
**Lead Me, Guide Me Along the Way:
A Study of the Relationship Between Pastors' Personal Characteristics
and their Level of Community Participation**

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Introduction

In 1996, then President William Clinton, seeking to reform the highly problematic welfare system, signed into law the Personal Responsibility, Work Opportunity, and Medicaid Restructuring Act ("Personal Responsibility, Work Opportunity and Medicaid Restructuring Act," 1996). Although most persons focused their attention on the program's elimination of the A.F.D.C. (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) program and the T.A.N.F. (Temporary Aid to Needy Families) provision, it was the ability of persons to deduct their contributions to religious organizations that many religious conservatives supported and that marked the beginning of the blurring of the line between church and state in recent times. However, with the election of George W. Bush as President and his ardent support for religious involvement in government, the U.S. government expanded the "Charitable Choice" provision to allow active social service churches the opportunity to solicit funds for their projects from the government (President George W. Bush, 2001). Yet, despite the fact that the changes in the 2001 Welfare Reform Law pursued by the Bush Administration and the Republican congressional delegation differed significantly from the 1996 reform implemented by President Clinton and the Democrats, what was analogous in both proposals was their support for faith-based institutions as viable government support for social services. What was equally seen, but rarely examined, was churches' support of, or willingness to participate in, this policy shift. This study sought to

add insight to this point by examining whether black pastors, particularly Baptist clergy, have been interested in community engagement and the relationship between the pastors' level of community participation and his/her background traits.

It needs to be noted early in this study that all churches are not alike, particularly in the area of decision-making. For instance, in white churches the members often make the majority of the decisions of the church, whereas black pastors are most often the central decision makers in their congregations, a reality that might explain why most of the research on black churches has come from the pastor's perspective (Mays and Nicholson 1930, Nelsen and Nelsen 1960, Lincoln and Mamiya 1998, Rasor and Dash 2001). Of these studies, several examined institutional characteristics, such as history, membership, cultural identity, resources, and leadership, as being associated with community participation, or visa versa. These studies clearly advanced differences between "this worldly" vs. "other worldly" churches based particularly on the leadership's perspective on engagement, which was related to their background traits. While previous research has only examined a descriptively limited range of background traits and has focused primarily on the polar extremes -- either active or in inactive churches -- this research went further to find out whether there is a relationship between background characteristics of black pastors and the community participation of black churches and, if so, which trait(s) were associated with, and to what extent were they related to, the churches' level

of community engagement. Essentially, this study examined determinants or factors that were related to behavior in black pastors. It is important to note that this study operationalizes the concept of community participation as constituted by: actions that emphasize the goals of community control, community decision-making and agenda-setting, community development, particularly through the use of community development corporations.

This article explores the above issue by beginning with an examination of the United States' policy regarding charitable choice. Although the particular focus of this study is on understanding what background variables are associated with community participation by black pastors, the data has direct implications on the debate about faith-based initiatives, which is a byproduct of the Charitable Choice policy. Moreover, we do not differentiate between black churches and other community organizations; thus, we seek to advance understanding of how black churches, like other community groups, seek to be political and economic advocates on behalf of their members, and to outline their responses when such demand were not met. In the course of understanding the above actions of many black churches, we analyze the literature on black pastors and their actions. It is from this review that this study seeks to address the issue of whether there is a relationship between background characteristics of black pastors and community participation of black churches and, if so, which trait(s) are associated with, and to what extent were they related to, the churches' level of community engagement.

This investigation of whether background variables of the pastors are associated with community actions of the church is made possibly quantitative study of all black Baptist pastors in Atlanta regarding their actions toward community development. The data reveal that education, theology, years in the pastorate, and involvement in the 1950s-1960s Civil Rights Movement were all associated with direct community participation by black Baptist pastors.

Charitable Choice

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of people-from public officials to academicians-debating the role of religion in politics (Bush 2001, Dilulio 1999, Dionne and Dilulio 1999, Cnaan 1999, and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State 2002). This discussion, which centered on the applicability of constitutional law as it pertained to the "separation of church and state," though not new to the body politic, reached its zenith with the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act of 1996, particular the "Charitable Choice" provision (Pew Forum 2001, and Carlson-Thies 2000). This provision, in short, advanced that faith-based organizations had been key contributors in providing social services to those in need and, because of their successes, were eligible to "partner with government" for the continuation of their secular programs (PRWOMRA 1996 and Small 2001). Such was the sentiment of many of the program's proponents (Lasater 1986, Malone 1994, Dilulio 1998, Chaves 1999, Bush 2001, and Press 2001). The opponents of "Charitable Choice," likewise, acknowledged both the activism of churches as well as their secular successes; however, they noted that Charitable Choice would be problematic because of the government's attempt to abdicate its responsibilities, as well as because of the blurring of the lines between public and private sectors (Mink 2001, Goeringer 2000, Pew Forum 2001, and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State 2002). Nevertheless, the words of John Dilulio, the White House's former Director on the Faith-Based Initiatives, made the point best as to why churches were looked to by the public sector: "Institutions of faith have succeeded in uplifting people out of their distress because of their innate desire to help those in peril, whereas, government, in general, provided 'welfare programs' that responded to the superficial, as opposed to the essential needs of the individual" (Dilulio 1998).

Community Organizations, Engagement, and Black Churches

Because churches were products of the local community, it was important to place them within the context of community organization for this study. Drawing on the work of Downs, a community organization was defined as any type of organization that exists within a neighborhood, from civic organizations (e.g., parent/teacher associations, and/or neighbor associations) to religious/social organizations (e.g., churches and fraternal organizations) (Downs 1981). As such, scholars have examined various types of community organizations in an effort to understand why groups participate in their communities (Flora et. al. 1992, Yates 1977, Downs 1981, and Herson and Bolland 1990, Olson, et. al 1988, Malone 1994, Gilderbloom 1996, Harris 1999, and Cavendish 2000). It was Dahl (1967), in his seminal work on pluralism, who argued that people, via collective action, formed community organizations to influence decision makers to advance the group's agenda. These organizations, essentially, had at their core a desire to influence government, either indirectly or directly, by capitalizing on the sociological need of people to belong to such groups as well as the political concept of "strength in numbers" (Berry 1989, Truman 1951, Salisbury 1969, Wilson 1973, Lindsey and Beach 2002, Browning and Rodriguez 2000, Calhoun-Brown 2000, Harris 1999, and Putman 2000). Herson and Bolland (1990) acknowledged the aforementioned, but went on to advance that community organizations often respond to community issues themselves, rather than waiting on government to react.

The Church as an institution has been the primary "force" with which the majority (82%) of blacks in America have affiliated, contributed most of their resources, both monetary and non-monetary, and most importantly looked to for help (Dilulio 1999, Harris 1999, Sernett 1999, and Reed 1994). As a result, black churches, according to Dilulio, and others, had historically served as a "second safety net" to governmental programs that were often too slow or unresponsive to the needs of the black community.

Many scholars have illustrated how and why black

churches responded to the needs of the black community. David Hurst (1989) wrote, for example, that slaves coped with their sufferings by forming their own underground churches. It was in these churches, which noted historian Dr. E. Franklin Frazier called the "invisible institution," where slaves were able to gather for community support and spiritual renewal. Gary Peck (1982) and Hortense Powdermaker (1968) asserted that black churches nurtured feelings of self worth for blacks, particularly during slavery, by allowing blacks to turn to each other for support and collective action. In addition to the psychological effects, black churches produced numerous sub-institutions (e.g., mutual and benevolent societies, as well as educational facilities) that were effective in meeting the practical needs of the black community. These groups were mostly designed for providing communal aid to enslaved and freed blacks who were facing traumatic situations in their lives (Frazier 1969, Franklin 1970, Lincoln and Mamiya 1990, and Sernett 1999). For instance, when a black enslaved family was split, because of the institution of slavery or death, it was these mutual aid and benevolent societies that assisted the remaining family members with necessities, mainly moral support, food, and money. Carter G. Woodson (1972) concluded that each organization that was birthed out of the black church was revolutionary, because they were testament to how blacks pulled their meager resources together to help meet the needs of their communities. It can be inferred from Woodson and Hurst that many black churches understood the plight of the black masses during this time period and desired to ameliorate these needs by connecting the church "closely with things of this world to make it [society] a decent place to live in." Gayraud Wilmore (1983) noted: "[W]henever these societies were organized, they began to protest against white prejudice and neglect and with the objective of providing not only for religious needs, but for social service, mutual aid and solidarity among people of African descent." This trend of black churches playing a chief role (e.g., cultural nurturer, social emancipator, political organizer, business innovator, and educator) for the black community originated in the late eighteenth century and has continued in

various degrees up to the present (Frazier 1963, Powerdermaker 1968, Meier and Rudwick 1976, Wilmore 1983, Harris 1999, Billingsley 1999, and Cavendish 2000).

Theoretical Framework

Analyzing Black Pastors

There have been various types of studies on understanding the action of the black church that have laid the groundwork for current interpretations. Most of the works on black churches have focused primarily on understanding its orientation -- "this worldly" vs. "other worldly." This model was found in *The Negro Church* by W. E. B. Du Bois, *The History of the Negro Church* by Carter G. Woodson, and *A Social History of the American Negro* by Benjamin Brawley. As a result of the nature of the subject matter and the disciplinary bases of the authors, these writings centered on historical accounts of the early black church and on its development and evolution. This paradigm produced two models for understanding the black church -- the other worldly and this worldly models. These perspectives saw black churches as a whole as institutions that were either focused on the life after death, on the one hand, or concerned with social activities on the other.

As I understand it, the historical paradigm for understanding the black church, especially from the perspectives of the above scholars, has several shortcomings. First, in examining a small selection of historical events and using this selection to categorize churches as "this worldly" or "other worldly," it provided a limited understanding of churches as institutions. The historical model stereotypes "this worldly" churches as churches that were involved in meeting the urgency of blacks by challenging the institution of slavery or racism and unspiritual. It is the case, however, that many black churches did not engage in such overt secular activities but were nevertheless involved in communal activities. For instance, many black churches developed benevolent and mutual aid societies to assist persons in need with monetary and non-monetary support. Secondly, in my interpretation, this model was too subjective with

each scholar presenting his/her account of the role that the black church played within the context of black history based on his or her own personal convictions of the institution. For instance, it was known that W. E. B. Du Bois was not a strong advocate for organized church; as such, he advanced in his writing that the black church had been a relatively ineffective institution in the advancement of blacks.

Because of what they understood to be the limitations of the historical model, many scholars shifted their research from historical accounts about the black church to studying the church's functions. The functional model suggested that the black church as an institution was best understood by examining its actions, particularly in various periods in American history. Whereas the previous model looked at the orientation of the church historically, this model looked at how the black church responded to critical historical moments. The leading writers and their work in this model were: E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Church in America*, Hart and Anne Nelsen's, *Black Church in the Sixties*, Charles Hamilton's *The Black Preacher in America*, Ruby Johnston, *The Development of Negro Religion*, James Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power*, Ronald Johnstone's, *Religion in Society*, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya's *The Black Church in the African American Experience*.

The scholars listed above, like others, began to wrestle earnestly with analyzing how black churches responded to community issues, such as enslavement or civil rights, and why the institutions chose such actions (Drake and Clayton 1963, Washington 1967, Wilmore 1973, and Billingsley 1990). No longer were these scholars interested in just chronicling the history of the black church, they were now interested in understanding what caused its actions. Out of this desire arose interpretive schematics or models of black churches and pastors, and theologies that encompassed the black church's struggle for black empowerment and engagement. Hart Nelsen and Ann Nelsen, for instance, identified four different types of black churches in the post-Civil Rights era. Their fourth model, the ethnic community-prophetic model,

asserted that the black church not only had to define problems, but also had the responsibility of challenging the institutions of power that caused crises for black communities. In short, it was their contention that the black church was a significant institution for building a sense of ethnic pride and community activism among its members; hence, it along with the pastors had a responsibility to speak out against societal wrongs. Such was the view of Ronald Johnstone who used Detroit ministers during the height of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement as his test subject and argued in 1975 that, although there was no "typical" black preacher in America one could examine their actions and develop an understanding of why pastors were or were not involved in the movement.

This model had two principal limitations: 1) it failed to examine the effects of various situations on the actions of the church and its leaders; and 2) because of its qualitative method, tended to be largely descriptive in nature. As a result, these studies never probed quantitatively into the reasons behind the actions.

The perceived shortcoming of the functional model caused some researchers to shift their attention from identifying the church's actions to exploring its motivations. As such, many scholars began to examine variables that made black churches active within a given situation. Black churches, it was discovered, transformed their mode of operation as a result of changes within as well as outside the church, specifically the social environment in which the church resides. This model is found in the studies of Gayraud Wilmore's *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*, William Auguman's *The Black Church in America: An Exploration in Cincinnati*, Rosemary D'Apolito's *An Analysis of the African-American Catholic Congregation as a Social Movement*, Brent Wood's *First African Methodist Episcopal Church and Its Social Intervention in South Central Los Angeles*, Joseph Simmon's *The Paradigm Shift and The African American Community: A 21st Century Quality Model for Restoring Broken Places and*

Rebuilding Communities through Partnerships, and Frederick Harris' *Something Within*.

Auguman, using the African Methodist Episcopal Church, found, for example, that there was a hierarchy of development that black churches go through in their relationship to social activism. He noted that most black churches experience each of the early stages of development; however, they do not always experience the stages at equal levels in this developmental process for several reasons, e.g. pastoral perceptions, the history of the church, and environment. Applying Donnel Thompson's stages of development: 1) The embryonic organization; 2) Baptism into white faiths; 3) The Independent Black Church; and 4) the Ghetto Church, Auguman posit that these levels served as fundamental phases in the life of any black church. When the church has ascended from the fourth level, according to Auguman, it was considered to have reached the "formal" stage of church development. This stage presented the church with two alternatives: 1) it may continue on the same path, sometimes trying to revive old behaviors, and ultimately decline; or 2) it may make a reassessment of its values and objectives, develop new ones, and proceed along new paths. Auguman noted that the majority of the black churches in America fell within the former path; on the other hand, there was an increase in the number of black churches accepting the latter alternative.

This model, though useful, had several drawbacks for this research: 1) it did not take into account the decision-making process at the different stages of churches' development; and 2) this model failed to examine the role of the pastor in setting the directions of their churches.

Our own view for understanding the black church, which was closer to the function model, looked quantitatively at the pastors' background. To assist in understanding, what one scholar described as, "the center of leadership within the Black community since slavery" -- the black pastor -- we drew upon the works of Barbara Kellerman, who, along with social psychologists, argued for the importance of internal and external attributes in explaining the actions of

others, particularly decision makers. We also drew upon Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory which insists that human action is linked to an individual's personality and that personality develops not accidentally or randomly, but in the context of a person's background.

Hypotheses

The background model of this research on black Baptist pastors posited an association between the pastor's community participation and a series of their personal traits. It had been reported by other scholars that black pastors were the primary decision makers in black churches. Thus, it was the general premise of this study that in order for one to understand the community engagement practices, or lack thereof, of the black church it was imperative to examine certain elements of its primary leader. It needs to be noted early in this study that we were not trying to draw any causality between the variables. We wanted to identify, and possibly try to understand, attributes of black pastors that were associated with their level of community engagement. The first hypothesis was that younger pastors were more likely to be directly involved in their communities (H₁). It was, likewise, probable that pastors who were highly educated also participated at a higher level in their communities (H₂). It was believed that pastors who had a liberal theological perspective would be more likely to be directly involved in their communities (H₃). It was also expected that pastors who had been in their pastorates the longest would be more likely to develop programs that would meet the needs of their communities (H₄). Pastors who subscribed to Black Liberation Theology -- a method of making the Christian gospel relevant to black people who had struggled daily against an oppressive white power structure both from within and outside of the church -- were more likely to be directly engaged in meeting the social needs of their communities (H₅). Pastors who were affiliated with the New Era State Convention -- one of the two mainline black Baptist conventions in Georgia and a sub-unit of the Progressive National Baptist Convention -- were expected to participate at a higher level in their communities (H₆). The next hypothesis was that

pastors that were members of civic or social organization were more likely to be directly involved in the communities (H₇). It was expected that pastors who were directly involved in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, would also be directly involved in their communities (H₈). In addition, pastors who lived within one mile of the church were expected to participate directly in their communities (H₉).

Variables

Dependent Variable

Pastor's Level of Community Participation

Community participation has been defined in various ways and a number of measures have been used to determine this variable. In this study, we used one scale to measure pastor's level of community participation: type of pastoral actions. The primary indicator of the pastors' level of community participation was the question: "In thinking about your responses to local community problems, in which of the following actions did you engage during the last year (1999-2000)?"

This question was measured by a seven-item scale adapted from Malone's (1994) work on community development. It was decided for more accurate analysis to collapse the items into two general responses (e.g., indirect action and direct action). Essentially, indirect participation by churches was defined as passive actions of interest and/or concern, such as speaking publicly about community issues, informal visits with civic or community leaders. Direct participation was defined as assertive, faith-based community participation through programs and activities developed and implemented by churches to address community problems. Examples of such activities might include forming a community development corporation or implementing programs in job training, housing development, or education. It was important that the church leaders who were sampled understood that the indirect and direct actions to be reported were to be community oriented, as opposed to being self-serving activities conducted

for the sole benefit of members of their respective churches.

Independent Variables

Background Traits

This research used nine separate variables to measure background traits: age, education, theological position, years in the pastorate, adherence to Black Liberation Theology, convention affiliation, participation in civic and social, involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, and proximity of pastoral home to the church. Below we present the general rationale, based on the existing and relevant literature, for each variable as well as nominal categories for each response.

Age. This trait was used to measure pastors' level of participation. It drew on two studies which noted that younger black ministers were more likely to be directly engaged in their community and in secular issues than middle-aged and older pastors (Mays and Nicholson 1922 and Johnston 1969). The variable contained a five-item scale: 1= less than 23, 2= 24-35, 3= 36-45, 4= 46-65, and 5= 66 and older.

Education. The levels of education were divided into eight categories: 1= no formal education, 2= some elementary school education, 3= completed elementary school, 4= some high school, 5= high school graduate, 6= some college, 7= college degree, and 8= graduate/professional degree. This variable was later examined as a four-category variable for easier analysis: 4= those black pastors who were high school graduates; 3= those with some college education; 2= college graduates and 1= those with graduate/professional degrees. Scholars have concluded that ministers who are educated are more likely to be community involved (Mays and Nicholson 1922, Muelder 1969, and Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Johnstone (1969) advanced that highly educated pastors tend to be directly active in social issues than those who were less educated.

Theological Position. Although theological

positioning is quite complex with an array of meanings, it is central to understanding ministers. There were four theological position identified in this study: fundamentalists, conservatives, moderates and liberals (Reid et al 1990). "Fundamentalists" interpreted biblical passages literally, and viewed the role of the church as being strictly sacred. The next group, "conservatives," closely aligned themselves with fundamentalists because they believed that the church's primary mission was to engage in sacred work, namely "saving souls," and rejected the liberalization of society's standards and of culture in the church; "moderates," sought to accommodate a balance between the two extremes of the debate -- "other worldly" and "this worldly" -- by linking their views of the church and pastor to contemporary issues and culture; and lastly, "liberals" tended to see the role of the church as being primarily secular in nature. The positions were divided into five categories: 1= fundamentalist, 2= conservative, 3= moderate and 4= liberal and 5= other. Liberal pastors were expected to be more active in their communities than their moderate to fundamentalist counterparts (Nelsen et al 1971).

Years at their Present Pastorate. The pastors were compared in terms of their length of time in their present pastorate. The categories ranged from less than six months to more than ten years. We hypothesized that pastors who had been in their pastorate for more than five years would be more inclined to be directly involved in their community than those who had less experience. The reason was that they would have had ample time to understand the needs of the church, the surrounding community, as well as the consequences of not engaging in community development. Essentially, the longer a pastor had been in his/her pastorate the greater the chance he/she would have had developed a supportive church structure that would be needed for developing new projects (Reed 1994). The categories for years in pastorate were: 1= less than six months, 2= six months to one year, and 3= 1-3 years, 4= 4-5 years, and 5= 6-10 years, and 6= 10 years of more.

Adherence to Black Liberation Theology. Black Liberation Theology was defined as a method of

making the Christian gospel relevant to black people who had struggled daily against an oppressive white power structure both from within and outside of the church (McCall 1975, Anderson 1995). It insisted that one's view of God and his action in the world was profoundly altered by one's personal life experiences. Thus, the goal of this theology, according to Cone, one of the fathers of the theology, was "not giving Christmas baskets, but working for political, social, and economic justice, which always means a redistribution of power. It is the kind of power which enables blacks to fight their own battles and thus keep their dignity" (Cone 1969). As such, we theorized that pastors who subscribed to this theology would see the importance of engaging directly in their communities. Thus, the variable was categorized into 1= yes and 2= no.

Convention Affiliation. There are two major black Baptist conventions in the United States: the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. formed in 1895 and the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. established in 1960 (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990 and Fitts 1985). Each of these conventions had subunits in Georgia: the General Missionary Convention of Georgia for National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., and the New Era State Convention of Georgia for the Progressive Baptist Convention, Inc. These conventions, both nationally and statewide, were generally accepted as important entities, mainly as a source of missions, publishing, affiliations, and assistances, for local black Baptist churches and their pastors. They, however, had no direct governance over how a local pastor led his/her congregation. We deemed that this variable would be useful for this study because of the way in which the Progressive convention was founded. In short, Joseph Jackson, then President of the National Baptist Convention, differed fundamentally and practically with a faction of Baptist ministers, led by Dr. Martin King, Jr., over the involvement of the church in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. As a result, they chose to form a counter convention, which had as one of its key tenets the direct involvement of their affiliated churches in the movement. Thus, we drew on social psychologists who argued that people were influenced by their group affiliation (Bourne and Ekstrand 1985). The

responses were divided into three categories: 1= General Missionary Baptist Convention, 2= New Era State Convention, and 3= not affiliated.

Participation in Civic and Secular Activities.

Although the laity in many black Baptist churches placed an overwhelming burden on their pastors to be totally committed to their congregations, many pastors involved themselves in various secular organizations from fraternal to political organizations. These activities afforded pastors the opportunity to socialize and interact, both professionally and personally, with persons outside of their respective churches. No research on this variable has surfaced within our literature review. Our interpretation of this variable, like that of convention affiliation, drew heavily on sociological theory. The respondents were given six types organizations and asked to select which type they were actively engaged: 1= Clerical Associations (e.g., General Missionary Baptist Convention), 2= Community Organizations (e.g., community planning), 3= Community Political Organizations (e.g., school board or zoning board), 4= Political organization (e.g., Democratic Party, S.C.L.C., NAACP), 5= Greek-lettered Organizations (e.g., Alpha Phi Alpha, Inc.), and 6= Fraternal Orders (e.g., Masons, Shriners).

Civil Rights Activism. The 1960s Civil Rights Movement was critical for African Americans. Though it was not the first time blacks became active in challenging the social, legal, and political barriers of America, it represents one of the more significant contemporary periods of Civil Rights activism. Consequently, it was inferred that pastors who were directly involved in the 1960s protest movements and were active members of a civil rights organizations would be directly active in ameliorating the existing problems in their communities (Morris 1980). These pastors were asked to select, from seven prominent civil rights organizations, the one group in which they were most active in during the 1960s civil rights movement: 1= Black Panthers, 2= NAACP, 3= National Urban League, 4= Operation Breadbasket, 5= Operation PUSH, 6= SCLC, 7= SNCC, and 8= none.

Proximity to the Church. There has been little research in the area of proximity of a pastor's residence to their church and its influences on their decisions regarding the church. However, this variable was seen as key because social scientists had pointed that social proximity, or the proximity principles, was an influential variable in understanding the actions of individuals. Quite simply, people were more likely to be attracted to, concerned about, and committed to people and communities to which they were in close social proximity rather than to those elements that were farther away (Stuhr 1970, Bourne and Ekstrand 1985 and Mark Davis et al. 1998). The response to this variable was as follows: 1= less than ½ mile, 2= ½ mile to 1 mile, 3= 1-2 miles and 4= 2 or more miles.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to address whether pastors' background influenced their community participation. The primary method for collecting data for this study was a forty-nine (49) -item questionnaire -- a closed-ended, forced response survey that was mailed to respondents. A universe of black protestant churches was constructed using the university's database of ministers, the local ministerial alliance membership list, the local newspaper's religious section, the most recent edition of the city telephone directory, and the city's black funeral homes. The reason this study chose Baptist pastors was that they, due to their denomination's congregational governing structure, had total control over the actions of their individual churches. This stood in sharp contrast to the churches, like Methodists or Church of God in Christ, which received mandates from various jurisdictional leaders. Although the representative nature of the list was not infallible, it was the best technique to garner a list of black churches. The process produced a list of 79 black Baptist churches.

In April of 2000, using Don Dillman's model (Dillman 1978 and Mangione 1995), a survey printed on white paper was mailed to every black Baptist pastor in Atlanta with a request that it be returned by April 30, 2000. For the convenience of each pastor, a

self-addressed stamped envelope was enclosed with each questionnaire along with a cover letter and letters of endorsement from the state presiding officer representing their respective denominations, as well as the president of the local black ministerial alliance. The endorsement letters were included in an effort to increase response rate. According to Dillman, letters from organizational leaders add credibility and legitimacy to the study, as well as serve as a motivation to the respondents to participate (Dillman 1973). Because of a low return rate (1%) on April 30, a follow-up letter and questionnaire printed on green paper were mailed, and calls were made, to those pastors who had not responded. They were then given a second deadline of June 1 to return the survey. This deadline garnered a total of 50 (63% of the total targeted population) usable surveys. However, we must note that all of the 50 respondents were male. On surface, this immediately skews the findings toward one segment of the Baptist denomination. It is believed, nevertheless, that since, according to Rasor and Dash, the majority of the black Baptist pastors in the United States, particularly in the south, are men, the findings in this study would be valid.

Although this study sought to understand in general the church's level of community participation, its results were based on responses provided by the church's pastor. The literature affirmed that a black pastor's perceptions were often very reflective of his/her congregation's views, and that it was his/her vision, for the most part, that set the direction, or "mission," for the church and the black community (Hamilton 1972). W. E. B. Du Bois, writing about black pastors in Philadelphia, advanced that "Taken on the average the Negro ministers of the city are good representatives of the masses of the Negroes. They are largely chosen by the masses... and must in every way be men whom the rank and file of the race like and understand" (Nelsen, Yokley, and Nelsen, 1971). Mays and Nicholson continued: "The [black] pastor is one of the [freest], as well as most influential men on the American platform today. This is due to various causes, but chief among them is the factor of the long-time prestige of the [black] minister" (Sernett 1999). They pointed out that: "What the [black] church does and will do...will depend in a

large measure upon the leadership as expressed in the [black] pulpit" (Sernett 1999). Likewise, Lincoln and Mamiya argued that black churches were predominately pastor-centered institutions with the black clergy having a greater degree of authority over their congregations and church than their white counterparts (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). In comparative studies, this method has been used by other scholars to investigate black faith groups (Mays and Nicholson 1920, Johnstone 1969, Lincoln and Mamiya 1990, and Dash and Rasor 2002). The data was analyzed using Pearson's chi-square:

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

Data Analytic Procedures

Data analyses included a general descriptive analysis of the respondents' nine determinant variables. The variables were measured for means, mode, median, and standard deviations. Afterwards, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables was measured at a .05 level of significance. If the calculated P-value was lower than ($P < 0.05$), then the hypothesis was seen as valid. Significant variables were presented in table format.

Summary Results

Frequencies

In our sample of 50 clergy, none were younger than 22 years of age, 4 (8%) were between 24 and 35 years of age, 12 (24%) were between 36 and 45 years of age, 30 (60%) were between 46 and 65 years of age, and 2 (4%) were 66 years and older. For Lincoln and Mamiya's sample of 1,531 urban pastors, the median age of was 51.5. The median age of pastors in this study was 49 years old. The age of pastor was an issue that was considered important for most black Baptist churches because pastors who were middle-

aged would have lived and experienced many external programs, particularly governmental, and may have come to the conclusion that the only way their communities can be saved would be a return to organic community institutions responding to salient issues in their communities.

The educational level of the pastors in this study showed that they were a highly educated group. This was not unexpected given recent research by Dash and Rasor (2000) and Lincoln and Mamiya (1990). This change from older studies could be attributed to three factors: 1) the growing number of black persons in urban cities attending and receiving post secondary degrees; 2) the number of graduate schools and seminaries in the city; and 3) the desire of many churches for a professional minister as opposed to a preacher. In Lincoln and Mamiya's 1990 study of black urban churches they noted approximately 70.2% of the urban black pastors in their nation-wide study had some level of college training with 37.9% of them having some form of training beyond four years of college. Dash and Rasor's 2000 national study of black Baptist churches discovered that nearly a third (33%) of the pastors had educational experience post-Master's degree, while only 10% had a certificate of completion from high school or less. In this study, the average level of education for black pastors was four years of college. Our study found that nearly all of the pastors, 49 (98%), had some college training. However, what was more significant was the fact that the majority, 31 (62%) of them had "Graduate or Professional Degrees." This trend, according to Johnstone, would make these pastors very inclined to engage in less traditional means for meeting the needs of their community. The theological position of the pastor in the sample ranged from fundamentalists to other with the mean position being moderates. Specifically, 10 pastors (20%) were "fundamentalists," 7 pastors (14%) were "conservative," 17 pastors (34%) were "moderates," 6 pastors (12%) were "liberal," and 1 pastor (2%) indicated that they fell into the category of "other." An understanding that the black church had to be both other-worldly and this-worldly in orientation, or active in sacred as well as secular activities, probably reflected the educational level of the pastors who,

based on their training and understanding of contemporary issues, believed that the black church has had, and must continue to have, a dualistic existence.

In regard to the length of time a pastor had served in his/her present pastorate, 6 respondents (12%) reported being in their present pastorate between six months to one year, 17 (34%) reported being in their present pastorate between one and ten years, while 23 (46%) had been in their present pastorate more than ten years. It was interesting to note that four respondents chose not to answer this question. At any rate, the mean length of time that most pastors have been in their pastorate was 8.4 years. Although many might have wanted to argue that this phenomenon was best explained by the lack of other opportunities, it was quite clear based on this study that the majority of these pastors had chosen to remain at their present church, as opposed to frequently changing churches. We assume that each had a vision for their church and its community and had not selected to leave until their plan had been accomplished. In field observations, pastors who were the most active in their communities had been at their church very long time.

Out of the 50 pastors surveyed in this study 4 pastors (8%) reported that they were not affiliated with the General Missionary of Georgia, Inc., or the New Era State Convention of Georgia, Inc. This was ironic considering the fact that we used the two conventions' membership list for selecting churches to participate in this project. That notwithstanding, 27 respondents (54 %) noted that their church was affiliated with the General Missionary and 19 (38 %) with the New Era. The slight difference in pastors' convention affiliation can be attributed to two facts: the General Missionary Baptist Convention, like its parent body, is the oldest existing black Baptist association in Georgia and its strong attraction for less educated pastors. However, while the General Missionary Convention had most of the pastors in this study, the pastors who were in the New Era Convention led churches that have been the most active in the struggle for parity of city services and enfranchisement for blacks in Atlanta, were the oldest in terms of date establishment, and had more economic resources. These churches, in general,

though not the most popular for recent generations, had a highly educated, older, and upper middle class congregation.

As part of the background examination of black Baptist pastors, we asked about their involvement in civic and/or social organizations, from clerical to fraternal. Of the 50 pastors in this study, 35 respondents (70%) were affiliated with a religious organization. This was not surprising since membership in either of the two state conventions constituted membership in a religious organization. Although more than 90% of the pastors in this study claimed to be concerned about their communities, our survey discovered that slightly more than half, 29 respondents (58%), were active in grassroots community organizations, 22 (44 %) were members of community organizations that dealt with political issues, and only 20 pastors (40 %) chose to be involved in political organizations, such as the Democratic Party or the NAACP. In spite of these pastors' relatively limited participation in community organizations, approximately half, 24 pastors (48 %) participated in in Greek-lettered organizations and 26 (52 %) in fraternal orders. Such memberships, though likely made either in college or when they were much younger, did suggest an understanding of the importance of helping those in need, albeit if in a less direct way.

Because the Civil Rights Movement has been so important for African American progress, the question of whether pastors had been directly involved in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement was posed to the entire surveyed population, out of which 22 (44 %) responded in the affirmative. Because this number is less than the majority surveyed, one could possibly discount on the surface that this researcher's assumption is invalid. However, when one takes into account the fact that only 32 pastors surveyed fell within the age range that would have allowed them to be at least old enough to participate, one can clearly see that the majority (68%) of them were directly involved in the movement.

In examining the levels of community participation we asked, "how far is your home from your church?"

The results were that only 4 (8%) of the total sample of black Baptist pastors responded that they lived between one and two miles from their church, while 45 (90%) reported that they lived two or more miles from the church. No respondent reported living a mile or less from the church. The approximate mean distance that black Baptist pastors lived from their church was two or more miles. The idea of black pastors living away from the church and its community was relatively new phenomenon. Historically, what made the pastor so important to their community was that though they were typically the most educated, the most accepted by the white establishment, and the most economically stable they still remained in the community of their congregation. As I reported in another study based on the same data, the majority of black Baptist congregations in Atlanta lived more than two miles from the church (Sewell 2001). It would not, of course, be unreasonable to conclude that as "white flight" happened in the 1970s in many urban cities, many blacks followed suite in the 1980s, participating in what this researcher terms "black flight."

Bivariate Analysis

The association between the dependent variable, level of community participation, and the background traits of the independent variables was interesting, because certain hypotheses were supported while others were found invalid. The background variables that did show an association to the level of community participation were: education ($X^2=16.119$, $p<.013$); Black Liberation Theology ($X^2=7.511$, $p<.023$); Greek-lettered organization ($X^2=10.211$, $p<.001$); Years in the Pastorate ($X^2=11.846$, $p<.019$), Proximity to the Church ($X^2=11.034$, $p<.001$) and 1960s Civil Rights Movement ($X^2=9.781$, $p<.008$). On the other hand, there were several variables of black pastoral traits that did not show a relation to the level of community engagement: age ($X^2=2.984$, $p<.811$); theological position ($X^2=3.479$, $p<.323$), Convention Affiliation ($X^2=6.111$, $p<.191$).

Conclusion

This study suggests the complex interactions that shape pastors' participation in their communities. The fact that 100% of the pastors noted that they had participated -- directly (20) or indirectly (30) -- in responding to the needs of their community indicates some degree of support for the current focus by policy makers on churches or faith groups' participation in community services as a strategy for addressing community needs. However, effective strategies for involving black churches appear to be based on a number of issues, particularly those that are related to pastors. Ultimately, this study has determined that among the fifty pastors surveyed, those with high levels of education, who subscribe to Black Liberation Theology, have worked in their churches for more than ten years, and were directly active in the 1950s-1960s Civil Rights Movement were predisposed to direct community participation. These findings were consistent with several national studies, which had examined the role of black pastors in America (Dash and Rasor 2002, Billingsley 1999, and Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

Although consistent with previous studies, the above findings confront this study with the prevailing question of why these personal characteristics contribute to community involvement of black pastors. It is my belief that there are serious implications that can be drawn from this study. This study indicates initially that most black Baptist ministers have themselves become sensitive, albeit to varying degrees, to the underlying causes as well as the conditions in their communities. The type of response to such information also varies, as some pastors have chosen to take a passive stance toward responding to the needs, while others have selected to develop programs and initiatives that precisely seek to ameliorate the problems. What can we infer from the findings?

Pastors who are highly educated understand that 21st century needs of black communities, like those of the 19th century, calls for more than just biblical interpretation and esoteric jargon. These pastors believe that problems do not just fade away without a level of engagement. It is my assumption that black liberation theology is a factor for community

engagement, because it is both an academic realization about the black church experience and a function of its present day suffering. But, more importantly, adherents to this theology understand that resources are never given willingly or without strings; thus, it becomes imperative for them to combine the concept of hope with the model of action for community development. Regarding the civil rights variable, many historians have noted in various journals over the years that the majority of black Baptist pastors in general did not play a predominant role in the struggle for civil rights. Many scholars, conversely, have noted the importance of the 1960 civil rights movement as a strong variable for shaping an active contemporary black leadership.

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general civic and social memberships as not being associated with community engagement was unexpected. At the same time, there was a relationship between membership in a Greek-lettered organization and community involvement. On the surface, it seemed that pastors who participated as members of any secular organization would be most interested in working explicitly to not only advance the needs of their community but to address their issues.

One possible explanation for this is recognizing that most persons joined secular organizations for the purpose of belonging or status. Although they may have embraced the history and programs of the group, they found it difficult or low on their priority list to put forth the time and commitment to endeavor for the organization's mission. These memberships became more symbolic than substantive in nature. This was especially true of black pastors who were often beseeched by organizations that were hoping to capitalize on the pastor's influence in the community and his/her direct and indirect resources. However, for persons who were members of black Greek-lettered organizations, they tended not to join these societies haphazardly. For the most part they had become members during the most formative period in their life, their matriculation in college, after having examined directly the ideas, the precepts, the membership, and the activities of the association for at least a year. Likewise, these organizations, unlike other secular organization, allowed for various approaches to carrying out their community mission - from tutorial to mentorship and from local voter registration drives to community feed the homeless projects. Such a myriad of community engagements allowed for these leaders to work with or in programs that they found interest in; whereas, in other organizations (i.e., NAACP, political parties, or neighborhood planning units), all of their activities tended to use one approach. Although this was not a negative attribute, it might explain why pastors who were in fraternal organization were more predisposed to being engaged communally.

It also suggests that black pastors who have - collectively -- the above characteristics are emerging

as the new religious leaders. It is my contention that these pastors have observed that politicians are too entangled with the politics of keeping themselves in office or supporting interests that are financially beneficial to them to act on behalf of their local communities. Therefore, it is necessary for "organic" leaders, persons who are not afraid to challenge the status quo, not only to speak out against community and societal ills, but to advance a plan of action. The pastors' available leadership combined with the above characteristics and sensitivity have made them direct responders to the needs of their community. This begs the questions: 1) Are these findings replicable in other urban communities and with other denominations? And 2) Are there other variables that also might predispose black Baptist pastors to community engagement?

By drawing conclusions based entirely on fifty black Baptist pastors, this study may be disproportionately focused on an elite segment of churches that want, for perhaps self-serving reasons, to engage in their community and have a mentality that does not always lend itself to substantive work. Although the data in this study, as well as in previous studies, suggests that most black pastors reflect the inclination of their congregations and that black faith communities are nurturing environments for meeting the needs of their communities, it is not clear that these findings are typical of all black churches.

Nevertheless, assuming that what we have found in Atlanta is true in other cities, significant concerns can be raised regarding the role, or the lack thereof, of black pastors in the formulation and implementation processes of the faith-based initiative which been put forward by the Bush administration. Perhaps most seriously, the conception of the faith-based initiative as advanced by the conservatives assumes a role for black church participation while weakening the idea of a separation of church and state, particularly the entanglement argument of *Lemon vs. Kurtzman* (1971), and autonomy that churches, especially black churches, embrace and advance.

Cross-national studies strongly suggest that the most successful strategies for community policy

formulation are linked with institutional as well as non-institutional community actors. Experiences with the formulation and implementation of community programs in the U.S. should be considered in implementing the faith-based initiative. More studies are needed to help ground the current faith-based initiative debate in a better understanding of the type of church that will be most effective.

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