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# BLACK MAYORS, WHITE MAJORITIES

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# BLACK MAYORS, WHITE MAJORITIES

The Balancing Act  
of Racial Politics

RAVI K. PERRY

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS | LINCOLN AND LONDON

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Set in Lyon Text and Neutraface by Laura Wellington.

Designed by A. Shahan.

To my parents,  
Drs. D. LaRouth Perry  
and Robert L. Perry,  
for their unconditional  
love and support



---

To be an Afro-American, or an American black, is to be in the situation, intolerably exaggerated, of all those who have ever found themselves part of a civilization which they could in no wise honorably defend—which they were compelled, indeed, endlessly to attack and condemn—and who yet spoke out of the most passionate love, hoping to make the kingdom new, to make it honorable and worthy of life.

James Baldwin

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## PREFACE

The ideas expressed and researched in this book began as I was a high school student in Ohio. There, in Lucas County, I was actively involved in local and regional politics. A reliable volunteer for many candidates in my home county, I was infatuated with politics, so much so that the study of politics became my academic interest while I was an undergraduate at the University of Michigan. While at Michigan, my interest in wanting to know more about how the representation of black interests functioned in non-majority-black contexts blossomed under the direction of my recently deceased mentor, Professor Hanes Walton Jr. This research interest began as conversations in his office in Ann Arbor. His loss is still heavy and I expect it to always remain so, for this book and my career are a direct result of his encouragement.

This book offers a substantive critique of deracialization as applied to the black urban governing context in majority-white cities. Based in part on the normative argument that the election of black mayors in major cities *should* improve the quality of life for blacks in those cities, it explores how two such black mayors sought to advance black interests in their majority-white cities.

The “should” argument referenced above is based on the classic proposition that blacks expect so much from major-city black mayors.

Because blacks expect such a path, it warrants this book’s claim that it is viable to examine how the election of black mayors impacts the material and non-material lives of blacks in those cities.

In so doing, though, the book provokes a question: why hasn’t the increased political power of black mayors resulted in the vast im-



provement of blacks as a group? I am of the opinion that the question returns scholars of urban and black politics to the root of black political emergence in the twentieth century. For example, in reference to Carl Stokes's campaign for mayor of Cleveland in 1967, during the height of the civil rights movement, Stokes had to decide whether it was more important for the black community to elect black mayors to advance a just society or to win elections.<sup>1</sup> For Stokes a successful bid for election as Cleveland's first black mayor was more important than the continued use of civil rights tactics to improve the quality of life and potential outcomes for Cleveland's black residents. Stokes's stance, though, explains why this book is a great fit for the Justice and Social Inquiry series at the University of Nebraska. Stokes's reflections on the opportunity to bring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to Cleveland while he was running for mayor positioned two styles of black mobility against each other—old-school civil rights tactics of civil disobedience and electoral advances said to benefit the black community. Now, more than forty years later, we still don't know which method has produced the most for African Americans.

According to Leonard N. Moore, Stokes ran because "he was driven by three overlapping purposes: to improve the lives of the black poor, to give blacks a voice in municipal government, and to prove to the nation that an African American could govern."<sup>2</sup> Yet, as Stokes's reflections on his 1967 campaign decision indicate, his electoral strategy was deracialized. Conclusively the trend toward deracialization and urban regime theories has undoubtedly changed the motives, or it has at least emphasized the alleged limited options available to contemporary black mayors. J. Philip Thompson, however, is pointing in a different direction. He concludes that black mayors suffer from a "lack of substance."<sup>3</sup> In this blunt recognition, he makes a call for a renewed thinking about how politics and community might work together to improve the quality of life of blacks. In the interim I contend Manning Marable is correct in his assertion that the effects of deracialized campaign strategies are "psychological triumphs."<sup>4</sup>

The U.S. census indicates that blacks have not made considerable improvements since the advent of deracialized politics. Thus the election of deracialized black mayors does not mean much for blacks in general. Hosea Williams's statement that "All these black politicians—they're black until they're elected"<sup>5</sup> highlights the long-standing tension between the politics of electability and respectability in blacks' urban campaigns and the perceived expectation that elections should result in significant improvements for blacks. Accordingly, for many, as long as black mayors implement policies that benefit minorities but that do not threaten whites, they are supposedly "representing" black interests.

If black mayors are increasingly being elected because they employ deracialized strategies, does this suggest multiethnic governing coalitions are needed to implement the policies that benefit minority groups? There is a down side to deracialized coalition-building in both electoral and governing contexts. As evidenced in the evolution toward an increasing number of analyses that extol the benefits of deracialization as a means of winning elections with African American candidates, post-analyses that consider the substantive benefits for the black community given a hypothetical black politician's election are lacking in the political science literature. The predominant focus on campaigns and elections without a significant study of the effects of the campaigns and elections, particularly as they concern African Americans, not surprisingly, returns many to reconsider the benefits to African American communities given prior racialism in electoral and governing approaches. In other words, despite sensing that a more direct racial policy approach may not result in many elections for black candidates, many black voters may have increasingly become more sophisticated in their analyses of who is the "right" black candidate. This sophistication is evident, perhaps, in the decreasing numbers of eligible black voters choosing to vote in municipal elections in the post-civil rights era, the bounty of evidence that suggests deracialized black candidates, once elected, produce few substantive benefits for their black communities, and the elec-

toral outcomes of black versus black contests that feature two styles of black leadership.

Ironically, then, the bifurcated goals of Stokes's 1967 campaign remain alive in the twenty-first century. The question still remains: is it more important to win elections or to complete a just sociopolitical agenda? Given this tension, for many the necessity of the return to movement-based, racially inclusive politics is imperative. In this book, the mayors studied suggest that a return to black political power, as understood by the black power activists of the 1960s, is perhaps blacks' best available option. Malcolm X summed up the approach eloquently in "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech at a Cleveland rally sponsored by the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) in 1964: "The political philosophy of black nationalism means that the black man should control the politics and politicians in his own community more; the black man in the black community has to be reeducated into the science of politics so he will know what politics is supposed to bring him in return." According to Malcolm X, blacks needed to be reeducated about the purpose of the science of politics for their quality of life to improve in the United States. Presumably this reeducation does not allow much room for deracialization, urban regime theory, or any other theory or practical electoral and governing strategy where blacks are arguably circumscribed by white power interests. If we factor in "targeted universalism," a new governing approach by which black mayors can actively pursue black interests while maintaining reasonable white electoral and governing support, then they also get to avoid Williams's lamentation, all while they're able to seek the improvement of the socioeconomic conditions and quality of life of black residents—what some have characterized as the ability to "stay black." Thus in an increasingly diverse society, the effort to advance the interests of particular groups may involve a return to the past, as evidenced by Malcolm X's suggestion. Should we follow that path, the representation of black interests may be subject to increased scrutiny as voters measure one's "blackness" by the outcomes produced for their black constituencies, as opposed to one's self-professed black identity. As X's speech sug-

gests, black voters might fare better by making voting preferences that account for pride in black identity and proven demonstrations of one's black consciousness as well—whether or not those black candidates are running for office in majority-black jurisdictions. This book explores how two mayors effectively used a new strategy to win election and govern while being inclusive of black interests in majority-white contexts. By strategically (and usually rhetorically) linking the needs of African Americans with the interests of whites, these mayors demonstrated that it was no longer political suicide to advocate for black interests. Like Olympic gymnasts successfully navigating the terrains of a balance beam, these mayors are strong examples for others who seek to advance the interests of minority populations even in political jurisdictions where those minority groups do not comprise a majority of the population. Seemingly, at least in some communities, deracialization has lost its balance.

This book was completed at Mississippi State University. Thanks are due to my colleagues in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration who provided the collegial and supportive environment necessary to complete this task. Throughout my various movements from undergraduate studies to graduate school and through two institutions, the support of my adviser, Marion Orr, has been invaluable. Marion has been and remains an inspiration and a really humble human being. A great adviser, he guides his students with a patterned simplicity that is warm and contagious. I can only hope, as I move through the profession, that I pick up some of his spirit.

Over the course of many years I have had the opportunity to interview dozens of stakeholders throughout Ohio. Without the giving of their time and offering of their trust to me, this project would not have been possible. Many interviewees, particularly both mayors for this project, welcomed me into their homes and indulged me greatly as I sought to describe their experiences as mayors of rust-belt cities in the Midwest.

Working with the University of Nebraska Press has been wonderful. Bridget Barry, Sabrina Ehmke Sergeant, Joeth Zucco, and Bojana Ristich have each been delightful stewards in bringing this book to fruition. Because of them, this process has been enjoyable and productive. Of course, without the invaluable support of series editors Jeremy I. Levitt and Matthew C. Whitaker, this book would not have been possible. The Justice and Social Inquiry series is a great fit for this project given the mayors' views on actively representing black interests even in their majority-white communities.

Finally, I want to thank my family. My husband, Paris F. Prince, was a continual firm and steady presence throughout every phase of this project. It is largely due to his patience that it is now finished. To my brother and sister, Bayé K. Perry and Kai M. Perry, I offer thanks for their support. My parents, D. LaRouth Perry and Robert L. Perry, have been my strongest supporters. In life they've been cheering for me loudly and proudly (literally) since day one! Their loving embrace has always inspired me to do better. For their unconditional love, it is to them that I dedicated this book.

# Introduction

## Theorizing the Representation of Urban Blacks in “White” Cities

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**We need to be universal in our goals but not in our process.**

**This is what fairness requires.**

john a. powell, “Obama’s Universal Approach Leaves Many Excluded”

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As you read this, somewhere history is being made. Somewhere, right now, in the United States, an African American is considering running for mayor in a city wherein his or her constituents are mostly white. Somewhere else in the country, perhaps, another black politician—an elected mayor—is making a calculated decision about an important issue in his or her city and is weighing how the decision might impact different constituencies—that is, white and black voters. Those realities have been made possible by a host of elected black leadership—namely mayors—in prior decades. By most indications, forty years ago such statements would have been impossible to write, if not laughable in their audacity. However, because of many trailblazers and demographic shifts in population and political attitudes, it is not difficult to imagine those scenarios. The result: an ever-increasing number of blacks seeking elected office as mayors in majority white cities. This book is about two such mayors: Jack Ford of Toledo, Ohio, and Rhine McLin of Dayton, Ohio.

What makes the scenarios mentioned above so very interesting is the projected impact of black mayors. Pundits and scholars alike may call such an impact pandering, but it is also a question of representation, electability, governance, and—of course—one’s legacy. It is also

a complex question of how to define urban interests. In the national context many Americans are familiar with the concept of national interest. Presidents have regularly referred to the country's involvements as characterized by what is in the national interest of the country. Scholars have long used national polls to identify the interests of groups of Americans across a range of issues. In the state context Kerry L. Haynie became one of the first scholars to define "black" interests at the state level.<sup>1</sup> However, in the urban municipal context, those interests are much less easily ascertainable. Yet they are at least as important as state- or national-level definitions of interests.

Interests matter because the representation of our interests is of paramount importance in a representative democratic republic. Therein politicians are said to represent our interests on our behalf. However, if those interests are not easily discernible, such as in the urban context generally, how does representation function? Should those interests change as a result of demographic shifts in the electorate, how might representation be expected to develop?

I attempt to take up such questions and examine under what conditions black mayors of majority white cities can and do represent black interests. In other words, what do black mayors do for blacks if it is assumed that every eligible white voter supports their candidacy and they could win election without a single black vote? If we find that they have represented black interests, to what extent have they done so and at what political costs? Theoretically the questions presume that black mayors seek to represent black interests because blacks are a part of their constituency. Moreover, the questions are unique in that they ask if it is electorally possible and politically expedient to actively seek to represent black interests in majority white cities and still maintain critical white support.

Utilizing the sole term of Mayor Ford in Toledo (2002–2006) and the two terms of Mayor McLin in Dayton (2002–2010) and race and representation as my linchpins, I seek to shed light on the question of black representation in the municipal context. With these two cases I explore questions of political responsiveness, effectiveness, and accomplishment as governance issues. Long cited as one of the most

favored methods in urban political research, case studies have been, and continue to be, the building blocks for social science generally and urban politics in particular.<sup>2</sup> As Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba observe, “Case studies are essential for description, and are, therefore, fundamental to social science. It is pointless to seek to explain what we have not described with a reasonable degree of precision.”<sup>3</sup>

I begin to interrogate that precision with theory building concerning the normative expectation that black mayors Ford and McLin will be found to represent black interests even in the majority white cities of Toledo and Dayton.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, I have assumed that these black mayors should represent black interests because blacks are their constituents, too. Particularly given the long history of varied voter turnout in municipal elections, seeking to represent the interests of the minority black community (of which one is a member) may result in significant benefits electorally. Scholars have found this to be true in terms of state and national politics and have labeled such efforts as those of a politician’s shared racial experience.<sup>5</sup>

### *Beyond Deracialization: Toward Targeted Universalism*

The first and second decades of the twenty-first century have seen more and more of that shared racial experience wherein African Americans are increasingly being elected to political offices in communities where the majority of the constituents are not black.<sup>6</sup> During the same period, scholars have turned their attention to the way in which these elected officials represent their black constituents’ interests—and how the concept of the “black politician” has begun to change.<sup>7</sup> Whereas in the past scholars tended to characterize black politicians’ efforts to represent their black constituents’ interests as either “deracialized” or “racialized”—that is, either as focusing on politics that transcend race or as making black issues central to their agenda—the changing demographic environment and the greater acceptance of African American politicians in high-profile positions of power have exhausted the utility of that polarization.<sup>8</sup> Increasingly they can point to examples of black politicians who no longer find



explicit racial appeals appropriate ways of advancing their electoral ambitions.<sup>9</sup> They also increasingly find that a lack of attention to racial disparities among constituents does not effectively address why certain groups suffer disproportionately compared to others across a range of issues. As a result, I argue that rather than continuing to make efforts to represent black interests within the frames of racialized or deracialized politics, twenty-first-century African American mayors elected to offices in non-majority black cities are increasingly adopting the governance strategy of universalizing black interests as interests that matter for the good of the whole. To “universalize” black interests suggests that a mayor seeks to gain significant support from whites (or other non-blacks) for policies and programs that benefit black communities. Such support is garnered through strategic political rhetoric and policy/program proposals that emphasize or at least reference race and/or racial disparities, establishing how race matters. Being careful to not deny the specter of race but also not to alienate non-blacks, the mayor presents black interests as important to the city’s long-term socioeconomic interests. The result: “universalizing the interests of blacks,” though controversial, can allow black politicians to represent the interests of African Americans without alienating the majority of their constituents.

Some scholars have already labeled many such politicians as “post-racial” or “deracialized” and thus adhere to the aforementioned exhausted bifurcation of deracialization and racialization.<sup>10</sup> However, I posit that universalizing the interests of blacks is not a “deracialized” approach. McCormick and Jones define deracialization as the “conducting [of] a campaign in a stylistic fashion that defuses the polarizing effects of race by avoiding explicit reference to race-specific issues.”<sup>11</sup> While this definition is limited to electoral strategy, scholars have begun to apply it to a politician’s governing efforts, and hence it need not be stretched far to be applied as well to governance strategies.<sup>12</sup> If this understanding is accepted, it becomes clear that many black politicians no longer “[avoid] explicit reference to race-specific issues.”<sup>13</sup> Rather, in their attempts to represent black interests, they increasingly note racial disparities where appropriate and

craft their rhetoric in a fashion that encourages non-blacks (i.e., whites) not to feel threatened.<sup>14</sup> McCormick and Jones also note that a deracialized approach “at the same time emphas[izes] those issues that are perceived as racial[ly] transcendent.”<sup>15</sup> While the McCormick and Jones definition emphasizes the avoidance of race-specific issues and the advocacy of issues that transcend race, the underlying assumption of the definition is that black politicians who employ this approach do not discuss the topic of race. Rather, they strive to “enhance effectively the likelihood of white electoral support” so that they may capture or maintain public office.<sup>16</sup> They do so, presumably, by simply running away from race at nearly all costs. As we shall see, the main difference in the approach of many black politicians in the twenty-first century, such as Ford and McLin, is that many are making an effort not solely to win public office and gain the necessary white votes but also to represent black interests in the context of a majority-white constituency.

Some of the components of deracialization are undoubtedly present in the “universalizing black interests” approach, however. McCormick and Jones emphasize the need for black politicians to project a safe image to whites—what James Q. Wilson called a “non-threatening image”—in order to make white support more likely.<sup>17</sup> Yet the meaning of “nonthreatening image” has changed. Black politicians who in the twenty-first century make efforts to represent black interests and do not wish to lose the support of some whites often have the support of liberal whites.<sup>18</sup> Hence their precise goal is no longer so much projecting a nonthreatening image as it is representing black interests and convincing whites that black interests are not represented at the expense of white interests.

An array of elections of African American mayors in non-majority-black cities corroborates the trend toward the universalizing of black interests. In Ohio, Columbus, Toledo, Dayton, Cincinnati, Youngstown, and Cleveland have all elected black mayors in the twenty-first century. Outside of Ohio many major cities with a history of black mayors continued to elect them, such as Washington DC, Atlanta, and Baltimore. Other cities with a less-established his-

tory of electing black mayors have brought them to office as well, including Buffalo, New York; Tallahassee, Florida; Alexandria, Virginia; Sacramento, California; Columbia, South Carolina; Philadelphia, Mississippi; Jacksonville, Florida; and Mobile, Alabama. This trend suggests that whites have become increasingly willing to vote for black mayoral candidates when they feel that their interests are not threatened.<sup>19</sup> In other words, when African American mayors are perceived as pursuing the interests of the majority and not the interests of particular racial constituencies, whites are more likely to support them. But white perception is only one part of the story.

Noticeably white support for black mayors excludes mention of the interests of the mayors. As of this writing, scholars know little about whether or to what extent the black mayors who have garnered substantial white support have personally desired to represent the interests of the white majority once elected. To the extent that they have done so, we do not know if they have done so preferentially—in terms of their personal values—or out of electoral expediency. The answers to these questions matter because they address the role that shared racial experience plays when black mayors consider how (if) to represent the interests of African Americans in non-majority-black cities. In an attempt to address these and related questions mentioned above, I analyze how, if at all, the representation of black interests has been actively pursued by black mayors Ford and McLin via the introduction of policies and programs designed to improve the quality of life of black residents in Toledo and Dayton.<sup>20</sup>

A historical trend and a recent demographic shift frame the various research questions. First, as members of a racial minority that has long been socially, politically, and economically marginalized, blacks have experienced disproportionate disparities in housing, education, and income. As a result, black residents in urban settings view the election of a black mayor as an opportunity to see city government work in their interests to address these inequities. Consequently African Americans embrace the election of one of their own with high expectations, as was the case when the first wave of black mayors won office in the 1960s and 1970s. In his biography of Cleve-

land's Carl Stokes, the nation's first major-city black mayor, Leonard Moore observed, "Black Clevelanders expected [Stokes] to revitalize their neighborhoods, provide low-to-moderate income housing, end police brutality, create a plethora of social welfare programs, and devise endless economic opportunities."<sup>21</sup> In an examination of Richard Hatcher, the first black mayor of Gary, Indiana, James Lane found that African American expectations were similarly high, perhaps unrealistically so: "During Hatcher's first days in office, his staff was preoccupied with, among other things, constituent requests for jobs, interviews, guided tours of city hall, and answers to homework questions. One woman, for example, wanted to know whether the mayor could marry couples, another whether he could get an errant husband out of the house."<sup>22</sup> When Kenneth Gibson was elected the first black mayor of Newark, New Jersey, in 1970, the "expectations of supporters during Gibson's first term extended beyond the question of changing benefits to meet needs of new constituents. . . . Many blacks felt the election was a moral and ideological victory. Minorities expected changes in attitudes in the business community and in government." A key member of Gibson's 1970 transition team observed that "after the election of a black mayor some blacks seem to think there will be jobs for everyone. Others look for immediate improvement of services and conditions in their neighborhoods."<sup>23</sup>

The black community's high expectations of black mayors continued into the 1980s and early 1990s. New York City's David Dinkins, for example, "had to be concerned about responding to the desires of the various elements of his victorious coalition—a collection of groups with numerous demands that had accumulated during the many years they had been excluded from power in city hall."<sup>24</sup> According to one observer, "like other black mayors," Dinkins "had been voted into office burdened by an imposing set of expectations," especially from fellow African Americans.<sup>25</sup>

Across the country the election of black mayors raised the expectations of black voters, who viewed black mayors as modern-day messiahs who, once in office, would dramatically alter the black com-

munity's social and economic predicaments.<sup>26</sup> William E. Nelson observed the following about this first generation of black mayors:

The demands placed on their shoulders were enormous. Their positions as the chief executives of cities created strong expectations that they would be able to use the resources of their offices to deliver an unprecedented array of social and economic benefits to their black constituents. These politicians were expected to produce jobs for black workers during a period of economic crisis in America. They were also expected to be skilled political brokers, balancing demands from the media, the fraternal order of police, real estate entrepreneurs, and other establishment groups, with the claims of emergent racial and ethnic groups for greater access to the policy-making process and more substantial benefits from that process. Changes in the urban benefit system produced by black mayors were expected to be permanent, not temporary.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, Michael B. Preston observed that black voters looked upon black mayors "as the new leaders who would help blacks achieve political power in urban areas. . . . The belief, by most, was that political power would also open the door to more economic power, as well as increase the probability of social justice." Black mayors were "expected to seek redress for the wrongs that had been perpetuated on blacks for so long."<sup>28</sup> As Maynard Jackson, the first black mayor of Atlanta, Georgia, commented, "The level of expectations of black people when a black mayor is elected is so intensely emotional until it is almost exaggerated. It may be impossible for any human being to satisfy the level of expectations."<sup>29</sup> In short, as William E. Nelson and Philip Meranto concluded, "The election of a black man as mayor of a major American city builds up extraordinarily high expectations from his black constituents."<sup>30</sup>

The research questions are also framed by recent population trends. Demographic changes in many American cities are steadily reversing the population dynamics that brought about the election of this nation's first African American mayors. The 2000 and 2010 U.S. censuses indicate that major cities are losing black population

while gaining Latinos and whites.<sup>31</sup> Washington DC, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, New Orleans, Atlanta, and Newark are examples of cities with significant declines in black populations.<sup>32</sup> Washington DC, for example, the nation's first black-majority city, recently lost its long-held status as such.<sup>33</sup> Should this trend continue, ambitious black politicians will increasingly find themselves running for mayor in cities that are not comprised of a majority of African Americans. This trend is of paramount importance as major cities lose majority black status and yet remain expected to elect black mayors for the foreseeable future.<sup>34</sup> The research presented here will hopefully serve to guide blacks' expectations in terms of representation in cities that have recently transitioned to a non-majority-black status, such as Washington DC.

### *Shared Racial Experience*

The primary expectation guiding my research is that Ford and McLin were involved in actively pursuing black interest issues. This expectation is founded in scholarship on black representation in other political contexts. In the congressional literature, several factors have been shown to influence members' personal policy interests.<sup>35</sup> Despite increased diversity in the black community, for example, black members of Congress share the experience of being members of a historically marginalized group, and blacks generally (black mayors included) have a shared memory of oppression.<sup>36</sup> That shared history of racialized experiences should incline black mayors to take a personal interest in actively pursuing policies and programs that are designed to improve the quality of life of their black constituents.

In addition, scholarship suggests that African American mayors might actively pursue black interests in non-majority-black cities because of their feeling of connectedness to other African Americans—a feeling termed “linked fate” by Michael Dawson.<sup>37</sup> The linked fate hypothesis is that social and economic factors influence whether or not black individuals have strong ties to African Americans as a group. Finding that some blacks use the group's interests as a proxy for their individual interests when making political choices, Dawson argues

that individual blacks, including black mayors, associate their life chances with those of the group. Research has found that many blacks do so because of social, political, and economic differences between themselves and whites.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, the congressional literature provides a clue as to why black mayors should be expected to actively pursue black interests in non-majority-black cities. Katrina L. Gamble notes that many black congressional members carry a heavy burden, as they are often expected to represent not only their districts but also “black America.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Richard F. Fenno finds that African American members of Congress tend to perceive their black constituency as extending beyond their geographical districts to include blacks nationwide—what some label “surrogate representation.”<sup>40</sup> The same may be true of black mayors, especially those in the high-profile roles as the first black mayors of their cities. Hence the confluence of life experience, the feeling of connectedness to African Americans as a group, and a commitment to represent black interests even within patterns of “surrogate representation” will make black mayors, and particularly Ford and McLin, more likely to commit personally to representing black interests. Thereby it can reasonably be expected that they will make a more conscious effort to actively pursue policies and programs to improve the quality of life of the black residents of their cities.

As powerful as the argument of shared racial experience is, some congressional scholars have argued that “theories that focus on shared experience ignore individual differences and the multiple and cross-cutting identities among members of marginalized groups, locking group members into essentialized identities and fixed policy perspectives.”<sup>41</sup> Also, some urban scholars argue that contemporary black mayors face more challenges than the black mayors first elected in major cities.<sup>42</sup> Hence even with shared experience and history, theory suggests that in general black mayors may not be willing or able to actively pursue black interests.

### *The Study of Medium-Sized Cities*

It is significant that this study examines only medium-sized U.S. cities. With the exception of a few scholars, urbanists have long ignored the public policy impact of black mayors in medium-sized cities, especially as it relates to their representation of black interests.<sup>43</sup> Yet according to 2011 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, most Americans live in medium-sized cities—that is, of the urban Americans who live in cities with a population of fifty thousand or higher, 60 percent of them live in cities with populations between one hundred thousand and five hundred thousand. Limiting studies of black mayoral governance to cities of five hundred thousand or more examines only 8 percent of the country’s total population and 31 percent of the urban Americans who live in cities with a population of fifty thousand or higher. The lack of studies of black mayoral governance in cities with populations between one hundred thousand and three hundred thousand means that approximately 11 percent of the country’s total population and 46 percent of the urban Americans who live in cities with a population of fifty thousand or higher is not being studied. Thus although my focus is on Toledo and Dayton, my findings will apply equally to cities like Tampa, New Orleans, Newark, Providence, Buffalo, and other similarly sized cities.

The scholarship that has focused on mayors of medium-sized cities, even if indirectly, has examined their leadership styles generally,<sup>44</sup> their impact on black social change over time,<sup>45</sup> or leadership in respect to a specific issue.<sup>46</sup> While such studies use great skill to explain the stylistic approaches, structural conditions, and single-issue responsiveness over time under which mayors of medium-sized cities win elections and govern, missing in terms of “white” cities is a detailed analysis of the mayors’ responsiveness to the issues of blacks’ quality of life.

Such a lack of research is increasingly significant as black mayors now govern cities that are the size of those in which most of the world’s urban population resides. According to 2005 figures from the United Nations, “Almost half of humanity lives in cities,” and



“Small cities, that is, those with a population of fewer than 500,000 people, were the place of residence of about fifty-one percent of all urban dwellers in the world in 2005. Thus, the majority of urban dwellers lived in fairly small urban settlements.”<sup>47</sup> The 2006 UN’s report projected that by 2030, 87 percent of residents of the United States would be urban dwellers, whereas nearly 50 percent of the population currently lived in small and medium-sized cities. The Brookings Institution and the National League of Cities found in 2002 that medium-sized cities grew faster in population than the largest cities during the 1990s and in general found that medium-sized U.S. cities were more white and less black, Hispanic, and Asian than larger cities, despite their having experienced significant growth in minority populations.<sup>48</sup> More recently, according to the UN State of the World’s Cities 2010/2011 report, “The world’s urban population now exceeds the world’s rural population.”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the actions of mayors who govern small- and middle-sized cities arguably have relevance to a larger number of people than studies limited to larger cities.

### *Impact of White Perceptions of Black Mayoral Governance*

Political scientist Zoltan Hajnal writes in his study of white attitudes toward black political leadership that “despite the hopes of the civil rights movement, researchers have found that the election of African Americans to office has not greatly improved the well-being of the black community.”<sup>50</sup> As a solution, Hajnal suggests that scholars redirect their research efforts from a focus on the impact—both substantive and symbolic—that black mayors have had on black residents to focus on the impact that they have had on changing the attitudes and preferences of whites toward African Americans. Hajnal notes that scholars have ignored the role of the white community in studies of the gains associated with black office holding. He finds that attention to white reactions under black mayoral leadership yields important conclusions not previously known about the effects of such leadership on whites. A key finding of Hajnal’s research is the process by which whites who reside in cities under the leadership of black

mayors change previously held beliefs and low expectations. Hajnal posits, “When blacks have the power (or are perceived as having the power) to inflict harm on the white community and they choose not to do so, many whites are forced to re-evaluate their assumptions.”<sup>51</sup> He suggests that once blacks secure powerful positions, such as the mayor’s office in non-majority-black cities, whites “fear that a black leader will favor the black community over the white community [and] they expect a black leader to redistribute income, encourage integration, and generally channel resources toward the black community.”<sup>52</sup> When black mayors do not advocate such positions, whites slowly gravitate toward them and begin to support their efforts. Hajnal does not examine whether the black mayors he studied *wanted* to seek the policies and programs in the interests of blacks that Hajnal claims whites feared.<sup>53</sup>

While Hajnal’s unit of analysis is the white community’s reactions to black mayoral leadership in primarily non-majority-black cities, I focus on the black mayor and his/her policy actions and program development policies over time. Hajnal suggests that black leadership is relevant in the twenty-first century because black mayors have been shown to have a positive impact on communities of white Americans. My study will show that black leadership is also relevant because what black mayors actively pursue in terms of policy and program development in the black community may also comply with the interests of the white majority in their municipalities. As national polling data indicate, whites and blacks largely share similar concerns. A survey conducted by the Joint Center National Opinion Poll in September and October 2008 found that 62 percent of blacks cited the economy as the single most important national problem, whereas 55 percent of Americans generally named the economy as “extremely important” in an October 2008 Gallup Poll.<sup>54</sup> To the extent that the shared concerns of whites and blacks can be applied to the urban context, the study of black mayors in the non-majority-black context may indicate that even in cases where policies of direct benefit to blacks are proposed or implemented, they often pose no threat to whites, as the mayors are careful to represent whites with

comparable resources and as whites and blacks generally have similar concerns.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, respective to McLin and Ford, in chapter 7, I detail white and black attitudes concerning the representation of black interests in Toledo and Dayton.

*Toward Universal Black Interests: The Human Relations Approach*

This study encourages readers to think beyond the black-white dyad and to instead envision the development of policies that can both serve the constituencies with the greatest needs (including but not limited to black communities) and simultaneously serve the white majority. Adopting what Cornel West suggests is a “human relations approach” to solving the pervasive problems that plague blacks in many of America’s cities is important for mayors who wish to implement policies and programs designed to improve the quality of life of black residents. Such an approach is best understood as a form of governance that appeals directly to people’s common humanity.

West asks, “How do we capture a new spirit and vision to meet the challenges of the post-industrial city, post-modern culture, and post-party politics?”<sup>56</sup> He prescribes “admit[ting] that the most valuable sources for help, hope, and power consist of ourselves and our common history. . . . We must focus our attention on the public square—the common good . . . generate new leadership . . . a visionary leadership . . . grounded in grassroots organizing that highlights our democratic accountability.”<sup>57</sup> In respect to addressing black issues, West attempts to cast aside the ideological divide that frames black issues from others. He observes that for liberals, blacks “are to be ‘included’ and ‘integrated’ into ‘our’ society and culture, while for conservatives they are to be ‘well behaved’ and ‘worthy of acceptance’ by ‘our’ way of life.”<sup>58</sup> Finding such a situation inadequate, West concludes that neither group understands that “the presence and predicaments of black people are neither additions to nor deflections from American life, but rather [are] constitutive elements of that life.”<sup>59</sup> Hence, for West, a new framework is needed that views blacks and their presence in American life as American. He main-

tains that such a framework should “begin with a frank acknowledgment of the basic humanness and Americanness of each of us.”<sup>60</sup>

Donald Cunnigen has similarly called for a full integration of black Americans’ social and economic problems into the patchwork of American society: “The failure of America, black and white, to recognize its commonality regarding racial matters lies at the heart of the problem. Whites should not be left off the hook in dealing with societal conditions that will eventually impact their lives. Not surprisingly, many of the problems faced by the black community, such as poor performance of young black males, relocation/outsourcing of jobs overseas, and the feminization of poverty, have become social issues within the white community.”<sup>61</sup>

While West’s and Cunnigen’s observations, which I refer to as the “human relations approach,” are philosophical and conceptual in nature, they can be applied to black mayoral representation of black interests in non-majority-black cities. This application generates the hypothesis that in their efforts to represent blacks by universalizing their interests in the non-majority-black context, black mayors may find success by appealing to the shared human condition. Such an appeal begins with successful rhetoric that convinces whites that the programs and policies proposed will advance their interests as well. This approach may allow mayors to actively pursue black interests without threatening their majority-white constituency or making whites feel that their interests are taking a back seat. If embraced by mayors, the human relations approach could have a direct racial benefit without raising the specter of preferential treatment.

The human relations approach stands in contrast to other suggested means of helping the disadvantaged. William Julius Wilson, for example, argues that “an emphasis on coalition politics that features progressive, race-neutral policies” is the best way to address pervasive problems facing blacks and other disadvantaged groups.<sup>62</sup> This method relies, arguably, on a trickle-down effect, an indirect process of distributing resources. The human relations approach, on the other hand, has the potential to improve the quality of life of black

Americans in the twenty-first century. Many black mayors in the modern era govern in non-majority-black contexts that have favorable race relations in comparison to the cities governed by the nation's first black mayors. With a new generation of black mayors came a change in perspective regarding how to garner support for policy and program development in the interests of blacks.<sup>63</sup> If we find that black mayors are adopting the human relations perspective, this may suggest what Hajnal hopes for: that whites will support policies that work to improve the quality of life of blacks without harboring the fear that their well-being will suffer as a result.

# BLACK MAYORS, WHITE MAJORITIES

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## CHAPTER 1

# A Way Out of No Way

## Reconsidering the Hollow Prize Thesis

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**We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed;  
we are perplexed, but not in despair.**

2 Corinthians 4:8

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Black mayors were a new American phenomenon in the late 1960s. By the 1970s and 1980s political scientists began examining the impact of black mayors. Did black mayors live up to the black community's expectations? Were black mayors successful in delivering on their campaign promises? H. Paul Friesema was one of the early commentators to caution about the high level of black expectations, warning that black mayors were inheriting what he labeled a "hollow prize."<sup>1</sup> Friesema argued that African Americans were gaining control of cities that businesses and white middle-class residents were leaving, depleting the cities' tax bases and providing inadequate resources to address the social and economic needs of the black community.

One of the earliest empirical studies to test the hollow prize thesis was conducted by Edmond Keller.<sup>2</sup> Keller examined whether there was a discernible difference in the policy preferences and positions on municipal expenditures between white and black mayors in six cities. He found that African American mayors were more likely to support social welfare policies than white mayors. According to Keller, "Black mayors, because of the constituencies they serve, would like to make welfare-type policies their central concern; but they are often constrained from doing this by structural and human factors."<sup>3</sup>



Albert K. Karnig and Susan Welch discovered modest shifts in spending policy preferences when a city had a black mayor. They found, for example, that “cities with Black mayors made greater gains in educational spending and in the social welfare areas.”<sup>4</sup> In his study of forty-three cities, Peter K. Eisinger observed, “The presence of a black mayor has a modest incremental effect on levels of black employment and on affirmative action effort, enabling us ultimately to conclude that a small but discernible portion of black employment is a product of black political authority.”<sup>5</sup> In a subsequent study Eisinger noted that the capture of city hall by blacks could have important and positive economic consequences for the black community.<sup>6</sup> In their classic study of ten California cities, R. P. Browning, D. R. Marshall, and D. H. Tabb found that black political incorporation, especially black control of the mayor’s office, was “associated with important changes in urban policy—the creation of police review boards, the appointments of more minorities to commissions, the increasing use of minority contractors, and a general increase in the number of programs oriented to minorities. . . . Cities with strong minority incorporation were much more likely to be responsive to minority interests.”<sup>7</sup> In their political incorporation model Browning, Marshall, and Tabb gave extra weight to cities where an African American occupied the mayor’s office. From their perspective leadership from black mayors played a stronger and more important role than efforts of African American city council members.

Grace Hall Saltzstein found that a mayor’s race had a clear effect on the types of policies implemented.<sup>8</sup> More recently Robert A. Brown found that the presence of a black mayor in many financially strapped cities “had a substantive impact upon increased spending for housing and community development.”<sup>9</sup> He also found a positive impact upon an increase in health spending. In the final analysis, he notes, “Black mayors had a significant influence upon increasing city government spending for social programs.”<sup>10</sup> In general, then, the research seems to conclude that the election of a black mayor has a positive impact on the design and/or promotion of city policies that work to change the quality of life of African American residents.

In addition to research on black mayors' impact on policy, scholars have recognized their symbolic, or psychological, impact. Lawrence Bobo and Franklin D. Gilliam Jr., for example, found that having a black mayor increased the political incorporation and participation of black constituents, leading to the greater political knowledge and political empowerment of black voters.<sup>11</sup> Bobo and Gilliam's conclusions suggest that black residents who are descriptively represented at the mayor's office are more active participants in local politics. More recently Melissa J. Marschall and Anirudh V. S. Ruhil found that blacks reported higher levels of satisfaction with their neighborhood conditions, police services, and public schools when blacks in city government represented them, including in the mayor's office.<sup>12</sup> Such research confirms the work of scholars who found that having blacks in high leadership positions at the municipal level led to higher levels of political trust among blacks and, at times, participation, as well as feelings of empowerment.<sup>13</sup>

Considerable literature points to the limitations black mayors face in shaping urban public policy, however. Much of this literature is in line with the hollow prize thesis. Keller found that black mayors spent more on welfare-related items than white mayors, but institutional structures limited their actions on policies of relevance to blacks and their efforts to make such policies permanent.<sup>14</sup> Adolph Reed Jr. has pointed to the "structural and ideological constraints" that considerably hinder the extent to which black mayors can respond to the needs and concerns of their black constituents, especially the black poor.<sup>15</sup> Carl Stokes, the nation's first major-city African American mayor, discovered such limitations. After two terms in office, Stokes concluded that being a black mayor held only the "promises of power."<sup>16</sup> He found, for example, that as mayor he had little control over the city's bureaucracy. As Bette Woody concluded, African American mayors "quickly discover [they have] little or no power over the bureaucracy and can meet few demands of [their] supporters . . . [due to] problems developing good intergovernmental relations with the state and federal bureaucracy [and to] limits [that] are structural and institutional and . . . embedded in local charters."<sup>17</sup>

Preston found that black mayors in large and medium-sized cities were without the power necessary to bring about significant changes to the quality of life of their residents, especially black residents.<sup>18</sup> Describing the wave of black mayors elected in the 1970s, Preston lamented, “The new black mayors have limited powers.” Black mayors, according to Preston, became “facilitators or housekeepers.”<sup>19</sup> Nelson similarly noted the lack of institutional power for black mayors.<sup>20</sup> Citing a study by the Joint Center for Political Studies, Nelson wrote that most of the twenty-three cities with black mayors under review did not give the mayor statutory power: “Many black mayors are denied substantial control over the policy-making process of city government by city charters.” Nelson discovered that “crucial powers of budget control and appointment were assigned either to city councils or to city managers.”<sup>21</sup>

Yet even in Chicago, Illinois, when a black mayor had budgetary and appointment authority, Harold Washington, elected in 1983 as the city’s first black mayor, was frequently met with resistance to his proposals from the city council. As Dennis R. Judd and Todd Swanstrom recorded, “Washington was hampered throughout most of his first term by the so-called council wars. Led by Edward Vrodlyak, a longtime machine Democrat, white machine politicians, who held a majority on the city council, did everything possible to thwart Washington’s agenda.”<sup>22</sup> J. Philip Thompson argues that similar resistance from city councils to a black mayor’s agenda was found in New York, Cleveland, and Philadelphia.<sup>23</sup> In response the African American mayors of these cities sought to restructure city councils by influencing future council elections, but to little avail. The constraints on black mayors’ power, then, are not limited to institutional structures. Intragovernmental resistance also constrains them; structural limitations and race work together to prevent the enactment of legislation, particularly in contexts in which white council members are not ideologically in sync with a black mayor.

Most scholars seem to agree with Reed, who finds that “these constraints stem from three main sources: 1) the city’s changing economic base and functions, 2) fiscal and revenue limitations, and

3) competition and conflict—both latent and overt—among the [black mayor’s] constituencies.”<sup>24</sup> Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that “minority mayors do not just inherit distressed cities, they *cause* them, simply by being elected, not through any policies they pursue.”<sup>25</sup>

In general previous research leaves no clear conclusion as to the efficacy of black mayoral “power” and a black mayor’s ability to use the mayor’s office to the benefit of the black population. Some scholars find that institutional and political conflict constraints are in line with the hollow prize thesis, concluding that there are limitations of black mayors to pursue black interests. Yet others conclude that black mayors may confront multiple limitations but that many still have been successful in their efforts to positively impact the quality of life of their black residents.

### *The (Not So) Hollow Prize*

Scholarship on the governing of black mayors and their black communities varies in content and approach. While many contributions focus on single issues like education or housing development, others recognize the structural limitations black mayors face.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, urban scholars have attempted to ferret out conditions that are more likely to lead to mayors having an impact on local policy.<sup>27</sup>

The findings of these scholars indicate that several black mayors have been able to make substantive changes for African American residents within the formal constraints of the mayor’s office. Harold Washington’s tenure in Chicago is a vivid example. Washington is generally recognized as having put in place policies that, had he not died unexpectedly, could have helped blacks in Chicago. Though Washington enjoyed mayoral jurisdiction to create social welfare programming and a full-time salary as mayor, in many efforts he lacked support from the Chicago City Council. Washington also inherited a city without a financial surplus. Nevertheless, as Judd and Swanstrom note of his first term, Washington was able to “create a more open and participatory atmosphere in city government” by including numerous agencies and community organizations in his of-

office's consultations about social policy, housing, and economic development.<sup>28</sup> Many of these groups were predominantly African American in composition. Hence, while the city council and other political groups lobbied against his efforts, Washington effectively garnered the support of other organizations to assist his policy development and implementation. This political maneuvering was effective for the socioeconomic progress of the black community particularly. As Robert Mier and Kari J. Moe note, a critical feature of Washington's plan for economic development involved minority participation.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the number of minority firms receiving city contracts increased from nine to sixty in a three-year period under Washington. His brief tenure illustrates that one effective avenue for mayors to get beyond the financial and political constraints of their city or office is to establish relationships with active groups who might assist in the mayor's implementation of some goals.

Mack H. Jones observed a similar network of support for Maynard Jackson in Atlanta after his administration's creation of an office of contract compliance.<sup>30</sup> For the first time in the city's history, a city department was established with the responsibility for reviewing all contracts entered into by the city and all purchases made by the city to ensure minority participation. The result of this policy change was that minority participation in city contract work rose from 2 percent soon after Jackson took office to 13 percent near the end of his first term. Noticeably Jackson faced opposition, especially from Atlanta's white business elite. Jones notes, however, that Jackson rebuffed some criticism and attempts at stalling the contract compliance project and others like it, in large part because of active groups that assisted his efforts. Jackson's success in reordering some of Atlanta's municipal priorities to the benefit of the black community was a result largely of ideologically congruent active group participation. As Jones notes, "The key to effective community empowerment is the presence of a well-organized and highly disciplined organization which not only works to help elect candidates sympathetic to its interests, but also develops a plan for action . . . to convert agenda items into policy."<sup>31</sup> According to Jones, mayoral constraints and limita-

tions make it difficult for black mayors to reorder existing priorities so that significant efforts to increase black political empowerment in Atlanta in the late 1960s and mid-1970s were limited to “a more equitable share for the black community within existing priorities.”<sup>32</sup>

Nelson writes about Carl Stokes’s ability to drum up funds for the construction of 5,496 low-to-moderate-income housing units in Cleveland by the end of his second term, despite the resistance of the city council.<sup>33</sup> Even in the face of threats, Stokes “assisted black businesses by initiating a policy that encouraged competitive bidding by black firms for city contracts.” Nelson credits Stokes’s “activist-entrepreneur style of leadership.”<sup>34</sup> Karnig and Welch similarly note that “black mayoral representation does result in some changes in the level of municipal expenditures,” even in contexts of resistance to black mayoral leadership.<sup>35</sup> In short, many scholars have concluded that there is room for a black mayor, even in a non-majority-black city facing considerable financial and political opposition, to actively pursue policies that are designed to improve the lives of black residents. Somehow black mayors “make a way out of no way” and are capable of introducing substantive change for blacks.

As noted, to create more favorable conditions to implement such policies, black mayors benefit from soliciting the support of active groups that share their administration’s goals. Supportive groups may be the key determinants of a black mayor’s success in this regard. Moreover, a black mayor may take an unconventional approach in pursuing policies for blacks in order to avoid potential backlash. For example, black mayors might seek out black community-based organizations and neighborhood associations or groups to illuminate black interests and assist in the governance of the city.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, the urban politics literature has long focused on conventional channels of political influence.<sup>37</sup> Browning, Marshall, and Tabb found that government effectively represents minorities when blacks form active electoral coalitions, win elected office, and comprise a significant part of a dominant, liberal governing coalition. They concluded that when blacks were members of the dominant coalition, their cities were more likely to create civilian review boards of the

police, increase black presence on boards and commissions and in municipal employment, and expand the number of city contracts awarded to blacks.<sup>38</sup> Building on this research, other scholars have found that the presence of black elected representatives resulted in an increase of black personnel in the public sector and had an impact on the effectiveness of fire and police services and road and park conditions in black communities.<sup>39</sup>

Hence, the likelihood that a city's government will be responsive to black interests appears to be highest with blacks in key leadership roles, such as in the mayor's office or on the city council. Often without the power of those positions the degree to which blacks may expect government to effectively respond to their interests is slim.

### *The Shared Racial Experience Variable*

In addition to the powers of the office of the mayor, the assumption of shared racial experience affects a black mayor's responsiveness toward his or her black constituents and helps explain why the representation of black interests matters. However, scholars' views conflict regarding the role a black politician has on the introduction and implementation of black-interest programs and policies. The most recent scholarship clearly finds that African American congressional representatives more actively represent black interests than do white members of Congress.

A strong theoretical and empirical body of literature describes how the representation of black interests differs from other kinds of representation because of "descriptive" characteristics, such as shared racial experience. A number of scholars have investigated to what degree politicians are responsive to their constituents. By detailing how shared racial experience defines a strong connection between a black politician and his or her constituents, congressional scholarship literature helps to explain why we might expect the interests of blacks to be represented by a black mayor in a non-majority-black city. Scholarship on political representation suggests that black politicians more often actively pursue the interests of blacks than do white politicians. The debate frames the argument for why I expect

that a black mayor would pursue black interests when black constituents are the minority.

### *The Debate over the Representation of Black Interests*

Scholars disagree concerning what factors contribute to the representation of black interests. For example, Carol M. Swain has posited, like Hanna Pitkin, that there is a distinction between “substantive” and “descriptive” representation and that black and white Democratic members of Congress at the very least equally represent African Americans.<sup>40</sup> Hence for Swain, who examined black representatives in a variety of different districts, including majority-white districts, descriptive representation has no place: “Black interests on Capitol Hill, at least measured by the policy congruence between the representative and his or her Black populations, are better looked after by the Democratic congressional party. . . . It suggests that Black interests will certainly be represented in Congress, even if the number of Black faces remain[s] low.”<sup>41</sup> What surfaces in Swain’s argument is the significance of party membership, platform, and ideas—not the race of individual representatives. In this view substantive representation supplants descriptive representation, and black constituents rarely gain more from electing a black representative, provided the non-black representative belongs to the Democratic Party. What the “certain” representation of black interests requires is an increased number of representatives from the Democratic Party. Consequently Swain thinks blacks and whites should form biracial coalitions to maximize the representation of one another’s interests. Swain’s findings and recommendations are limited, however, to a comparable measurement of white Democratic members of the One Hundredth Congress.

Katherine Tate criticizes Swain for equating partisanship to black interests, noting that “descriptive representation turns out to be very important to Blacks, as Blacks were generally approving of their legislator when that representative was Black.”<sup>42</sup> Yet Swain argues that aggressive pushes for descriptive representation for blacks in Congress can be damaging: “The assumption that only Blacks can represent Black interests puts African Americans who want to maximize



the descriptive and substantive representation of Blacks in Congress in an untenable position. . . . It operates to hurt Black politicians who need White support—those Black politicians who seek to emphasize racial commonalities, those who seek to represent Whites as well as Blacks.”<sup>43</sup> Swain does not suggest that white representatives can unequivocally represent blacks: “Although a White representative can ‘think, act, and talk Black,’ he or she can never *be* Black. White representation of Blacks will never replace Black representation.”<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, Swain’s overall conclusion is that white Democratic representation in Congress is equal to or better for blacks than descriptive black representation.

Tate, among others, finds this prioritization of party over racial group membership in the representation of black interests to be troubling. She argues that black representation is not only best achieved through black members of Congress because black representatives share a particular interpretation of history with their black constituents, but also that all groups, including whites, place a strong value on descriptive representation. This is a consideration that both Pitkin and Swain ignore. For them, it appears, descriptive representation is not only pejorative but is also limited to minority group experience.<sup>45</sup> Tate, on the other hand, is adamant that “all Americans place a strong value on [descriptive representation,] as it is a component of political representation continuously stressed by members of those elected to the U.S. Congress.”<sup>46</sup> Both Tate and David Runciman concur that descriptive representation is endemic in the institution of political representation.<sup>47</sup> Challenging Swain’s conclusion that party trumps racial identification, Tate asserts, “Black Democrats are strikingly more liberal or less conservative than White Democrats.”<sup>48</sup> This finding contrasts with Swain’s finding that white Democratic Party members of Congress represent black interests as well as black members do.<sup>49</sup>

### *The Black Representation Variable in Local Politics*

Given the unique nature of city cultures, every city unveils its own challenges to a mayor’s active pursuit of policies and programs.<sup>50</sup> Some cities’ histories may require that mayors consult union leaders

prior to any major policy development that affects certain local neighborhood communities. In other cities the mayor may find himself or herself more likely to pursue policies that have party endorsement. V. O. Key has argued that a two-party competitive politics environment is better suited to guarantee responsiveness than is one-party dominance.<sup>51</sup> In other words, when the electorate is given “political options,” elected officials within a two-party system are more likely to be responsive to their supporters’ concerns. In addition, district elections may influence the quality of representation on city councils and commissions because these elections have been found to provide a closer connection between an officeholder and the constituents than at-large elections.<sup>52</sup>

As noted, community-based organizations may be effective supporters of black elected officials. Barbara Ferman argues that neighborhood and community groups play key roles as channeling agents to achieve responsiveness for or from government leaders.<sup>53</sup> By lobbying for their interests, they make public officials better informed about and more responsive to their concerns. While some note the limitations of such groups’ effectiveness,<sup>54</sup> the combined presence of a strong and mobilized black community and shared racial experience between a black mayor and his or her black constituents tends to produce greater levels of responsiveness to black interests. Still other scholars have found that traditionally excluded groups use neighborhood organizations to gain attention, service, and access to government and that organizational resources empower racial and ethnic minorities.<sup>55</sup>

### *The Way Out of No Way: Targeted Universalistic Governance*

Rhine McLin and Jack Ford sought to represent black interests via a leadership style and governance choice to (unknowingly) utilize John A. Powell’s concept of targeted universalism.<sup>56</sup> The concept is a political strategy and governing approach that recognizes the need for a universal platform that is simultaneously responsive to the needs of the particular. By extension, then, targeted universalism is a rhetorical strategy and also a public policy development strategy where-

in policy output is determined in part by how a program effectively can be described as benefitting all citizens yet has a targeted focus toward the problems of specific groups.

As explained in the introduction, I reframe Powell's concept as a "common humanity, human relations" approach. I do so because Powell's concept is based in part on the scholarship of others who were also concerned with questions of how best to implement social welfare and urban public policy initiatives. Most recently scholars have debated the question of how to represent the disparate "other" in terms of initiatives' universal or targeted impact.<sup>57</sup> William Julius Wilson and Theda Skocpol are often cited as supporting a universalistic approach to public policy implementation.<sup>58</sup> For example, Wilson describes how targeted programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, introduced by President Franklin D. Roosevelt under the New Deal, were successful in gaining political support only because they were perceived to provide "a modicum of security for all."<sup>59</sup> President Lyndon Johnson's targeted War on Poverty programs, on the other hand, gained little political support because "this system amounted to taxation to pay for programs that were perceived to benefit mostly minorities, programs that excluded taxpayers perceived to be mostly white."<sup>60</sup> Thus in rejecting race-specific policies and programs with a targeted focus, Wilson has argued for universal, economic-reform-based programs "to improve the life chances of groups such as the ghetto underclass by emphasizing programs in which the more advantaged groups of all races can positively relate."<sup>61</sup> Economically based and universally applied social programs, Wilson argues, will address racially disparate problems in inner-city communities and the "substantive inequality" that would remain if the policy focus were limited to race-specific policies and means-tested goals and objectives.<sup>62</sup> Consequently universalistic policies and programs can have targeted benefits for African Americans in the urban context.<sup>63</sup>

Skocpol has agreed with Wilson that social welfare and urban public policy programs require universalistic benefits.<sup>64</sup> Skocpol, who champions the universalist approach toward social welfare and urban

public policy programs that may benefit particular constituencies such as blacks, argues that policymakers' efforts should be guided by fundamental values and moral obligations that are alleged to be monolithically understood or accepted.<sup>65</sup>

Not all scholars agree with Skocpol and Wilson.<sup>66</sup> For example, Robert Greenstein argues that Skocpol makes incongruent comparisons: “[Skocpol] overstates the relative political strength of universal programs because she compares universal programs providing entitlements to targeted programs that are not entitlements and must have their funding levels determined in the appropriations cycle each year.”<sup>67</sup>

As a solution, Greenstein argues for a combination of universal and targeted approaches. He cites an unpublished paper by Isabel V. Sawhill that found “if there is one lesson that we have learned from all the evaluations and research that has been conducted since the War on Poverty began, it is that [service] programs that provided limited benefits to many people, although politically popular, are not effective in responding to the problems of the most seriously disadvantaged.”<sup>68</sup> Douglas S. Massey and Mitchell L. Eggers have also found that social conditions vary significantly among ethnic groups and across regions.<sup>69</sup> Hence social programs should perhaps be targeted to certain ethnic groups or within certain regions to achieve the best possible outcome.

I share many of the universalist criticisms of scholars such as Greenstein, Roger Wilkins, and Massey. The findings support the targeted thesis based on the fact that blacks and whites in the cities examined reported that black interests were more actively pursued with black mayors than under their white predecessors. By extension, it is striking how similar proponents of universalism appear to be to communitarian theorists. Communitarians often view the public realm as unified and homogenous, where collective interests and “equal citizenship” are normative values. It follows, then, that by embracing the commonality of citizens, all persons' interests and problems are addressed in civic life. Similarly proponents of universalist-based public policy approaches to racially disparate and urban

problems suggest that by appealing to the universal, the needs of the particular are served.<sup>70</sup>

As theorist Iris Marion Young has indicated, however, “the universal citizen is also white and bourgeois.”<sup>71</sup> Thus for Young, who argues against Rousseau and other early political philosophers—whose views embodied “the universal point of view of the collective interests and equal citizenship” yet denied citizenship to women—the universal or impartial ideal is insufficient. In rejecting what she calls the universality of the ideal of impartiality, Young distinguishes between two kinds of universality: “Universality in the sense of the participation and inclusion of everyone in moral and social life does not imply universality in the sense of the adoption of a general point of view that leaves behind particular affiliations, feelings, commitments, and desires. . . . Universality as generality has often operated precisely to inhibit universal inclusion and participation.”<sup>72</sup> As a result, for Young approaches to civic life that construct the universal as general and subsume the differences embodied in the particular experiences of those who are not “white and bourgeois” inherently fail to adequately address the interests of those who are different.

Young finds that the communitarian approach excludes the value of citizenship for those who are socially different from the norm. She finds that “this ideal expresses a desire for the fusion of subjects with one another, which in practice operates to exclude those with whom the group does not identify. The ideal of community denies and represses social difference.”<sup>73</sup> Correspondingly proponents of universal programs to address the interests of particular constituencies presume that the urban problems of blacks can be addressed by crafting economic policies to meet the needs of all low-income citizens, including blacks. However, as Young suggests, if we presume the universal approach to be successful in addressing low-income black problems in the urban context because it addresses low-income economic limitations for all citizens, then it would follow that other black “problems” experienced by those who are not low-income would not be addressed. Hence by suggesting that urban black problems can be fixed by appealing to macroeconomic restructuring, one in

effect denies the potential problem of racially disparate issues that affect blacks who are not low-income.<sup>74</sup>

Young notes, “Appeals to community are usually antiurban.”<sup>75</sup> Her solution to the many urban problems is regionally based governmental units and public policy and service delivery initiatives.<sup>76</sup> Both Ford and McLin championed a regionally based network of shared responsibility and investment. While Young’s alternative to the communitarian universal approach is important, most significant is the theoretical comparison her research affords; it can be applied to the targeted versus universal social policy debate.

Similar to Greenstein’s proposal to combine the targeted and universal approaches in an effort to substantively address social welfare policies, Powell has argued that universal laws and policies do not effectively address the needs of black and urban communities. He thus argues for targeted universalism in race politics, a strategy in which arguments are made in a way that is racially inclusive rather than polarizing. It is this rhetorical strategy that Ford and McLin utilized in their State of the City speeches and related addresses (see chapter 8). Powell’s notion of targeted universalism is similar to Skocpol’s notion of “targeting within universalism,” wherein extra benefits are directed to low-income groups within the context of a universal policy design.<sup>77</sup> As an example of targeting within universalism, Skocpol cites the hypothetical development of a family security program as an extension of preexisting social security programs for the elderly.<sup>78</sup>

Powell’s targeted universalism has a different focus and describes why universal, race-neutral policies are ineffective in race politics:

Policies that are designed to be universal too often fail to acknowledge that different people are situated differently. For racially marginalized populations, particularly those who live in concentrated-poverty neighborhoods, there are multiple reinforcing constraints. For any given issue—whether it is employment rates, housing, incarceration, or health care—the challenge is to appreciate how these issues interact and accumulate over time, with

place as the linchpin holding these arrangements together. Universal policies that are nominally race-neutral and that focus on specific issues such as school reform will rarely be effective because of the cumulative cascade of issues that encompass these neighborhoods.<sup>79</sup>

Thus Powell argues for the necessity of a policy and programmatic approach that acknowledges that any social problems affect more than just blacks yet still require targeted implementation.

In addition, proposed remedies, such as affirmative action, should examine a broader array of factors than race alone.<sup>80</sup> Powell's "targeted universalism" is a strategy that achieves what racialized politics attempted in the 1960s and 1970s with, for example, programs focused on urban renewal. In a new era in which scholars at least question how a preference for "diversity" in the job sector may negatively impact blacks,<sup>81</sup> however, Powell recognizes that racialized efforts are ineffective and that universal interests deny the specter of race:

What is required is a strategy of "targeted universalism." This approach recognizes that the needs of marginalized groups must be addressed in a coordinated and effective manner. To improve opportunities and living conditions for all residents in a region, we need policies to proactively connect people to jobs, stable housing, and good schools. Targeted universalism recognizes that life is lived in a web of opportunity. Only if we address all of the mutually reinforcing constraints on opportunity can we expect real progress in any one factor. My research suggests targeted efforts—ones that target both racial and spatial arrangements—to break this cycle of the racial dimension of the geography of opportunity . . . [can be effective]. While these practices may be less dependent on deliberate racialized policies today than earlier in America's history, only deliberate policy interventions that are sensitive to the structural dynamics of opportunity are likely to be effective in ending this cycle of opportunity segregation.<sup>82</sup>

Powell cites former Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and former Chicago mayor Harold Washington as examples of public officials who have actively utilized the targeted universalism approach successfully. Both of these men “built broad-based multi-racial, multi-class coalitions and succeeded by keeping both race and class issues in focus. . . . There has never been—at least in 20th Century America—a progressive political movement built solely on class. To inoculate such efforts from divisive race-baiting, there must be discourse to inspire whites to link their fates to nonwhites.” The concept of targeted universalism is thus meant to establish a discourse and to develop related actions and programs that inspire “Whites to link their fates to non-Whites.”<sup>83</sup>

What Powell considers targeted universalism I characterize as Jack Ford’s and Rhine McLin’s efforts to universalize the interests of blacks. In these attempts the mayors garnered white support for seemingly racialized initiatives. While their reelections may have been threatened, as Joseph P. McCormick and Charles E. Jones have noted, at the very least they initiated a discourse on racial equal opportunity that potentially could affect the city culture for years to come.<sup>84</sup>

As proponents of targeted universalism have argued, though, while an opportunity for positive discourse may develop out of a targeted universalistic approach, the approach has limitations. As Young has indicated, notions of what is universal are understood insofar as they stand in contrast to background assumptions that are particular or non-universal. When it comes to universal public policies and how best to implement them, however, often such policies, even if targeted under the framework of universalism, tend to be perceived as racially polarizing. President Johnson’s aforementioned War on Poverty programs are one example: though these programs were promoted in universal language, many white citizens felt that their tax dollars were being spent to benefit black people. Some scholars have noted, moreover, that Aid to Families with Dependent Children, a universal program, came to be perceived as predominantly for the black urban poor.<sup>85</sup> Even though blacks were disproportionately ex-



cluded from the program when it was first established, demographic changes and changes in the development of media led many Americans to believe poor blacks were the dominant group affected by poverty. Thus according to some scholars, most universal programs are de facto targeted or particular, either because of how they are perceived or in terms of how their benefits are implemented.<sup>86</sup> In the final analysis, it appears that particularly at the implementation stage, targeted universalism can become racialized.

A second limitation with the targeted universalism approach concerns how to measure what it is that proponents of the approach are in fact attempting to accomplish. There is no way to answer the question directly, as some may utilize the approach, as Ford and McLin arguably have, to achieve racial justice or fairness, while others may focus less on the “targeted” dimension of the concept and more on the “universal” dimension and seek to accomplish racial or color blindness.<sup>87</sup> This possibility, as Powell has noted, leads to a problem because while theoretically these two versions of the concept could “work in tandem, in practice they are often in conflict.”<sup>88</sup> Universalism is not the same as targeted universalism—and it’s easy to confuse them.

Moreover, Dona and Charles Hamilton examined a variety of targeted universal programs, particularly those in the civil rights era, and found that none promoted racial justice, in part because of salient racial resentment.<sup>89</sup> Finally, Powell argued that the framing of the particular within the confines of the universal created a legal and policy limitation, as those who were either aggressively pro-racialization or pro-deracialization occupied better positions in terms of argument strength, given that they did not suffer from the weakness of trying to occupy both ends of the spectrum simultaneously.<sup>90</sup> Consequently according to some scholars, the implementation of targeted universal policies and programs rather than universal programs and race-specific programs is not a perfect solution.

As emphasized in the introduction, though, the practice of universalizing the interests of blacks is not the same as deracialization, and as a result, it is conceivably a better option, even if its targeted

focus is not perfect. The targeted universalist approach is different, as the process includes black elected officials that consider the interests of black constituents, develop particularized policy actions and programs, and popularize them by rhetorically advocating for these interests in a way that does not deemphasize race or alienate all whites. The context in which this process functioned in the case studies that we will consider was one in which the mayors emphasized citizens' common humanity. Hence, in addition to noting the significance of race while supporting certain policies and programs, the mayors carefully tapped into the common humanity of city residents through strategic rhetorical framing. As a result, the mayors received support for their causes in neighborhoods and groups not their own, as when Ford received initial assistance from the Associated General Contractors of Northwest Ohio to support his Capacity Building program or when McLin received the support of the business community, as recognized by an anonymous business leader and by the president and CEO of the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce (see chapters 5 and 6). Their approach is a good example of how to maintain some white electoral and governing support in a non-majority-black city while at the same time advocating for black interests. Their willingness to do so and their ability to do so suggests the hollow prize thesis also has a limited application to twenty-first-century black mayors.