


Spring 1979

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Recommended Citation

Herbert, Adam W. (1979) "Blacks, public policy and political participation," *Ralph Bunche Journal of Public Affairs*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <http://digitalscholarship.bjmlspa.tsu.edu/rbjpa/vol2/iss1/2>

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BLACKS, PUBLIC POLICY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Address by Dr. Adam W. Herbert, *Director of Research,*
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On January 20, 1977, The Reverend Jesse Jackson gave a speech to standing ovations at a luncheon of the Republican National Committee. In that well publicized speech, he made an observation that provides an excellent framework within which to explore the evolving dynamics of blacks and public policy:

“Power is simply the ability to achieve purpose. Our purpose is both simple and complex. Simple because our goal is equity and parity (our share). Complex because we must begin where we are and use what we've got to take us to where we want and need to go.”

Gaining Our Share

The struggle to secure “our share” of the political and economic pie in America has been at the heart of a struggle which can be traced to the latter part of the 19th century. From those early efforts to secure the rights of political participation, to the demonstrations and riots of the 1960's, to the contemporary emphasis on political and economic participation, blacks have continually sought to become equal partners in all aspects of life in American society.

While the political participation and employment data mentioned herein suggest that we have made progress on those fronts, when one examines the current economic status of blacks, doubts must be raised as to whether we are making serious progress in the effort to gain “our fair share.”

Consider these facts:

- the overall unemployment rate through January 1978 was 6.3 percent;
 - Whites 5.5%
 - Non-whites 12.7%
 - Youth (16-19) 16.0%
 - Black Youth 38.9%
- in 1976, 33% of white families had incomes over \$20,000, compared to 14% of black families;
- with regard to median family income, in 1969, whites received \$9,794, compared to \$5,999 for blacks; in 1976, the median family income for whites was \$13,290 compared to \$7,900 for blacks.
- while whites complete an average of 12.1 years of school, blacks complete an average of 9.4 years.

Factors such as these prompted Vernon Jordan to observe at his recent press conference on the State of Black America:

“Most Americans consider that 1977 was a year of economic recovery. We cannot share that view. For black Americans, 1977 was a year of continued depression, with unacceptably high unemployment and a widening income gap. Perhaps the most disturbing symbol of this situation may be found in the unemployment statistics for youth: white youth joblessness went down, black youth unemployment continued its upward spiral.

The generally dismal picture is worsened by the widespread expectations that the new Administration would right the balance and would accelerate black progress, based on campaign promises and commitments. Those expectations have been disappointed.”

Perhaps it is in recognition of the gap between black experiences and expectations that the last decade has been one of significant political achievement for blacks. While the overall picture contains a few areas of concern, I would like to share with you some data which suggest that blacks have become and can be an even greater force in the American political system than we have attempted to be. Perhaps more fundamental, it is my thesis that in light of the growing competition at all levels of government for expanding services in the face of limited dollars, blacks must become more active politically and participate more fully in the administrative affairs of government if this nation is to respond to conditions such as those mentioned above.

Electoral Participation

Consider first the area of electoral participation. When blacks vote, we can make a difference. The 1976 and recent 1977 elections document this clearly. The Joint Center for Political Studies analyzed the black vote in the 1976 election, and we discovered a number of significant facts. In general it is clear that blacks played a major role in the election of officials at all levels of government. Specifically, we have noted such impacts as the following:

- The black vote proved to be the margin of President Carter’s victory in 13 states, including Texas. The combined electoral vote in these 13 states was 216 — only 54 short of the 270 electoral votes needed for victory;
- in Missouri, black voters provided the margin of victory for the winning gubernatorial candidate;
- in Arkansas and North Carolina, blacks gave the winning gubernatorial candidate more than 90% of their votes;
- in three Senate races (Tennessee, Michigan and Ohio) black voters provided the margin of victory for the winner.

Shifting to the 1977 elections, another interesting phenomenon becomes evident — blacks are, in a growing number of instances, deserting the Democratic candidate to vote Republican. This is certainly consistent with the comment made by Jesse Jackson in his speech before the Republican National Committee, when he stated that blacks, “must pursue a strategy that prohibits one party from taking us for granted and another party from writing us off.”

What has happened when Republicans realize the importance of approaching the black community on the grounds of mutual interest? The 1977 elections were instructive in this regard. In Charlotte, N.C., blacks recently helped to elect that city’s first Republican mayor. He received 41% of the black vote and 61% of the total vote. In New Orleans, blacks supported Robert Livingston with 30% of their votes in his winning race for the Congress. In Jackson, Mississippi, Doug Shanks received 49% of the black vote and 49% of the total vote in his losing bid to become mayor of that city. Never before have blacks voted in such numbers for a Republican candidate in Mississippi.

In each of these cases, the black vote was actively sought. But perhaps more important, the traditional Democratic party — black voter alliance was broken on self interest grounds. This kind of break with recent tradition has also been evident in the campaigns of such Republican Senators as Jacob Javits, Charles Mathias and Ed Brooke. Most recently it was evident in Virginia where Marshall Coleman was elected as the first Republican Attorney General in that state’s history. Thirty-three percent of black voters supported him over his conservative Democratic opponent.

These facts speak for themselves. *We can make a difference in many elections around the country.* Remember that we are geographically concentrated; and this means power at the polls, when we choose to utilize it. This is perhaps best illustrated by the following facts:

- in 81 Congressional Districts blacks constitute 20% or more of the total population, and in 61 of those Districts we constitute 20% of the total voting age population;
- in 557 counties located throughout the nation, blacks comprise 20% or more of the total population, and in 103 counties we comprise at least 50% of the total population;
- In four states — Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina and South Carolina — blacks comprise approximately one-fourth of the total state population.

The one disappointing factor which consistently stands out when examining the obvious power potential which accompanies concentrations and voting bloc patterns such as these is that blacks simply do not

vote to the extent necessary to cause politicians to take our agenda items seriously on a continuing basis. If we want to reduce unemployment in our communities, increase our potential to graduate from public schools, and live more decent lives, this trend must be reversed.

The Black Elected Official

Both because and in spite of the electoral participation patterns I have described, growing numbers of black elected officials have been selected to hold public office amid expectations that they will make the difference; that public agencies and the policies they develop and administer will become more responsive to minority group needs. Unfortunately, there has been very little research on the "effectiveness" of these officials or on the differences in policy, if any, which they have been able to promote. Recent works by William Nelson and others on black mayors do identify some of the problems these officials have encountered as they have attempted to develop policies and administer the implementation of public programs, but at this point we must rely almost totally on anecdotal information to evaluate the results of their presence in the seats of power.

If numbers are any indication, however, we are assuming a growing presence in elective offices at all levels of government, except the federal government. Although black elected officials represent less than one percent of all elected officials, their presence suggests at least the potential to make a difference as we seek to move from where we are to where we want to go. (See Table, page 24.)

At the *federal level*, Senator Edward Brooke is the only black member of the Senate, where he has served since 1967. In 1968, there were eight Members in the House of Representatives; today there are 16, who come from 10 states and the District of Columbia. It should be noted, however, that blacks lost the Andrew Young seat; and two black members, Barbara Jordon and Yvonne Burke, will not seek reelection in 1978.

At the *state level*, there are sixteen black elected officials whose offices are subject to state-wide election, including two (2) lieutenant governors. Especially important is the growing number of black state legislators (from 276 in 1976 to 294 in 1977), and a Speaker of the House in Pennsylvania.

Finally, at the *local level*, there are 1,921 black elected officials. There are 162 black mayors, most serving in small cities with populations under 15,000; 447 black judicial and law enforcement officials; and 1,051 black education officials.

A clear indication of the power of the concentrated and active black voter can be seen in the fact that Mississippi is the state with the most

black elected officials with 295. Illinois ranks second with 281, and Louisiana is third with 276. Texas, with its 158 black elected officials ranks 14th.

It seems probable that the number of black elected officials will continue to increase, but we must recognize that there are limits to what they can accomplish. They must cope with some very real, and often difficult, constraints including such factors as the following:

1. Lack of experience
2. Seniority systems
3. Limited, if any, staff support
4. Harassment (legal and political and economic)
5. Uncooperative white officials at the state, regional and local levels
6. Limited community or governmental resources
7. Economic discrimination
8. Racial discrimination
9. Uncooperative business communities
10. Poor committee assignments
11. Limited potential for coalition building among elected colleagues
12. Absence of evidence of strong black community backing
13. Faulty or incomplete bureaucratic information

The major challenge to us in the black community is to recognize the existence of these constraints, avoid the temptation of expecting more than our officials can be reasonably expected to deliver, and assist them in overcoming barriers which limit their capacity to serve in our best interest.

The Black Administrator

Not to be forgotten in this equation are black administrators — both appointed and those with career status. These are roles which many of you are or will be filling at the federal, state and local levels. While the elected official has policy making, and in the case of mayors some management oversight duties, the responsibility of assuring the effective implementation of public programs rests with professional and/or appointed managers.

Based upon my experiences both in and studying government, I am firmly convinced that although the actions of elected officials are critical at the policy formulation stage, also of importance to our communities are:

- how well public agencies function;
- how committed agencies are in responding to the problems/needs confronting them;
- how agency managers and staff perceive problems and manifest a willingness to address them; and

Ralph Bunche Journal of Public Affairs Vol. 2, 1972
BLACK ELECTED OFFICIALS IN THE UNITED STATES
 As Of July, 1977

STATE	TOTAL	Federal		State		Regional	County			Municipal					Judicial and Law Enforcement					Education							
		Senators	Representatives	Administration	Directors, State Agencies	Senators	Representatives	Members, Sub-Naval Regional Bodies	Members, Local Bodies	Members, Local Bodies	Members, Other	Other Municipal Officials	Mayor	Members, Municipal Governing Bodies	Members, Other	Other Municipal Officials	Member, Advisory Commission	Judges, State Courts and Law Courts	Judges, Other Courts	Magistrates, Justices of the Peace, Constables	Other Judicial Officials	Police Chiefs, Sheriffs, Marshals	Other Law Enforcement Officials	Members, State Education Agencies	Members, Central and Local School Boards	Members, Local School Boards	Direct Education Officials
Alabama	201				2	13		15	7	11	87	2	2				3	27	4	4					23	1	
Alaska	2							1																	1		
Arizona	14					2					6								2					4	4		
Arkansas	218				1	3		29		11	81		10								1			5	77		
California	177	3	1	1	2	6	2	10	1	1	9	29	8	3		1	40							12	48		
Colorado	16		1		1	2					1	4					1				1			3	3		
Connecticut	48		1		1	5					22	3	1						1		1			11	11		
Delaware	13				1	2					8													2	2		
District of Columbia	251	1								1	11				232									6	6		
Florida	91					3		3			7	60	2	1		1	5							9	9		
Georgia	225				2	21		15	3	3	127	2					4	4	1					41	2		
Hawaii	1					1																					
Idaho	1										1																
Illinois	281	2			6	14		17	14		9	109	2	14			21						10	63	5		
Indiana	66				2	4		6		2	1	30		1	9		5	1					1	77	3		
Iowa	9				2	2				1														1	4		
Kansas	33				1	5		3			9	1	2				1							11	12		
Kentucky	66				1	2					1	42					3	4				1		12	12		
Louisiana	276				1	9		60			10	75					4	26	1	9		3		78	4		
Maine	3					1		1			1																
Maryland	88	1			5	14		3			7	43		1			8		1	1				4	4		
Massachusetts	24	1			3	8					3	4	1										1	6	7		
Michigan	251	2	1		4	13		25	4	15	53	2	15			25	4		1		1	9	77	3			
Minnesota	9				1	1					1						2							3	3		
Mississippi	295				4	4		16	15	6	14	120	4				47	4	1				60	4			
Missouri	126	1			2	13		2	3		9	59		6			9	4		5			1	12	4		
Montana	1				1																						
Nebraska	7				2						1													2	2		
Nevada	7				1	2											2						1	1			
New Hampshire	1					1																					
New Jersey	148				1	4		6	1	4	56		4											72	1		
New Mexico	4				1	1				1	1													1	1		
New York	186		2		4	10		9			22		2				31							106	1		
North Carolina	221				2	4		15			10	129	3				5							53	53		
North Dakota	1										1																
Ohio	159	1			2	10					8	85	3	5			19						2	24	18		
Oklahoma	69				1	3					8	26		12			1							2	2		
Oregon	6										1																
Pennsylvania	128	1			3	12			1		41		3			1	25	14	2					25	25		
Rhode Island	3					1					2																
South Carolina	182					13		28	2	9	60						19		2					48	1		
Tennessee	117	1			2	9		55	3		31						4	4						10	10		
Texas	158				13		1	1			4	57	1				1	8	3		1			67	67		
Utah	1					1																					
Virginia	82				1	1		23	2	7	45								2	1							
Washington	13				1	1					1	4					4							2	2		
West Virginia	15				1	1					1	12						1									
Wisconsin	16				1	2		3	1	1	5						1							3	3		
Wyoming	1																										
Total	4318	1	18	4	1	56	238	2	31	134	16	31	182	356	33	87	241	3	229	158	15	31	1	7	42	994	8

Note: No Black Elected Officials Have Been Identified in South Dakota or Vermont.
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- How captive agencies are of the special interests with which they deal on a daily basis.

It is in these contexts that individual managers can play important roles. While the presence of black administrators in public agencies does not guarantee governmental responsiveness to community needs, in an environment of severe competition for public service, it does offer such a prospect.

Since the mid-1960's, a significant effort has been made to secure greater employment opportunities for blacks in public service at increasingly higher levels of responsibility. Those efforts are making a difference. Although the rates of change may not be as rapid as we would like, federal employment patterns offer an excellent example. The last yearly employment survey released by the Civil Service Commission indicates that of the 2.4 million full-time federal employees covered by the General Schedule in 1976, 384,515 were black. This was 16% of the federal work force. By way of contrast, in 1966 blacks were 13.89% of the federal work force.

The expectation that minority public administrators can make a difference in the implementation of public policy is based on the assumption that accompanying their presence is a capacity to impact agency policies and practices. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. First, it is clear that Blacks have not been able to progress up the bureaucratic ladder in a timely fashion. Far too few minorities have been able to achieve grade levels above GS-9, not to mention supergrade status with the accompanying potential to influence high-level political appointees.

To convey some sense of the absence of minority employees in those higher level professional grades where contract and grant award decisions as well as numerous program administration rules are made, consider the following data taken from the aforementioned Civil Service Commission survey:

- at the supergrade level, the percentage of black professionals in Cabinet agencies range from only .4% (Interior) to 7% (HEW and HUD);
- only 3.14% of all supergrade employees in Cabinet agencies were black (220 out of 6,987);
- only 4.38% of all GS 12-15 employees in Cabinet agencies were black;
- only 8.36% of all GS 9-11 employees in Cabinet agencies were black.

A second assumption made by those who perceive a relationship between the presence of blacks in a bureaucracy and policy/program output is that the orientation of those officials will consistently be toward addressing the problems and needs of minorities and low-income people. Certainly because of common experiential bases this

appears to be a reasonable expectation. It is essential, however, that we recognize the fact that there exists a range of pressures and constraints which make the potential for community disappointment over individual performances much higher than most of us realize.

Among the most important of these are the following:

1. Bureaucratic System Demands
2. Collegial Pressures
3. Personal Objectives
4. Limited Decision-Making Authority
5. Limited Access to External Policy Analysis Information
6. Limited Access to High-Level Political Decision Makers
7. Budgetary Constraints
8. Political Administrative Policy Constraints
9. Legal Parameters to Desired Policy Initiatives

A third assumption being made is that minority managers are located not only in grade levels which will enable them to impact policy content and program implementation, but also that we are in agencies and offices therein where a significant impact can be made on the nature and scope of public programs. One of my major concerns in this area is that blacks have routinely been placed into and/or have personally assumed that they should only work in a narrow range of social agencies or functional areas. We at the Joint Center are currently looking at federal employment statistics to determine the scope of this phenomenon. Some data currently available do stand out even now:

- At HUD, 4 of the 8 career supergrade executives are in the Office of Equal Opportunity where their impact on the nature of most Departmental policies is limited;
- The Departments of Interior, Agriculture, Justice, Commerce, and Defense have disproportionately lower levels of black executives than the more socially oriented agencies, particularly HEW, HUD and DOL

At the local level, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission has conducted its EEO-4 survey of state and local government. Not surprising is the fact that blacks tend not to work as professionals in such functional areas as fire, police, natural resources, and financial administration. Rather, there is a strong presence in such areas as housing, welfare, hospitals and sanitariums, and corrections.

While we clearly must continue to make contributions in the more "traditional" employment areas, it is equally critical that our base of influence be broadened. There must be a budget office presence; there is a great need for black technicians working in housing and agricultural finance, economic development, defense procurement, bonding

and tax policy. These areas and many others we could easily identify have direct impacts on all our lives as individuals and certainly on minority communities generally.

Significant opportunities exist today to expand our horizons, to broaden the scope of our interests, and to enhance our potential as builders of our own destinies. We must take advantage of them.

Public Policy Analysis

Again, expanded electoral participation, coupled with increased numbers of minority elected and administrative officials can make a difference in achieving public policies and programs which are more responsive to our community needs. A final ingredient which must not be overlooked as part of a comprehensive strategy for assuring more responsive government is Public Policy Analysis.

One of the real dilemmas for black elected officials, political appointees and career officials is that the implications of proposed policies for the black community are not always clear. What will the President's proposed tax cuts mean to blacks? What are the effects of increased individual Social Security contributions on our communities? What will the proposed welfare program mean to us? Which of the numerous energy proposals now being discussed should we support or oppose? Are the various manpower programs now in place or currently being considered by the Administration going to improve the unemployment picture in our neighborhoods? Are these programs addressing the systemic causes of unemployment instead of creating only temporary make-work opportunities which fail to address the *real* problems confronting us? Will the national urban policy being developed by the Administration meaningfully address the problems of inner cities? What minimum provisions should an urban policy contain and at what funding levels, to be responsive to the needs of inner-city minority communities of which we are all so very much aware? What should the future direction be for OMBE, the 8-A program and minority contracting generally?

It is essential that there be an ongoing effort within our communities to assess such significant issues as these, *before* executive decisions are made and the final votes are cast.

In far too many cases we have waited until the policy parameters are firmly established and the financial pie has been divided before recognizing the importance or impact of various public policies on minority communities.

One solution to this problem may be the creation of a Common Cause type organization created within and funded by the black community. Alternatively, schools of public affairs and students in

academic institutions can and should address greater attention to public policy questions through such vehicles as special projects and classroom assignments. You at Texas Southern University can be of great assistance to the 13 state legislators; 57 city council members and the 67 Board of Education officials in your state.

On the national level, the Joint Center for Political Studies, Urban League, NAACP and numerous other minority organizations are working on both national and some state-wide policy questions. Unfortunately, the money available to fund such efforts outside of our communities is limited; but we must proceed.

The years ahead are going to offer even greater challenges to those of us who want to improve the plight of our people. As I have suggested today, the competition for dollars is expanding. This competition is exacerbated further by tax revolts and the clear message that tax payers do not want to pay more for government services. If we in the black community do not expand our political efforts, increase our administrative presence in government, and develop enhanced policy analysis capabilities as other interest groups continue their efforts in these areas, the result seems clear. We can and must work with greater determination to move from where we are and "use what we've got to take us to where we want and need to go." It will only be through greater vigilance, determination, political action, and greater coalition building that we will achieve this end.