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HISTORICAL DATA ON BLACK-CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC POLICY

Introduction

Since the area of Black religion, of which Black churches are a major part, has emerged historically as the strongest institutional sector of Black communities, it is only natural that it became a part of the political process, producing public policies that affected the laws of the country. Historically, public policy advocacy has been carried by Black clergy, church-related lay leaders, politicians supported by churches, and by Black ecumenical church organizations and by Black and white ecumenical organizations. However, as a historical generalization, Larry Jones's perceptive comment tends to hold true: "The absence of consensus on important public-policy issues means that the power of churches to influence public policy tends to be proportional to the charisma and prestige of individual church leaders."¹ This essay will provide a brief historical overview of Black-church involvement in public-policy formation.

Before we proceed, we also need to remember that the political victories of the Republican Party in the past two decades were fueled by some seventy neoconservative think tanks and public-policy institutes. So the topic of this conference and this essay is critical to the future progress of Black communities nationwide.

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¹Lawrence N. Jones, "The Black Churches: A New Agenda," *Christian Century* 96 (April 18, 1979): 434.

The Period of Slavery and Its Abolition

Depending on how one dates the beginning of slavery in the United States, whether it is 1619, the founding of the Jamestown Colony in Virginia or 1565, the establishment of a Spanish-African colony in St. Augustine Florida, the years of the Atlantic slave trade constitute the largest segment of historical time, 250 to 300 years. During this period, there was a consensus on the part of most Africans, slave or free, that the major public-policy issue was slavery and its abolition. Africans themselves showed their desire for abolition by slave revolts, escaping, and other acts of resistance. With the emergence of independent Black churches in the mid-eighteenth century, first Baptist churches in South Carolina and Virginia, and Methodist ones in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York City, individual clergy and church-related lay leaders took the lead in advocacy for the abolition of slavery. Many of them helped enslaved Africans escape to the North. The Africans who helped to construct the First African Baptist Church in Savannah built a crawl space beneath the sanctuary's main floor to hide escaping slaves. Bishop Richard Allen of Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia also used the church's basement to sequester escaped slaves. However, the A.M.E. Zion Church became known as the Freedom Church because they had some of the most famous Black abolitionists—Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Jermaine Loguen, etc. Zion also built a string of churches that led up the Hudson River to Albany and the cities of northern New York such as Utica, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo. Zion churches played a major role in hiding escaping slaves through its underground railroad. During the Civil War years, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman were instrumental in persuading President

Abraham Lincoln to recruit the newly-freed Africans into the Union Army. This critical decision in 1863 helped the Union Army to turn the tide of the war as half a million Africans signed up (until then General Robert E. Lee's military genius enabled the Confederate Army to win most of the major battles).

The Period of Reconstruction

The brief decade of Reconstruction from the Civil Rights Act of 1867, which gave the freed people the franchise to 1877 when a tie in the electoral system led to a presidential promise to pull federal troops out of the South, saw the largest number of Black politicians elected to office—two Black senators and twenty congress[persons]. Two A.M.E. clergy were among those elected to Congress. The Rev. Hiram Revels of Mississippi was the first Black senator and the Rev. Richard H. Cain of South Carolina was elected to the House. The public policies that were in the forefront of all of the Black politicians were education for the newly-freed people and jobs. These two issues will be resurrected time and again in Black history, including the present.

Different southern states began the process of disenfranchising Black voters from 1877 to the end of the century. The removal of federal troops gave rise to a reign of violence and lynching. Ida B. Wells began her anti-lynching campaign in A.M.E. churches in response to the lynching of a successful Black store owner in Mississippi. Anti-lynching legislation became a major public-policy goal of the majority of African Americans until World War II. The Supreme Court decision of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* of 1896, the "separate but equal" clause, led to the total segregation of southern communities. So the policy goals at the beginning of the twentieth century includ-

ed: regaining the vote, anti-lynching legislation, and an end to segregation in schools and public facilities.

Best Practices and Lessons from Ecumenical Organizations in Relation to Public-Policy Issues in the Twentieth Century

In assessing best practices and lessons from other ecumenical organizations, this section will focus on only four: the Fraternal Council of Negro Churches, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the National Council of Churches and the Congress of National Black Churches. The reason for including "lessons" as well as "best practices" will become clear since these groups developed problems of their own and provide a historical reminder for those who want to organize a church base across denominations to deal with public policy issues and lobbying.

The Fraternal Council of Churches (1934-1964)

In 1908, the Federal Council of Churches, the forerunner of the National Council of Churches, came into being as a voice of the social-gospel movement. Liberal white church leaders and progressive Black church pastors formed an ecumenical group to counter the problems of industrialization and the formation of labor unions. The Federal Council placed its emphasis and resources on labor organizing and unions, which at the time excluded the majority of Black workers. However, racial justice was not on the agenda of the Federal Council. As a result of this lack of attention to racial justice, in 1934, the Black churches that were part of the Federal Council withdrew and under the leadership of Bishop Reverdy Ransom of the A.M.E. Church, the Fraternal Council

of Negro Churches (later called the Fraternal Council of Churches) was formed. The Council membership included at various times, the major Black denominations, some Black sects and cults (such as Father Divine's Peace Mission), the Central Jurisdiction of the Methodist Church, and some Black clergy in white denominations.

The Fraternal Council had its most productive years in the 1940s and 1950s largely through its Washington Bureau, which was headed by an activist Baptist minister, the Rev. William H. Jernigan. The Washington Bureau acted as a lobby on Capitol Hill for legislation in which Black churches were interested. Its most significant achievements were the Anti-lynching legislation of 1946 and the Civil Rights Act of 1947, which led to the desegregation of the U.S. armed forces. Both bills were passed under President Harry Truman. Both policies also provided the legal legitimation for the watershed Supreme Court decision, the 1954 *Brown vs. the Board of Education*. The beginning of the demise of the Fraternal Council occurred with the establishment of the new National Council of Churches (later called National Council of Christian Churches) in 1950 and the shift towards a Southern-based Civil Rights Movement. Several Black denominations withdrew from the Fraternal Council to join the NCC. The rhetoric of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the emphasis of the new Civil Rights Movement on "integration" also led many Black-church leaders to look down upon an all Black-church organization as vestiges of segregation and a sign of "backwardness." It was only through the persistence and commitment of Rev. Jernigan that the Fraternal Council lasted until 1964.

The Fraternal Council became the model for all Black ecumenical organizations that arose in the second half of the twentieth century, including the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (1957-), the Interdenominational Theological Center (1958-),

the National Black Evangelical Association (1963-), the Black Theology Project (1975-1977), Partners in Ecumenism (1978-), National Conference of Black Churchmen (1973-1983), National Black Pastors Conference (1979-1981), National Conference of Black Christians (1983-1984) and the Congress of National Black Churches (1978-2003).

In terms of best practices and lessons, the Fraternal Council is the prime example of Black-church leaders organizing across denominational lines to pool their collective wisdom and resources. Its funding came from the members themselves; there were no private foundation grants or government funds available. Although its programs were limited to largely interdenominational dialogue, some civil-rights protests and lobbying for civil-rights legislation, its own funding base gave the organization a freedom and independence to pursue causes that would benefit Black communities. In fact, its lobbying arm, the Washington Bureau under Jernigan, has not been effectively replicated by any of the other later Black ecumenical organizations, including SCLC and CNBC. The latest studies by the Pew Charitable Trust Project on Black churches and Public Policy at Morehouse College in 2001 found that the voices of Black churches have been conspicuously missing in public-policy debates on the Welfare Reform of 1996, Affirmative Action legislation, etc.

A second lesson includes the fact that the interests and vision of ecumenical organizations are often carried by a few committed progressive church leaders. Not every denominational leader has the vision and foresight to see the need for an ecumenical organization. Most leaders are mired in the local politics of their denomination. In the case of the Fraternal Council, one clergyperson, Jernigan, carried out the activities of the group in the final decade of its existence. There is a

need to search for the next generation of committed and progressive church leaders who will deal with public-policy issues.

A third and final lesson is found in the phrase "what goes 'round,' comes 'round.'" It is an ironic historical pattern that the members of the Fraternal Council withdrew from the largely white Federal Council in 1934 over the issues of racial justice. In the 1950s after the founding of the National Council of Churches, some of the Black denominations withdrew from the Fraternal Council to join the NCC over the issue of racial integration. The period of Black Power and Black Consciousness in the late 1960s and early 1970s led to a strong critique of the ideology of integration. It also led to the creation of Black caucuses in religious and political groups and to a search for greater autonomy and independence. In 1978, dissatisfied by the lack of attention by the NCC on the issue of racial justice and feeling the need for independence, the Congress of National Black Churches was formed by the Black mainline denominational leaders meeting at the Lilly Endowment in Indianapolis. This historical pattern shows the need for an ecumenical organization like CNBC that will consistently press the issue of racial justice in American society. It has been shown time and again that largely white ecumenical (and political) groups will tend to diminish racial concerns that are at the heart of the Black community.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference

The successful Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-1956 led to extensive discussions between Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, Fred Shuttlesworth, Bayard Rustin, Ella Baker, and others about creating an organization that could coordinate the civil-rights activities of local organizations. In

1957, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was founded with King as its first president and Abernathy as the treasurer. SCLC's leadership was primarily drawn from the Baptist denomination but in due time it became ecumenical reaching across denominations. As its name implies, the organization was led primarily by Black clergy. SCLC participated in civil-rights campaigns in Albany, Georgia, which filled the jails. It also participated in the Birmingham campaign—the attempts to desegregate the downtown area. In 1963, it became a key sponsoring organization of the March on Washington, whose national support led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. SCLC also participated in the Selma march where the televised violence provided sympathetic support in Congress for passing the Voting Rights Act of 1965. President Lyndon Johnson was aware of the impact of both bills in pushing many Southern Democrats to the Republican Party.

In the late 1960s, SCLC shifted its focus from civil rights to attacking poverty. There was the belief that poverty was the cause of inner-city violence. King's assassination led to a limited success of the Poor People's Campaign, which was then led by Ralph Abernathy. The campaign did prompt the federal government to provide food aid to the poorest U.S. counties and also led to federal support for the construction of low-income housing. After 1969, SCLC had problems raising money and was forced to cut its staff. Andrew Young and Jesse Jackson followed in succession as leaders. In 1977, Joseph E. Lowery became SCLC president and led the organization in battling efforts by the Reagan administration to limit and cut civil-rights legislation. SCLC's opposition to Reagan policy in Central America (Nicaragua and El Salvador) induced the FBI to begin surveillance of SCLC among other civil-rights organizations. Lowery led SCLC's support for the efforts to end racial

apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s. He resigned as president in 1998 and was succeeded by Martin Luther King III.

To some degree, SCLC replicated the success of the Fraternal Council in pursuing public policies on racial-justice issues.

The National Council of Churches

A brief treatment of the National Council of Churches (NCC) is included here because it serves as a primary vehicle for dealing with public-policy issues for some historic Black denominations such as the C.M.E. Church. For example, C.M.E. Bishop Thomas L. Hoyt, who is the president of the NCC, told me that the CME Church's primary work in public policy is done through the NCC.

Organized in 1950, the NCC was the successor to the Federal Council which was battered by the Great Depression and ended its activities by the start of World War II. The National Council was also part of the legacy of John D. Rockefeller Jr. who built the liberal Christian ecumenical institutions on Morningside Heights such as the Riverside Church (1930) and the Interchurch Center (1956). In fact, the Interchurch Center was built to house the NCC as part of Rockefeller's liberal ecumenical vision, as well as to provide office space for other denominations. The Riverside Church always had an interdenominational membership in the American Baptist Church and the United Church of Christ. Rather than summarizing the history of the NCC, the current situation will be discussed.

Currently, the NCC has thirty-six member denominations, which includes most of the Black mainline denominations, excluding the Church of God in Christ that chose not to join. Its membership assessments are on a sliding scale with

the larger and wealthier denominations paying more and some of the smaller communions paying little or having free membership. A set assessment fee is not given.

In 2000, the NCC had a deficit of \$2.3 million, bringing the organization to the verge of bankruptcy. Its administrative structure was similar to CNBC's with a large program staff, an executive director called General Secretary (following the model of the United Nations), and a large Board of eighty-six constituent representatives that met once a year in a General Assembly (UN model again). A smaller Executive Board met several times a year. Given that structure, the NCC was largely staff run with little input from the Board. The relationship between a staff-run National Council and local churches has always been problematic.

The large deficit that the NCC incurred had similar dynamics to CNBC. The 1990s were the most expansionary decade in the stock market ever and the optimism of that time led to a large flow of private foundation and government grants through the organizations, accompanied by haphazard accounting practices. The NCC ran two government funded projects for Job Corps and Americorps. Part of the financial crisis included mixing government funds with operational funds.

The rescue plan for the NCC included bringing in the Rev. Robert Edgar as the new General Secretary to clean up the financial situation and stabilize the organization. Edgar recruited Spencer B. Bates, a California businessman, as the Associate General Secretary for Administration and Finance. The three-year rescue plan included a large lay-off of staff members since there were too many people in administration. Edgar also convinced the two largest denominations in the NCC, the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church, to contribute \$1.5 million in 2001 as part of the

deficit reduction plan. In order to reduce the remaining deficit of \$800,000 the other denominations will be asked to contribute more and membership fees will be raised.

According to Bates, one of the major problems of non-profit organizations like the NCC is that they do not look at the balance sheet. Church folks do not understand economics. You can only do what you can pay for in terms of programs. In other words, the programmatic vision is often much broader than what the organization can afford. He also thought that the NCC staff did not have the expertise to handle large government grants. Bates, however, did support pursuing foundation grants from Rockefeller, Lilly, etc. Pursuing the "big dollars" in the form of research grants from foundations was for him a better strategy than trying to raise funds from individual donors. He also supported Bishop Adams's idea of raising \$1,000 each from 1,000 of the largest and wealthiest congregations in the NCC constituency. He argued against NCC staffers who wanted to solicit small donations of \$5 or \$10 from individual Christians. That kind of fundraising operation would be more costly than the amount of donations that would come in.

The NCC would also be restructuring its administrative structure and procedures so that a smaller group of directors, the Executive Board, will meet more frequently and will have more hands on contact and involvement in the running of the organization.

The two areas of NCC Offices relevant to the development of a Black Church Institute on Public Policy are the NCC Office in Washington, DC that deals with public-policy issues and a Communications Office. As mentioned above, CNBC has had no direct involvement on public-policy issues which the older Fraternal Council did through its Washington Bureau.

An effective Communications Office is also needed to reach the Black-Church constituency and Black community through the use of modern technology. CNBC has not had an effective television or radio presence over the past two decades.

A Brief History of the Congress of National Black Churches

In the late fall of 1976, the Program Staff of the Religion Division of the Lilly Endowment, Inc., under the leadership of Dr. Robert Lynn, Vice President, became interested in the topic of interdenominational dialogue among the mainline Black denominations. With the assistance of two representatives from the Black denominations and Lilly staff, especially Dr. Jacqui Burton, a historic meeting of the leadership of the seven denominations (African Methodist Episcopal Church; Christian Methodist Episcopal Church; African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; National Baptist Convention, USA; National Baptist Convention of America; Progressive National Baptist Convention; and Church of God in Christ) was convened at the Lilly Endowment in Indianapolis in late 1978. Bishop John Hurst Adams of the AME Church chaired the meeting. Its main purpose was to see if there were enough interest among the denominations to form an organization. After another series of meetings between 1978 to 1980, the group was incorporated on July 1, 1980, as a formal nonprofit organization under the name, the Congress of National Black Churches (CNBC). Dr. C. Eric Lincoln of Duke University coined the name at a meeting in Atlanta. The National Missionary Baptist Convention of America became the eighth member of the Congress in the 1990s.

The vision and purpose of the Congress of National Black Churches was to serve as a vehicle for collaboration among Black religious leaders across denominational lines as they seek

to provide educational, social, and economic development opportunities for those most in need in African-American communities. The articles of Incorporation affirm this vision: To be an instrument through which the several denominations work collectively for the religious, moral, social, educational, and economic progress of Black People. Since Black churches remain among the strongest institutions in Black communities, there still is a great need for continued ecumenical dialogue and collaboration among these denominations.

Bishop Adams eloquently summarized the need for an ecumenical organization like CNBC in 1985:

The one compelling thing which has over-arched (our differences in polity and doctrine) is the pain of black folk. The summons of the Congress has always been to address the needs of black people....Our purposes are really quite clear. We want to do together what we can't do separately. What we want to do together that we can't do separately is empower black people so that they can be fully human in the world.²

For the first several years of the Congress's existence, the focus was on interdenominational dialogues. No programs were developed or sponsored. The staff was kept to a minimum, and their role was largely to expedite the dialogue meetings. The first fundraising by the denominations came via the Fund for Theological Education when \$75,000 was raised for scholarships for seminarians. However, with the passage of time, the hiring of an executive director and an increasing

²Mary R. Sawyer, "Black Ecumenical Movements: Proponents of Social Change," *Review of Religious Research* 30, no. 2 (December 1988): 159.

number of program staff became the norm for the organization. Five program areas emerged over the past two decades:

1. Children and Family Development Program, which developed Project Spirit, an after school tutorial and living skills enhancement training program for children six- to twelve-years old.
2. Economic and Community Development Program, which sought to increase economic opportunities in African-American communities through partnerships with agencies such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Fannie Mae.
3. Health and Wholeness Program, which assisted churches in disease prevention and health promotion. Partnerships developed with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on issues such as diabetes, HIV/AIDS, smoking and tobacco control, as well as substance abuse and treatment.
4. Theological Education and Leadership Development Program, which was designed to empower clergy in becoming more effective administrators and to meet changing needs via training institutes, workshops, etc.
5. A fifth area was added in 1995 when both government grants and foundation funds were made available for the Rebuilding Black Churches Program when a number of Black churches in the South were burned in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Strengths and Weaknesses of CNBC's Operation

While the fiscal bankruptcy of CNBC has led to a pessimistic atmosphere, it is important to remember that not everything that happened over the past two decades of the Congress's activities has been negative or problematic. Some good and things did occur. The strengths included the Theological

Education and Leadership Development Program. The ministerial fellowships led to the training of a cadre of highly effective and successful pastors, some of whom are major leaders now. The Children and Family Development Program and Project Spirit were also effective in reaching Black youngsters and their parents in the target areas. Its only limitation was that it could not be extended beyond the model areas to Black churches in the whole country. Above all, the Congress demonstrated the need for and the possibility of interdenominational cooperation among Black church denominations. If it did not exist, it would need to be invented.

In assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the program areas mentioned above, it is important to note that the programs involving federal government grants (points 2, 3, and 5) became increasingly problematic for CNBC staff members to adequately handle. Federal grants require constant hands on assessment and evaluation reports which tended to fall between the cracks in the everyday operation of the office. Furthermore, mixing federal grant funds with operational funds led to problematic and misleading accounting procedures, giving rise to the million-dollar debt. Money was spent inappropriately and the leadership attempted to disguise the misuse.

The most prominent weakness mentioned in interviews is the lack of a strong executive director. None of the three executive directors (Joseph Eglin, Herbert Lemmons, and Sullivan Robinson) in CNBC's history has been a strong and effective administrator. Administration of the CNBC budget and honest reporting to the Board have been major failures.

Another glaring weakness was the lack of women on the Board. Dr. Jacqui Burton has acted in the capacity of a consultant to the Board and Ms. Sullivan Robinson was the executive director of CNBC but not a board member. Over the past

twenty-three years, there have been no women directors with full membership on the Board. This lack of representation is ironic since the vast majority of Black church members (70 percent to 80 percent) are made up of women. It also means that the CNBC Board has not reflected the local church. There are highly qualified women pastors in each of the denominations and a woman bishop in the AME Church (Bishop Vashti McKenzie). Reaching the next generation of leaders will have to include Black women representatives on the Board.

Other weaknesses include the fact that the representatives on the CNBC Board cannot speak for their denomination. They are not authorized to do so. However, this lack of authority is one of the accepted limitations of ecumenical organizations. The best that representatives of an ecumenical organization can do is to act as a channel of communication with their denomination.

CNBC needs to re-focus on the fundamental issue of racial justice. If there is universal agreement among the Black denominations on one issue, it is racial justice in the United States. Other issues such as abortion, homosexuality, etc. tend to be divisive. But they will unite as they have in the past on racial justice. Historically, Black churches and Black denominations arose because of racial injustice in white churches and denominations when Black pastors and bishops were refused ordination, and Black church members were relegated to the balcony or back pews of white churches.

Finally, CNBC can develop its own funding base by expanding its membership to include local congregations. According to Bishop John Adams, the Black denominations themselves do not have a lot of financial resources such as buildings and property or access to capital. The denominations are dependent upon assessments from local churches.

Much of the wealth and strength of the Black Church is in individual congregations. For example, as Adams has pointed out, 1,000 Black churches contributing an annual membership fee of \$1,000 would immediately raise a capital base of \$1 million for CNBC each year. The organization could develop several types of membership levels. A denominational membership at the current assessment and a local church membership with a sliding scale, beginning with \$1,000 for the larger and wealthier congregations to \$100 for smaller urban and rural churches. While the majority of meetings throughout the year will occur at the denominational level via the CNBC Board of Directors, one large annual gathering could bring together representatives from the local churches. This large gathering will allow local church members to learn about CNBC and what their fees cover. It will also enhance interdenominational dialogue at the "grass-roots" level.

While it is imperative for CNBC to develop its own funding base, the role of the Lilly Endowment has been important in the past and future of the organization. From the initial conversations in 1976 to the present, Lilly's grants have been the major financial support for the CNBC's development. The combination of CNBC's own funding plus Lilly support for programs will enable the organization to stabilize itself and move forward to meet other challenges of the twenty-first century such as interfaith dialogue with other religions: Islam, Bahai, traditional African religions, and the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) that have been making inroads in Black communities. Another future challenge includes developing coalitions with Hispanic/Latino clergy and churches on common civil-rights issues.

Comparisons between the NCC and CNBC

The financial troubles and bankruptcy crisis of the NCC indicate that the problems of CNBC are not unique. There has been a tendency to view CNBC's troubles as endemic to Black institutions—the “here we go again” response of many observers. However, the experience of the NCC illustrates that white institutions can get into financial trouble too. The major point is what can ecumenical organizations learn from periods of crisis. In comparing the lessons of the NCC and CNBC, the following points can be drawn:

1. The need for a strong, hands-on involvement by a smaller group of the Board of Directors, something like an Executive Committee or Council.
2. Be wary of government grants. A special expertise is needed in handling them properly.
3. A strong and honest financial accounting practices need to be in place.
4. A large top-heavy staff is ultimately detrimental to the organization. People need to be hired on the basis of short-term, temporary contracts.
5. A strong executive director who watches the bottom line and is willing to lay off people and cut programs in order to stabilize the organization.
6. The need to establish contact with the local church “grass roots” constituency of ecumenical organizations.
7. The NCC Offices of Communications in New York and Public Policy in Washington, DC are areas of future development by CNBC.

The Current Weakness in Public Policy among Black Churches

Historically, Black churches have been most effective at mobilizing at the local level on issues of racial justice. A survey and study by R. Drew Smith of "Black Churches and Public Policy," funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia, indicate that Black churches have been more strongly engaged in public-policy activism on the issues of racial justice and community economic development, which have been their historic concerns. There is also growing concern about women's rights and policies towards Africa. However, as Smith and other authors in *Long March Ahead: African American Churches and Public Policy in Post-Civil Rights America* point out there is a major weakness in public-policy analysis advocacy at the national level by Black-church denominations. He writes:

Although African American congregations within mainline denominations (including the Presbyterians, Episcopalians, United Methodists, American Baptists, Lutherans, Disciples of Christ, United Churches of Christ, and Roman Catholics) have been able to draw upon their respective denominational lobbyists on Capitol Hill and on denominational offices and divisions devoted to public affairs, this kind of advocacy has generally not existed within the historical black denominations. Two of the historically black church bodies (the A.M.E. denomination and the Progressive National Baptist Convention), however, have had Washington lobbyists off and on during the last twenty years.³

³R. Drew Smith, "Assessing the Public Policy Practices of African American Churches," in *Long March Ahead: African American Churches and Public Policy in Post-Civil Rights America*, ed. R. Drew Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 22; also Cathy J. Cohen, "Service Provider or Policymaker? Black Churches and the Health of African Americans," in *Long March Home*, [103]-126.

The essays by Megan McLaughlin and Cathy Cohen in *Long March Ahead* point to the weakness in public-policy analysis and the lack of a strong, coherent voice by Black clergy and churches during the 1993-1996 debate on Welfare Reform. This was a critical national debate since it meant moving from welfare as an entitlement and safety net under FDR's New Deal to welfare as "temporary" with no safety net for poor families. As McLaughlin points out, through seventeen legislative hearings during the three-year-period over a broad range of issues from welfare hotels to child-welfare programs, among the 285 witnesses identified, "not a single witness specially representing an African American denomination, religious coalition or congregation was found."⁴ She also interviewed the Rev. Dr. Calvin Butts of the Abyssinian Baptist Church who said, "**public policy debate and how you do that is one of the greatest challenges we [the Black Church] have.**"⁵ His view was echoed by James Ferguson, former Policy Director of the Congress of National Black Churches who pointed out that "Most churches don't have the resources or the expertise to effectively engage in, and influence, complex policy discussions."⁶ McLaughlin concludes her study with the following observations:

Nonetheless, there is also acknowledgement that times have changed, that the current public policy context requires resources and a high degree of strategic organization, and that African American churches cannot successfully engage in public advocacy without the necessary

⁴Megan E. McLaughlin, "The Role of African American Churches in Crafting the 1996 Welfare Reform Policy," in *Long March Home*, 58.

⁵*Ibid.*, 59.

⁶*Ibid.*, 61.

resources and structure....In the case of African American churches, it is recognized that their role in the shaping of public policy is greatly limited by the lack of resources and the high demand placed on them by a population that still is largely poor and disenfranchised.⁷

The Rev. Eugene Williams III, executive director of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches, emphatically argued for the need of Black clergy to receive some training in public-policy analysis. He pointed out that in the mayoral race in Los Angeles in 2000, the Black clergy association supported James K. Hahn, largely because Hahn's father had a good track record in the Black community, instead of strategically backing the Latino candidate, Councilperson Antonio Villaraigosa. They missed the opportunity to start building a political coalition with the Latino community, the largest minority group in California and in the nation. A year later, the Black clergy and community were angry with Mayor Hahn for dismissing the popular African-American police chief, Bernard Parks.

Conclusion

The majority of clergy in the U.S. do not receive any training in public-policy analysis as part of their education in divinity schools. For African-American clergy, whose role as religious and community leaders often intersects with politics, that kind of training in public policy is imperative. However, the complexity of public-policy issues in the twenty-first century will also require the establishment of a Black Church Public Policy Institute that can help denominational and church lead-

⁷Ibid., 65.

ers to analyze the policy options, work to mobilize public opinion in Black communities, and to organize lobbying groups. This kind of Institute can be part of a broader coalition of denominations in a resurrected Congress of National Black Churches. As far back as 1979, Lawrence N. Jones, the Dean of the Howard University Divinity School, pointed out that Black church members receive limited guidance from their national judiciaries on such important public-policy issues such as abortion, homosexuality, capital punishment, women's rights, etc. "The absence of consensus on important public-policy issues," wrote Jones, "means that the power of the churches to influence public policy tends to be proportional to the charisma and prestige of individual church leaders."⁸

⁸Jones, "Black Christians," 3.