acceptable provisions listed under the “Law, Family, Crime” black issue section below.

- In general, fair housing bills are included under the anti-racist criterion because these are efforts to combat racial discrimination.

- In general, cash and “in-kind” transfers from the government to poor people are included as black issues. The basic idea is that such policies contribute to poverty alleviation, and the disproportionate number of black people in poverty is a major contributor to negative racial stereotypes about intelligence, work ethic, morality, and general worth. In practice this means that all sorts of welfare programs ranging from earned-income tax credits to food stamps to energy vouchers are included as black issues.

- In general, changes to welfare policy that create distinctions between deserving and undeserving poor – tying benefits to marriage, paternity, work requirements – are not included as black issues because establishing such requirements automatically stigmatizes those who do
not qualify. In practice this means that the change from AFDC to TANF would not qualify as a black issue.

- In general, improving social services for poor mothers and poor children are included under the social welfare criterion. Given the concern with poverty in general and educational achievement in particular, the well-being of children is critical to combating the negative stigmas associated with the intersection of class, race, and education.
References


