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The Black Atlantic: Race and Local Politics

The Black Atlantic

The fifteenth-century explorations of Portuguese ships carrying their mysterious cargo from Africa to Europe set in motion a chain of events that would envelop the Atlantic world and forever change the course of African history. For four hundred years, the Atlantic slave trade forcibly removed Africans from their homelands and repositioned them as enslaved noncitizens in Europe, the Caribbean, Latin America, and North America. These were the pivotal building blocks of the Black Atlantic.

We must be careful not to confuse the concept “Black Atlantic” with the term *African Diaspora*. The Black Atlantic stands as only one facet of the African Diasporian experience. The concept “African Diaspora,” in its fullness, encompasses the worldwide migration of Black people out of Africa long before the commencement of the Atlantic slave trade. This migration is well documented. Research on the international history of African people confirms that ancient Africans traveled throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Asia as merchants and sailors.¹ When European crusaders traveled to Rome, Florence, Portugal, and Spain, they were accompanied by Ethiopian monks and missionaries devoted to the sacred cause of spreading the gospel of Christianity and Islam around the world.² Arab slavery preceded European slavery by fifteen hundred years. At the end of this experience, Black communities were left behind in Iran, Iraq, India, and the northern Mediterranean coast.³ Africans were world travelers, leaving a rich cultural legacy in North America long before the arrival of Columbus.⁴ When Balboa,

Columbus, and Panfilo de Alvarado landed in North America, they were not alone: great seamen of African descent served as key members of their exploration parties.⁵

The humanistic reach of the African Diaspora has been worldwide. No province on earth has been unaffected by the transcontinental migration of African people. The conceptual boundaries of the Black Atlantic fall within well-defined parameters of the broader concept of the African Diaspora. When we speak of the Black Atlantic, we refer to the complex of new world forces ushered into existence by the Atlantic slave trade. European penetration of Africa produced a tidal wave of human migration. The Atlantic slave trade created both a new world order and new world communities. In the wake of its destructive impulses, the African world, at home and abroad, would never be the same. Blacks in the new Diaspora would be transplanted from rational, well organized, culturally fulfilling, psychologically uplifting environments to strange societies where the mosaic of primary institutions would be largely alien, remote, unpredictable, atomistic, and irrational. Out of the experience of their human oppression, they were compelled to undertake the arduous task of recasting their lives and building new, functional communities—and they had to do so with no guideposts and few economic resources. The Black Atlantic emerged in the fifteenth century as a compelling human phenomenon and continued to develop over five subsequent centuries. Spread out over several continents, Blacks would search for the meaning of life in music, dance, song, extended family ties, and militant political action. Everywhere they traveled, they would leave the indelible marks of Africa. The old world would become the new world transfigured by the perennial storms of cultural interaction. Rising above it all would be an irrepressible hunger for human liberation.

The Racial Hierarchy: Piercing the Conceptual Veil

Contemporary students of the African Diaspora have searched for a plethora of operational concepts to distill the essence of the Black Atlantic. When viewed through the intellectual prism of post-modernist critic Paul Gilroy, the Black Atlantic becomes a metaphor for transnational cultural linkages that bind Blacks together in a cohesive rhythm of spiritual awareness and internal self-expression.⁶ Gilroy rails against the narrow identification of Black culture with nationalism. This approach, according to Gilroy, leads to the

articulation of forms of cultural absolutism that elevate parochial national interests above the universal cultural artifacts produced by the intermixture of ideas and artistic creations flowing out of the totality of the new world experiences of African people. Gilroy suggests that Black culture has been made anew by the emergence of a transnational Black community that draws its energy and substance from disparate sources.⁷ This “vernacular culture” is not American, Caribbean, Latin, or European, but represents the reconfiguration of the culture of all of these places into a unique cultural form. According to Gilroy, this is not a new phenomenon; it is poignantly reflected in the writings of towering intellectuals such as W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Richard Wright and in the political works of Martin Delany, Ida. B. Wells, William Wells Brown, and Marcus Garvey.⁸ Although based in the United States, the Garvey movement, Gilroy contends, should properly be viewed as a transcontinental movement, elevating the struggle for Black freedom to new levels of consciousness and conviction all across the Black Atlantic.⁹ This is the fundamental meaning of Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness: to be aware of one’s existence in a particular nation while embracing transnational values and constructs and imbibing polymorphic cultural spirits that link one’s human commitment to the struggles of Black people everywhere.

Gilroy’s vision of the Black Atlantic is at once revealing and concealing. His work makes an extremely important contribution to our understanding of the limits and distortions of modernist cultural history and criticism. This genre of scholarly work has been exceedingly myopic in its refusal to move the analysis of Black culture beyond the restricted box of neo-Americanism. The value of Gilroy’s intervention is diminished by his unwillingness to give credence to the importance of nationalism as a strategic factor in the actions of Black artists, intellectuals, and political leaders. Existing evidence shows that the transnational actions of these individuals have been guided by a keen awareness of their duties and obligations as citizens of the nation. Transnational connections have often been used by political leaders to serve the goals of primordial national causes. Thus, Frederick Douglass traveled to England not to bolster the cause of international antiracism but to mobilize support for the abolitionist campaign in the United States.¹⁰ Beyond the question by whom are you influenced is the deeper question for whom do you act and speak—what is your primary significant other? Du Bois’s dilemma of double consciousness is real and can serve to weaken as well as strengthen one’s commitment to transnational struggle.

Gilroy also cannot elude the criticism that transcultural identities have tended to be the exclusive possessions of the elite. How much do grassroots Blacks in Newark know, or care to know, about the struggles of Blacks in Bristol? The analysis is long on the illumination of elite to elite connections but short on identifying grassroots organizational connections across the Atlantic world.

Clearly, the illumination of transnational cultural connections cannot tell us much that we need to know about human strivings in the Black Atlantic. The full import of the cultural dimension can only be understood in the context of race and power relations that have served to relegate Black people to subordinate positions in every sector of the Atlantic world. Postmodernist thought does not give sufficient recognition to the fact that the struggle to rescue and transnationalize Black culture is a political struggle with inextricable ties to a deeper struggle for human rights and personal freedom. From the perspective of politics, the Black Atlantic can be seen as the array of forces that bring Black people together to fight for justice, representation, and power within hierarchical political systems based on white domination and Black subordination.

The institutionalization of White dominance and Black subordination within hierarchical political systems is a continuing legacy of the European slave experience. Realization of the goals of European capitalist expansion required the establishment of processes of human bondage that sought to maximize White control over every aspect of Black life. In the United States, efforts were made to exercise sufficient physical and psychological control over enslaved Africans that their journey to freedom would become an insurmountable task. The objective was not only to make Africans stand in fear but also to unhinge their psychological balance.¹¹ To accomplish this goal, legal codes were enacted that reduced the status of Blacks to the position of chattel slaves—human property. As early as the 1640s leaders of the Virginia colony were engaged in legal maneuvers to create a system of racial subordination reserved for Blacks only.¹² The legal enslavement of Blacks was codified full blown in Virginia law in 1705 with the passage of legislation that classified African slaves as personal property rather than real estate.¹³ These steps toward legal subordination were undergirded by a racial ideology that dehumanized Black life and ruled Black people out of the human family. Audrey Smedley contends that the racist ideology developed by American colonists to justify slavery was an extension of ideological positions fashioned by the English to rationalize the brutal suppression of Irish human rights in the six-

teenth century.¹⁴ The reduction of the enslaved African from a person to a thing became one of the pivotal touchstones and defining characteristics of American slavery. In the words of Joel Kovel, White slave owners told their slaves in effect:

While I own much, much more than my body, you own not even your body: your body shall be detached from your self and your self shall thereby be reduced to subhuman status. And being detached and kept alive, your body shall serve me in many ways: by work on my capitalist plantations to extract the most that can be taken from the land in the cheapest and therefore most rational manner; as a means to my bodily pleasure—both as nurse to my children and a female body for sexual use (for my own women are somehow deficient in this regard); and as medium of exchange, salable like any other commodity of exchange along with or separate from the bodies of your family. For in fact you have no family, since a family is a system that pertains to human beings, and you are not human. And since I, being a man of the West, value things which are owned above all else, I hold you—or, rather, the owned part of you, your body—in very high regard and wish to retain you as my property forever. On the other hand, since I have a certain horror of what I am doing, and since you are a living reminder of this horror and are subhuman to boot, I am horrified by you, disgusted by you, and wish to have nothing to do with you, wish in fact to be rid of you. And since this set of ideas is inconsistent and will stand neither the test of reason nor of my better values, I am going to distort it, split it up and otherwise defend myself against the realization.¹⁵

This process of rationalizing and justifying human oppression reached its apogee when enslaved Africans came to believe in their own inferiority and the inevitability of their debasement, degradation, and subjugation.

The demise of slavery in the Americas in the nineteenth century did not destroy the system of hierarchical power. Reconstruction politics in the United States embraced the electoral disfranchisement of the Black population in the South and the institutionalization of wage slavery and social segregation. Falling to the weight of raging white supremacy, African Americans marched into the twentieth century largely poverty stricken and powerless.¹⁶ The results were not significantly different in Latin America and the Caribbean.

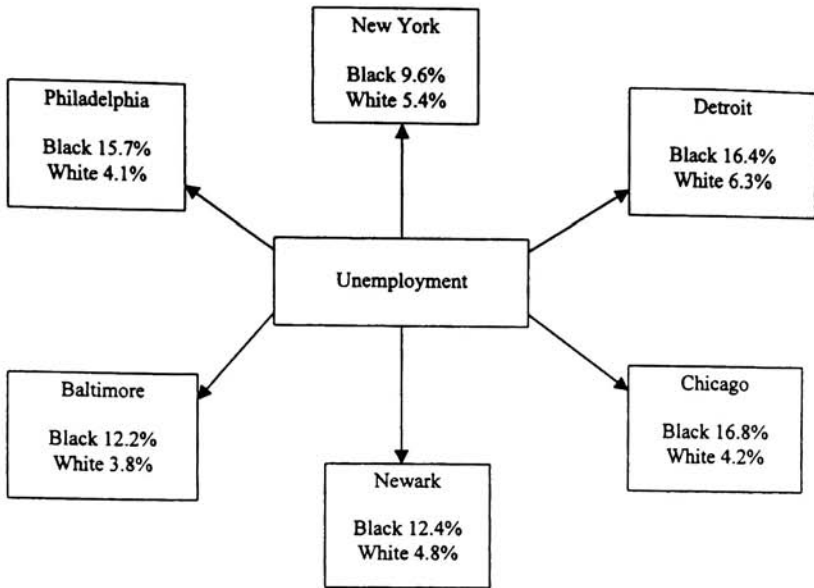
In the post-emancipation period of the nineteenth century in Brazil, efforts at economic modernization produced a huge influx of foreign immigrants to major cities. Blacks were victimized by this process. Their strategic position in the economy was supplanted by

foreigners and rural migrants, pushing Blacks into marginal sectors of society and transforming them into a subproletariat.¹⁷ From its inception, the process of economic modernization in Brazil was a revolution for Whites only. Under the guise of racial democracy and color-blindness, a system of racial privilege continued in Brazil that largely ignored the plight of Blacks at the bottom of the social and economic order. Race relations in Brazil have taken on a profoundly Orwellian cast:

The Whites do not victimize the Negroes and Mulattos consciously and willfully. The normal and indirect effects of the functions of color prejudice do that, without racial tensions and social unrest. Because they restrict the economic, educational, social and political opportunities of the Negro and the Mulatto, maintaining them 'out of the system' or at the margin and periphery of the competitive social order, color prejudice and discrimination impedes the existence and the emergence of a racial democracy in Brazil.¹⁸

Racial bias and hierarchical relationships have frozen the subordinate status of Blacks into the social fabric of Venezuela and other Latin American countries.¹⁹ Social conditions in the Black community in Colon City in Panama, for example, have been characterized by escalating poverty, homelessness, and violence. Militant demonstrations led by the Movement of the Unemployed of Colon (MODESCO), founded under Black leadership in 1992, have sought to radically reduce unemployment, upgrade health services, and halt the eviction of tenants occupying houses reverted by the United States government to Panamanian authorities.²⁰ Parallel demonstrations by Black protest groups in El Chorrillo, led by Hector Avila, have attempted to block the entrance to Puente de las Americas (Bridge of the Americas), the major link between Panama City and the central and western provinces of Panama.²¹ In the 1990s, the institutionalization of hierarchical racial relations remains a crucial source of social tension and political conflict throughout the Americas.²²

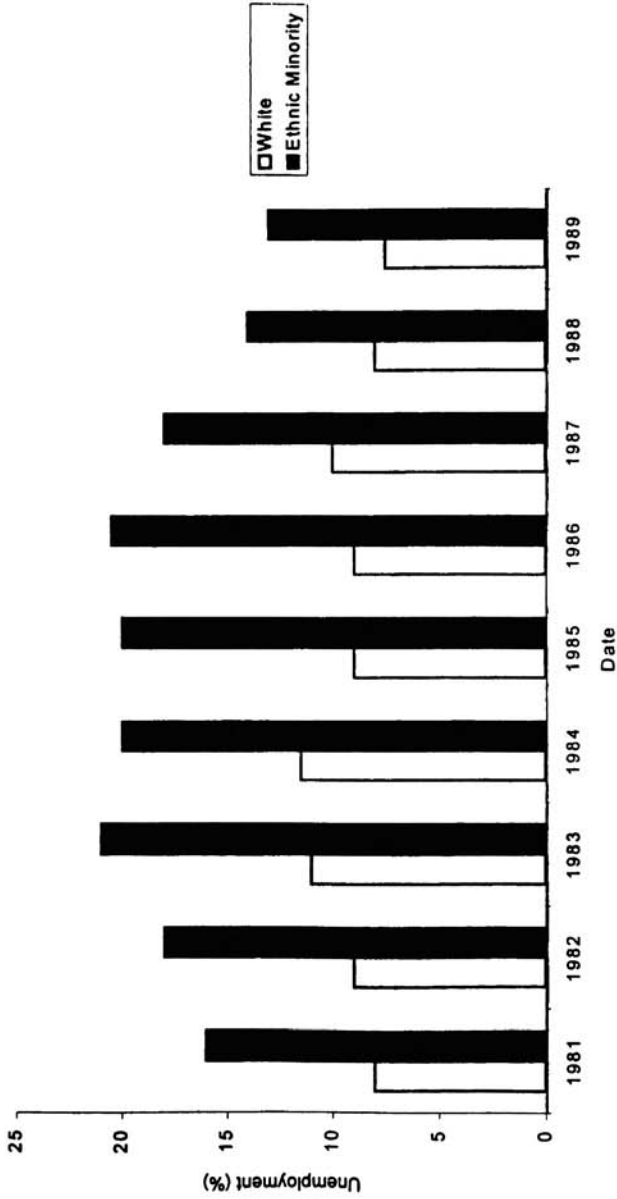
The footloose character of twentieth-century capitalism has reinforced the racially exploitative predilections of hierarchical political systems. Throughout the Black Atlantic, the massive flow of capital from the West to the Pacific Rim has left Black communities socially marginalized and economically shattered. The endless and ruthless search for profits by American corporations has triggered the decentralization of jobs outside of cities with large Black concentrations (See figure 1.1).²³ This pattern has produced depressionlike conditions in

Figure 1.1. Black/White Central City Unemployment Rates, 1990

Source: U.S. Department of Labor—Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 1991.

central cities, while the economies of the suburbs have flourished. Processes of racial subordination have stifled the ascension of Blacks into entrepreneurial roles required to rebuild the economic foundations of America's most depressed urban communities.²⁴ Similar results have obtained in Britain where Black males in the 1980s earned 10 to 15 percent less than their White counterparts and were largely locked out of positions in the top sectors of the British economy.²⁵ The concentration of Black workers in Britain in declining industrial sectors of the economy has produced high unemployment and poverty in the Black community. From 1983 through 1987, unemployment rates among ethnic minorities in Britain hovered at the level of 20 percent; among African Caribbeans aged sixteen–twenty-four, the unemployment rate exceeded 30 percent.²⁶ Although the gap between Black and White unemployment dropped after 1989 because of improvement in the British economy, high unemployment remained a major problem for the Black community (See figure 1.2). High unemployment has spawned extraordinary tension between Black youth

Figure 1.2. Unemployment Rates for Whites and Ethnic Minority Groups in Britain, 1981–1989



Source: Adapted from statistical data included in Colin Brown "Same Difference: The Persistence of Racial Disadvantage in the British Employment Market," in Peter Braham, Ali Rattansi, and Richard Skellington (eds.), *Racism and Anti-Racism: Inequalities, Opportunities and Policies* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1992), pp 58–59.

and the police in Britain. Commenting on the response of the dominant power structure to rising social unrest in British Black communities in the 1970s, A. Sivanandan notes:

Black youths could not walk the street outside the ghetto or hang around streets within it without courting arrest. And apart from individual arrests, whole communities were subjected to roadblocks, stop and search and mass arrests. In Brixton in 1975 the para-military Special Patrol Group (SPG) cruised the streets in force, made arbitrary arrests and generally terrorized the community. In Lewisham the same year the SPG stopped 14,000 people on the streets and made 400 arrests. The pattern was repeated by similar police units in other parts of the country.²⁷

The search for justice, power, and representation in racially hierarchical political systems constitutes the fundamental mission, method, orientation, and motivation of Black politics in the Black Atlantic. Mack H. Jones has correctly called attention to the critical need to frame the analysis of Black politics in the context of the struggle for power between dominant and subordinate groups in society.²⁸ Racial politics in the Black Atlantic illuminate important power relationships in society. Throughout the Atlantic world, Whites have occupied privileged positions and used their positions to keep Blacks locked out of key domains of policy making and resource distribution. A realistic and insightful frame of reference for Black politics must shed penetrating light on the barriers to Black empowerment in society and the dilemmas faced by Blacks in their efforts to fundamentally alter the power equation. Black political empowerment involves the reallocation of power in ways that enhance or favor the policy preferences of the Black community.²⁹ Three critical benchmarks of Black political empowerment are the capturing of high-status elected offices by socially conscious and racially committed Black politicians, expansion of significant and effective Black representation in public-sector jobs, and major enhancement of Black influence and control over governmental agenda setting and decision making.³⁰ Black political activities that do not achieve a reallocation of power reinforce subordination rather than promote empowerment.³¹

An essential element in the analysis of Black political empowerment is the examination of strategies adopted by Black activists to create effective resource bases and mobilize collective power in the political system.³² One key starting point in this analysis is the history of protest that has served as the crucial foundation for efforts

by Blacks to respond to the dominant White power forces arrayed against them.³³ The vision of the Black Atlantic as a warrior community united in protest against structures and processes of racial domination represents a conception of the Atlantic world deserving of probing investigation and analysis. Protest politics, of course, constitutes only one dimension of the struggle for Black freedom and liberation. This volume will meticulously assess a medley of instruments in the strategic armor of Black communities struggling for justice, power, and representation in the political process.

Theories of Race in Local Politics

More than twenty years ago, Ira Katznelson called for extensive comparative research on the local politics of race.³⁴ This volume attempts to speak to many of the issues raised by Katznelson by analyzing the dilemmas of political empowerment faced by Black Atlantic communities in Boston and Liverpool. Since the publication of Katznelson's book, the literature on the local politics of race in the United States and Britain has continued to ignore or misconstrue important dimensions of dominant-subordinate group relations. Despite the pioneering work of W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Oliver Cox, and John Rex underscoring the centrality of race in the policy-making process, mainstream studies in political science and sociology have often failed to address the implications of dominant-subordinate relationships in racially hierarchical political systems. On this score, Hanes Walton Jr. has observed that behavioral studies of American politics have routinely rendered Black challenges to the prevailing political system invisible.³⁵ These studies lodge the source of Black behavioral action in sociopsychological and intrapsychic forces emanating internally from the Black environment rather than structural power arrangements that artificially limit Black access to important arenas of public and private decision making.³⁶

Following the groundbreaking theories advanced by American sociologist Robert Park, scholars writing on race in the cities have tended to discount the importance of race in the policy process because of what they view as the unfailing capacity on the part of the political system to assimilate racial minorities and address their needs within traditional channels of the political and governmental process. The Park school of social analysis views race relations as a

process that evolves through four stages: contact, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation.³⁷ The pivotal underlying assumption of studies of racial attitudes, prejudice, and discrimination, based on this model, is the existence of societal consensus on major racial issues and the infinite capacity on the part of the political system to promote racial harmony and conciliation. This pattern of analysis has been a central motif of scholarly studies on race in Britain as well as the United States. Assessing the orientation of scholarly studies on the politics of race in Britain, John Solomos concludes that the dominant focus of these studies has been on "a set of limited issues relating only to some aspects of the integration of black minorities in the established political institutions."³⁸

A logical extension of the Park theory of assimilation is the theory of pluralism. Pluralist analysis is the dominant theoretical paradigm for the description and evaluation of decision making in the United States and Britain. The key assumptions of pluralist analysis present immense difficulties for the realistic examination of dominant-subordinate race relations in society.³⁹ Pluralist theory also discounts the importance of race as a barrier to the exercise of effective influence over policy making by minority citizens. Claims are made that in Western democracies the political process is sufficiently open that all citizens who wish to have an impact on policy can do so with great effect.⁴⁰ Interest groups in these societies have developed a multitude of techniques for influencing government policy.⁴¹ The rules and procedures of democracy guarantee that the needs and concerns of minority groups will be accommodated by the agencies of government and the instrumentalities of the wider political system.

Robert Dahl's study of decision making in New Haven, *Who Governs?* represents the classic statement of the pluralist position.⁴² Dahl paints a picture of local politics characterized by multilateral conflict between an array of interest groups. He disputes the existence of a power elite, contending that the political influence of economic notables in New Haven has been limited mainly to the area of urban redevelopment.⁴³ This analysis underscores one of the guiding assumptions of pluralism: that power in local communities is so decentralized, and the influence of political actors so specialized, that racial and economic hierarchies cannot take root and do not serve as impediments to the full flowering of minority political influence in the governing process. Dahl contends that the ballot stands as the ultimate instrument of power in democratic polities. For the sake of survival, elected officials are compelled to anticipate the

needs of grassroots citizens and to address their policy concerns, even if they are not formally organized as permanent interest groups.⁴⁴ The promises of democratic representation and influence are preserved through a two-step decision-making process linking leaders and subleaders to their grassroots constituents.⁴⁵

Pluralism does not stand up as a valid theoretical model for understanding and evaluating the impact of the race factor in local politics. As Marguerite Ross Barnett has cogently observed, the racial status of Blacks in America has not been characterized by democratic inclusiveness; the objective reality for Blacks has been one of exclusion based on color and the continuing production of discriminatory policy outcomes by a permanent racial hierarchy.⁴⁶ Pluralist analysis does not acknowledge the fact that lower-strata Black communities have often been disconnected from the policy process of local government.⁴⁷ In an extremely revealing case study of community politics in Newark, New Jersey, Michael Parenti found that for lower-strata Blacks in Newark, there was only the world of the rulers and the world of the ruled. Black activists seeking to promote community goals in Newark ran up against an intractable urban power structure that flatly refused to recognize the legitimacy of their claims or provide access to the basic resources of local government.⁴⁸ The primary political world of Blacks in Newark analyzed by Parenti was far removed from the pluralist republic described by Robert Dahl.

Theories of pluralist democracy are flawed because they do not take into account nondecision making: the capacity of powerful groups to prevent issues relating to the needs of lower-strata groups from penetrating the policy arena.⁴⁹ Black issues often become nonissues; they exist as long-standing grievances but are never addressed in any meaningful sense by policy-making institutions.⁵⁰ The political impact of these issues is muted by a "mobilization of bias" that firmly insulates the policy preferences of the poor from the arena of governance and decision making where the policy interests of affluent actors are systematically endorsed and implemented by the prevailing racial hierarchy.⁵¹ This reality has led E. E. Schattschneider to remark: "The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent."⁵² Schattschneider concludes that the system of pressure group politics is a highly selective process "ill designed to serve diffuse interests."⁵³

In a major theoretical work, Rufus P. Browning, Dale Rogers Marshall, and David H. Tabb have suggested that Black communi-

ties can overcome the constraints produced by the racial hierarchy by adopting strategies designed to promote Black political incorporation. By *political incorporation*, they mean significant access by racial minorities to the key policy-making processes and resources of city government.⁵⁴ In this sense, *political incorporation* is a term used to signify the extent to which a group's interests are effectively represented in the policy making process. Effective representation requires not only the formal representation of a group in the governing process by members of that group, but also the substantive involvement of the group in a coalition that dominates city policy making on issues of greatest concern to the group.⁵⁵ Browning, Marshall, and Tabb contend that substantive participation in a dominant coalition will enhance a group's control over policy making and secure its position as an influential participant in the prevailing city governing coalition.

As a measure of political power, political incorporation can range from no representation in city government to the position of a group as an equal or leading force in a dominant coalition strongly committed to minority interests.⁵⁶ The logic of the theoretical model presented by Browning, Marshall, and Tabb suggests that strong Black political incorporation would strengthen Black governmental control and endow Black politicians with the power to promote Black community development by radically altering the policy priorities and basic programs of city government. To achieve these results, they recommend that Black political strategies focus on the formation of biracial and multiracial coalitions. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb's study of minority politics in ten California cities found that strong Black incorporation was directly related to Black involvement in biracial and multiracial coalitions. Their study revealed that when Blacks joined forces with liberal Whites to form majority governing coalitions, the responsiveness to Black community policy objectives greatly increased. Black political incorporation in California meant that the social and economic policy preferences of the Black community could no longer be ignored: senior citizen centers were located in Black neighborhoods; minority health projects were launched; parks were developed or improved in minority districts; and a host of community-based programs were given increased financial support.⁵⁷

While the Browning, Marshall, and Tabb theoretical perspective provides interesting insights into the possible impact of minority coalition politics, there are major drawbacks. First, biracial and multiracial coalitions are difficult to develop and maintain. Long

histories of cross-racial antagonisms in many cities have made it difficult or impossible for Black and White political activists to arrive upon a community of interests and hammer out a workable common agenda. Often Whites will only join coalitions with Blacks if Blacks agree to serve as junior partners. Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) and Charles V. Hamilton have vividly pointed out the dangers such coalitions pose for the Black community.⁵⁸ When forged, many biracial and multiracial coalitions are short-lived. Interestingly, in the California case, biracial and multiracial coalitions were undermined by the decision by city administrations to drop funding for minority programs in the wake of shrinking federal support for community-based initiatives.⁵⁹ The deterioration of Black-Jewish relations precipitated by the visit to Los Angeles in 1985 by Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam created major cracks in the liberal coalition that dominated city politics during the twenty-year reign of Black mayor Tom Bradley. The defeat of Michael Woo, a progressive Chinese American city councilman and a protégé of Bradley, in the 1993 mayoral election by Republican businessman Richard Riordan, brought to a precipitous end the long march of strong minority incorporation in Los Angeles.⁶⁰

A serious rollback of minority gains has occurred in big cities with the defeat of Black mayoral candidates in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. These defeats reflect dramatic shifts in racial ideologies by liberal Whites whose support for minority concerns has substantially eroded; they also reflect the emergence of White-led centrist coalitions with broad appeals to Whites and Latinos who formerly served as backbones of Black-led coalitions.⁶¹ The increasing racial diversification of the urban population has meant that Latinos are no longer satisfied with serving as junior partners in Black-led coalitions. The changing attitude of Latinos is underscored by the fact that coalitions between Blacks and Latinos established in Black mayoral campaigns in New York and Chicago have crumbled in the months after the elections on the back of sharp disagreements across racial lines regarding leadership, the distribution of patronage benefits, and the direction of the minority policy agenda.⁶² In Britain, the gap between the ideological and policy orientation of African Caribbeans and Asians has been quite large.⁶³ Disputes between these two groups over a range of issues, including protest and electoral strategies, has made it extraordinarily difficult to build effective minority-based coalitions in Britain. Second, it should be noted that biracial and multiracial coalitions do not challenge the racial hierarchy; they result in the replacing of all White

power structures with new power arrangements without altering the prevailing institutionalized hierarchical structure that systematically produces Black subordination and exclusion. Third, biracial and multiracial coalitions only make sense where Black numbers are large enough to assure that Blacks will have meaningful representation and power in key areas of coalitional decision making. In cities such as Boston and Liverpool where Blacks are vastly outnumbered, the utility of the coalition strategy as a power strategy is, to say the least, problematic.

Clarence Stone has extended the discussion of political incorporation beyond the analysis of city coalitions to embrace the interplay of political and economic forces that establish the foundation for the operation of urban regimes. In Stone's analysis, urban policies are pursued through an array of forces impacting on the electoral process as well as the broader political economy in which elections take place. Minority incorporation requires that minorities not only join dominant coalitions but become a part of the governing coalition that controls decision making in the public arena.⁶⁴ The analysis of urban politics must therefore entail the identification of private and public actors involved in the making of public policy and an understanding of the relationship of these actors to one another, as well as the specific resources and strategies they bring to the governing process.

Stone posits the existence of informal linkages among public officials, business leaders, and politically active groups representing the interests of important segments of the urban electorate. Like the pluralists, Stone fails to give adequate attention to the hierarchical racial structures and relations that systematically screen Blacks out of the arena of informal bargaining and therefore blunt Black incorporation into local governing coalitions. Penn Kimball has confirmed the existence of systematic biases in the political system that keep broad sectors of the Black community disconnected from the political process.⁶⁵ Stone's urban regime acquires its legitimacy and power not from the consent of the governed but from the ability of urban elites to manipulate the resources of politics to their advantage. Black elites involved in the process (especially Black business elites) rarely represent the interests of grassroots Black citizens and provide little leverage for the Black community in the decision-making process. To the extent that grassroots Black community interests are represented in the process, they are represented by community-based organizations, an arena of politics basically ignored by regime theory.⁶⁶ This failing is especially note-

worthy since divisions over racial issues by community-based organizations constitute a major source of political pressure that must be constantly managed by public and private elites.⁶⁷

Regime theory has only limited utility for cross-national comparative research. The process of informal bargaining described by Stone is muted in the British context by the ability of the central government to set the local agenda and define the ground rules for political interaction. In Britain, private business leaders have fewer targets of opportunity. Because local officials are not permitted by the unitary system to operate autonomously, the ability of business interests to use mobile wealth to garner tax breaks and other benefits from local officials is significantly constrained.

The growing concentration of Blacks in major cities in Europe and North America has drawn attention to electoral mobilization strategies as instruments for Black empowerment. Clearly, the resources of numbers and concentration have given Blacks strategic advantages in the electoral process. In the United States, Blacks hold electoral majorities or near majorities in some of the country's largest and most important cities.⁶⁸ The strong representation of Blacks in the populations of northeastern states has meant that Blacks have often played decisive roles in the outcome of presidential elections.⁶⁹ Although Blacks in Britain are only 5 percent of the national population, their concentration in important boroughs in London has given them considerable political clout in local and parliamentary elections. In many localities outside of London, Black electoral potential is not insignificant. Blacks constitute at least 15 percent of the population in sixty parliamentary constituencies.⁷⁰ Since 1987, nine Blacks have held elected seats in Parliament (including four of African descent and five of Asian descent). To what extent have Black electoral resources promoted political incorporation? The greatest political breakthrough for the Black community has been at the local level in the United States. Since the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Black electoral mobilization has resulted in the election of an impressive array of local Black officials; among the most important have been Black mayors of major American cities.

While the record of achievement of Black mayors has been outstanding, one goal that they have not been able to accomplish is Black political incorporation.⁷¹ Problems of economic decline, physical deterioration, unemployment, and social instability have continued to multiply in cities governed by Black mayors. Black representation in city hall has not lead to Black control over the

mainsprings of policy making in central cities. Despite the election of Black mayors, the core defining ingredients of the racial hierarchy remain firmly in place. Black mayoral leadership has not significantly challenged the institutional arrangements that produce Black subordination but has concentrated on shifting the social and economic priorities of city government within the confines of the prevailing racial hierarchy.⁷²

Obstacles to Political Incorporation

The explanation for the failure of the electoral strategy to achieve Black political incorporation is rather complex. First, we know, in retrospect, that high-pitched Black mayoral campaigns represent a two-edged sword. On the one hand, these campaigns produce high racial consciousness and electoral turnout; they also provide valuable lessons in community organizing and resource management.⁷³ On the other hand, Black mayoral campaigns tend to become so all consuming they damage or destroy other important avenues for political mobilization, including neighborhood organizations and organizational networks linking citizen action groups with churches, civil rights organizations, and educational institutions. When the election is over, all eyes are on city hall to provide leadership for the entire Black community. Hindsight also teaches us that it is extremely difficult to sustain Black mayoral coalitions beyond the election campaign. Many Black mayors have discouraged the continuation of their campaign organizations on the grounds that these organizations are unwieldy and get in the way of day-to-day policy implementation.⁷⁴ The continuity of electoral organization has also been stifled by the dissipation of insurgency politics in the Black community.⁷⁵ Many second-generation Black mayoral candidates have abandoned grassroots Black community strategies designed to challenge the prevailing order; they have preferred to run deracialized campaigns incorporating the extensive involvement of nonBlack community residents and a phalanx of public relations consultants.⁷⁶ This new approach to political campaigning has had the effect of demobilizing grassroots participation.

Issues of resources and leadership have been at the center of the dilemma of political incorporation. The capacity of Black mayors to serve as effective urban managers has been severely circumscribed by the massive withdrawal of strategic funds to local communities by the federal government. Direct federal aid to cities fell from 26

percent of the cities' own-source revenues in 1978 to 14.5 percent of own-source revenues in 1984.⁷⁷ Among the cities hardest hit by this drop have been those governed by Black mayors. City resources have also been reduced by the flight of middle-class taxpayers to the suburbs and the disinvestment in cities by factories and corporations.

Black mayors have been restrained in their capacity to deliver redistributive benefits to their Black constituents by the competition for mobile wealth in metropolitan areas. Facing diminishing tax bases, Black mayors have had to place the search for corporate and industrial development at the top of their programmatic agendas. Like their White counterparts, Black mayors have become strategically dependent on businesses and corporations to assist them in their efforts to achieve their administrative goals.⁷⁸ This dependent relationship has helped to foster White corporate dominance over the policy-making processes of Black mayoral governed cities.⁷⁹ The opportunity costs for Black organizations are so great, they cannot compete with White businesses and corporations (with lower opportunity costs) for the time, attention, and support of Black mayors. Economic pressures have compelled Black mayors to be prudent fiscal managers. This has often meant that issues of social and economic development in the Black community have been reduced to secondary importance in their agenda-setting priorities. Shifts in policy priorities at the local level have been reinforced by parallel moves by state and national officials. President Clinton has made it clear that affirmative action and welfare programs will not receive priority attention in his second term. Britain's historic commitment to color-blind urban policies has been expanded since the days of Margaret Thatcher to include the defunding of programs for urban minorities and the transfer of major urban projects from public to private agencies.

Obstacles to Black political incorporation also emanate from the milieu of community politics. The achievement of political empowerment by minority groups requires the cultivation and effective utilization of indigenous resources such as social institutions, communications networks, an experienced leadership corps, organized groups, and money.⁸⁰ Black Atlantic communities are suffering from a paucity of these resources. The disappearance of neighborhood civic associations and community development groups is especially troubling. Black protest movements of the 1960s relied heavily on indigenous resources to build movement centers to coordinate and strategically manage a broad range of

essential political activities.⁸¹ The loss of these resources means that the community's capacity to defend its interests through the formation of viable movement centers has been seriously weakened.

The internal politics of the Black community has created a number of class problems. Postcivil rights developments in the Black community in the United States have created segmented opportunity markets that have pushed some Blacks up the class ladder while keeping others permanently fixed in the lower strata.⁸² These patterns have produced social class tensions. In some communities class divisions run so deep that avenues for discussion have totally broken down. Many middle-class Blacks have walked away from their community responsibilities. Lucrative business deals have fostered political alliances between Black and White entrepreneurs that threaten to abolish important sources of Black community leadership.⁸³

African Caribbeans in Britain have been able to avoid serious class problems because, except in London, no major middle class has emerged among this group. Blacks in the United States and Britain (African Caribbeans) share the problem of leadership co-optation. Both societies have seen the emergence of buffer organizations and arrangements designed to thwart efforts to build and maintain independent Black institutions.⁸⁴ The buffering problem has been especially severe in Britain where community relations councils (CRCs) and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), have used government resources to co-opt and neutralize community organizations.⁸⁵ This phenomenon lead A. Sivanandan to charge: "The CRE took up the Black cause and killed it."⁸⁶

Competition for scarce resources and leadership recognition has played havoc with the mounting of common Black agendas and the uniting of community organizations in collective political struggle. Frequent calls for Black unity in the United States and Britain have fallen on deaf ears. There were many in the United States who hoped that the Million Man March would have the lasting effect of quelling internal rivalries and disputes.⁸⁷ This goal of the march has not been realized. Internal friction appears to be a common currency of Black Atlantic communities. Ironically, internal divisions are continuing in a political atmosphere that has produced mounting White hostility to the aims and objectives of the Black community's quest for justice, power, and representation. In the United States both major political parties have used the issues of rights and taxes to polarize the electorate and create a conservative backlash against Black social and economic advancement⁸⁸ In Britain the passage of

anti-immigration legislation in 1968 signaled the emergence of a political strategy endorsed by both parties to bring the issue of race to the center of the electoral process.⁸⁹ On the heels of the provocative "Rivers of Blood" speech delivered by Tory politician Enoch Powell and the warning by Margaret Thatcher that Britain ran the risk of being "swamped" by foreign immigrants, the race card became a staple of British politics.⁹⁰ In the United States and Britain, the politics of racial liberalism has been abandoned. This fact was underscored by presidential candidate Bill Clinton's shunning of active political support by Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition in the 1992 and 1996 presidential campaigns and the absolute refusal by the Labour Party to approve petitions by Black political activists to establish a Black section of the party equivalent to those in effect for women and young people.⁹¹

How have Black Atlantic communities in the United States and Britain attempted to grapple with the dilemmas of political empowerment? What success have they enjoyed in forging effective structural linkages to dominant decision-making forces in local government? To what extent does the racial hierarchy operate as a major impediment to the realization of Black social, economic, and political objectives? These questions serve to establish the analytical parameters of our examination of Black politics in Boston and Liverpool.

Comparative Black Politics

Research presented in this volume ventures into the uncharted waters of comparative racial politics. The comparison is between two historically Irish port cities: Boston and Liverpool. Blacks in Boston and Liverpool live in Atlantic world cities with long histories of racial conflict and institutional discrimination. The barriers to Black political incorporation in these cities are unusually high. Blacks in Boston and Liverpool are compelled to fight deeply entrenched racial hierarchies without the advantage of majority numerical concentration. In addition to the liability of a relatively limited numerical base, Blacks have faced in these cities dominant White forces that have been exceptionally resistant to Black demands for justice, representation, and power.

Our essential task is to spell out the precise ways political systems in Boston and Liverpool produce structured inequality for the Black community; we will also examine the consequences of these