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THEN AND NOW:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE
URBAN BLACK CHURCH IN AMERICA

Introduction

"Among our people generally, the church is the Alpha and the Omega of all things."[1] Martin Delany's assertion summarizes the centrality of the Black Church[2] in America. A large body of literature also exists regarding the historic role of the *urban Black Church* as a religious and spiritual institution for African Americans,[3] an arena for social and cultural expression,[4] a safe haven from discrimination and racism and for economic assistance,[5] a train-

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[1] *The North Star*, 15 February 1849.

[2] Throughout this work, the term "Black Church" is used to represent the institution as a collective and "Black church" when specific congregations are referenced. The "Black community" is used to reference the collective. However, the common sociological descriptive to identify race/ethnicity, "African American," is used rather than "Black."

[3] See W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: The Modern Library, 1903); also Cain Hope Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964); Hart M. Nelsen and Anne K. Nelsen, *The Black Church in the Sixties* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1975); and Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[4] See St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City,* 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1942); also DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*; and Ulf Hannerz, *Soulside: Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).

[5] See DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*; also Christopher Ellison and Darren Sherkat, "The 'Semi-Involuntary Institution' Revisited: Regional Variations in Church Participation Among Black Americans," *Social Forces* 73 (1995): 1415-1437; and E. Franklin Frazier, *Negro Church in America*.

ing ground for leaders and political activists,[6] and a storehouse of racial/ethnic identity.[7] Thus, the Black Church has met many of the sacred as well as secular needs of members of the urban Black community.[8]

Increased integration, tolerance, and opportunities as well as secularism and changing migratory patterns have expanded the options and resources of many urbanites such that many of the needs met primarily by the urban Black Church in the past are now being met by other civic and community organizations and institutions in the larger society.[9] However, current research suggests that the urban Black Church continues to provide important religious, spiritual, economic, social, cultural, and political outlets for the urban Black community.[10] While the urban Black Church's prominence is still apparent, fewer studies focus on the role it takes today in addressing new and/or chronic problems impacting the Black community as compared to its role in the past. These types of problems/issues include neighborhood involvement and outreach, social services to address poverty, and political activism.

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[6]See Frazier, *Negro Church in America;* also Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984).

[7]See Hart M. Nelsen, Raytha L. Yokley, and Anne K. Nelsen, eds., *The Black Church in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

[8]See C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

[9]See Ellison, 'Semi-Involuntary Institution Revisited.'

[10]See Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); also Michael Dash, Jonathan Jackson, and Steve Rasor, *Hidden Wholeness: An African-American Spirituality for Individuals and Communities* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1997); C. Eric Lincoln, *Race, Religion and the Continuing American Dilemma* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984); Gayraud S. Wilmore, ed., *African-American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994).

The objective of this study is to determine whether the Black Church continues to advocate social, cultural, and political activism, provides spiritual support, is actively engaged in neighborhood outreach, and responds to the economic needs of urbanites. The overall purpose is to investigate the role the Black Church takes today in addressing problems that impact the Black community as compared to its role in the past. This work adds to the literature on the urban Black Church by empirically studying these issues using several large representative samples. These findings also inform and update scholarship on the urban Black Church's involvement in meeting sacred and secular needs as well as its ability to be adaptive and resilient in the face of growing community needs not easily reconciled by traditional beliefs or approaches found effective in the past.

Empirically Studying the Urban Black Church

Because findings based on a varied methodology will strengthen the resulting theoretical conclusions, several secondary data sources are referenced here. This study is based on a review of existing scholarship as well as data from the *Faith Communities Today* project[11] on religion in the United States based on responses from over 14,000 congregations, 2000 Gallop poll data on the faith experiences of over 2,000 African-American clergy and senior lay leaders from various denominations, and data from the ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000 at the national

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[11]See Carl S. Dudley and David A. Roozen, *Faith Communities Today: A Report on Religion in the United States* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2001).

level,[12] and including about fifty churches in the southeast region. Trends across these sources as well as bivariate analysis are used to assess the urban Black religious experience. The multi-method approach, emphasizing national and regional data, provides a variety of "lenses" with which the urban Black Church can be evaluated more comprehensively.

The Urban Black Church Then and Now:
Context and Findings

The Black Church in urban America faces a myriad of unique challenges that differ greatly from those of its counterparts in the suburbs or in rural areas. In the early twentieth century, African Americans who migrated to urban cities in search of gainful employment and upward mobility met with resistance from white urbanites, varied norms and values, and increased diversity and challenges associated with an infrastructure ill equipped for such masses. This, in combination with racism, segregation, and discrimination that still exists today, reinforced the need for the religious/spiritual foundation from their rural past.[13] The Black Church was still needed. However, the institution was

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[12]The ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000 is important here because it includes disproportionate representation by urban clergy [79% of Baptist, 75% of Black Presbyterian, 75% of United Methodist , 64% of COGIC, 63% of AME, 54% of AMEZ, and 49% of CME churches in the sample are located in urban areas]. Thus, ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000 figures provided throughout are driven by urban churches since the majority of sampled churches are located in urban areas.
[13]See Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); also Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass (*Boston: Harvard University Press, 1993); and William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

re-constituted to reflect the urban experience.[14] And although the debate continues regarding the extent of the secularization of the urban Black Church, it is in this ecological context that the contemporary urban Black Church is examined here as a religious, political, economic, social, and cultural institution.[15]

As a Religious Institution

Sociological studies on the African-American urban experience illustrate the religious role played by the urban Black Church. Drake and Cayton's[16] ethnographic study represents an exhaustive analysis of life in urban Chicago. Residents are characterized as upper, middle, and lower class and further divided based on religious and ethical proclivities. The authors describe the existence of "church-centered" and "non-church-centered" persons within the three classes. Church-centered and non-church-centered persons are characterized based on their involvement and commitment to neighborhood religious organizations. Members of the former group tend to be active in the church, while members of the latter group are less "other-worldly" and have goals and aspirations that focus on earthly success. The authors argue that, as one moves up in class position, there is greater tendency to become less church-centered and to become more non-church-centered in

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[14]See Drake, *Black Metropolis*; also Hannerz, *Soulside*; Frazier, *Negro Church in the African-American Experience*; and Melvin D. Williams, *On the Street Where I Lived* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981).

[15]See Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River*; also W. E. B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1899); Frazier, *Negro Church in America*; James H. Harris, *Black Ministers and Laity in the Urban Church: An Analysis of Political and Social Expectations* (New York: University Press of America, 1987); and Lincoln, *Black Church in the African-American Experience*.

[16]See Drake, *Black Metropolis*.

orientation. This and other studies show that, while segregation forced persons to live in certain neighborhoods, diversity existed and the Black Church was central to community and individual identity.[17]

Empirical findings from the 1930s on 609 urban Black churches by Mays and Nicholson[18] illustrate the religious canvassing that occurred. One-hundred percent of the congregations sponsored the following organizations and activities: preaching, union services, missionary societies, and Sunday school; while at least 65 percent also provided revivals, choirs, youth ministries, and prayer meetings. Although the authors acknowledge the ailments of the Black Church, i. e., financial insolvency, lack of trained clergy, they noted that the overriding strength of the church (and hence its *genius*), lay in its position as the only institution in the Black community owned and controlled by African Americans. The authors translate this religious independence to strength and collective empowerment.

When the findings from Mays and Nicholson are compared to those of contemporary Christian churches in general, the vast majority sponsor religious activities such as Sunday school/weekend school, Bible study, prayer services, and youth/teen events.[19] The 2000 Gallop poll findings based on African-American congregations indicate that religious issues continue to be central during sermons and include a focus on God's love (98 percent of persons noted "always" or "often"), practical advice for daily living (at least 88 percent of time), and focus on spiritual growth (at least 93 percent of time).

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[17]See Hannerz, *Soulside*; also Lincoln, *Black Church in the African-American Experience*; and Williams, *On the Street Where I Lived*.

[18]See Benjamin Mays and Joseph Nicholson, *The Negro's Church* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1933).

[19]See Dudley, *Faith Communities Today*.

Comparable patterns that illustrate the religious and spiritual importance of the urban Black Church are evident when other data sources are examined.

According to findings from the ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000 on African-American denominations,[20] at least 56 percent of Baptists consider their churches spiritually alive and provide an array of programs to meet the needs of congregates, assimilate new members, and retain existing ones. In comparison, slightly higher representation exists among Church of God in Christ for these church dimensions and similar patterns for the United Methodists. Christian Methodist Episcopals note spiritual vibrancy in their churches and African Methodist Episcopal respondents acknowledge varied programs to enhance spiritual support for members. Similarly, African Methodist Episcopal Zion and Black Presbyterian clergy report spiritual as well as financial stability among their churches and a variety of programs in place to meet members' needs.

Review of the results from *Project 2000* on urban Black churches in the southeast indicate that almost 50 percent of respondents consider their churches to be spiritually alive and reflect a deepened relationship with God. The majority is also optimistic about the congregation's future. Teaching and preaching tend to reinforce and encourage spiritual support through its emphasis on God's love, the Holy Spirit, and personal spiritual growth. Greater emphasis is placed on addressing the daily needs of members and assisting them toward personal spiritual maturity.

Congregational involvement tends to center around Bible teaching, prayer, and community services. One-hundred percent

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[20]See the ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000.

of the urban churches sponsor Bible study other than Sunday school and 80 percent sponsor prayer or meditation groups and youth programs. Spiritual retreats, parenting/marriage enrichment, and young adult/singles programs are participated in the least, but still take place in at least 40 percent of the churches. (See Table 1, page 155) Based on these findings, Gunner Myrdal, although quite critical and reductionist in his assessment of the Black religious experience, provides an appropriate descriptive of the urban Black Church: "The Negro church means more to the Negro community than the white church means to the white community—in its function as a giver of hope, as an emotional cathartic, as a center of community activity, as a source of leadership, and as a provider of respectability."[21]

As a Political Institution

The priestly convictions in urban Black churches often translated to prophetic ones as pastors, leaders, and members championed political causes from the pulpit and the pew. Scriptures became battle cries, marches were made to hymns, and congregations were summoned via a "Dr. Watts."[22] However, scholarship is inconclusive in terms of the extent of political involve-

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[21]Gunner Myrdal, "Black Theology as Liberation Theology" in *The Black Church in America*, ed. Hart Nelsen, Raytha Yokley, and Anne Nelsen (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 88.

[22]See Melva Wilson Costen, *African-American Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993); also Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Exodus: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000); Jon Michael Spencer, *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Wilmore, *Black Religion* and Wyatt Tee Walker, *'Somebody's Calling My Name': Black Sacred Music and Social* Change (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1990).

ment. Early survey work of over 1,000 Black churches by Marx[23] show the presence of a "social gospel" that translated into political and social activism, but involvement varied by denomination. However, the vast majority of respondents did not associate religion with civil rights militancy and churches with an "other-worldly" orientation were less likely to promote activism.

Research by Harris[24] on the relationship between clergy and laity in the urban Black Church supports the centrality of the church in the political arena. The vast majority of the 338 urban congregates surveyed support the following: sermons that link the spiritual to the political, organizing for political change, allowing scripture to inform civil rights involvement, pressuring public officials on behalf of the oppressed, and rallying congregations to directly address a political goal. Related data compiled by Lincoln and Mamiya[25] show that over 40 percent of urban Black churches are affiliated with civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and SCLC and work with local agencies regarding fair hiring, housing practices, and community crises events such as local demonstrations.

In his examination of urban Black churches in Brooklyn, Taylor[26] suggests that the church attempts to provide political and moral leadership in the community and has had success as well as failure. He points to the continued plight found in the Bedford-Stuyvesant housing project since the mid-1960s as an example of how the urban Black Church *did not* take advantage of its political power and resources to bring about

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[23]Gary Marx, "Religion: Opiate or Inspiration of Civil Rights Militancy?" in *The Black Church in America*, 150-160.

[24]See Harris, *Black Ministers and Laity in the Urban Church*.

[25]See Lincoln, *Black Church in the African-American Experience*.

[26]See Clarence Taylor, *The Black Churches of Brooklyn* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

effective change. From organizing voter registration, informing members of political candidates who could improve the urban condition, socializing members toward Black and Liberation Theologies, and preparing political leaders, the Black Church, in spite of its limitations, has been at the helm of politics in many urban settings.[27] These assessments are also supported by more recent data.

According to the 2000 Gallop results, at least 65 percent of clergy from Black Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ), United Methodist, and Black Presbyterian churches strongly support clergy involvement in protest marches. Similarly, most clergy support the need to inform churches on the social and political issues of the day. Baptists, followed by Church of God in Christ (COGIC) churches, are least likely to strongly support such political involvement.

ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000 results demonstrate that Baptist clergy in general, support clergy involvement in civil rights issues and protest marches. However, seminarians and those with doctoral degrees are more likely to approve of active involvement in political action. However, in general, COGIC leaders are less supportive of such involvement. In contrast, the vast majority of respondents from the CME and United Methodist communities strongly support clergy involvement in protest action. And at least 70 percent of AME clergy support political involvement by its leaders; this patterns persists among AMEZ respondents. Support for political involvement by clergy varies for Black Presbyterians based on clergy edu-

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[27]James H. Cone, "Black Theology as Liberation Theology," in *African American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology,* ed. Gayraud Wilmore (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 177-207; also see Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984).

cation, but at least one-third of respondents strongly approve of involvement in protest marches and civil rights issues.

When the examination focuses on urban churches from the southeast, a dramatically different portrait of political activism emerges. Topics associated with social justice, racial and Black liberation are the *least likely* to be the focus of sermons, i. e., 22.40 percent, 14.89 percent, and 8.51 percent coded as "always," respectively. Political activism and civil rights involvement most often take the form of voter registration drives (42.55 percent), prison ministries (40.43 percent), and social advocacy (39.13 percent). The findings suggest that most urban churches in the survey disapprove of clergy involvement in protest marches (57.78 percent "strongly disapprove") as well as political/social activism (68.09 percent "strongly disapprove"). (See Table 2, page 156). Thus, the level and type of political activism in the contemporary urban Black Church differs somewhat from that of its predecessor.

As an Economic Institution

According to Taylor,[28] urban churches in the Black community have striven to maintain economic independence from the larger society and to provide economic support for church members and non-members in need. Mays and Nicholson's[29] report on 609 urban Black churches show 97 percent provided economic relief for the poor, 2.1 percent feed the unemployed, and about 1 percent offered free clinics and benevolent societies (when placed in the historical context of the Black urban experience in the early twentieth century, these accomplishments were noteworthy). Lincoln and Mamiya's

[28]See Taylor, *Black Churches of Brooklyn*.
[29]See Mays, *Negro's Church*.

quantitative analysis on 1,531 urban churches[30] evidence that over 70 percent of these churches are involved with social agencies and non-church programs to deal with community challenges. Additionally, such churches also provide direct economic support in the form of employment assistance, elder care, food programs and clothing banks, and to a lesser degree, day care centers and drug abuse intervention programs.

Results from the *Faith Communities Today Report*[31] project show that over 80 percent of congregations provide some type of community services such as food and cash assistance; 60 percent provide clothing assistance; and about 40 percent sponsor day care, prison ministries, elder care. African-American respondents to the 2000 Gallop poll acknowledge that preaching and teaching based on "social gospel" often translates to social involvement and tends to take the form of youth programs (92 percent), cash assistance (86 percent) and food pantries or soup kitchens (75 percent). Denominational differences exist and AMEZ and Black Methodist churches are more likely to provide such services. As noted in Table 2, urban Black churches in the southeast provide economic services in the form of cash assistance (89.13 percent), employment counseling (40.43 percent), and, to a lesser degree, credit unions (4.26 percent). These findings suggest that the present-day urban Black congregation provides economic support similar to churches in the past.

As a Social Institution

DuBois'[32] sociological analyses of the Black Church uncovered strengths as well as weaknesses and illustrate the church's

[30]See Lincoln, *Black Church in the African-American Experience*.
[31]See Dudley, *Faith Communities Today*.
[32]See DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*.

sacred and secular roles. Although he often criticized the church's focus on the social, DuBois also recognized that no other institution could galvanize the Negro [Black] community like the Black Church.[33] According to Green,[34] urban Black churches have also been instrumental in training leadership and honing the social skills of members for effective involvement in the larger society and providing social outlets limited by segregation. Milbrath[35] illustrates the contemporary Black Church's involvement in job counseling, service for senior citizens, and hospice care in urban areas in Portland. And while today's Black Church has been criticized for its inability to effectively address the needs of youth,[36] research suggests that poor, inner-city adolescents absorbed in church are less likely to be involved in gangs or succumb to peer pressure, less likely to have stress and psychological problems, and tend to have stronger self-worth.[37]

Findings by Mays and Nicholson[38] show that urban Black churches provided more sacred than secular outlets but meet important social needs. Of the 609 churches, 100 percent offered social, educational, and financial clubs; 31 percent offered other types of recreational activities; and less than 1 percent provided social options such as movies, Girl and Boy Scouts, kindergarten, and day nurseries. More recent quantitative studies by

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[33]See Phil Zuckerman, ed., *DuBois on Religion* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2000).

[34]Robert L. Green, "Growing Up Black, Urban, and in the Church," *The Crisis* 89 (1982): 14-16.

[35]John Milbrath, "Outreach in an Urban Setting" in *The Experience of Hope: Mission and Ministry in Changing Urban Communities*, ed. Wayne Stumme (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1991), 53-61.

[36]See Lincoln, *Black Church in the African-American Experience*.

[37]Kaye V. Cook, "'You Have to Have Somebody Watching Your Back, and If That's God, Then That's Mighty Big': The Church's Role in the Resilience of Inner-City Youth," *Adolescence* 35 (2000): 717-730.

[38]See Mays, *Negro Church*.

Billingsley and Lincoln and Mamiya[39] suggest that over 65 percent and over 70 percent of urban Black churches from each respective study are involved in some type of community outreach program. The former author notes changes in the type of community outreach available. Billingsley notes that such outreach in the 1950s and 1960s focused on social action and protest, while contemporary community outreach tends to take the form of social services (family enrichment, food, clothing, and child care) and community development. Similar observations can be made based on *Faith Communities Report*, 2000 Gallop poll, and *Project 2000* data.

According to *Faith Communities Report* findings, of the congregations exhibiting strong, faith-based convictions, almost 80 percent have developed social ministries and 90 percent are actively working for social justice. Only about 30 percent sponsor employment, voter registration, and outreach focused on social issues. Historically Black protestant and liberal protestant churches are more likely to support social justice issues and develop programs to these ends. Moderate and evangelical Protestants are the least likely to do so. 2000 Gallop poll results show that sermons addressing social justice/action or racial issues are preached in their churches at least 50 percent and 40 percent, respectively, regardless of denominational affiliation. Such exposure is linked to social services such as voter education/registration, organized social advocacy, employment counseling, and prison/jail ministries. A review of the trends across data sources shows a greater involvement in these type of social services by African Americans than whites.

According to *Project 2000* data, the number of social services provided by congregations is directly associated with the

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[39]See Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River*; also Lincoln, *Black Church in the African-American Experience*.

size of the church. About 33 - 86 percent of Baptist churches sponsor social outreach programs and similar trends exist for COGIC churches. The data evidence greater variability for the CME, AMEZ, and UMC congregations. While some churches do not offer any type of social outreach programs, 100 percent of certain churches provide such programs. Results for AME respondents show that, even among smaller congregations, at least 40 percent offer social outreach programs and larger churches are more likely to provide such programs. Relative to the other denominations, less support for social outreach programs is evident among Black Presbyterians.

Most noteworthy in the *Project 2000* data from the southeast is the result that shows congregational and sermon focus is *least likely* to emphasize "working for social justice" (17.02 percent). All churches are involved, to varying degrees in social services (See Table 2), but the focus tends to be on practical, i. e., food banks, community support rather than social or political concerns, i.e., protests. Highest representation occurs for cash assistance and youth programs followed by food pantries, tutoring services, and programs for the elderly. The majority of urban churches surveyed (84.21 percent) spend under $1,000 annually on missions and 95 percent spend under $25,000 annually, while over 5 percent spend over $55,000 yearly on missions. Based on these results, Taylor summarizes this dimension of the urban Black Church best: "The formation of church clubs and auxiliaries and leisure activities such as dances, picnics, bazaars, and fashion shows, were not an indication of a growing secularism among the Black Church but a blending of the secular and the sacred."[40] However, it remains to be seen how the urban Black Church will respond to more pressing social concerns in the Black community.

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[40]Taylor, *Black Churches of Brooklyn*, xvii.

As a Cultural Institution

The urban Black Church is widely accepted as a "carrier of communal culture."[41] Research associates the urban congregation with Black identity formation and retention through the re-appropriation of mainstream cultural forms in positive, empowering ways.[42] Some suggest its pervasive influence constitutes an "ethnic niche" in that it has and continues to provide cultural and social support to members and urbanites since the Great Migrations of the 1900s and meets needs that white society is unable and/or unwilling to provide.[43] Through this process, African Americans as individuals, and the Black community as a collective, have been able to develop and maintain collective identity and pride.[44]

Central to a cultural identity is the importance of Black consciousness[45] and racial socialization[46] to prepare African Americans for interaction in the larger society. These scholars contend that, through mediums such as sermons, church events, and music, African-American culture is perpetuated and strengthened. For example, Lincoln and Mamiya[47] note that over 80 percent of Black churches surveyed financially support church-related Black colleges and about two-thirds of clergy purposely incorporate the importance of Black con-

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[41]Ellison, 'Semi-Involuntary Institution' Revisited, 1431.

[42]See Taylor, *Black Churches of Brooklyn*.

[43]Robert L. Boyd, "The Storefront Church Ministry in African American Communities of the Urban North During the Great Migration: The Making of an Ethnic Niche." *The Social Science Journal* 35 (1998): 319-332.

[44]See Glaude, *Exodus*.

[45]See Lincoln, *Black Church in the African-American Experience*.

[46]See Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African-American Families* (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1992); also see Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River*.

[47]See Lincoln, *Black Church in the African-American Experience*.

sciousness in their sermons.

The ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000 data sources include few indicators to directly measure the importance of culture. However, certain results imply that a percentage of the urban Black clergy and congregates polled consider the church to be central in perpetuating Black culture. First, clergy who are better educated are more likely to preach on issues of Black liberation and racial issues and support political activism to address oppression. Such churches are more involved in social advocacy as well. According to the data, most representation occurs for CME, United Methodist, AME, and AMEZ churches. Although the majority of clergy from urban churches surveyed in the southeast do not consistently preach and teach on issues of race and Black liberation, the data show that between 9 to 22 percent do address these issues of culture. These findings may appear to illustrate the need for churches to more concertedly focus on Black culture. However, it can also be said that the urban Black Church, as an institution, represents a living testament to Black culture and by virtue of membership and support by clergy and congregates, persons are attesting to a certain degree of awareness and support of Black culture.

Conclusion

In his watershed text, E. Franklin Frazier[48] referred to the Negro church as a nation within a nation. He characterized the church as an agent of social change, education, political life, and economic co-operation, as well as a refuge in a hostile white world. Findings from this study suggest that the contemporary

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[48]See Frazier, *Negro Church in America*.

urban Black Church can be characterized similarly. These results propose that the urban Black Church continues to provide spiritual, economic, and social assistance to its constituents and non-members in need. However, its involvement in political and social arenas has waned, and its stance on traditional forms of activism and civic involvement is decidedly conservative.

Several implications are evident. First, contrary to earlier scholars who were concerned about the Black Church's continued importance,[49] these data suggest that the urban Black Church will continue to respond to the varied needs of congregates and members of the Black community. The challenges the Black Church, in general, and the urban Black Church, in particular, must face involve creative, proactive methods to address new and chronic problems in the Black community such as new forms of racism[50] and the AIDs pandemic.[51] Of special concern for urban Black congregations are issues of job creation, hyper-segregation, lack of low-cost housing, increased African-American single-parent households, and chronic poverty.[52] Some scholars, clergy, and community leaders question whether the Black Church should be involved in such arenas. However, based on its sacred and secular dictates in the past, others realize that such involvement is paramount.

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[49]Ibid; also Mays, *Negro Church*; and Myrdal, *Black Theology as Liberation Theology*.

[50]See John Dovidio and Samuel L. Gaertner, eds., *Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1986).

[51]See Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River*.

[52]See Massey, *American Apartheid*; also Wilson, *Truly Disadvantaged*.

TABLE 1:
RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION
AMONG URBAN BLACK CHURCHES
IN THE SOUTHEAST

During the past twelve months, did your congregation participate in any of the following:

Service Type	Percent "Yes"
a. Bible study other than sunday school	100.00
b. Prayer or meditation groups	84.78
c. Youth programs	80.43
d. Community service	67.39
e. Theological or doctrinal study	67.39
f. Parenting or marriage enrichment	51.06
g. Spiritual retreats	46.81
h. Young adults or singles programs	46.81

N=47

TABLE 2:
SOCIAL SERVICES/ACTIVISM
AMONG URBAN BLACK
CHURCHES IN THE SOUTHEAST

In the past twelve months, did your congregation provide or cooperate in providing any of these social services or community outreach programs?

Service Type	Percent "Yes"
a. Cash assistance	89.13
b. Youth programs	85.11
c. Food pantry	59.57
d. Counseling	57.45
e. Tutoring	46.81
f. Senior citizens	44.68
g. Health programs	42.55
h. Voter registration	42.55
i. Employment counseling	40.43
j. Prison ministry	40.43
k. Thrift store	40.43
l. Substance abuse	34.04
m. Social advocacy	39.13
n. Elderly/housing	29.79
o. Credit unions	4.26

Activism	% Strongly Approve	% Somewhat Approve	% Somewhat Disapprove	%Strongly Disapprove	Total
a. Clergy Involvement in Protest Marches	0.00	6.67	35.56	57.78	100.00
b. Focus on Daily Social and Political Issues	2.13	2.13	27.66	68.09	100.00

For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you."

Hebrews 2:11b-12