

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: FAITH WITHOUT FUNDING, VALUES WITHOUT JUSTICE: THE BUSH CAMPAIGN'S SUCCESSFUL TARGETING OF AFRICAN AMERICAN EVANGELICAL PASTORS AND CHURCHES IN THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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This dissertation examines the impact of the Black church on electoral politics through an analysis of the role it played during the 2004 presidential election. By examining this particular election, I illustrate both the complexity and political import of the Black church and how neither can be taken for granted by presidential candidates or major political parties seeking to win elections. Paying particular attention to the strategies the Bush campaign and Republican Party used to target a certain segment of the Black church, I focus on faith-based initiatives and same-sex marriage as two specific issues that connected Black churches to the 2004 presidential election in critical ways. I collected data from historical and political texts as well as newspapers and published reports. My interviews with a cross-section of clergy, party operatives and political activists also provided critical information. This dissertation will examine the significance of the role faith-based initiatives and values centered wedge politics played in impacting Black pastors and churches during the countdown

to the general election of 2004. The Bush campaign targeted and successfully reached evangelical Black pastors and congregations across the nation by appealing to their conservative moral values. This is significant for two reasons. First, because in expressing their support for President Bush, these Black churches represented a clear departure from the perception that all Black churches support Democratic candidates. They also complicated the notion that African Americans, often thought of as a racial monolith, are politically predictable. Second, because it signaled a shift in Republican presidential campaign outreach strategy from the previous four presidential elections. This study will interrogate whether that strategic shift was grounded in a desire to broaden and diversify the base of the Republican Party. The Bush campaign capitalized on existing relationships with Black churches and pastors, which were cultivated as the administration courted their support during Bush's first term with promises of faith-based initiative funding.

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CAMPAIGN'S SUCCESSFUL TARGETING OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
EVANGELICAL PASTORS AND CHURCHES IN THE
2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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Dedication

This dissertation is written in honor of the educators in my family:

Dr. David Abner, III
Lalanya Abner
Cora Masters Barry
Harry Lawson, Jr.
Sandra A. Lawson
Dr. Isabell A. Masters
Moses A. Wilds, Sr.
Rodney H. Wilds, Sr.
Rosa B. Wilds

It is inspired by courageous Black preachers who have touched my life:

Bishop Thomas Masters
Rev. Tom Skinner
Dr. Christine Y. Wiley
Dr. Dennis W. Wiley
Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner
Rev. Willie F. Wilson

It is lovingly dedicated to:

Jonathan Poullard

...who has transformed personal pain into a beautiful life full of powerful love for himself and others.

In Memory of:

Jamal Malik Chandler

...whose struggle to fully embrace his authentic self took him away too soon.

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Without question, my family has been my most consistent and invaluable source of support. My mother, Cora Masters Barry, a dynamic political science professor for over twenty years, sowed the seeds of interest in academia early in my life. She also celebrated my achievements and made significant material contributions including two laptops, which made my life as a graduate student much easier to navigate. My father, Moses A. Wilds, Jr., an excellent writer and communicator,

passed those skills to me through years of priceless dialogue and exchange. During my doctoral studies, he provided constant positive reinforcement, financial support and the blessing of significantly subsidized housing. I will be forever grateful to both of them for their unconditional love and belief in me. My sister Lalanya and brother Rodney are the best siblings on earth and have looked after me and kept me laughing over the years. My fearless grandmother, Dr. Isabell A. Masters, motivated me and validated my desire to attain a Ph.D. by placing such great value on education and excellence. My Aunt Cookie, Auntie Lillie and Cousin Janice have always shown genuine interest in my progress and prayed for my success which I appreciate more than they know. Most significantly, I would not have made it through the last leg of graduate school or writing my dissertation without my adoring, loving, patient, protective and generous husband, Harry Lawson, Jr. His unflinching support throughout this intense process reinforced my love for him and appreciation of our marriage. He is my best friend and I am so excited to experience our life together beyond this milestone.

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“As far as I am concerned, I see the hand of God on President Bush.”¹

Chapter One: Introduction

In 2004 President George W. Bush was reelected by another close margin. He beat his opponent, Senator John F. Kerry, by 3,337,303 votes, which equaled 2% of the popular vote.² Although Kerry conceded the day after the election, controversy surrounded the results, which were quite close in Ohio, a key battleground state that gave Bush the margin of victory. As much discussion as there was in the mainstream press about the election results, in the days, weeks and months following the election there was also quite a bit of talk about the African American community and how it responded to each candidate.

The Democratic nominee, Massachusetts Senator John F. Kerry, had been plagued for months by reports that he was not connecting with African American voters. He was also criticized for not diversifying his senior campaign staff until close to the general election. Meanwhile, on the other side of the aisle, reports were circulating that George W. Bush was making inroads with African Americans, Christians in particular, who like him, opposed same-sex marriage. Consequently, it was argued that values in general and same-sex marriage in particular resulted in critical African American votes for Bush. This public narrative continued in spite of the exit polling which indicated that Bush only received 2% more of their votes in

¹ Kirkpatrick, “Black Pastors Backing Bush Are Rarities, but Not Alone,” *New York Times*, October 5, 2004.

² Kevin J. McMahon, David M. Rankin, Donald W. Beachler, and John Kenneth White, *Winning the White House, 2004: Region by Region, Vote by Vote* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), viii.

2004 than he did in the 2000 election.³ Although this nationwide margin was small, it obscured a significant increase of seven or more percentage points in African American votes for Bush in key states including Ohio and Pennsylvania.⁴ When broken down by state, these numbers indicate that the Bush reelection campaign and the Republican Party were able to appeal to the often over looked conservative moral values of some African American Christians.

In the following study, I will argue that the Bush campaign capitalized on their existing relationships with Black churches and pastors, which were cultivated as the administration courted their support during Bush's first term with promises of faith-based initiative funding. I will also provide evidence that the Bush campaign used same-sex marriage, the most controversial domestic policy issue debated during the campaign, to gain African American votes. In short, this dissertation will interrogate the significance of the role faith-based initiatives and values centered wedge politics played in impacting Black pastors and churches during the countdown to the general election of 2004.

The Bush campaign targeted and successfully reached some Black pastors and congregations across the nation by appealing to their conservative values. This is significant for two reasons. First, because in expressing their support for President Bush, these Black churches represented a clear departure from the perception that all Black churches support Democratic candidates. They complicated the notion that all African Americans, often thought of as a racial monolith, are politically predictable.

³ Larry J. Sabato, *Divided States of America: The Slash and Burn Politics of the 2004 Presidential Election* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006), 105.

⁴ Robert C. Smith and Richard Seltzer, "The Deck and the Sea: The African American Vote in the Presidential Elections of 2000 and 2004," in *The Expanding Boundaries of Black Politics*, ed. Georgia A. Persons (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 265.

To understand this dynamic this study will illuminate the complexity of the Black church along denominational and class lines. Second, because it signaled a shift in Republican presidential campaign outreach strategy from the previous four presidential elections. This study will interrogate whether that strategic shift was grounded in an authentic desire to broaden and diversify the base of the party or if it was motivated by ambition to win the 2004 election.

At present, no comprehensive literature connects an examination of the “Black church,” its relationship to faith-based initiatives, response to the same-sex marriage debate within the context of the 2004 election, and the Bush reelection campaign’s outreach and strategy. Considering the interplay of these phenomena is critical to offering a complex rather than simplistic assessment of the Black church’s role in the election. To that end, this study builds on the work of Fredrick C. Harris, who interrogates the multifaceted relationship between Black religion and activism in *Something Within: Religion in African American Political Activism*. His exhaustive examination of how Black religion impacted Black political involvement in the 20th Century in *Something Within* provided a solid foundation for my analysis of the significant role Black churches played in the 2004 election. Harris’ central argument is that “religion's affects on Black activism varies not only because of religion's multidimensionality, but also because of the nature and context of political action.”⁵

This intersectional theory supports my assertion that a combination of the Bush campaign’s targeting strategy and the complexities of the Black church, resulted in a slight but important shift in Black presidential political activism in 2004 that had

⁵ Fredrick C. Harris, *Something Within: Religion in African American Political Activism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 10.

significant implications for both parties. In *Something Within*, Harris considers “how religion...mobilizes African Americans into the political process.”⁶ This study focuses more narrowly on how a specific segment of the Black church mobilized its members to support a particular presidential candidate. Consequently, this project seeks to break new ground in analysis of an election that has been the source of much spirited speculation and debate. Within those political, religious and cultural debates, the role of the Black church has received sparse attention and research presented in the following pages will contribute to filling that scholarly void. This project will draw from literature in four main areas.

First, I will look at the history of the Black church as a complex and dynamic entity, which contradicts its typical characterization as a monolithic “institution.” Theologian C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya’s *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, includes an exhaustive look at the history of the different denominations within the Black church. Lincoln and Mamiya’s work will help me address the fact that the “Black church” is actually comprised of a diverse collection of denominations and congregations that cover a wide range of theologies, levels of social activism and socio economic status. Lincoln and Mamiya devote an entire chapter to politics, and include an insightful section that discusses the “ambiguity of the Black church toward politics,” arguing that it is due to its “strong evangelical tradition.”⁷ They maintain that this born-again evangelical tradition has a strong influence among Black Christians, and is correlated with political

⁶ Ibid, p. 8.

⁷ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 4.

conservatism among whites. Their argument underscores my assertion that George W. Bush's Christian values struck a chord with a number Black Christians.

More recent studies of the Black church and Black religion including R. Drew Smith's *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America* and *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* and *The African American Religious Experience in America* were also extremely useful. For example, members of the Black Religious Scholars Group (BRSB), which collectively authored *Black Church Studies*, offer a detailed look at the Black church tradition in the context of an interdisciplinary "field of study that describes and analyzes the legacy, traditions, and social witness of the Black church in North America."⁸ They include explanations of, and historical context for, Black church theory, theology, history, methodology and hermeneutics. While the format of the study is geared towards Black Church Studies instructors and students, its concise explanation of a myriad of concerns relevant to this project, including Black theologies, and African American "Christian social ethics" helped me further illuminate the complexities of the Black church.

Anthony B. Pinn's, *The African American Religious Experience in America*, was useful because Pinn included information about African American Christians who exist within historically white protestant denominations including the Lutheran, Presbyterian and Episcopal churches as well as the Roman Catholic Church. He also posited the "Black church" and Black Christians within the broader religious experience of African Americans which is certainly not limited to Christianity. This

⁸ Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Juan Floyd-Thomas, Carol B. Duncan, Stephen G. Ray, Jr., and Nancy Lynne Westfield, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), xxii.

background was helpful in ensuring that I did not trade one generalization, that all Black Christians think and vote alike, for another, that all African Americans are Christian and belong to historically Black denominations and congregations.

Although *A Matter of Faith: Religion in the 2004 Presidential Election* focused primarily on white Christians and their impact on the election, a few chapters including Scott Keeter's "Evangelicals and Moral Values" and Eric L. McDaniel's "The Black Church: Maintaining Old Coalitions" provided useful quantitative data about Christian African American voters. It is worth noting that *A Matter of Faith* was one of few religion based studies of the 2004 election that either included figures about Black voters or differentiated between Black church denominations.

Next, I will look at literature focused on the 2004 presidential election. Along with an examination of the Bush campaign's targeting strategy, this literature also includes a comparison of how both campaigns handled African American outreach. Four studies were particularly useful in identifying the strengths and weakness of both campaigns and candidates. *Election 2004: How Bush Won and What You Can Expect in the Future*, was written by Evan Thomas who assembled the reports, observations and reflections of Newsweek reporters who traveled with both campaigns and were able to "blend into the background."⁹ This insider account of the 2004 campaign season provides balanced assessments of everything from how both candidates handled "the road" to the momentum each campaign gained and lost. Thomas' central argument, that the Bush campaign was "better organized" and their candidate had the advantage of being a "natural campaigner" is not unique, as it was

⁹ Evan Thomas, *Election 2004: How Bush Won and What You Can Expect in the Future* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), xxiii.

echoed by other mainstream journalists and political science scholars, including Larry Sabato and Ronald W. Walters.¹⁰ However, *Election 2004's* intimate tone and honest analysis helps fill in details that other more polling centered analyses neglected.

Four researchers, Kevin J. McMahon, David M. Ranken, Ronald W. Beachler and John Kenneth White, provide a concise and informative look at the campaign in *Winning the White House, 2004: Region by Region, Vote by Vote*. With over forty figures and tables, *Winning the White House, 2004* proved extremely valuable to this study, especially chapters and tables included in the “Issues” section. The charts on same-sex marriage and evangelical voters captured rarely reported information that informed my analysis of the Bush campaign’s targeting strategy. Unfortunately, the study contained little analysis or polling data broken down by race and no information about African American Christians or evangelicals broken down by denomination.

Applebee’s America: How Successful Political, Business, and Religious Leaders Connect with the New American Community by Douglas B. Sosnik, Matthew J. Dowd and Ron Fournier like *Election 2004*, is far from a scholarly treatment of the 2004 presidential election. However, one of its authors, Matthew J. Dowd, was the technical mastermind behind the MicroTargeting method, which the Bush reelection campaign used with such great precision. He writes about their strategy with surprising candor. As a result, *Applebee’s America* is not only filled with anecdotes and observations about the campaign but also slices through political science jargon and presents sensible arguments about why Bush was reelected with simple but informed theories. For example, early in *Applebee’s America* the authors assert that

¹⁰ Thomas, xxv.

the President was reelected because he conveyed a sense of authenticity to voters and spoke to their “Gut Values,” an ability he shared with President Bill Clinton. They explain that the campaign used the unpopular War in Iraq to forge the President’s strongest connection to voters who “opposed the war but voted for Bush because they thought he had the Gut Values to keep them safe”.¹¹ Such insider observations confirmed what many journalists and scholars speculated from the sidelines during and after the election. The authors’ analyses in *Applebee’s America* complimented other more scholarly analyses of political strategy during the 2004 presidential campaign including Jo Renee Formicola’s *The Politics of Values: Games Political Strategists Play* which provided a sound strategic context for this chapter.

Finally, Ronald W. Walters’ *Freedom is Not Enough: Black Voters, Black Candidates and American Presidential Politics*, greatly informed this study because it is the only contemporary comprehensive treatment of the role of African Americans in presidential politics, and because it provides an excellent historical review of late 20th Century Black political participation. Walters argues for the continued development and growth of what Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr. has called the “third rail” of politics: independent Black political mobilization and strategy. He opens and closes the study by stressing the primacy of strengthening the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which he argues was compromised by the 2000 election. His astute and candid critique of contemporary Black leadership was also invaluable. Echoing much of Walter’s scholarship on Black political activism and leadership, several articles from

¹¹ Doug B. Sosnik, Matthew J. Dowd, and Ron Fournier *Applebee’s America: How Successful Political, Business, and Religious Leaders Connect With the New American Community*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 53.

The Expanding Boundaries of Black Politics provided additional perspectives that complicated my discussion of African American voters and the 2004 election.

The literature on faith-based initiatives, although limited in number, is quite comprehensive. Literature on the topic which proved useful to this project include Jo Renee Formicola, Mary C. Segers and Paul Weber's *Faith Based-Initiatives and the Bush Administration: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, which gives a fairly unbiased look at faith-based initiatives as the hallmark domestic policy of the first Bush administration. The "good" in the title describes the best attributes of faith-based initiatives, including what influenced Bush to conceive the idea as well as the good intentions of those who helped him bring it to fruition. The "bad" refers to the portion of the study dedicated to discussing major issues at the center of the onslaught of criticism the Bush administration encountered as it attempted to institutionalize faith-based initiatives. This chapter was especially informative because it provided details about the "constitutional and legal challenges that plague faith-based initiatives" making it difficult to translate the concept into legislation.¹² The failure of faith-based initiative legislation along with the political battles that hampered the President's premier domestic priority from its inception, are the focus of the "ugly" chapter of the text.

Studies including Bob Wineburg's *Faith-Based Inefficiency: The Follies of Bush's Initiatives* and *Of Little Faith: The Politics of George W. Bush's Faith-Based Initiatives* by Amy E. Black, Douglas L. Koopman & David K. Ryden take a more critical stance and suggests that the 2000 Bush campaign and subsequent

¹² Jo Renee Formicola, Mary C. Segers and Paul Weber, *Faith-Based Initiatives and the Bush Administration: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 2.

administration threw their weight behind faith-based initiatives because of their aggressive plan to increase the President's base of support in the 2004 election. In *Faith-Based Inefficiency* Wineburg, a Social Work scholar at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, criticizes the Bush administration for launching a national versus locally centered initiative that was "ideologically driven and poorly executed."¹³ He argues effectively that the administration should have sought more input from local leaders who had a better sense of what was needed and which churches and organizations were best equipped to address those needs. *Faith-Based Inefficiency* also contains a chapter cryptically titled "Blacks and Jews" that included valuable information about President Ronald Reagan's limited outreach to Black churches which Wineburg claims foreshadowed Bush's campaign strategy.

In *Of Little Faith*, Black, Koopman and Ryden contend that the Bush administration's zealous public support of faith-based initiatives was purely political. According to Black, Koopman and Ryden, "their overt support for intense and vocal religion would be consistent with the views of the Republican Party's white Protestant base, yet its emphasis on aiding the poor would help with moderate whites, Catholics, and racial minorities who would be the prime beneficiaries of faith-based funds."¹⁴ This indictment was reiterated by a White House insider in *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction*. David Kuo, who worked in the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) as a Special Assistant to

¹³ Bob Wineburg, *Faith-Based Inefficiency: The Follies of Bush's Initiatives* (Westport: Praeger, 2007), 117.

¹⁴ Amy E. Black, Douglas L. Koopman, and David K. Ryden *Of Little Faith: The Politics of George W. Bush's Faith-Based Initiatives* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 12.

George W. Bush from 2001 to 2003, provided a scathing account of how faith-based initiatives were touted versus what they actually achieved and how.

According to Kuo, even as it became clear that faith-based initiatives would not be fully funded, the administration supported and encouraged the White House OFBCI to host conferences in key states including Pennsylvania and Georgia (where Republicans were trying to unseat a Democratic governor and senator) that would provide churches with information on how to apply for federal grants. In much the same way that *Applebee's America* provided intimate insight into the Bush reelection campaign targeting strategy, *Tempting Faith* documented the disconnect between the President's rhetoric and his administration's lack of commitment to giving his faith-based initiative "teeth" through sound implementation and *new* federal funding. Kuo concludes his account by arguing that the Bush administration's deceit simply reiterated the limitations of political leaders who are seduced by power. Although his concluding argument is weak, the observations made along the way in *Tempting Faith* helped substantiate my assertions about the White House's narrow political priorities during President Bush's first term.

Paul Kengor's *God and George W. Bush: A Spiritual Life* and Stephen Mansfield's *The Faith of George W. Bush* help provide the personal history and background necessary to understand Bush's religious convictions, which became a crucial component of the Bush campaign's outreach effort to African American churches. While these authors are transparent about their respect for and support of George W. Bush, their obvious bias does not eclipse the usefulness of observations

like this one offered by Mansfield about what differentiates Bush from other overtly religious presidents:

What distinguishes the presidency of George W. Bush thus far is not just the openness with which he has discussed his personal conversion and spiritual life, nor simply the intensity of his public statements about faith. Rather, he is set apart both by the fact that he seems to genuinely believe privately what he says publicly about religion—when Americans are more used to religious insincerity from their leaders—and by the fact that he seeks to integrate faith with public policy at the most practical level.¹⁵

Mansfield's assertion that Bush's faith has influenced his public policy is supported by the fervor with which he rallied behind faith-based initiatives during the 2000 presidential campaign and his first administration. However, those who have reflected on the first four years of his presidency including Wineburg and Kuo, argue that too often regarding faith-based initiatives, his actions contradicted his faith.

Several studies have been published on the issue of same-sex marriage over the last decade. George Chauncey's *Why Marriage?: The History Shaping Today's Debate Over Gay Equality*, David Moats' *Civil Wars: A Battle For Same-sex marriage* and *The Politics of Same-Sex Marriage*, edited by Craig A. Rimmerman and Clyde Wilcox are examples of solid examinations of the topic. Chauncey anchors his discussion of same-sex marriage within the historical context of how heterosexual Americans' attitudes towards gay people have shifted, recalling the widespread and intense discrimination that gay men and women faced just a few decades ago. He argues that today's discrimination has taken on a different, more organized form, evident in the current political campaigns against gay rights.

¹⁵ Stephen Mansfield, *The Faith of George W. Bush* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2003), xviii.

Civil Wars: A Battle for Same-sex marriage provides a balanced look at the issue by chronicling the battle over same-sex marriage in Vermont, which culminated in the state becoming the first to grant gay and lesbian couples the right to join in civil unions. Moats includes stories and anecdotes from Vermont citizens who gave public testimony in front of the state legislature which was tasked with the responsibility of changing the law after the Vermont Supreme Court decision stating that gays had a right to marry.

The Politics of Same-Sex Marriage is one of few studies published on same-sex marriage that focuses on the politics of the issue. A collection of chapters written by political science scholars and gay rights activists, the project does not have a “single theoretical framework.”¹⁶ However, some of its chapters including “Same-Sex Marriage in the 2004 Election” by DeWayne L. Lucas were informative. What sets Lucas’ chapter apart from others in the study and from many other scholarly and newspaper articles, was his focus on how the Republican Party “framed the election as a defense of the institution of marriage.”¹⁷ According to Lucas, the Democratic Party never defined their stance on the issue and spent much of the election season on the defensive, fearing definitive support for same-sex marriage would alienate centrist Democrats. His argument underscores my assertion that the Kerry campaign and Democratic Party, while their fundraising was competitive, failed to successfully differentiate themselves from the Republican Party on a number of key issues during the 2004 election. Although none of these studies address the Black church’s response to same-sex marriage in significant detail, they are worth mentioning

¹⁶ Craig A. Rimmerman and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *The Politics of Same-Sex Marriage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), xii.

¹⁷ Rimmerman and Wilcox, 243.

because they provided a solid historical context in which to discuss how same-sex marriage became such a significant issue during the 2004 presidential campaign and election.

This project also pulled from a plethora of mainstream and alternative news sources that covered the election and provided post election commentary. Articles from mainstream periodicals including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe* and *Philadelphia Inquirer* helped capture the progression of the Bush and Kerry presidential campaigns and their African American outreach strategies. Such articles documented the response to their tactics by various political pundits and observers before and after the election.

Intersections: Race, Class, Culture and Sexual Orientation

Although this project focuses on African Americans and Black churches within the context of the 2004 presidential election, it also recognizes the extent to which race, culture, class and sexual orientation informed much of what transpired. The interplay of these phenomena informed many of the questions that drove my research and interviews. For example, was the seemingly unlikely pairing of the Republican Party, a historically conservative and exclusive institution run by white men, and Black churches, whose congregations are historically filled with African American Democratic members, an indication that certain religious philosophies transcend race and social class? Or was this an opportunity for the Bush campaign to use the controversial issue of same-sex marriage to mask its other conservative domestic policies which have a disproportionately negative impact on African

Americans? Furthermore, was this “coalition” of Bush and the Republican Party with certain Black pastors more or less genuine than the questionable relationship between the Democratic Party and Black churches?

There is a certain culture of “exchange” that takes place between Black churches and political campaigns during election cycles. It is a phenomenon, well known in political circles, that involves direct payments to ministers by campaigns in exchange for endorsements and general support. There are some, like Chicago Tribune columnist Clarence Page, who suggest that faith-based initiatives are merely a new form of this “patronage.” Another example of how this project will investigate culture is through an analysis of the difference between George W. Bush and John Kerry’s “style” of faith, which became evident during media coverage of the candidates. Jodi Wilgoren and Bill Keller of the *New York Times* observed that one candidate was much more comfortable discussing his faith than the other:

Senator John Kerry’s visible discomfort with discussing religion is in stark contrast to President Bush’s spiritual rebirth into more confessional tradition of evangelical Christianity; is more at ease in the realm of secular facts; despite frequent invocations of term ‘values,’ he has not yet connected his agenda to deeper moral convictions, but with polls showing Bush in the lead among Catholics and Protestants, Kerry says he will discuss his faith at the “appropriate moment.”¹⁸

This project will explore whether the difference in their style of faith impacted the public’s perception of their views on sexual orientation and homosexuality in general and same-sex marriage in particular. Besides the obvious differences in their views, another distinction involved the style of how each candidate “wore” their religious faith and how that translated into their language and messaging about the issue.

¹⁸ DeWayne Wickham, *Bill Clinton and Black America* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 30.

Some suggest that style has become just as important in presidential elections as substance. For example, many pundits argue that style was at the core of Bill Clinton's appeal within the African American community, which by his second term celebrated him as the "first Black president." In spite of support for a myriad of conservative domestic policies including mandatory sentencing and welfare reform, President Clinton was viewed by African Americans across socio-economic classes as what American Studies scholar Sheri Parks calls, "Brother Bill," someone "we could have taken home." In short, they could relate to him.¹⁹ Although neither Bush nor Kerry achieved Clinton's level of appeal with African Americans, I will argue that Bush's brand of evangelical Christianity was easier for some African Americans to relate to than Kerry's more private approach to his religious faith. Perhaps those African American pastors and congregants who supported Bush, did so because they could relate to his unapologetic style of Christian beliefs, manifested in his stance on same-sex marriage. I will argue that this was not lost on the Bush campaign, who fashioned an outreach strategy which included mailings to Black pastors in battleground states extolling the Christian values and principles of George W. Bush.

Ethnographic Interviews

Because this project is concerned with the Bush—and to a lesser degree—Kerry campaign strategies, ethnographic interviews, conducted within a particular context and environment, were critical. I incorporated interviews²⁰ with campaign operatives, pastors, activists and party insiders. My interviews with Leah Daughtry,

¹⁹ Sheri Parks, "Brother Bill," *Baltimore City Paper*, January 17, 2001.

²⁰ When relevant, I will be candid about whether they were willing to answer "hard" questions.

former Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chief of Staff and former Secretary of Labor and Democratic political veteran Alexis M. Herman, provided rich information about the history of the Party's African American outreach to churches and its current challenges.²¹ I interviewed the former in her office at the DNC and was struck by her candor as we sat just steps away from Chairman Howard Dean's office.²² The latter, whose political involvement has been in a mostly advisory capacity since she left the Department of Labor in 2001, provided her first-hand knowledge of African American church outreach in presidential campaigns dating back to Jimmy Carter's reelection campaign in 1976.²³

²¹ Leah Daughtry, Joseph Watkins and Jesse Jackson, Sr. served dual roles during my interviews with them. They are all ministers who also happen to have been very active in party and presidential politics.

²² I first met Leah Daughtry when she worked at the Department of Labor and I was the Director of African American Outreach at the DNC. I encountered her again when I worked on the pre-transition team for the Kerry campaign. We had interacted in political circles over a six year span by the time of our interview but a mutual acquaintance helped us reconnect. I interviewed her in her office in her capacity as the Chief of Staff to Chairman Howard Dean at the Democratic National Committee. In spite of our presence at the National Headquarters, she was candid and honest and even critical at time of the party. You could look out of her office and see people working at rows of desks, but we were able to close ourselves off from that bustling environment by closing her door and shutting the shades. Daughtry was one of the people I interviewed who wore two professional hats, both of which were relevant to the project. As a political operative with experience in several presidential elections she was invaluable. However, her position as a Pentecostal preacher was extremely informative because she gave an insider's perspective on the role Pentecostal preachers and churches played during the 2004 election. Although she mentioned her father, who is also a Pentecostal preacher during the interview, and the fact that he remains an anomaly as an activist Pentecostal preacher who is politically engaged, after our interview I discovered that he is widely known for his activism, especially in New York City. This fact further legitimizes her observations and also explains the cultural contradictions she embodies by being both a Pentecostal preacher and a political operative. It also explains her willingness to speak critically about "her" church.

²³ I had a preexisting relationship with Alexis Herman that spanned over a decade. I first encountered her through an African American leadership organization and would interact with her in multiple political environments over the years. I worked with her most directly in her capacity as the co-chair of the Kerry transition in 2004. I believe my ability to remain discreet throughout that process engendered a trust that resulted in her comfort during our interview which I conducted in her house. She was relaxed because we were in her environment and I worked around her schedule so I could let the interview develop into a conversation in some places which led to questions I did not originally intend to ask. She chose her words carefully, but that is characteristic of how she usually speaks which is probably a function of the various high profile positions she has held over the years. However, her deliberate speech did not preclude her from making observations about what she viewed as the limitations of the Democratic Party and to a lesser degree Kerry Campaign in 2004.

Interviews with two African American pastors supported my central argument that Black churches are diverse and their political alignments vary across and within denominational lines. For example, an interview with Rev. Bryan Carter, head pastor of a megachurch based in Dallas, Texas confirmed my belief that the Bush reelection campaign reached out to certain Black churches early in the campaign and stayed in touch with them throughout the duration.²⁴ Pastor Carter even appeared at a public rally where he, along with other pastors, condemned same-sex marriage. However, in 2008 Pastor Carter, who is still opposed to same-sex marriage, was supportive of Barack Obama, whose campaign reached out to him early as well. My interview with Dr. Dennis W. Wiley, co-pastor of a Baptist church in Washington, DC was intriguing, because at the time, the church was struggling with internal dissension over whether it should conduct union ceremonies for same-sex couples.²⁵ I

²⁴ I was introduced to Pastor Carter through a friend. As a result I had direct access to him and did not have to go through a series of e-mails or calls with his staff. I also benefitted from being connected to him through our mutual acquaintance—who described me to him as a graduate student—because he trusted my integrity and discretion based on the preliminary conversation he had with that acquaintance about this project. As a result, I believe he was less guarded and willing to be more candid than he would have been had I been a complete stranger. We spoke over the phone and I recorded the call which took place while he was in between meetings on a week day. It is important to note that Pastor Carter indicated that I could call him Bryan which felt a little awkward for me. I was aware of his position but had never spoken with him before and thus expected our exchange to be much more formal. Interestingly, he did not voluntarily mention the size of his church (which has more than 5,000 members) but did offer that his church is rooted in activism with a rich tradition of community involvement and social advocacy under its previous pastor, his predecessor who was well known in Black church and political leadership circles. Pastor Carter was not hesitant to express his views on any of the subjects I broached.

²⁵ Pastor Dennis W. Wiley is the co-pastor of the Baptist church I attend in Washington, DC. At the time of our interview I had been a member of the church for two years and he was aware of my graduate research but less familiar with my political background. Not long before our interview I attended a church meeting where I discovered that many of the members in the congregation were upset because Pastor Dennis Wiley and his wife Pastor Christine Wiley had presided over two union ceremonies of gay couples. At that meeting church members made several comments about how such union ceremonies reflected poorly upon the church (an article had been written in a local paper about the Pastors' progressive position on homosexuality within a Christian context) and were not in keeping with the word of God as outlined in the Bible. The fact that some members were leaving the church because of this issue was mentioned and many gay members spoke openly about their pain and frustration over how it was dividing the church. Consequently, this project was discussed at a time when same-sex marriage was very much on Pastor Wiley's mind and being debated by the church

interviewed Pastor Wiley, who supported such unions, in his church office and his frustration and concern over the tensions brewing in the congregation was palpable. For this church and its pastors, the issue of same-sex marriage could not be dismissed as irrelevant to the African American experience. Our dialogue greatly impacted my analysis of Black churches and how they responded to same-sex marriage as a wedge issue in the 2004 election.

The two progressive activists I interviewed provided some of the most compelling observations. While Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., Chairman and CEO of Rainbow-PUSH, was unwilling to directly criticize the Kerry Campaign or Democratic Party and their roles in the 2004 election, he offered little praise.²⁶ For Rev. Jackson, the Bush reelection campaign and Republican Party's targeting of Black churches was insincere and insulting because the Party made no changes to its ultra-conservative and exclusionary platform during or after the campaign. Thus, in

community. Thus, when I conducted the interview, Pastor Wiley was very honest about his struggle with the issue and his disappointment and sadness that it elicited such rancor from some members was readily apparent. The interview took place in his pastoral study so we were clearly in his territory which I believe made him more comfortable and willing to speak candidly. I believe the fact that I spoke during the church meeting and expressed my support of the church's inclusive doctrine and character, which was a reflection of his beliefs, also made him more willing to be vulnerable about an issue he said he was grappling with while trying to reconcile its impact on the church's survival.

²⁶ While I have met Rev. Jackson and heard him speak in person, a mutual acquaintance was responsible for connecting me to him. He did not remember our political interactions and I chose not to remind him, preferring to engage him from what I viewed was the more neutral identity of a graduate student. Rev. Jackson's travel and speaking schedule is quite hectic so I conducted our interview over the phone within the hour before he boarded a plane. Although I was initially concerned about his ability to speak freely because he was in a public space, he clearly was not and gave thoughtful answers to my questions. Interestingly, he was the only preacher I interviewed who throughout the interview expected me to participate in the rhythm, of his comments through call and response. Rev. Jackson was also, like Leah Daughtry, someone who wears two hats. He is a minister and accepted as such by his peers but is also a national leadership figure and political veteran. His opinion is often sought out and his presence can bring a certain weight to both political and religious gathering which is why I thought it was important to include his voice and perspectives in this project. His decades of experiences in both realms meant he was able to provide a unique historical perspective while responding to specific questions. Our limited time did preclude me from asking follow up questions but in many cases his answers were so comprehensive that he almost seemed to anticipate the direction I wanted to take the interview.

spite of the criticism heaped upon Kerry for his predictable outreach to African Americans, Rev. Jackson cautioned against forgetting the bigger picture: the Democratic Party's support of livable wages, affirmative action, low-income housing and affordable health care, which are manifested in its platform. One of Rev. Jackson's most significant contributions to this project was his assertion that independent African American political and social justice mobilization will continue to be more effective than either party in pushing a progressive agenda to improve the lives of Black people in particular and all Americans in general. As I will discuss in the fifth chapter, Rev. Jackson, whose publicly expressed views about same-sex marriage were somewhat ambiguous in 2004, offered a clearer and more progressive position on the issue during the course of our interview.

I interviewed Dr. Ron Buckmire, an African American gay rights activist based in Los Angeles, days before the general election where Proposition 8 would be on the ballot across the state of California.²⁷ Buckmire was troubled by the tendency of white gay activists to assume everyone in the Black lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgendered (LGBT) community agreed with their political priorities. His

²⁷ I met Dr. Ron Buckmire as an undergraduate at Occidental College in Los Angeles, California where he is a professor. We were reconnected through a former administrator and mutual acquaintance who knew he was an African American gay rights activist in the Los Angeles area. He was in Washington, DC for a conference and allowed me to interview him before he returned to Los Angeles. He suggested we meet at Dupont Circle and I actually conducted the interview on benches in the park in the middle of the circle. Although diverse crowds use that park, I found it significant that we were conducting the interview in an area of town that has historically been a social and political gathering place for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community and we were talking about his views on same-sex marriage in the context of the 2004 election. I thought it was very important to balance my discussion of that issue with the voice of an African American gay activist since the majority of the voices I cited in the study were those of white gay activists. He was very comfortable discussing both the 2004 election and the work he was doing around Proposition 8 which would be on the 2008 presidential ballot in California. He was most passionate when speaking about the rhetoric and arguments made by opponents of same-sex marriage including the notion that homosexuality was infectious and that if full marriage rights were extended to gay couples it would open up the flood gates and the gay "lifestyle" would be imposed on everyone else and negatively influence children.

observations about the need to recognize diversity within the Black LGBT community were enlightening, given this project's assertion that the Black church deserves similar recognition. He also admonished white and Black gay activists, but particularly white activists who have more grassroots organizational and monetary resources, for criticizing Black churches for their conservative views, while failing to engage the Black faith community around gay rights issues. Such community engagement is the challenging but important work that must be done to educate and dispel the myths often perpetuated in opposition campaigns around issues like same-sex marriage.

Lastly, my conversations with Tiffany Watkins and Rev. Joseph Watkins, two politically active African American Republicans, were critical because they provided some partisan balance to my interviews. Tiffany Watkins worked as the Director of African American outreach in the Bush administration and played that same role for the Bush Reelection campaign in 2004.²⁸ Her recollection of a campaign manager and team committed to early, consistent and targeted African American outreach confirmed reports of Ken Mehlman's well-organized campaign apparatus. Ms. Watkins also relayed accounts of several campaign events where African Americans

²⁸ I was connected to Tiffany by her father, Rev. Joseph Watkins, and did not discover until we began to communicate that we went to high school together for a brief time. That connection no doubt opened her up to the possibility of participating in an interview. I also believe that my political background (which I shared), and the fact that we had held the same position within presidential campaigns, created an affinity—despite the fact that we worked on different sides of the aisle—that made her comfortable sharing her experiences. I interviewed her in her office after hours. This enabled us to speak freely with the door open. While she was willing to recall much about her specific role in the White House and in the campaign she seemed hesitant to make general observations related to my thesis. For example, she was very clear in stating that she was not involved in any direct conversations about the use of same-sex marriage as a wedge issue. Yet she was aware of the “coalition” pastors like Bishop Harry Jackson who the Bush campaign used to activate the faith community around the issue. She also shared that while at the White House she did not deal with or organize any faith-based initiative conferences. Throughout the interview it was clear that she was proud of her work and the role she played in bringing more African Americans into the fold.

were excited to be invited and included. This supports my contention that Republicans were building momentum in 2004 which had the potential to make an even larger impact in the 2008 election.

My interview with her father, Rev. Joseph Watkins, who held the same position in the White Office of Public Liaison for George H.W. Bush, was interesting because of his current roles as both a Republican political pundit on MSNBC and head pastor at an evangelical Lutheran church.²⁹ Rev. Watkins stated clearly that there was no overlap between these two roles: he did not wear his pastoral hat on TV or wear his political hat in the pulpit. Consequently our discussion, though valuable, was very compartmentalized. We talked about his experiences working in the White House and as a political pundit in radio and television. His years as both an insider and partisan analyst resulted in astute observations about the role “issues of passion” often play during presidential campaigns. The religious views he shared as an evangelical pastor were consistent with research that informed this project asserting

²⁹ I had never met Rev. Watkins before our interview. As with many of my interviews, I came to connect with him through mutual acquaintances. I had seen him in his capacity as a political pundit on television but never experienced him in person. I traveled to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to interview him and conducted our exchange in his office where he works as a consultant. While I described my background in politics, I chose to engage Rev. Watkins primarily from my identity as a graduate student, as I had during my interview with Rev. Jackson. This was particularly important because I was aware of Rev. Watkins’ affiliation with the Republican Party and wanted him to feel comfortable expressing his views without thinking they were being received in a partisan context. During our time together he kept the door open which was interesting given some of the controversial topics we discussed. I did not get the sense that he wanted to shield his views from his colleagues or people occupying adjacent offices. Perhaps our interview gave him the opportunity to make his positions on politics, same-sex marriage and other topics clear to them. Of the people interviewed who wore two hats, he was the least willing to connect those roles. He was emphatic that the two were completely separate. He also seemed, by stating what he felt the role of the church should be (a spiritual, soul-saving place of worship only) to make a critical statement indirectly about “activist churches.” His political role and faith roles did not seem to inform each other in his mind. I felt comfortable asking questions but also followed his cues and did not continue to interrogate those possible connections because it was a “dead-end.”

that African American evangelical churches are more politically conservative and hermeneutically strict.

All of these interviews, along with observations made during my time with each subject, greatly informed my arguments and provided a human element to each of the following chapters.

Chapters

Chapter Two: “The Black Church”

Before taking a look at the 2004 presidential campaign environment, it is important to dispel the myth of the Black Church as a monolithic entity through a discussion of its dialectical tensions, denominations, evangelical trends and megachurches. Following this analysis the chapter discusses how since 1964, no Democratic presidential candidate has won an election without garnering the vast majority of the Black vote in the urban centers of key states including Pennsylvania, Ohio and Michigan. It goes on to examine the fact that political candidates have traditionally viewed the Black church as the gateway to the Black community in these cities with pastors serving as gatekeepers. In addition to addressing the extent to which both parties have previously used outreach to Black churches as an African American outreach strategy, this chapter addresses the larger political and cultural impact of the Black church. As journalist David Kirkpatrick observed in his New York Times article in October of 2004, “Both sides acknowledge that the endorsement of African American clergy has a symbolic value among non-Black voters, in part because of their status in the broader culture as the legacy of the civil

rights movement.”³⁰ This legacy has given the Black Church a certain moral authority—which I will also complicate in this chapter—that has contributed both to the effectiveness of some churches as powerful mobilizing forces and led to higher expectations around issues of sexuality and class which have been woefully unmet in many churches.

Chapter Three: The 2004 Bush Re-Election Campaign

Chapter three begins with a discussion of the innovative strategy used by the Bush campaign. This is important because their African American outreach and outreach to Black Churches was a piece of this larger puzzle. The chapter also covers the 2004 campaign environment preceding and following both party conventions as well as both campaigns’ African American outreach plans. Questions I attempt to answer in this chapter include: What were the domestic policy issues of primary concern to Bush and Kerry before and after the national conventions of each party? Did the Bush and Kerry campaigns’ African American outreach include specific plans to target Black churches? Media analysis and research will help me answer most of these questions.

Chapter Four: Faith-Based Initiatives

Chapter four addresses faith-based initiatives and George W. Bush’s support of them in the 2000 election, their evolution during his first administration, and the possible correlation between them and the Bush campaign’s ability to effectively reach Black pastors during the 2004 election. This chapter examines the history of

³⁰ Kirkpatrick, “Black Pastors Backing Bush Are Rarities, but Not Alone,” *New York Times*, October 5, 2004.

faith-based initiatives, which were one of Bush's signature campaign domestic policy promises during the 2000 election season. According to Amy Black, in *Of Little Faith: The Politics of George W. Bush's Faith-Based Initiatives*, in 2000, Republican leaders thought faith-based initiatives might "allow them to attract a few more highly religious African American and Hispanic voters" and help "change the caricature of their party as one beholden to white evangelical Protestant males, without actually offending any members of that group."³¹

Once elected, faith-based initiatives became the top domestic policy priority in George W. Bush's first administration and the chapter will conclude by identifying its status by the 2004 election.

Chapter Five: Same-Sex Marriage

Chapter five covers same-sex marriage, which became such a hot-button issue by the debates, that both candidates were forced to address it. This chapter discusses how each candidate responded. In this chapter I argue that strategically, the issue of same-sex marriage became a domestic policy issue that Bush used to distinguish himself from his opponent whom he consistently accused of "flip flopping" on issues in the last months of the campaign. According to Martin Evans of *Newsday.com*, Kerry underestimated the significance of the issue. "Kerry and the Democrats thought they would just sweep same-sex marriage under the table, be opposed to it but not say much about it... That left people who were very much against same-sex marriage with

³¹ Black, Koopman and Ryden, 12.

the impression that it was not important to him, even though it was very important to them.”³²

In addition to discussing the history of the issue as outlined in the studies described earlier, the chapter also includes statistics about African Americans and their views on same-sex marriage. For example a study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life showed that since 2000, Black protestants have become far less likely than other Protestant groups to believe that gays should have equal rights. My ethnographic interviews with pastors of Black churches are invaluable to understanding the cultural context and environment in which these views are fostered.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of why the issue of same-sex marriage became so important within the African American Christian community given the other domestic policy issues like healthcare and unemployment that disproportionately affect African Americans. The debate over same-sex marriage elicited the kind of intense responses that have historically been reserved for civil rights issues. For example, a group of Black ministers in Chicago held a news conference applauding Bush’s stance on same-sex marriage and Rev. Gregory C. Daniels, the organizer of the event, was actually quoted as saying, “If the K.K.K. opposes same-sex marriage, I would ride with them.”³³

Chapter Six: Conclusion/Future Implications

³² Martin C. Evans, “Same-sex marriage Gained Bush Black Votes,” *Newsday.com*. November 14, 2004.

³³ Lynette Clemetson, “Both Sides Court Black Churches In The Battle Over Gay Marriage,” *New York Times*, March 1, 2004.

The last chapter briefly revisits and synthesizes the central themes and arguments from the previous chapters in order to make some compelling conclusions about the effectiveness of the Bush campaign's targeting of African American pastors and churches in the 2004 election. It also discusses what implications their efforts in 2004 had for both the Republican and Democratic parties and their African American outreach in 2008.

Original Contribution

No comprehensive study that addresses the Bush re-election campaign and Republican party's targeting of African American churches and pastors exists. Consequently, this study breaks new ground by addressing a phenomenon that had the potential to shift the African American outreach strategies of both national parties. On a broader scale it will complicate conceptualizations of race, religion and politics in America, which have often been over simplified by scholars and pundits alike. For example, this project, through an analysis of same-sex marriage and its polarizing role within the Black church during election 2004, will dispel the notion that all Black pastors and churches place civil rights before every other domestic policy issue. Interviews with key political operatives, pundits and activists along with several pastors will hopefully add to the unique nature of the project.

Challenges

This project presented a few challenges. First, although I was certain about my ability to document the Bush campaign's use of same-sex marriage as a part of their

outreach strategy to Black churches and pastors, I was concerned that my assertions about faith-based initiatives would be much more difficult to document. While there was more research and information available about same-sex marriage as a wedge-issue, I found enough information about faith-based initiative projects and funding to piece together a reasonable argument.

Second, since the bulk of this project was completed before the 2008 presidential election, I struggled with whether to update each chapter by including comparative polling data and post-election analyses or include that information in the conclusion. Fearing that the former approach might cloud my central arguments about what took place during the 2004 election and disrupt the flow of the chapters, I decided on the latter. The reader should be aware that as of this writing, much of the 2008 polling data broken down by race, religion and other social categories is still being developed.

While I did not view my personal relationship with the subject matter as a challenge, it is important for me to locate myself within the project. I am both a scholar and member of two key groups discussed in great detail throughout this project. I was raised in Black Baptist churches and currently belong to the Black Baptist church led by one of the aforementioned pastors.³⁴ My religious affiliation combined with my experiences in partisan presidential politics led me directly to this topic.³⁵ Furthermore, my Master's Thesis research focused on Union Temple Baptist

³⁴ I am a member of Covenant Baptist Church located in Southeast Washington, DC where Dr. Dennis Wiley and Dr. Christine Wiley serve as co-pastors.

³⁵ I was active during the 2000 election cycle as a staffer on Vice President Al Gore's presidential campaign and as the Director of African American Outreach for the Democratic National Committee. In both capacities I encountered and interacted with three of the people I interviewed for this study, Secretary Alexis Herman, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr. and Rev. Leah Daughtry.

Church, another Black Baptist church in Washington, DC with a strong activist tradition.³⁶ It was during my research for my Master's Thesis project that I first used my insider/outsider status to observe and analyze a church. In this study I used my insider/outsider status in the Black church tradition and political arena to observe and critique Black churches and pastors as well as political campaign environments.

Both my religious background and political activism informed each other and also impacted my choice to focus on strategy, the candidates' campaign "styles," and Black churches as African American outreach gateways. The intersections of race, culture, class and sexual orientation complicated and connected each of these elements to each other in the context of the 2004 election.

³⁶ Tamara M. Wilds, "Rev. Willie F. Wilson and Union Temple Baptist Church: Agents of Change 'Saving' the Ghetto and the Disinherited from the Inside/Out" (master's thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 1998).

“There’s always the need to keep prodding the Black church to go to other-centeredness rather than self-centeredness. It can slide back into private salvation rather than social justice. There’s always that tension between saving souls and saving the conditions in which souls operate.”³⁷

Chapter Two: “The Black Church”

“The Black Church” has always been a reflection of its wide-ranging laity and is therefore more multifaceted than is often acknowledged. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries it has continued to change, grow, evolve, shift and adapt to the socio-economic and socio-political trends of African Americans as a whole. Although Black Americans also belong to other faiths, including Islam and Judaism, the vast majority of religious African Americans belong to Christian churches. Over the last thirty years it has diversified significantly as evidenced by the proliferation of megachurches and nondenominational churches. Over the course of those thirty years the courting of Black churches has also become a staple of Democratic presidential politics and campaigns. Presidential candidates seeking entrée into the Black community have viewed the Black church as the most logical institution to engage in order to reach the most African Americans.

In 2004 for the first time since the major party re-alignment of 1964, the Republican Party, in conjunction with the Bush reelection campaign, included Black Churches in their outreach and targeting. They did this in spite of consistent African American alignment with the Democratic Party in past elections because they recognized the multidimensional nature of the contemporary Black church and as a

³⁷ Jesse Jackson, Sr., interview by author, March 18, 2009.

result identified and targeted a segment they believed would be receptive to their message. While Democrats were aware of and had interacted with various Black church denominations in past elections, their failure to create and implement an innovative strategy to energize Black churches—recognizing the complexities of the institution—resulted in a significant stumbling block for their candidate, Senator John F. Kerry. Understanding Black churches as dynamic entities will continue to be critical for political parties and candidates. They must adjust their strategies and outreach to account for the diversity and potential mobilizing power of 21st Century Black churches or risk alienating and losing voters to their opposition. The following examination of the complexity of the Black church will begin with a history of the institution and its various Christian denominations followed by a look at how it has become a political force and why it played such a significant role in the 2004 presidential election.

One of the central reasons the Black Christian religious community is often thought of as a monolithic entity is because it is referred to as ‘the Black Church,’ a label which obscures the diverse range of African American Christian faiths. As a result of the Civil Rights and Black consciousness movements of the 1960s, ‘the Black Church’ replaced the older term ‘the negro Church’ which was used by an older generation of scholars including W. E. B. Du Bois, whose study *The Negro Church*, was the first book length sociological study of *any* religion written in this country.³⁸ During the first half of the 20th Century, the Negro Church proved an invaluable anchor for African Americans who developed leadership, public speaking, accounting, political and community organizing skills within the walls of its

³⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, ed., *The Negro Church*. Walnut Creek, (AltaMira Press, 2003 (1903)).

institutions. Negro churches often filled the void created by Jim Crow laws, segregation and institutionalized racism by creating colleges, Black-owned insurance companies and credit unions that helped buoy the Black middle class while also providing much needed aid like food, clothing and temporary housing to the urban and rural poor. Today, the term ‘Black church’ typically refers to any Black Christian person who is a member of a Black congregation within a Black denomination. However, according to Anthony Pinn, author of *The African American Religious Experience in America*, there are more than two million Black Christians in white denominations including the Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopal and Lutheran churches.³⁹ Still, it is estimated that more than 80 percent of all Black Christians are in the seven largest historically African American denominations.

Dialectics and Denominations

In their comprehensive study *The Black Church and the African American Experience*, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya discuss the history of the seven denominations in great detail. However, one of the most important things they accomplish is identifying a dynamic model for analyzing the Black church that honors its complexity and continuing significance within African American life. In part they offer this dynamic model as a way to address simplistic analyses of the Black church and its relationship with and impact on African Americans. For example, Gary Marx is credited with formulating the “opiate theory” about Black churches and activism which asserts that religion acts as a form of social control by

³⁹ Anthony B. Pinn, *The African American Religious Experience in America* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 17.

distracting African Americans from focusing on the reality of their “subordinated status” by emphasizing the rewards they would receive in the “hereafter” or heaven.⁴⁰

Since he first espoused his theory in *Protest and Prejudice* in 1967 premiere religion scholars including C. Eric Lincoln, Lawrence Mamiya, R. Drew Smith and Fredrick Harris have debated the merits of his central argument that religious involvement “acts as an opiate” rather than a catalyst for political and civil rights activism. Many of the aforementioned scholars have dedicated significant portions of their scholarship to complicating what many argue is a simplistic theory. Fredrick C. Harris calls for recognition that Christianity can both “dampen” and “stimulate” Black activism while Lincoln and Mamiya’s dialectical theory, discussed below, speaks directly to the importance of recognizing that elements of Marx’s opiate theory exist within the tensions with which all Black churches struggle.⁴¹

Lincoln and Mamiya sought to paint a more “holistic picture” of the Black church through the identification and use of six pairs of dialectic tensions. According to Lincoln and Mamiya, “Black Churches are institutions that are involved in a constant series of dialectical tensions” to which there is no “ultimate resolution.”⁴² While some of the dialectics are more sound than others, they all help illuminate the wide spectrum of theology and practice that exists within the Black church. Lincoln and Mamiya’s model, along with the recent expansion of that model by contemporary Black church scholars, provides a sound theoretical context in which to discuss churches in the seven denominations as well as non-denominational evangelical Black churches.

⁴⁰ Harris, 5.

⁴¹ Harris, 67.

⁴² Lincoln and Mamiya, 11.

Lincoln and Mamiya argue that all Black churches are impacted by the “dialectic between priestly and prophetic functions.”⁴³ This means pastors and ministers constantly struggle with whether they should spend more time attending to their specific pastoral duties including providing spiritual guidance to members, overseeing the day to day operation of the church and preaching or use their platform to speak to the social and political issues affecting the African Americans in general and the surrounding community in particular. Lincoln and Mamiya suggest that whether they eschew one for the other or attempt to achieve balance, all pastors are aware of and affected by the tension.

The next pair is the dialectic between “other-worldly” versus “this-worldly,” which is rooted in how Christians view the world. Other-worldly refers to a focus on the afterlife and Heaven so that believers are primarily concerned with living this life in preparation for the bounties they will receive in the next. This-worldly refers to a connection with the social and political realities of the “here and now.” The other-worldly aspect down plays or even negates a need to address current day racial and economic oppression in deference to what awaits “beyond the pearly gates,” while this-worldly locates God’s word and lessons in present day struggles for justice.

The next dialectic between universalism and particularism addresses the tension for pastors between the universalism of the Christian religion, the larger faith from which they come and share a bond with others, and explicitly acknowledging the very real racism they have experienced within the mainstream church. This tension was heightened for many churches following the civil rights movement when race became a part of the national and intra-group dialogue. Should pastors for

⁴³ Ibid., 12.

example, regularly address how the Bible was used to justify slavery in their preaching and teaching or should they just preach “the word” straight from the Bible. Is it possible to do both? Can Black pastors and churches recognize the injustices of the past while fellowshiping and building coalitions with white Christians?

The fourth dialectic is between the communal and the privatistic. Churches who attempt to meet the spiritual and societal needs of their members and those in the community through programs and outreach efforts fall within the communal aspect. More privatistic churches lean more towards attending solely to the spiritual needs of their congregation and withdrawing from “the concerns of the larger community.”⁴⁴ This dialectic is closely linked to the priestly versus prophetic tension described above because pastors who lean towards the priestly, would likely lead a more privatistic church. Conversely, a prophetic pastor would most likely embrace a communal vision and agenda for his or her church.

According to Lincoln and Mamiya, the next dialectic, unlike the others, trends overwhelming to one side. The majority of Black churches, emphasize charismatic versus bureaucratic skills and leadership. In spite of the differences between denominations, which will be outlined shortly, churches across all of the Black denominations place great importance on and operate out of a historical tradition of charismatic leadership. Here, Lincoln and Mamiya discuss how this emphasis on charisma, rooted in the oral tradition of early African American culture, has not waned in the 20th and 21st centuries:

Rising educational levels and upward mobility among Black people have not diminished the appeal of charisma in Black churches. While middle class Black churches have been more careful in keeping better

⁴⁴ Lincoln and Mamiya, 13.

records and in adopting more efficient organizational forms, their pastors must not only possess the proper educational credentials but also a charismatic preaching ability. ..The “organization man and woman,” those who embody the bureaucratic style, are seldom found among the pastors of the leading Black churches in the United States.⁴⁵

The lack of focus on bureaucratic forms (which generally characterize the mainline white denominations) has been a thorn in the side of Black churches, most of whom have not established national headquarters. Future studies of the Black church should ascertain the extent to which technological advances have improved membership and financial record keeping.⁴⁶

The final dialectic is the tension between resistance and accommodation. The authors borrowed the concept for this dialectic from historian Manning Marable, who argues they have been the “two decisive political options” for African Americans throughout history. These options, which W. E. B. Du Bois referred to as “twoness,” have been a cultural narrative for Black people and institutions struggling to be accepted as a part of the broader American culture. Of course this desire, ironically, has often required resisting hegemonic and racist forces which refused to allow such acceptance and access. Lincoln and Mamiya stress the primacy of resistance by Black churches manifested in “self determination” and “self-affirmation” while acknowledging the pervasiveness of their accommodation as well. The Black church helped facilitate the growth of a Black middle class by serving as a bridge between slavery and freedom:

In their accommodative role, Black churches have been one of the major cultural brokers of the norms, values and expectations of white society. For example, after the Civil War the church was the main mediating and socializing vehicle for millions of former slaves,

⁴⁵ Lincoln and Mamiya, 14.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

teaching them economic rationality, urging them to get an education, helping them to keep their families together and providing the leadership for early Black communities.⁴⁷

The tension of this dialectic became more intense during and after the civil rights movement when churches weighed the costs and benefits of defining their role in the struggle. Would they bow to pressure from their white Christian brethren to be patient or identify with the resistance movement gaining momentum across the country? Black liberation emerged as a result of this dialectic during the height of the Black consciousness movement. Grounded in the scholarship of theologian James H. Cone, Black Liberation Theology called for religious practice informed by the Bible as well as social justice and activism.

For Cone and other Black theologians including Gayraud S. Wilmore and Lawrence Mamiya, Black Liberation Theology had three important components. First was the idea that “the values of religion should be interpreted from people’s own experience.”⁴⁸ In other words, it argued for a redefinition of Black people’s relationship to Christianity, a religion that for too long had cast them as outsiders through racist biblical interpretations and revisionist history. The material manifestation of this redefinition was the display of a Black Jesus in church sanctuaries and stained glass depictions. Second, through Liberation Theology they advanced the idea that “God’s heart is for all people of creation to know freedom, justice and peace.”⁴⁹ Their hope was that acknowledging these qualities in the Creator would necessarily place the Black church at the center of social justice struggles rather than on the sidelines, where they believed too many Black churches rested

⁴⁷ Lincoln and Mamiya, 15.

⁴⁸ Lincoln and Mamiya, 178.

⁴⁹ Floyd-Thomas, 17.

comfortably. Finally, Black Liberation Theology sparked an “internal dialogue” which resulted in a critique of Black church hermeneutics and the role the Black church should play in empowering Black people to love themselves and contribute to the struggle for social and economic equality.⁵⁰ According to Lincoln and Mamiya, this dialogue also helped gain respect and recognition of the intellectual writings of Black theologians in academic settings.⁵¹ Thus, Black Liberation Theology was the embodiment of the resistance versus accommodation dialectic but was also connected to the universalism versus particularism and communal versus privatistic dialectic tensions, with which many pastors and churches struggled.

These dialectics provide a crucial prism through which to view the denominations and independent churches that make up the Black church. Through this prism we can analyze their relationship to politics with a depth that would be difficult to reach if we considered Black churches to be stagnant rather than dynamic. The authors of *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*, assert that the term Black church as it is commonly used is a “euphemistic generalization for the collective identity of African American Christians in both academic and societal contexts.”⁵² This generalization, created by scholars for the “sake of simplicity and efficacy” lends itself to one dimensional analysis. Consequently, the authors prefer to consider the Black church a *tradition* which allows more space for viewing it less as an institution and more as a complex and fluid entity. Presenting a “holistic picture” of a

⁵⁰ Womanist theology also emerged from the Black theology tradition as women theologians and scholars felt that its focus on racial oppression excluded the sexism experienced by African American women outside of and within the church.

⁵¹ Lincoln and Mamiya, 178. Black Liberation Theology continues to be taught and debated in African American divinity schools and espoused in what are usually activist churches.

⁵² Floyd-Thomas, xxiv.

living Black church tradition is imperative to the current study and requires a differentiation between its various denominations.

As has been mentioned, the Black church is comprised of seven major denominations. Six of the seven denominations are a part of the Baptist and Methodist faiths while the final denomination is part of the Pentecostal movement. The inability or unwillingness of pastors to reach enough of what Lincoln and Mamiya call the “working poor” and “dependent poor,” who make up a quarter of the Black population, is a reflection of the larger societal class divide growing among African Americans.⁵³ Yet there are thousands of African American churches that provide services including food and clothing banks, health screenings and shelter to those in need. The question is, are those receiving services, authentically welcomed and embraced by the church leadership and congregation? While it has been documented that many poor African Americans do not belong to churches, some belong to independent Pentecostal “storefront churches.”⁵⁴

The National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Incorporated (NBC), founded in 1886, is the largest of all of the Black denominations and is also considered the largest organization of African Americans in existence.⁵⁵ The other two conventions, the National Black Convention of America (NBCA) and the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) were founded in 1951 and 1961 respectively as a result of fractures within the NBC.⁵⁶ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was at the center of the schism that occurred within the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A, Inc. over social

⁵³ US Census, “We the People: Black Population in the United States,” *Census 2000 Special Reports*, August, 2005.

⁵⁴ Lincoln and Mamiya, 384.

⁵⁵ Pinn, 15.

⁵⁶ Lincoln and Mamiya, 36.

change strategies that led to the creation of the PNBC. Although the PNBC remains the smallest of the three National Baptist Conventions, it boasts unusually large congregations, primarily due to the fact that most of its churches are located in major urban rather than rural areas.

One of the most significant differences between Baptist churches and other faiths is found in their leadership structure. For example, Baptist churches do not have their pastors selected for them as in many Methodist churches, which Lincoln and Mamiya discuss here in detail:

Great emphasis is placed on being “called” to the ministry, while less significance is attached to formal education and training, although this varies from one locale to another. Those ministers who are responsible for a local church are called pastors, (that is, all pastors are ministers; but not all ministers are pastors). In contrast to other denominations, Baptist pastors are not appointed to a church by a higher ecclesiastical authority, but are elected by majority vote of the local congregation.⁵⁷

This autonomy and lack of accountability to a denominational hierarchy has resulted in many Baptist pastors staying with their churches for years, often until their retirement or death. However, it has also enabled them to engage in political and community activism without fear of reproach or reprimand from a governing body. Yet in the 2004 and 2005 Religion and Society surveys cited by Government researcher Eric L. McDaniel, African Methodist Episcopal churches were more politically engaged and active than Baptist churches during the 2004 election.

According to Anthony Pinn, the formation of Methodist versus Baptist denominations had a regional component, with the former cementing their presence

⁵⁷ Lincoln and Mamiya, 42.

up North while the latter initially grew in number across the South.⁵⁸ As Pinn discusses, the three Black Methodist bodies have much more in common than what separates them, which is primarily their “nature and place of origin as opposed to deep doctrinal disagreement.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, all of them have some level of educational requirement for those seeking to become “ministers,” “licensed preachers,” and “elders.”

The first Methodist denomination is the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, which was founded in 1787 by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones. According to Lincoln and Mamiya, the AME Church is the largest of the Black Methodist communions and has several denominational divisions including the “supreme legislative body” which is called the General Conference.⁶⁰

The next denomination is the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church, which was founded in 1820. Organizationally, it is quite similar to the AME church with the exception that there is no judicial council or court independent of the bishops to which decisions may be appealed. It is distinguished by consistent commitment to social justice and equal treatment of women, as it “was the first among all of the Methodist denominations, including the Methodist Episcopal Church, to extend the vote and clerical ordination to women.”⁶¹

Unlike the AME and AME Zion churches, which were founded and based in Northern states, the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church, founded in 1870, was based in the South. It also has the distinction of having been formed within the

⁵⁸ Pinn, 15.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁰ Lincoln and Mamiya, 55.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

white Methodist denomination when its leadership decided to segregate its members without losing African Americans to the already formed AME and AME Zion churches.⁶² The CME Church remains the smallest of the three Black Methodist denominations.

The Church of God in Christ (COGIC), was founded in 1907 and was a part of the Pentecostal tradition. It is the second largest of all of the Black Christian bodies right behind the NBC. Similar to the Black Methodists, The Church of God In Christ has a substantial organizational bureaucracy. However, COGIC pastors of local churches, many of which are very family oriented, serve for life. Furthermore, the requirements to become an ordained minister are much less stringent as Lincoln and Mamiya explain here:

Candidates must be active in their local church, be tithers and complete the course of study approved by their respective jurisdictions, usually involving one or two years attendance at one of the seventy Bible colleges sponsored by COGIC.⁶³

Of all of the Black denominations, the Church of God in Christ has grown the fastest over the last few decades. It has been characterized by scholars and religious leaders alike as generally the most politically conservative of the denominations, due primarily to its roots in the Pentecostal tradition which adheres to a “strict interpretation of the gospel.”⁶⁴ The Pentecostal tradition is also associated with speaking in tongues, healing through laying on of hands, “prophesy as direct communication from God” and spirited services filled with upbeat music, singing and dancing.

⁶² Pinn, 16.

⁶³ Lincoln and Mamiya, 89.

⁶⁴ Floyd-Thomas, 29.

These various denominations are all part of the phenomenon that is the collective Black Church and are typically referred to as the main-line denominations. Although they differ in many ways, including their organizational bureaucracies and requirements for ordaining ministers, these denominations have dominated the religious, spiritual, cultural and social lives of African Americans for well over a century. This has been the case since slavery, when Black churches were often the only places where Black people—both free and enslaved—could express themselves and serve as leaders. As African American communities developed in the North and South following emancipation, and the majority of Black adults worked as unskilled laborers, many of them found solace in the church, where they were respected as ministers, trustees, deacons and ushers. However, any contemporary study of Black churches must also push beyond these seven denominations to address evangelism, an even more dynamic religious phenomenon which threads through them all.

African American Evangelicals & Megachurches

According to polling data and research conducted by the Institute for American Evangelicals and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, between 30 to 35% of Americans are evangelicals. African Americans make up roughly one fifth of those estimated 100 million evangelicals.⁶⁵ The word “evangelical” describes a certain brand of Christianity and is not a denomination in and of itself. Evangelicals

⁶⁵Precise figures for the percentage of evangelical voters in the U.S. are extremely difficult to capture. This is particularly the case because various scientific surveys have asked different questions and used different criteria, producing conflicting results. For example the Gallup organization poll, which has been tracking evangelicals since 1976, does not include African Americans in their surveys. Further complicating matters is the fact that some people who are polled fit the description of evangelicals but would not describe themselves that way. Consequently, the ISA averaged figures from Gallup and other scientific surveys to come up with this estimate.

are often described as Christians who have had a “personal religious conversion, believe the Bible is the work of God and believe in spreading their faith.” In other words, they are “born-again.” Consequently, the term evangelical crosses denominations including some Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptists and nondenominational Protestant churches. This explains why in spite of how often they are discussed as a homogenous group, evangelicals are extremely difficult to classify. If the aforementioned percentage is accurate, it is also illogical to label evangelicals as a fringe group or “other” as the mainstream media often does, given the sheer numbers they represent within the country’s overall population. In other words as Larry Eskridge, associate director of the Institute put it, “If you’re talking about 33 percent of the population, they’re not this ‘other.’ They’re your next-door neighbor.”⁶⁶

Much like the Black church is often spoken about in sweeping general terms which obscure its complexity, evangelical Christians are often portrayed as uniform in attitude and practice. While they are considered “reactionary or fundamentalist” according to Paul Nussbaum, writing for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, evangelicals “are actually an amalgam of unpredictable, sometimes contradictory, strains of Christianity”.⁶⁷ They are often grouped together because they are perceived to be different from middle class mainline churches. Essentially they have been marginalized as Leah Daughtry, who is also a Pentecostal minister, attested to during our interview. As a perceived cohesive group, evangelicals usually receive attention around controversial issues like same-sex marriage, which catapulted them into the

⁶⁶ Nussbaum, Paul, “The Surprising Spectrum of Evangelicals,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 19, 2005.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

national cultural dialogue during the 2004 election. However, evangelicals are concerned with a myriad of other serious issues, which according to Nussbaum's research and the National Association of Evangelicals' (NAE) manifesto, include "aid for Africa, fighting poverty, battling the traffic in sex slaves, and supporting efforts to reducing global warming".⁶⁸ Reflecting the diversity which exists behind the evangelical label, their congregations often have different social and political priorities along with wide-ranging interpretations of the Bible.

African American evangelicals are represented within this number and their trends further complicate the term. According to Nussbaum, most African American evangelicals are "charismatic" and believe "in the active influence of the Holy Spirit" which is often manifested through faith healing and "speaking in tongues." Here, Bishop C. Milton Grannum, who pastors the predominantly African American New Covenant Baptist Church in Philadelphia, PA, which has over 3,000 members, speaks candidly about African American evangelicals:

There's a difference in the way we identify politically because there is a difference in the way we identify, period. We have had totally different experiences. . . . The church reflects the larger community.⁶⁹

The born-again, evangelical tradition, which crosses denominational lines and is one of the traits that many Black churches share, has continued to have a strong influence among Black Christians. Historically, the evangelical tradition tends to be highly correlated with Pentecostal churches as well as political conservatism. They are also hard to quantify because they don't like being called evangelical which they identify with white conservatives. Consequently, they often refer to themselves as "spirit-

⁶⁸ *National Association of Evangelicals Manifesto*, http://www.cephas-library.com/world_church_evangelical_manifesto.html

⁶⁹ Nussbaum, June 19, 2005.

filled” or “true Christians.”⁷⁰ Even though the majority of Black evangelicals usually register as Democrats, according to Lincoln and Mamiya, many of them still advocate noninvolvement in politics. Black evangelicals exist in the largest numbers within the Pentecostal tradition. This reinforces Marable’s “ambiguity of The Black Church toward politics” argument and is also indicative of the growing diversity in perspectives among Black churches and their leadership.

There is often a direct link between evangelical Christians and megachurches, which have grown at an accelerated rate over the last twenty years. Megachurches are generally defined as churches with more than 2,000 members attending services weekly.⁷¹ As of 2007 there were more than 1,250 megachurches in existence in the United States. Black megachurches are fairly new phenomena that have further complicated the already diverse scene of Black churches. They cross denominational boundaries and even as their infrastructure may vary they typically share an evangelical zeal and spirit.⁷²

According to Scott Thumma, less than 1% of all U.S. congregations are megachurches. However, megachurches have close to 4.5 million attendees every Sunday, the same number of those in attendance at the smallest 35% of churches in the United States combined.⁷³ In other words, although megachurches represent a very small percentage of all Christian churches in the United States, their membership dwarfs that of most congregations. The National Congregations Study (NCS) found

⁷⁰ “The Jesus Factor,” *Frontline*, December 10, 2003.

⁷¹ Scott Thumma and Davis Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America’s Largest Churches* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 3.

⁷² Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “Plenty Good Room: Adaptation in a Changing Black Church,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 558 (July 1998): 101-121.

⁷³ Thumma, 1.

that most Protestant and Catholic congregations have a median size of seventy-five regularly attending people.⁷⁴ The large membership numbers and consistent giving through tithes by members of megachurches means they bring in significantly more money than smaller churches as evidenced by the following statistics:

The largest 1 percent of U.S. churches contain at least 15 percent of the worshippers, finances, and staff in America. Across the whole of Protestantism, the largest 20 percent of the churches have around 65 percent of the resources. Money, resources, and people are concentrated in the largest churches.⁷⁵

In this country such large concentrations of money and members in one institution usually translate into economic power and political influence, which explains why interest in and criticism of megachurches has increased over the last twenty years. California and Texas with 178 and 157 megachurches respectively, have the largest numbers of megachurches. They are followed by Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan and Tennessee. According to Thumma, the number of churches in the Northeast and Mid Central states has grown significantly within the past five years.⁷⁶

To support his assertion that megachurches are not a monolithic entity, he breaks them down into categories or “distinctive streams.”⁷⁷ Old line megachurches are usually found in the inner city or “first-ring suburbs” and are often the darlings of their denominations. African American churches in this category tend to have a “distinctive message and ministry of social and economic betterment of the community” which is not necessarily shared with predominantly white old line churches whose identities are rarely so closely linked through programs and outreach

⁷⁴ National Congregations Study, <http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/about.html>

⁷⁵ Thumma, 5.

⁷⁶ Thumma, 8.

⁷⁷ Thumma, 31.

with social betterment.⁷⁸ In many cases, old line megachurches have grown over a much longer period of time than churches in the other “streams.” For example, the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City has always had a large congregation, but has grown substantially over the last two decades under the leadership of its current pastor Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III.⁷⁹ Supporting Thumma’s assertion that these churches are engaged in the community, Abyssinian has an HIV/AIDs ministry and encourages civic engagement and economic revitalization through the Abyssinian Development Corporation.

According to Thumma, charismatic and pastor-focused megachurches are typically evangelical and steeped in the Pentecostal tradition. These megachurches often depend on the pastor’s charismatic personality and exuberant sermons to attract new and retain current members. Furthermore, the senior pastor’s vision for the church, as opposed to a denominational or trustee board mandate, is the driving force behind its mission and ministry. The senior pastor usually enjoys a good amount of notoriety outside of the church and maintains it through writing books and doing “preaching tours.”⁸⁰

Charismatic and pastor-focused congregations rarely have homogenous congregations, and are unified solely by their attraction to a dynamic pastor who has what they believe is a transformative vision. While their programs are less oriented towards developing and supporting local communities than old line megachurches, they have a myriad of unique ministries for congregants to participate in. They are also decidedly less political than the old line churches many of which Ellingson also

⁷⁸ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁹ Floyd-Thomas, 43.

⁸⁰ Thumma, 38.

points out that these churches are more likely than churches in the other categories to have successful television ministries like Joel Osteen, pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas whose Sunday morning show attracts millions of viewers. Creflo and Tafi Dollar, pastors of World Changers Ministries in College Park, Georgia and T.D. Jakes of the Potter's House of Dallas, Texas are other examples of African American ministers who run charismatic and pastor-focused megachurches. In keeping with Thumma's description of charismatic and pastor focused congregations, Potter's House and its ministries are dwarfed by T.D. Jakes and his books, films and commentary. Until 2004 Jakes was steadfast in his refusal to identify with a particular political party saying, "I've never seen an eagle fly on one wing. I've got to be in the middle of the bird." Jakes is more focused on serving parishioners who have become increasingly more sophisticated and remaining relevant and competitive with other megachurches by offering conveniences such as computer hook ups in the sanctuary and ample parking.⁸¹ Yet, as will be discussed in the next chapter, he was among the pastors courted by the Bush administration during the President's first term.

Seeker churches are the most evangelical in nature of all of the four streams of megachurches. According to Thumma and Stephen Ellingson their mission is to reach the "unchurched" and they use unconventional methods to non-traditional worship styles to accomplish that mission. Most seeker churches, many of which were founded during the 1980s and 1990s, are nondescript edifices which look more like office parks than they do places of worship.⁸² That corporate aesthetic continues on the inside of seeker churches which are often void of crosses and other traditional

⁸¹ Eugene Robinson, "Supersize Me, Jesus," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 16, 2005.

⁸² Thumma, 39.

religious symbols. Carrying the corporate trend even further, these churches operate from a purpose and mission statement and “organize much of their staffing according to their functional roles as described in these statements.”⁸³ In an attempt to appeal to people who are “indifferent” to or have become disenchanted with organized religion, these churches emphasize one’s personal relationship with Jesus and individual faith.⁸⁴ They often describe themselves publicly as non-denominational, even if they have denominational ties, to maintain their identity as innovative and autonomous entities.

According to Ellingson, seeker churches make up 30 percent of all megachurches while charismatic and pastor focused churches make up 25 percent. Both megachurch “streams” have received the most press attention and criticism over the last two decades because their pastors have been the most visible, leading “fast-growth” churches which have been at the cutting edge of the late 20th and early 21st century religious experience in the United States.⁸⁵ Thumma also discusses new wave or Re-envisioned churches, which represent the youngest stream. However they are not relevant to the current discussion because Black pastors and churches are rarely represented in this stream.⁸⁶

As more large churches have sprung up across the country, religious and cultural scholars have debated whether the trend represented the future for churches who wanted to retain their members and remain relevant. Currently, predominantly

⁸³ Ibid., 40.

⁸⁴ Stephen Ellingson, “The Rise of the Megachurches and Changes in Religious Culture: Review Article,” *Sociology Compass*, December 12, 2008.

⁸⁵ Thumma, 40.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

African American megachurches represent about 12% of all megachurches, a figure that mirrors the percentage of African Americans in the United States population.⁸⁷

Regardless of which stream they are associated with, contemporary Black megachurches usually seek to attract a lot of attention and are sometimes met with resistance in the communities they inhabit. Prince George's County, Maryland, the most affluent majority Black county in the country provides an excellent example of the tension between megachurches and their surrounding communities.

Megachurches in the county include Reid Temple, AME, Jericho City of Praise Baptist Church which boasts "19,000 members and 11 properties covering 73.8 acres" and Evangel Temple which is housed in an "arena-sized" building. Some residents of Prince Georges county are weary of these churches which loom on major thoroughfares like large box stores and attract thousands of parishioners every Sunday leading to traffic congestion. Lawmakers worry about the revenue the county loses every time a megachurch, which enjoys tax exempt status, buys acreage that could have gone to more lucrative residential and commercial construction. Yet those lawmakers have to be careful because megachurches in the region have become significant political forces to be reckoned with.⁸⁸ Here Rev. Joseph Watkins discusses the political power megachurches wield:

And there are all these independent churches now and they're not in anybody's hip pocket. And those churches are entrepreneurial, they're not following a script they're not following somebody's convention. They're not trying to become president of the national convention at some point.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Thumma, 28.

⁸⁸ Sudarsan Raghavan and Hamil R. Harris, "Growing Churches Trouble Prince George's," *Washington Post*, March 14, 2005.

⁸⁹ Rev. Joseph Watkins, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, August 12, 2008.

The above summary and analysis of the Black denominations, evangelical and megachurch phenomena within the context of their dialectical tensions have clearly demonstrated the complexities of the Black church. Because of the dialectical tensions they grapple with, Black churches of the same denominations and size might have completely different theologies or beliefs about political involvement. As has been discussed, megachurches are also more diverse than most assume and should not be clumped together without regard to their leadership style and doctrinal differences. In light of these variations, the tendency to assign a politically liberal label to all Black churches is deeply flawed. Even worse is the notion that they are all blindly loyal to the Democratic Party. The following discussion will locate the Black church tradition including evangelicals and megachurches within the recent history of presidential politics. Furthermore, it will address the myth that all Black churches are ultra-liberal politically, using the 2004 election as evidence to the contrary.

The Black Church and Presidential Politics: A Brief History

The major function of Black churches in electoral and protest politics has been to act as mobilizing and communicative networks in local and national settings. There are thousands of Black churches and clergy nationwide with millions of members. This kind of national institutional network cannot be easily replaced. Consequently, no other Black institutions have the mobilizing potential of Black churches. The Black church has a history of socio-political action dating back to the late 19th Century. However, its contemporary relationship to politics is rooted in the formation of early 20th Century organizations that are still in existence including the

NAACP and National Urban League (NUL). Not only were Black clergy involved in their founding, but both organizations depended heavily on the leadership and membership of Black churches for support.

Long before local NAACP and NUL offices existed, they often held meetings in churches.⁹⁰ Throughout the early 20th Century, in spite of the deleterious effects of the Great Depression on African American communities, some Black churches mobilized voters and allowed candidates to speak from their pulpits and make their case to the congregation. In addition to the NAACP and NUL the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, a Black union led by Philip Randolph, used churches as a “primary organizational base for recruitment and financial support,” according to Lincoln and Mamiya.⁹¹

In spite of the close relationship such organizations, on the front lines of socio-political activism for African Americans during the first four decades of the 20th Century had with Black churches, by the 1950s many Black church leaders “courted low visibility.” This supports the argument that churches wrestled with the dialectical tension between “survival and liberation.”⁹² Particularly in the South, where racial tensions and oppression was more palpable, Black pastors often preferred to quietly communicate and negotiate with local white leaders on behalf of their congregants. For them, incremental change seemed more realistic than the more aggressive advocacy and activism encouraged by pastors like Dr. King whose churches provided “the bodies for demonstrations” and meeting spaces for organizers

⁹⁰ Lincoln and Mamiya, 209.

⁹¹ Lincoln and Mamiya, 210.

⁹² Ibid, 235.

across the south.⁹³ This explains why the Black church tradition and Black churches became so intertwined with the civil rights movement and was manifested in everything from music, to speeches and nonviolent protest. These churches are made up of prospective voters, to whom this analysis will now turn.

The voting habits of African American citizens have been shaped by several large historical events. The Civil War freed them and made them Lincoln Republicans. The reaction to Reconstruction in the South disenfranchised African Americans because in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, most of them lived in the rural South well within the reach of Jim Crow laws. The growth of American industry brought many African Americans north and this took them away from the most severe legal impediments to citizenship, but did not always rescue them from the cycle of poverty or exposure to racial discrimination. Their migration to the North often disrupted their traditional ways of “belonging” and they regularly sought community in churches, social organizations and eventually electoral politics. The effects of the Great Depression of 1929 on African American voters in the North brought them into the New Deal coalition, and northern African American voters have remained supportive of the Democratic Party ever since.⁹⁴ In the South, especially after the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was enacted during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, newly enfranchised African Americans also voted Democratic. As these voters have observed Democratic politicians espousing a commitment to causes in which they believe, and have seen the Party platform expand to include their interests, they have maintained high levels of support.

⁹³ Ibid, 212.

⁹⁴ Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections: Strategies and Structures of American Politics* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 15.

Today, African Americans are so closely associated with the Democratic Party that political candidates, campaigns and many in the media assume that they will vote Democratic based solely on their racial identification. Nelson Polsby, the author of *Presidential Elections: Strategies and Structures of American Politics*, asserts that most people have overlapping characteristics. Thus a single individual can be Black, female, Catholic, and a union member all at the same time. By separating these “subjective identifications” scholars have shown that belonging to a union creates a strong push toward Democratic allegiance. Being Jewish, being Black, and being female propel people toward the Democrats as does being Catholic or working class.⁹⁵ Yet, of those categories, the following discussion of African American voting trends will show, being Black is the only one that could stand alone as an identifier of political party allegiance, regardless of class:

African Americans have established themselves as a substantial component of the Democratic Coalition: from 5 percent to 7 percent in 1952-1960 to 12 percent in 1964, and 19 percent in 1968. In 1972 the percentage rose again, to 22 percent. In 1976, their contribution fell for the first time, reaching 16 percent, largely as a result of the return to Democratic voting of many other voters who had defected in 1972. In 1980 the African American percentage of Democratic voters was again at 22 percent, and in 1984 it went up to 25 percent, where it has remained with only slight changes since. In 1992 African American and other racial minorities supplied a quarter of Bill Clinton’s votes, and in 1996 they supplied 22 percent of his votes.⁹⁶

Likewise, in 2000 minority voters constituted 28 percent of Al Gore’s supporters and he received 90% of the Black vote. Yet class played a role in the 2004 election within the African American electorate. According to Robert C. Smith and Richard Seltzer, African American voters earning under \$30,000 increased their votes

⁹⁵ Polsby, 31.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

for Bush by a total of 11%.⁹⁷ Although Polsby discussed the major contributions of Black voters to the Democratic Coalition since the middle of the 20th Century, he failed to mention the significance of Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign in 1984, which resulted in high African American voter registration, turnout and participation and was responsible for solidifying African Americans as a steady "base" of the party.

Jesse Jackson's 1984 campaign in the presidential primaries provides further confirmation of the mobilizing potential of Black churches in the electoral process. In seeking the Democratic nomination, Jackson—who was able to stick his foot in a door cracked opened by Shirley Chisholm's historic 1972 candidacy—received more than 80 percent of the Black vote in most states and he encouraged the registration of more than 1 million Black voters.⁹⁸ Throughout the massive mobilization and fundraising efforts of his campaign, Jackson's network of Black ministers and churches was significant. As a Black church insider—he was ordained as a Baptist minister in 1968—Rev. Jackson used the network to help him do everything from registering voters to guaranteeing that his campaign stops and rallies would be heavily attended. They helped him generate excitement about his campaign and spread his message to their congregations. Furthermore, many of his local, state and national campaign operatives went on to hold important roles in the national Democratic Party structure. Just as the civil rights movement and the Black Church had been a training ground for him, his campaign became a training ground for talented young Black men and

⁹⁷ Persons, 258.

⁹⁸ It has been documented that because she was a woman, Shirley Chisholm did not receive the same level of support from men in the civil rights movement who felt one of her male colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus should have sought the nomination.

women. Once they became a part of the Democratic Party structure, these young operatives advocated for resources to be more strategically directed into the Black community during presidential elections.

Prior to the historic turnout of Black voters for Jesse Jackson, Sr., the 1976 presidential election of Jimmy Carter was both (up until that time) the largest Black vote in history and “the most decisive and influential exercise of minority political power in this century.”⁹⁹ Voting rights have long held a particular significance to African Americans, due to a longer history of disenfranchisement. Much of the support he gathered in the Black community can be attributed to the influence and ambassadorial role that well known Black preachers played early in his campaign. When Carter was running in the presidential primaries, former Southern Christian Leadership Conference Executive Director and then U.S. Congressman Andrew Young and Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr., pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, took Jimmy Carter directly to Black churches and clergy. They started in their home state of Georgia, and the impact they made for him there in African American communities spread like a wildfire across the country.

Carter’s campaign followed by Jackson’s solidified and institutionalized a practice within the Democratic Party, which was already taking place—albeit to a lesser extent—in previous presidential elections. Their success ensured that candidates, particularly Democratic candidates, would publicly acknowledge the critical role African American voters would play in their success at the polls. The best place for them to convey that message was in Black churches attended by many Black

⁹⁹ Lincoln and Mamiya, 215.

voters. Here, Alexis Herman, who has been an active participant in eight presidential elections, discusses the importance of presidential candidates visiting Black churches:

In battleground states in the later years, it became important to see the candidate worshipping. It used be a debate of whether the candidate was going to actually go to a church on Sunday. That's no longer a debate. The only debate now is what type of church. And it used to also be that the only church that mattered was a Black church in the context of the campaign's visible structure. So if you're gonna go to church you say okay what Black church are you going to go to? Now the issue is, what church are you going to go to? So in many ways the Black church created that political foundation.¹⁰⁰

Not only did they participate in public symbolic acts, including attending and speaking at Sunday services, but they also depended heavily on the private counsel of Black church leaders, many of whom had their fingers on the pulse of the Black community. Post Carter and Jackson, it became important for candidates to have Black campaign staffers who were familiar with the complexities of the religious communities throughout the country and could serve as “ambassadors to the ambassadors.” In other words, these staffers were responsible for understanding the religious politics of local communities, ensuring that candidates sought the counsel and support of the “right” pastors and churches in the “right” order. According to Herman, it was imperative that campaign staff carefully navigated the candidate around potential local political mine fields. There was a pecking order, an unspoken pecking order that had to be followed:

Often times if you were in the Black Community and there was some presence of elected Black leadership there then clearly they would be very important and very pivotal. So the candidate would need to say he was in Congressman's so and so's church. Those elected officials would often point you to the “right” church or their church. The

¹⁰⁰ Alexis Herman, interview by author, McLean, VA, January 12, 2006.

converse of that used to be, because we had so few elected officials and we had so many Black churches, that you had to make sure you were doing a balancing act.¹⁰¹

Current Trends in Black Church Political Activism and Participation

Sean Everton argues that although Conservative Protestant congregations have received much attention from scholars and the media during recent presidential election cycles, Black Protestant congregations are far more politically active and engaged. In this excerpt from “Whose Faith-Based Initiative?: A Look at the 2004 Election,” Everton discusses his research findings which indicated Black churches are much more willing to mention the election, political issues and voter registration during services:

They are more likely to tell people at worship about opportunities for political activity, to form groups to discuss politics or organize voter registration campaigns, to distribute voter guides, or (as we have already seen) invite someone running for office as a visiting speaker...In 1992, 1996, and 2000, Bill Clinton and Al Gore visited and spoke at several Black churches during the closing days of their presidential campaigns.¹⁰²

Studies have indicated that Black churches are also more likely to participate in more general political activities. R. Drew Smith and Corwin Smidt in “System Confidence, Congregational Characteristics, and Black Church Civic Engagement,” cite their Black Churches and Politics Survey (BCAP) which indicated that 84% of pastors said their churches were involved with voter registration initiatives while 64 % said their churches helped transport people to the polls. Less than 40 % of respondents indicated that they “passed out campaign materials” or “advocated on behalf of a

¹⁰¹ Alexis Herman, interview by author, McLean, VA, January 12, 2006.

¹⁰² Sean Everton, “Whose Faith-Based Initiative,” *Books & Culture*, January/February 2007.

ballot issue or referendum.”¹⁰³ Based on these survey results Smith and Smidt conclude that overwhelming majority of Black churches are generally active in electoral politics and encourage their members to participate in the voting process. However, such encouragement does not necessarily result in equal levels of issue advocacy or protest politics. According to the BCAP, lower levels of involvement in advocacy and protest were not necessarily correlated with church theology as much as church size and infrastructure. Here Smith and Smidt explain this phenomenon:

The larger the size of the congregation and the larger the level of church income, the greater the likelihood that the congregation is currently involved in the activities of a civic organization or has helped in a voter registration drive, advocated on behalf of some ballot measure, or participated in protest rallies or marches. Of those pastors who serve congregations of less than 100 parishioners, only 33 % reported that their congregation is currently involved in the activities of some civic or political organization—as compared with 61 percent of pastors serving congregations of 500 or more that reported such involvement.¹⁰⁴

These findings were supported by Fred Harris, who dedicates a significant amount of *Something Within* to Black church involvement. Harris also discussed a practice that developed involving Black pastors and candidates as the latter began to recognize the powerful influence pastors often had over their congregations and the surrounding community. Some Black pastors were known to accept “street money” or financial donations to their churches and social programs in exchange for

¹⁰³ R. Drew Smith and Corwin Smidt, “System Confidence, Congregational Characteristics, and Black Church Civic Engagement,” in *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America*, ed. R. Drew Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 60.

¹⁰⁴ R. Drew Smith and Corwin Smidt, “System Confidence, Congregational Characteristics, and Black Church Civic Engagement,” in *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America*, ed. R. Drew Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 69.

encouraging their congregations to support a particular candidate.¹⁰⁵ They might also allow these candidates to speak from the pulpit.

This form of “patronage” went mostly unnoticed throughout much of the 20th Century, but some who learned of the practice criticized both parties for participating in what they argued was bribery or even “prostitution.”¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, this “patronage” is not openly discussed, even within political circles, but is important to mention in order to provide an honest history of the relationship between the Black church and political campaigns. As will be discussed in the fourth chapter, critics of Bush’s faith-based initiative who believed it was being used for political purposes, argued that Black churches who supported the President were receiving federally funded “street money.” Journalist Clarence Page maintains that if they were, at least they had “more built-in accountability than the old variety” which often resulted in pastors pocketing the money for personal use.¹⁰⁷ Although the clandestine nature of the practice makes it impossible to track, it has historically been associated with Democratic candidates.

What is often obscured in mainstream media discussions about the Black church and electoral politics, is how few churches are actually actively engaged in political activism. Unfortunately the activism of a small number of churches is often erroneously attributed to the “Black Church” as a whole. For example, historiographies of the civil rights movement have documented how it actually

¹⁰⁵ Harris, 105.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Clarence Page, “Blacks Hearing a New Gospel From GOP: Republicans are Reaching Out to Black Neighborhood-Based Churches and Pastors to Boost Their Platform and It’s Working,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 6, 2005.

thrived in spite of many Black churches and pastors who were often the last to sign on to such outspoken resistance. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who today is usually remembered as a mainstream minister, was considered radical by his cohorts in general and the National Baptist Convention leadership in particular. His message and organizing efforts represented a significant departure from the typical behavior and attitudes of Black religious leaders, which explains why he was at the center of the rift within the NBC.

Although the number of activist churches has increased markedly since the 1960s, Black churches remain some of the most socially conservative institutions in the country. This is where the complexities of the church are really illuminated. According to Lincoln and Mamiya, across denominations, Black Christians tend to be “conservative in their religious views but liberal in their political positions.”¹⁰⁸ The same Black congregations that may support improving public education, universal healthcare and affirmative action might resist doing AIDS outreach—because they associate it with homosexual or promiscuous sexual behavior—or prevent women from being confirmed as ministers and pastors. Furthermore, many small Black churches lean towards the privatistic dialectic and open their doors before Sunday service and close them directly afterwards, opening during the week only for Bible study or choir practice. Yet most often this social conservatism remains in house, out of view of the larger American society. In the 2004 election the conservatism of some Black churches was exposed through the debate over same-sex marriage. In 2004 the Kerry campaign underestimated the extent to which the same-sex marriage debate would resonate with Black voters in general and Black Christian voters in particular.

¹⁰⁸ Lincoln and Mamiya, 229.

It is evident that failure to acknowledge the complexities and socioeconomic and political diversity that exists within the Black church can result in a miscalculation of the voting trends of their membership in any given presidential election. The Republican Party and Bush campaign gambled on the divisive potential of same-sex marriage as a wedge issue and won to the extent that it drew attention away from the bread and butter domestic concerns that have historically resulted in a bloc alignment with the Democratic party and its platform. Black clergy spoke both publicly and directly to their congregations about their disapproval of “gay-marriage” and the sinful gay lifestyle its support in states like Massachusetts legitimized.

Some pastors expressed their outrage in the media about gay rights activists linking their activism around the issue to the Civil Rights Struggle of the 1960s. However my research illuminated trends that suggest that certain kinds of Black clergy and congregations were predisposed to such disdain and were purposefully targeted by the Republican party and Bush campaign because of that predisposition. In other words, they stayed away from churches and pastors who had historically been aligned with the Democratic party and went after more churches which were new to political involvement or generally remained neutral during presidential elections. Based on these findings it appears that in 2004 the Republican Party was more attuned to the diversity of the Black church than the Democratic Party. To that end, the Bush re-election campaign targeted evangelical Christians, and in many instances to reach the largest amount of those potential voters, looked to megachurches and Black evangelicals.

In 2004, Ted Haggard was the newly elected president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) which claimed 30 million registered members. Haggard argued that NAE's members would vote for Bush because Bush was "Born Again and Bible-carrying" and because "we need good, God-fearing people in government." He went on to say that he would discourage people from supporting John Kerry because he didn't "even pretend to be an Evangelical...and mixes up verse numbers when he quotes the scriptures." His was not a partisan preference but a born-again preference for elected officials and Presidents, including Bill Clinton who gave NAE "everything we asked for."¹⁰⁹

Bishop Harry R. Jackson, an African American pastor of Hope Christian Church, a suburban megachurch expressed views similar to Haggard's in an article published in the *Washington Times* expressing his support for Bush and describing what he believed would be an "October surprise." His comments reflect one of a myriad of perspectives that existed within the Black church during the 2004 election:

Courageous Black voters will attempt to act as the conscience of the party that currently seems, to many, so insensitive to the plight of the poor and needy. They will vote for President Bush and hope for major policy adjustments in these vital areas: protection of biblical marriage; wealth creation opportunities for minorities; educational reform, which emphasizes urban change as a priority; prison reform that rehabilitates inmates with spiritual solutions; and health care for the poor. These sophisticated churches need governmental assistance from both a policy and fiscal level. I predict thousands of members of these churches, which represent the best of American Christianity, will only give the Republicans four more years to prove themselves. I believe that a delicate balance must be struck between righteousness and justice. For the reasons outlined above, this election I will be voting to re-elect George W. Bush.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Lara Marlowe, "Born-Again Bush Can Be Sure of Millions of Evangelical Votes," *Irish Times*, September 14, 2004.

¹¹⁰ Bishop Harry Jackson, Jr., "October Surprise," *Washington Times*, October 19, 2004.

One can assume that these churches Bishop Jackson claimed represented the “best of American Christianity” were like his evangelical megachurch in College Park, Maryland. Where did that leave pastors of mainline Baptist, Methodist churches, COGIC churches or even other megachurches who chose not to encourage their congregations to “hope” for “major policy adjustments?” According to Jackson, these other pastors, who overwhelmingly support the Democratic Party, mistakenly give social justice issues primacy over issues of “personal morality.” Pastors who are “free thinking” should align themselves with the Republican Party because of the latter and serve as its “conscience.”

Bishop Jackson worked diligently on behalf of President Bush in 2004 to organize pastors of other megachurches, including Pastor Bryan Carter, across the country around a “values agenda.” Pastor Carter recalled that Bishop Jackson “was one of the key persons that reached out to me and tried to get us engaged in terms of this moral agenda for America.”¹¹¹ The Bush campaign and White House reached out to Bishop Jackson and like-minded evangelical pastors of other megachurches because they knew President Bush could benefit from the influence the pastors had over their congregations and supporters without having to address the concerns or questions of denominational bodies, since most Charismatic megachurches are autonomous.

The evangelical connection between Bush and Black Christians is key because it is with that community that his faith and in general and born-again testimony in particular, resonated. Therefore party and campaign strategists knew that same-sex

¹¹¹ Pastor Bryan Carter, interview by author, March 3, 2009.

marriage would upset these particular Christians vehemently enough to distract them from other issues, including the War in Iraq and domestic issues, regardless of their race. However, it was their race that made their outcry so important because their disapproval might result in defection from the Democratic Party or even better, votes for George W. Bush in November. The numbers suggest that this actually occurred, albeit minimally. For statistics that had steadily increased for the last 15-20 years in favor of Democrats, even a 2% regression for the Democratic candidate and 2% increase for the Republican candidate was significant. The Kerry campaign's failure to pay attention to the complexity of the Black church and craft an innovative Black outreach strategy left them unprepared to address the friction the issue of same-sex marriage was causing in congregations across the country.

Throughout the 2004 presidential election many scholars, political pundits and print journalists often characterized Black pastors and churches as blindly loyal or went to the opposite extreme and portrayed them as moral standard bearers. Examining the Black church as a tradition within the context of Lincoln and Mamiya's seven dialectics helped illuminate these key stereotypes of Black pastors and churches which were commonplace during and after the election. As will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters on faith-based initiatives and same-sex marriage, those stereotypes emerged repeatedly in reporting and coverage of Black churches during the 2004 campaign.

The media's lack of knowledge about the complexity of the Black church contributed to the stereotypes which were damaging. In the future, scholars and journalists must complicate their analyses by including the Black church and its

various denominations in articles and polls. This will go a long way towards preventing the kind of simplistic scapegoating of the Black church that took place in both 2004 and 2008. In 2004 Black churches and pastors were placed at the center of the controversy over same-sex marriage and its impact on the 2004 election. In post election coverage they were blamed, because some pastors publicly opposed same-sex marriage, for swaying enough Black voters to cost Kerry the election.

“If you drive a Volvo and you do yoga, you’re pretty much a Democrat and if you drive a Lincoln or a BMW and you own a gun, you’re voting for George W. Bush.”¹¹²

“In 2004 the Democrats took for granted and used a broad brush to deal with Black churches. They didn’t take into account the tremendous diversity of belief systems among Black churches and Black ministers and invest time trying to make the case for why voters ought to be more loyal to their party, then to their belief system.”¹¹³

Chapter Three: The 2004 Bush Re-Election Campaign

Against significant odds, including a controversial war and a distressed economy, the Bush 2004 re-election campaign was successful. Although President Bush was re-elected by a small margin, he received more votes than he did in 2000 and helped usher in a Republican majority in the House and Senate. Many political scientists and pundits argue that his victory was due in great measure to the strategy outlined by Bush's Senior Advisor Karl Rove and executed by Bush Re-Election campaign manager Ken Mehlman. These men bucked twelve years of presidential campaign conventional wisdom and made targeting swing voters secondary to going after inactive but conservative thinking and leaning voters. Could such a strategy work against the campaign of a long-serving and well respected Senator who also happened to be a Vietnam veteran?

With new information being released almost every week about the faulty intelligence the Bush Administration used to justify starting the war in Iraq and the mounting costs of that war, many thought the election was John Kerry’s to lose. When he did lose, ranking high among the reasons given for his defeat was his campaign’s inability to effectively respond to Republican attacks and tactics. While

¹¹² Dan Balz and Mike Allen “Four More Years Attributed to Rove’s Strategy; Despite Moments of Doubt, Adviser’s Planning Paid Off,” *Washington Post*, November 7, 2004.

¹¹³ Rev. Joseph Watkins, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, August 12, 2008.

portraying Kerry as an untrustworthy waffler was a key aspect of the Bush campaign's strategy, their narrowly focused plan to ignite "dormant" Republicans by presenting the President as someone who shared their values was central to his victory. For Rove and Mehlman, conservative African American Christians were not only a logical component of their plan to amass enough votes to win both the popular vote and Electoral College in 2004, they were necessary. They knew they were starting at ground zero so they started building a strong African American outreach apparatus immediately which would bear fruit four years later. Although it did not result in a huge increase overall, in certain states the increase was substantial. The larger story is how the Republicans, by focusing on a small group early and often, took the Democrats by surprise and gave them something they had not had in over forty years regarding African American outreach: competition.

President George W. Bush

The son of the 41st President of the United States, George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush grew up in a political family. After losing a Congressional race in 1978, an older and wiser Bush returned to politics in 1994. He ran against incumbent Texas Governor Ann Richards and won. Throughout his terms (he was re-elected in 1998) as governor, Bush developed a reputation for being rigid on issues such as the death penalty (which was administered more in Texas during his tenure than in any other state) and gun control. His relationship with African Americans in Texas was lukewarm at best. Vice President Al Gore and his campaign exploited this and used the 1998 lynching of James Byrd in Jasper Texas as an indictment against Bush who,

as governor, opposed hate crime legislation. Add to this the fact that Bush was not committed to addressing the social ills, including child poverty, that were so important to the African American community and the result was a candidate with a very weak reputation with Black voters. Accounts of Black voter suppression and disenfranchisement in Florida, the state governed by his brother Jeb Bush, who was governor at the time, only intensified the damage that had already been done. Consequently, Bush entered the White House in 2001 in an unfortunate position with African Americans most of whom, polls showed, did not trust him or support his presidency.

Bush had made some friends in the African American community with his commitment to federal support for churches making a difference in the community in the form of faith-based initiatives. This was his signature domestic policy when he entered the White House in 2001. As will be discussed in the next chapter in more detail, Bush committed the White House and several Agencies to create offices within their walls that would make funding accessible to churches. Because many Black churches across the country have programs that support their surrounding communities, it was assumed that they could benefit greatly from such funding. It was hoped by the White House that support for faith-based Initiatives from African Americans might smooth over some of the damage done following the 2000 election which disenfranchised thousands of African Americans in the state of Florida. Former White House Director of African American outreach, Tiffany Watkins confirmed this effort was a priority:

I think after 2000 one of the main goals of the administration was let's reach out to everybody early. So that when it comes time, we know

what to talk about. So the primary goal was to build a grassroots network. And to build it as broad and as big as possible and so my goal was to think of different ways to do that and they let us implement our different ways.¹¹⁴

In his first term President Bush matched President Bill Clinton's record on Executive Branch diversity by appointing several women and people of color to cabinet positions including Colin Powell as Secretary of State, Elaine Chao as Secretary of Labor and Condoleezza Rice as National Security Advisor. Although he made these historic appointments, he received little praise or attention for his efforts. Some attributed this to his hostile relationship with national African American leaders and civil rights organizations including the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Such organizations, which praised President Clinton for his diverse cabinet, were too preoccupied with Bush's refusal to give them access to the White House (he did not meet with either organization during his first term) and what they viewed as counter-productive domestic policies to applaud his diverse cabinet. Furthermore, his appointments below cabinet level were far less diverse than President Clinton's, which led some to question the depth of Bush's commitment to diversity.¹¹⁵

By the end of his first year, he had gained a little momentum with some African Americans through domestic policies, which included faith-based initiatives and No Child Left Behind (as well as a lot of criticism). The latter was the Bush administration's attempt to improve performance in the country's public schools by

¹¹⁴ Tiffany Watkins, interview by author, Washington, DC, August 29, 2008.

¹¹⁵ This was more of a political priority for Rove who was nicknamed the "Architect." Based on his time as governor Texas, I believe for Bush, a diverse cabinet was more about personal loyalty and allegiance.

establishing national teacher accountability and student achievement standards. Whatever momentum he gained was stopped in its tracks when two planes hit the World Trade Center, one plane hit the Pentagon and another slammed into a field in Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001. The administration's response to what was quickly determined to be a terrorist attack were the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. As has since been documented, the newly minted "War on Terror" took attention and resources away from all of the President's other priorities, but particularly his domestic priorities. He would spend the majority of the next three years leading up to the 2004 election focusing on, explaining and defending his administration's choice to invade and occupy a country that was alleged by 2003 (and later confirmed) to have no weapons of mass destruction or viable connection to the Al Qaeda terrorists responsible for the September 11th attacks.

Consequently, President Bush entered the 2004 campaign season with little support in the African American community. His polling numbers remained around 20% among African Americans throughout his first term.¹¹⁶ Yet, as has already been mentioned, the Bush reelection campaign activated a rather aggressive African American outreach effort. That effort, which targeted a specific segment of the African American community, was a significant piece of an innovative campaign strategy to garner support from groups Bush and the Republican Party failed to energize in 2000. Evangelicals, both white and Black, were at the top of the list. While this study is greatly concerned with the Bush campaign's outreach to evangelicals, it is important to place it within the context of their overall plan to win the election. Following an examination of that plan, I will return to a discussion of the

¹¹⁶ Steve Miller, "GOP a Tough Sell to Black Voters," *Washington Times*, July 22, 2004.

campaign's evangelical outreach and explain how the social differences between Black and white evangelicals necessitated different strategies.

The Bush Re-election Master Plan

General strategies emerged for the Bush campaign in early 2004 which they would stick to through Election Day. One important and successful strategy the Bush campaign employed was to paint John Kerry as incapable of handling the office of President by labeling him a flip-flopper and generally weak on national security. This was a battle they waged openly in the media in contrast to what critics characterized as the covert way they targeted conservative voters across the country. In the spring of 2004, soon after Kerry clinched the nomination, the Bush campaign was already on the attack and was relentless for the next eight months. Essentially, they got off to an early start (as incumbents historically have had the ability to do) and forced Kerry into a defensive stance before he could begin crafting a consistent message about the President.

Under the leadership of Ken Mehlman, the campaign bucked trends of the last three presidential cycles and focused more on Republicans first and so called "swing voters" second. Swing voters are voters who are in the middle of the two party poles. They are usually not registered independents, who research has shown are often partisans that like the label and the idea of not being placed in a party "box." Only 43% of swing voters actually identify themselves as Republican or Democrat and

most claim not to know where they “fit in” politically.¹¹⁷ With such big issues as the war and economy on the table, the Bush camp felt it would be too risky to devote as many resources and attention to swing voters as had been done in the past. They would focus their energies right of center and work their way towards the middle.

So they focused on registered Republicans who had not been active, as well as those who the campaign believed would vote Republican if they registered. Rove called them “suspected Republicans” and believed they were more capable than swing voters of “tipping the balance in a narrowly divided race.”¹¹⁸ These “suspected Republicans” just needed to be energized and “touched” by campaign workers and volunteers who could share Bush’s message and vision with them. This group, according to Rove, Mehlman and chief campaign strategist Matthew Dowd, was much more dependable because they fit the profile of Republican voters and were already leaning towards supporting the President. Furthermore, if the campaign could reach them, they would be more likely to vote Republican in future elections. This strategy would only work if the election was close. Rove banked on the advantages of incumbency during a time of war (even if that war was becoming increasingly controversial by the day) and the benefit of having no Republican challengers. He also instituted a plan to make sure that it stayed close by conveying a consistent message and labeling Bush’s opponent as inconsistent.

These elements combined to set the stage for a close enough election that the Bush camp could actually implement the Micro Targeting strategy they depended on

¹¹⁷ William G. Mayer, ed., *The Swing Voter in American Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 11.

¹¹⁸ Anne Kornblut, “Strategist Focuses on President’s Devotees,” *The Boston Globe*, August 30, 2004.

so heavily. That targeting was the brainchild of Matthew Dowd, who pitched the idea to Rove of using demographic files and consumer data to locate, register and inundate conservative leaning voters with messaging geared towards their beliefs, concerns, consumer habits and values.¹¹⁹ Here Mehlman discusses the campaign's innovative voter identification plan, which helped them determine which people would be inclined to support and hopefully vote for Bush during the election:

We did what Visa did. We acquired a lot of consumer data. What magazine do you subscribe to? Do you own a gun? How often do the folks go to church? Where do you send your kids to school? Are you married? Based on that, we were able to develop an exact kind of consumer model that corporate America does every day to predict how people vote -- not based on where they live but how they live. That was critically important to our success.¹²⁰

According to Ed Gillespie, RNC Chair during the 2004 campaign, the party registered 3.4 million new voters who had been identified in mid 2003 by Rove as a top priority if Republicans were going to be able to compete with Democrats.¹²¹ The Bush camp found these new registrants who a campaign official described as “a homogenous group” of people who were often tucked in outer suburbs of “fast-growing counties” and bombarded them with messaging and attention. They received direct mail, personal phone calls and “front-porch visits” from campaign staff and volunteers all designed to get them to the polls for Bush in November.¹²² Here, Tiffany Watkins, who transitioned from the White House to the Bush reelection campaign describes some of outreach efforts she coordinated:

¹¹⁹ Balz, November 7, 2004.

¹²⁰ Adam Nagourney, “Bush Campaign Manager Views the Electoral Divide” *New York Times*, November 19, 2004.

¹²¹ Balz, November 7, 2004.

¹²² Balz, November 7, 2004.

My goal was of course to get as many votes as I could. Knowing that African Americans vote 90% Democratic, what could I do to break into that. And the church was one way, you know the values piece was one way. But I really felt that the message was showing the diversity of the party and what kind of people he had put in place to say look, this President is not as bad as you guys think. Look at the breadth and the diversity within the African American community of supporters that he has. So whether it was a small business person, an engineer or a pastor, there's something that is linking all three of them to support President Bush.¹²³

According to a *Washington Post* article written by Dan Balz outlining the campaign's strategy a few weeks after the election, Republicans wanted to "eliminate the Democrats' traditional registration advantage." They were successful in their efforts and "for the first time, the percentage of Republicans equaled the percentage of Democrats on Election Day, each accounting for 37 percent of the electorate."¹²⁴

Equally as impressive as the number of new registrants was the number of volunteers the Bush campaign had built up by election day. An estimated 1.4 million volunteers were actively involved in the targeting and subsequent get-out-the-vote apparatus for the Bush re-election campaign. The candidate played his role in this intense targeting production by making several trips to counties in battle ground states including Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania, which he had won in 2000. These counties were decidedly Republican and were places where his team identified Republican leaning voters he could reach and fold into his base. This is not to suggest that he avoided highly contested areas or "hostile territory" all together, because he did spend time in those places as well. But predominantly Republican areas were his first

¹²³ Tiffany Watkins, interview by author, Washington, DC, August 29, 2008.

¹²⁴ Dan Balz, "GOP Governors Celebrate Party Wins; Tutorial on Bush Campaign Strategies Shows What Went Right," *Washington Post*, November 18, 2004.

priority as opposed to his second or third as had been the trend on both sides of the aisle in recent elections.

The Bush campaign continued their targeting of Republicans with an advertising strategy that was also aimed at Christians in general and conservative Christians of color in particular. Based on their data collection the Bush campaign was also able to “spend smart.” They concluded that Democrats not only watch more regular television but also watch more local and national news. Consequently, they bought more airtime on cable TV and radio than in past years. In fact, 25% of their advertising dollars, which amounted to 20 million dollars on cable and 12 million dollars on the radio went to mediums other than “spot” TV. In keeping with their overall strategy, they decided to reach their base of Republican leaning voters where they would reach them best and in the largest concentration rather than spreading money to advertise at a time and in between shows that fewer Republicans watched.¹²⁵ They placed many of the ads between rush hour traffic news reports which families listened to on their way home. Their general advertising strategy and budget included buying time on Christian, Spanish-language and African American radio. Here, Leah recalls how effectively the Bush campaign used Black pastors as ambassadors for Bush on Christian radio:

They were very smart about Christian radio. In a way, they didn’t have to have Bush. If you had TD Jakes, who had talked to Bush, that was good enough. And then the myth, the legend takes over. And you’re dealing with these megachurch people. So all of the years of them just calling and checking in, pays off for you.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Ira Teinowitz, “W’s Secret Weapons: Scarborough, Nielsen; Shifted Money to Radio, Cable to Target ‘Missing’ Republicans,” *Advertising Age*, November 15, 2004, 3.

¹²⁶ Leah Daughtry, interview by author, Washington, DC, March 29, 2006.

What was left unsaid by Rove, Mehlman and Dowd in mid-November as they proudly described how they won the election, was how much values had to have played a role in their MicroTargeting strategy and advertising. What they did not say, other political operatives including Scott Reed, Bob Dole's campaign manager in 1996, discussed openly:

The evangelical vote was where he really ran up the numbers. This was part of their national strategy to play to the base, and that's what they did to close. They stuck with it. They didn't waver when there was a push from some in the party to move to the middle, and it paid off in spades.¹²⁷

All of the references to the "base" necessarily referred to "suspected Republicans" and evangelical Christians.

Black Evangelical Outreach

The Bush team was also unwilling to discuss African Americans in their post election commentary, giving no indication of how significant, early and consistent their outreach to certain segments of the African American community had been. Even if the Bush campaign's African American targeting was done quietly, the Party's attempts to be more inclusive were apparent during the Republican National Convention where there were a "record number of minority delegates" and the crowd on the convention floor was noticeably more diverse.¹²⁸ During the week of the convention even ultra conservative former House Speaker Newt Gingrich was "on

¹²⁷ John F. Harris, "For Bush and GOP, A Validation," *Washington Post*, November 3, 2004.

¹²⁸ Gail Russell, "With the Hispanic Population Poised to Grow 35 Percent in a Decade, Outreach Rises to Top of Agenda," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 9, 2004.

message” stating, “If we don't attract more minorities who share our values, we'll eventually be a minority party," in speeches to two separate groups.¹²⁹

Yet Bush campaign operatives did not openly admit that they were targeting African Americans. In fact, after the election they conceded defeat in the press, although they were essentially conceding African Americans who clearly identified as Democrats. They also made no mention of evangelical churches or ministers who were supporting them or working on their behalf across the country. During the campaign, Kwesi Mfume, President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) at the time, called the campaign to task for targeting he characterized as insulting:

We're not fools. If you're going to court us, court us in the daytime, but not like we're a prostitute where you run around at night or behind closed doors and want to deal with us, but not want to deal with us in the light of day.¹³⁰

Mfume was referring to outreach to churches and other segments of the African American community which the Bush campaign did without a lot of fanfare. The Bush campaign responded by claiming they did not change their messaging depending on their audience but instead talked “about the same important issues to all groups.”¹³¹ This reinforces the argument that they had a singular focus for the people they targeted. They knew that focus would be considered divisive because it was not based on big picture domestic or foreign policy, but on values. Yet the Bush

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ William Douglas and Amy Worden, “Bush Faults NAACP’s Leaders: Citing Harsh Remarks By Some, He Said He Would Seek Members’ Support in Other Ways,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 10, 2004.

¹³¹ Howard Kurtz, “Kerry Invests \$2 Million in Ads to Court Black Voters,” *Washington Post*, July 15, 2004.

campaign knew they would have to use a different formula with Black evangelicals who were by no means identical to white evangelicals.

While African American and white evangelicals share a belief in the Bible, conversion and moral issues including abortion and same-sex marriage they have, according to historian Mark Noll, “socialized into very different political behavior.”¹³² Consequently, white evangelicals vote “overwhelmingly” for the Republican Party such that “Black churchgoers and white churchgoers who would share a common set of evangelical beliefs almost predictably are going to come down on different sides of the modern political debate.”¹³³ In a PBS survey conducted in the spring of 2004, 84% of Black evangelicals identified as Democrats or “leaned Democratic.” As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, the Bush reelection campaign hoped the President’s opposition to same-sex marriage would encourage them to “lean” towards the Republican Party.

In a 2005 Chicago Sun-Times article about evangelicals, Rev. James Meeks, pastor of Black Baptist church in Chicago, said one of the reasons for the differences in party affiliation between Black and white evangelical churches is that the latter are much more individualistic and opposed to many of the social programs that Black evangelicals value. In the same article, Sociologist Michael Emerson said his research supported Rev. Meeks’ claims and argued that many white evangelicals had a history of opposing racial progress for African Americans.¹³⁴ Here Rev. Meeks outlines specific differences in their social and political priorities:

¹³² “The Jesus Factor,” *Frontline*, December 10, 2003.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Cathleen Falsani, “One Faith, One Bible—But Two Races; African Americans Often Avoid the Term ‘Evangelical,’” *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 14, 2005.

It seems as if the flaw in the white evangelical church is that it will fight tooth and nail to protect an unborn child in the womb, but won't lift a finger to assist a child once it's been born. Where is the [white] evangelical church on issues outside of abortion and outside of homosexuality?"¹³⁵

Rev. Meeks went on to say he believed that most white evangelicals think Black poverty is self-imposed and therefore social programs would just be “an enabling crutch.” However, the Bush Administration and Bush reelection campaign were well aware of the importance of social programs to mainline protestant and evangelical Black churches and presented their support of faith-based initiatives as evidence that they valued their contributions to the community.

According to political science scholar Ronald Walters, the Bush campaign and RNC started their campaign-specific targeting of Black evangelical churches as early as February of 2004. RNC Chair Ed Gillespie promoted Bush's commitment to faith-based initiatives and the millions of dollars he promised to Black churches through them. For example, Gillespie told pastors and their wives, who were gathered in DC for a meeting, that Bush “sought many ways to tap the moral leaders in America's communities.”¹³⁶ Here Rev. Joseph Watkins discusses why he believes some Black pastors were “in play” for the Republicans in 2004:

There are people who are strict constructionists of the Bible and there are some people who do not strictly construct the Bible and everything in between. So really, a lot was just based on how pastors reacted to the issues that were on the table in the 2004 election and their understanding of scripture and the degree to which they felt that one ought to vote in concert with one's beliefs.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ronald W. Walters, *Freedom Is Not Enough: Black Voters, Black Candidates and American Presidential Politics* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 178.

¹³⁷ Rev. Joseph Watkins, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, August 12, 2008.

By October, it appeared that some in the press finally made the connection, including David Kirkpatrick a white journalist who wrote several articles about religion for *The New York Times* over the course of the election. In an October 15th article, Kirkpatrick used unambiguous language when discussing Bush's targeting of Black churches saying "In a departure from typical Republican presidential campaigns, the Bush campaign is making a serious push for the allegiance of African-American clergy, while the Democrats are fighting back to motivate them to get their parishioners to the polls."¹³⁸ Kirkpatrick was one of the few in the media to mention both the size and denomination of the churches the campaign targeted and Bush visited:

Mr. Bush has appeared several times over the last few years in large predominantly Black churches from Philadelphia to Dallas. Timothy Goeglein, the White House liaison to conservatives and Christians, meets frequently with predominantly Black congregations and religious groups, including the annual meeting of about 25,000 members of the Church of God in Christ, one of the largest and most theologically conservative Black denominations, to the Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York.¹³⁹

Kirkpatrick went on to discuss several pastors, who though he made clear were "anomalies," were among a cohort of pastors. Pastors like William Turner of Pasadena, California who said he thought the President was an "honest man," and prioritized Bush's personal character and beliefs over the economy or the war. Leah Daughtry believed this cohort was largely Pentecostal:

Where the Bush people targeted in the African American clerk community were primarily Pentecostal ministers. I'm Pentecostal, so I know who was getting the phone calls and what people were hearing.

¹³⁸ Kirkpatrick, October 5, 2004.

¹³⁹ (Kirkpatrick, *The New York Times*, 10/5/2004).

We tend to be more conservative than the others. We also have a much shorter history with political involvement.¹⁴⁰

According to Walters, African Americans did not support the war, thought it was senseless and believed a disproportionate number of their young men and women were dying on its front lines.¹⁴¹ He cited data from pollster Cornell Belcher indicating that 77% of African Americans agreed in some measure that President Bush “intentionally misled the country as to America’s entry into war.” Walters also asserted that they were frustrated by the diverting of resources away from domestic problems to funding the war.¹⁴² Similarly, a Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies poll found that there was a 20% gap between African Americans and whites regarding the direction of the country with 74% of the former versus 54% of the latter believing that “America was on the wrong track.”¹⁴³

Kirkpatrick went on to explain that many of these pastors including Bishop Ernest Morris, were greatly impacted by the President’s faith and his opposition to same-sex marriage which “made their decision about the election a closer call.”¹⁴⁴ A combination of Bush’s values and the fact that he was on a first name basis with pastors including Bishop Morris, went a long way with African American pastors of similar churches and inevitably spilled over into their congregations. In short, the fact that Bush was an evangelical Christian was not enough to sway African American evangelical pastors. While that was a good start, it also took four years of cultivating

¹⁴⁰ Leah Daughtry, interview by author, Washington, DC, March 29, 2006.

¹⁴¹ Walters, Freedom, 158.

¹⁴² Ibid., 159.

¹⁴³ Walters, 161.

¹⁴⁴ Kirkpatrick, October 5, 2004.

relationships with Black pastors through faith-based initiative outreach and using his opposition to same-sex marriage to energize them enough to gain their support.

Their efforts were well organized and based on a strategy that deputized openly supportive pastors to use their influence externally and internally. According to Kirkpatrick, the campaign was using “coalition coordinators” in churches to identify other conservative churches that would be potential support bases as well. This was supported by researchers Russell Muirhead, Nancy L. Rosenblum, Daniel Schlozman and Francis X. Shen in “Religion in the 2004 Presidential Election,” a chapter in *Divided States of America: The Slash and Burn Politics of the 2004 Presidential Election*. In the article, four government scholars describe these efforts which included the explicit directions the Bush campaign gave to churches. They were instructed to send important membership information including lists of Bush’s supporters and conservative members who were not registered to vote directly to the Bush headquarters.¹⁴⁵ Kirkpatrick also reported that they were given deadlines to accomplish these and other assignments that were meant to sway members not just to vote but to vote for Bush. Although their directives included churches hosting registration events, most of the activities the pastors were asked to facilitate were explicitly intended to garner support for the Bush re-election campaign. Coalition coordinators were even asked to host “parties for the President” and recruit volunteers within the congregation.

The campaign combined legal and acceptable non-partisan voter registration and education activities with clearly partisan activities and both the IRS and Democrats took notice. The latter called their church outreach, “an exploitation of

¹⁴⁵ Sabato, 229.

religious faith for political gain and a potential violation of privacy.”¹⁴⁶ As a result of such public outcry, the Bush campaign, according to the Harvard scholars, stopped the practice. The criticism was valid given the clear violations of tax exempt status the Bush campaign was encouraging by asking churches to use their resources to share information and plan events of a partisan nature. However, it also seemed hypocritical, given the long-standing interactions between Democratic presidential candidates and campaigns and Black churches that was outlined in the previous chapter. Yet it is important to note that these directives were not the only questionable tactics the Republicans used during the election. As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, the White House hosted several faith-based initiative funding workshops in key states in 2004. According to former Special Assistant to President Bush, David Kuo, they were not organized by the campaign but sanctioned by the same person calling the political shots for the White House, campaign and RNC: Karl Rove. The fact that people who were invited to the workshops were being misled about the amount of funding that was actually available, makes them even more problematic.

Even with all of these efforts, it is important to remember that the Bush campaign’s targeting of Black evangelical churches was just one piece of a larger strategy to reach conservative evangelical Christians across the country whom they hoped would identify with Bush’s stance on abortion and same-sex marriage. According to Rove, it was really important for the Republican party to compete successfully with historically strong Democratic voter mobilization and turn out

¹⁴⁶ David D. Kirkpatrick, “Bush Appeal to Churches Seeking Help Raises Doubts,” *New York Times*, July 2, 2004.

efforts. Rove said they were able to get their “efforts up to parity” by mobilizing evangelical Christians and other conservatives who shared the president’s values.¹⁴⁷

Senator John F. Kerry

Kerry emerged from the pack of Democratic candidates by Super Tuesday in March when his primary victories were substantial enough to eliminate his most formidable challenger, former Senator John Edwards. He was a decorated Vietnam veteran, who returned from the war and was among a small number of young soldiers over the course of the conflict to speak out against it. He came into public service in 1982 when he was elected Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts on the ticket with Michael Dukakis. Prior to entering the 2004 presidential race he had served in the U.S. Senate since 1985. Based on his success during the Democratic primaries (he won both the Iowa Caucuses and the New Hampshire primary with 38% of the vote, won the February 2nd primaries and swept Super Tuesday), it was clear Democratic voters believed Kerry would be the candidate most capable of defeating Bush in 2004 because of his military service, voting record and the respect he enjoyed on both sides of the aisle as a practical politician with an informed command of the issues. But by the time he entered the race as the presumptive nominee, he was already at a disadvantage because the Bush campaign was able to craft a strategy and message, half of which was designed to invalidate any of Kerry’s strengths as a candidate. It did not help matters that the Kerry campaign focused more on fundraising in the spring than it did getting him out into the states to touch “real people.” According to Chuck Todd, former *Hotline* Editor-in-Chief and current MSNBC Political Director,

¹⁴⁷ Rick Klein, “From Start to Finish, Bush Sticks to Original Strategy,” *Boston Globe*, November 3, 2004.

Kerry wasted too much time that could have been used to establish his readiness to take over the White House during wartime:

For a challenger, Kerry had an unprecedented amount of time as the unofficial nominee and looking back, it was not memorable time well spent. There were no trips to Iraq, no unique 50-state campaign swings and no presidential administration creating. It's this final point that we believe future nominees running in a wartime atmosphere ought to consider. With the country at war, there was a sector of the electorate who despite their misgivings for the incumbent, was reticent at changing horses in midstream. What if Kerry had used each week of, say, a six-to-eight week span in the late spring and early summer to name a major cabinet member? Kerry would have had more control of each news cycle and likely forced the Bush campaign to be more reactive instead of always proactive.¹⁴⁸

John F. Kerry the candidate, much like Vice President Al Gore, the Democratic nominee in 2000, did not engender a lot of excitement. His campaign did little to counteract his reserved and aloof image which, in spite of his clear stance on issues, plagued him throughout the campaign. But this was not all their fault. Kerry was an intellectual who did not like typical campaign one-liners which he called "slogany."¹⁴⁹ He was prone to speaking too long and didn't like to repeat himself too much in speeches, an important message branding tactic that his opponent had mastered. His concerned family and friends, including Senator Ted Kennedy, tried to get him to work on his delivery and loosen up, but to no avail. The long-winded speeches filled with what Senator Kennedy called "too much senatese" stuck.

This unfortunate image also created the perception that he was too theoretical on domestic and foreign policy as Walters suggested in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* when he said, "There is a persistent sense among activists that Kerry is not passionate

¹⁴⁸ Sabato, 34.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas, 78.

enough on the Iraq war, poverty and social justice.”¹⁵⁰ This was the case in spite of his voting record as a U.S. Senator on these very issues, which were considered to be quite progressive. This perception had not changed three months later and was echoed by “regular” African Americans like Michael Johnson, interviewed in a *Washington Post* article in October of 2004, who expressed his disdain for Bush but ambivalence about Kerry. Johnson said he might just pass over the presidential section of the ballot because Bush “is the most inept president I’ve ever seen in my lifetime” but Kerry “does not have the charisma, and his platform does not excite me.”¹⁵¹ Confirming that the Bush campaign strategy to paint Kerry into a corner was working, Johnson went on to explain that he felt Kerry spent too much time sparring with Bush over Iraq and too little time addressing “the economic and domestic issues” that were more relevant to his community in his hometown of Normandy, Missouri. The article warned that if the “festering dissatisfaction” with Kerry articulated by Johnson and many other like him was not addressed, it could lead to a decrease in African American voter turnout. Some African Americans may have been able to sense what Leah Daughtry described as Kerry’s obligatory attitude towards Black outreach which was a stark contrast compared to his predecessors:

For Clinton it was more of a here’s who I am, I want you to know me, I want you to see me, I want you to understand that I understand you. For Gore it was, okay I know I need to do this. And we share values and we share issues. And I kind of get it, I’m just not warm and fuzzy like Clinton but I kind of get it. For Kerry it was, they put me on the phone and told me I have to do this. And part of me doing this is the Republicans are beating us up on the values issues with this set of

¹⁵⁰ Fitzgerald, June 30, 2004.

¹⁵¹ Vanessa Williams, “Kerry’s Priorities Leave Some Blacks Cold; Focus on War Instead of Economy Decried,” *Washington Post*, October 2, 2004.

people. And so if we've got any hope of holding them, I've gotta show them I don't have two heads.¹⁵²

The Kerry Campaign: Missteps and Lost Opportunities

Kerry's struggles to solidify the support of African Americans, a very important component of his base throughout the campaign, by articulating a message that was relevant to them, might have been the result of his campaign's lack of diversity early on. In *Freedom*, Walters argued that the Kerry campaign made a woefully slow transition from what he described as "the kind of campaign structure with which he had won the nomination to a structure that was capable of mobilizing the large national constituencies that were the base vote of the Democratic party."¹⁵³ As a result his campaign was broadsided by critics who expected him to hit the ground running with an experienced and diverse team capable of mobilizing the various constituencies within the Party's big tent.

African American political veterans including Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr. and former Gore 2000 presidential campaign manager Donna Brazile, were not shy about expressing their frustration with an obvious lack of African American senior staff in Kerry's camp.¹⁵⁴ Brazile and Jackson would eventually quiet their complaints when, by late summer, Kerry hired political heavy hitters like former Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman, former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Susan Rice and labor veteran Bill Lynch. But Jackson was still complaining to the press about what he argued was a backwards political strategy in the fall. Very much aware of

¹⁵² Leah Daughtry, interview by author, Washington, DC, March 29, 2006.

¹⁵³ Walters, *Freedom*, 164.

¹⁵⁴ Rev. Jackson avoided answering my questions about the shortcomings of the Kerry campaign and Democratic Party in 2004.

Rove's master plan to start with the Republican core and fan out, Jackson called Kerry to the carpet for "distancing himself from his base."¹⁵⁵

The next month, Jackson was brought on as a senior advisor, but the campaign's base strategy, much like the campaign's broader strategy, was reactive, limited and stale compared to the Bush campaign.¹⁵⁶ Kerry's outreach continued to follow the same rubric as past Democratic presidential campaigns where African Americans received the most attention in the fall Get-out-the-vote (GOTV) portion of the election cycle. As Alexis Herman pointed out, there was no "ongoing outreach infrastructure in the party that was comparable to what was going on on the other side."¹⁵⁷ The Kerry campaign took this 20th Century approach in a 21st Century campaign, waiting until late in the year to specifically target African American voters. Just as the Kerry campaign proved to be defensive on larger issues, it continued its reactionary stance with African Americans only diversifying its staff or intensifying its outreach when criticized for its subpar outreach to a key component of the base.

The Democratic Party, under the leadership of Terry McAuliffe, was competitive with the Republican Party in terms of fundraising during the 2004 election. The party was free to play "bad-cop" and bombarded Democratic voters and potential voters with messaging attacking Bush's record and the ongoing scandals associated with the Iraq war. In addition to raising unprecedented amounts of money for the party, McAuliffe was responsible for creating a database of over 1.5 million Democrats which he used to get the message out through daily e-mail blasts that kept

¹⁵⁵ Juan Gonzalez, "Kerry Better Heed Faithful," *Daily News (New York)*, September 14, 2004.

¹⁵⁶ Some might consider this a form of upper level version of the "patronage" discussed in the previous chapter.

¹⁵⁷ Alexis Herman, interview by author, Washington, DC, January 12, 2006.

Bush's failures front and center while highlighting Kerry's profile as a pragmatic and well respected politician. Consequently, the DNC feverishly raised money and distributed it across the country to state offices in order to hold on to existing, and pick up new Congressional seats.

Simultaneously, emboldened by four years of cutbacks to social programs and a war that was continuously draining federal dollars from the programs that were still left, non-profit, non-partisan organizations like the National Coalition for Black Civic Participation (NCBCP) partnered with other organizations including the NAACP. The large scale African American targeted voter registration and mobilization campaigns of 2000 expanded in 2004 to include their coordinated efforts to forge a substantial grass roots push to educate and energize young and minority voters. Independent advocacy groups called 527s played a significant role in the 2004 election. Big donors whose contributions were limited by the 2002 McCain-Feingold Act, could give large sums to 527s which were behind many of the ad campaigns for both candidates. Along with the aforementioned grass roots coalition, America Votes, Media Fund, Americans Coming Together and MoveOn.org were four 527s that spent a total of 60 million dollars in their attempts to help elect John Kerry.

Their efforts, though significant, were no match for the combined forces of the RNC, Bush Campaign, Republican bankrolled 527 organizations and the White House. On the Democratic side of the campaign, the most important leg of the stool, the candidate and his campaign, did not do their part successfully or consistently enough to create the united front necessary to compete with the Bush team. The Democratic party and the coalition of organizations could not carry the election by

themselves because Democratic and swing voters did not connect with the candidate. They energized young people, shone a light on the important issues and the president's failures but could not sell a candidate who struggled to sell himself.

In *Applebee's America* the authors, Douglas Sosnik, a former Clinton adviser, Matthew Dowd, the chief strategist for the Bush campaign and Ron Fournier, a political writer, argue that "Great connectors" like Bill Clinton and George Bush were able to connect with people and win unlikely elections and re-elections because they conveyed a strong sense of assuredness and authenticity. They contend that it is much more important for voters to feel that a candidate is relatable and shares their "gut values" than for them to agree with the candidates on their political stances:¹⁵⁸

Voters don't pick presidents based on their positions on a laundry list of policies. If they did, President Bush wouldn't have stood a chance against Al Gore in 2000 or John Kerry in 2004. Rather, policies and issues are mere prisms through which voters take the true measure of a candidate: Does he share my values?"¹⁵⁹

While Bush and his campaign were able to convey this sense of commonality with conservative voters, Kerry struggled to connect with important segments of his party's base, especially African Americans. Although the aforementioned Democratic coalitions articulated exactly what was at stake for African Americans, Kerry the candidate was never able to energize them by tapping into their "gut values." Admittedly, those values were as diverse as the Black population itself, but there were enough issues which cut across socio-economic lines that he could have used to authentically express his commitment to fighting on their behalf.

¹⁵⁸ Sosnik, 14.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

His struggle to connect effectively with African Americans was due in part to his campaign's weak outreach to Black churches. While Black churches did not become an outreach priority until the fall for Democrats, according to Tiffany Watkins the Bush campaign and Republican Party activated a national network of pastors who served as ambassadors to the Black community for Bush:

It was new in the fact that, they used real people who were actually recognized in their community as ambassadors. So people were like, oh so and so's talking about President Bush? So you'd hear your local community leader on the radio talking about the President and that made a pretty powerful statement.¹⁶⁰

This cannot be blamed on his senior African American staff, many of whom were hired in the second half of 2004, but reflected the Kerry campaign's overall sense of entitlement regarding African American support. Why create a plan to energize and activate pastors of churches who had supported Democratic candidates in the past? As was outlined in the previous chapter, the answer to that question lies in the constant growth and evolution of the Black church, along with their mounting frustration at being taken for granted. Democratic candidates and the Democratic Party paid little attention to this evolution over the last two elections. Walters also placed equal blame on the Kerry campaign and Democratic Party for their failure to capitalize on the "mobilizing power of the Black church."¹⁶¹

While Walters blamed their ineffectiveness on "weak political resources of policy, money and mobilization," their lack of an organized Black Church outreach effort showed that they simply did not deem it *worthy* of necessary energy and

¹⁶⁰ Tiffany Watkins, interview by author, Washington, DC, August 29, 2008.

¹⁶¹ Walters, 182.

resources.¹⁶² This sentiment lies at the core of the frustration expressed by some African Americans inside and outside of the party who have complained for decades that it takes their support and votes for granted. Consequently, this lack of a coordinated outreach to Black churches, which Walters described as a “serious flaw,” rendered the Kerry campaign incapable of addressing the issue of same-sex marriage when Black pastors who opposed it began using it as a reason to support George Bush.

The Kerry campaign could not present a unified coalition of Black pastors to respond because they had not taken the time to reach out to African Americans in general and pastors in particular, with the same energy they used to court “soccer moms” and other swing voters. Here Walters astutely describes how that choice, along with a strategic abandonment of the South, resulted in unnecessary losses for Kerry on election day:

The battleground strategy devalues Black voting power by ignoring the South, except for the state of Florida. And although...George Bush won all of the Southern states, the margin in several of those states was not out of Kerry’s reach. With Kerry losing several Southern states by numbers in the mid-40 percent range, that addition of an achievable number of voters could have resulted in Democratic victories. It shows that the difference between the candidates in the 2004 presidential contest in the South was not so insurmountable but that with some effort additional voters could have been added to the Black voter base to make the Democrats competitive.¹⁶³

How Bush Won: The Four Year Campaign

Bush won 50.7% of the vote and Kerry won 48.3%. The election came down to Ohio where Bush beat Kerry by two percentage points. Echoes of the 2000 general

¹⁶² Walters, 182.

¹⁶³ Walters, Freedom, 176.

election lingered in reports of voter disenfranchisement across the state on election day. The difference was this time, Bush actually won the popular vote. The mainstream media declared that Bush's victory could be attributed to the political prowess of Karl Rove and the strategic genius of Ken Mehlman who openly discussed their methodical targeting plan in the weeks and months following the election. Although he was criticized for it throughout the campaign, Rove's risky strategy of focusing resources and attention on a smaller pool of potential voters worked. While his critics were right that the results of his strategy would not yield a landslide, the contentious political landscape should be considered. First, it would have been almost impossible for Bush to achieve a landslide, given the abysmal state of the economy and costly (in human lives and U.S. funds) war in Iraq. Second, he barely won the 2000 election, so a decisive reelection victory (like the one Clinton enjoyed in 1996) would only be possible if he had been able to make it through his first term without any major mistakes and controversies.

Given these factors, Rove, supported by Mehlman and other strategists, decided to start campaigning early and focus on voters they could win over by marketing Bush's values and personal strengths. Those who had already made up their minds would not respond to this strategy, but those who had not would give the President a big enough bump to at least win the popular vote in 2004. Although Rove and Mehlman were clear about their narrow targeting, their strategy included swing voters. The difference in 2004, was that swing voters were not the top priority—conservative and evangelical voters were. Leah Daughtry described the Republican

strategy as the “perfect storm of things” including their focus on Black evangelicals “who were newly active and most susceptible to their message.”¹⁶⁴

Ultimately the Bush Re-election team won the election because they organized their efforts with great precision and their candidate conveyed a sense of confidence and authenticity to “suspected” Republican voters, many of whom were evangelical Christians. This successful strategy also included efforts to reach African Americans in Black Churches which shared George W. Bush’s views on “moral issues” in general and same-sex marriage in particular. Not only did some Black pastors speak out in passionate opposition to same-sex marriage, many of them claimed the issue would be the reason they voted for Bush in the general election. Whether their congregations followed suit is almost impossible to ascertain. What is clear, is that Bush received a 2% increase in African American support in 2004. When viewed within the context of a weakening economy, war in Iraq and the continued devaluation of social programs, that increase is much more significant. Here, Leah Daughtry agrees with this assertion and does not hesitate to offer Black evangelicals as the explanation for Bush’s substantial increases in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Florida (See Chart):

The way things were going in this country, there’s no way he should have picked up any percentage points in the Black community. None. And I would contend, that it’s this church crowd. This particular set of folks who were enamored with the whole moral values thing.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Leah Daughtry, interview by author, Washington, DC, March 29, 2006.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

CHART

The African American Vote for the Republican Presidential Candidate, Selected States, 2000 and 2004¹⁶⁶

	2000	2004	(R) Gain/Loss
Oklahoma	N/A	28	N/A
Texas	5	17	+12
<i>Pennsylvania*</i>	7	16	+9
Delaware	9	17	+8
South Carolina	7	15	+8
<i>Ohio</i>	9	16	+7
Mississippi	3	10	+7
California	12	18	+6
New Jersey	11	17	+6
<i>Florida</i>	7	13	+6
North Carolina	9	14	+5
<i>Nevada</i>	8	13	+5
Georgia	8	12	+4
Maryland	7	11	+4

*Italics Indicates battleground states.

¹⁶⁶ Chart compiled from figures presented in: Robert C. Smith and Richard Seltzer, "The Deck and the Sea: The African American Vote in the Presidential Elections of 2000 and 2004," in *The Expanding Boundaries of Black Politics*, ed. Georgia A. Persons (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 265 and Gregg Sangillo, "The GOP & Blacks: An Inch at a Time," *National Journal*, January, 2005. Among the 23 states where an exit poll of African-Americans could be measured in the past two elections, Bush increased his black vote percentage in 17 states.

As has been discussed, Black pastors who were loyal to the President acted as “coalition coordinators” and appealed to their fellow pastors to support him. Some, like Bishop Harry Jackson, played that role very effectively. In other words, the Bush reelection campaign inched forward in their attempts to bring African Americans in to the Republican fold. Those few inches, when added to the other incremental inches gained through the targeting of white evangelicals and right leaning voters, was enough to win the election.

While the Bush reelection team may have won the campaign strategy battle with African Americans, they lost the “party-building” war because they were not able to build a sustainable connection with them. The primary reason the connection did not last was because while the campaign and RNC’s outreach to African Americans was a political and personal—according to his campaign staff and close associates—priority for Ken Mehlman, the Party’s platform remained the same as did the re-elected President’s domestic policies. In other words, Mehlman’s commitment to a more diverse Party did not take root, because the majority of Republican Party operatives, loyalists and supporters did not think it was necessary or important.

Hurricane Katrina was one of the reasons offered for the Democratic Party’s victory when they won the majority in the House in 2006. According to Democratic political veterans, doubt over the legitimacy of the war on terror, caused by continuous controversy and casualties in Iraq, also became a real liability for the Republican party heading into the 2006 election. Well before the election, former Commerce Secretary Bill Daley articulated this argument clearly when he said, “a lot

of people were standing with the Republicans because they had one issue that blocked out the sun: security, safety, ‘they can protect us better’ ...but two things blew a hole in that: Katrina and Iraq.”¹⁶⁷ Perhaps the Bush administration’s failure to respond expeditiously to such a catastrophic disaster also explains the Republican Party’s inability to continue the momentum they gained from their outreach efforts with African Americans in 2004. In 2006, there was a clear issue which directly involved and impacted African Americans that could be used as evidence that the administration and by association, the Republican Party, did not value the well-being or lives of African Americans. In the shadow of such a recent and grossly mismanaged tragedy, it was hard to portray the Republican party as committed to expanding its base. This, combined with Mehlman’s departure and the steady decline of the economy made it unlikely that the Republican Party would be able to increase African American support without doubling the ambitious efforts of 2004.

Mehlman took over the RNC following the election and seemed determined to continue outreach to evangelical Christians and African Americans building on the momentum of the campaign and values issues that energized some socially conservative African Americans. However, when Mehlman left the RNC any desire to broaden the party’s outreach and membership to include African Americans left with him. Yet the strategic victory he helped win, showed there was potential in the African American community for the Republican Party if it was willing to invest the time and resources to cultivate that potential.

¹⁶⁷ Roger Simon, “Bush Perceived Blunders on Iraq, Katrina Buoy Democrats in 2006,” BloombergNews.com, March 7, 2006.
http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=10000103&sid=aauss_7Y0WoU&refer=us

Now the discussion turns to faith-based initiatives, which many have argued were inspired by Rove's desire to win in 2004 as much as they were a genuine priority for President Bush.

“Everybody heard about the money and nobody knew anybody who got any.”¹⁶⁸

“Even people who know Mr. Bush are not always sure how much issues are shaped by his conscience and how much by the political calculation that this White House has refined to high science.”¹⁶⁹

Chapter Four: Faith-Based Initiatives

During George W. Bush’s first press conference as President of the United States, veteran journalist Helen Thomas, who was so well respected she was called on first at White House press conferences for decades, asked, “Mr. President, why do you refuse to respect the wall between the church and the state?” When the President responded that he “strongly respected” that important separation, Thomas interrupted and sharply replied, “You wouldn’t have a religious office in the White House if you did...you’re a secular official and not a missionary.”¹⁷⁰ Thomas’ tough question foreshadowed the challenges the Bush administration would encounter over his faith-based initiative, which was touted as the President’s signature domestic policy when he took office in 2001. The faith in faith-based initiative referred to churches, religious organizations and institutions that sponsor programs including food banks, prison outreach and troubled teen support groups that are socially beneficial to individuals and communities. According to C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, authors of *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 71% of Black churches of various denominations throughout the country were already running such

¹⁶⁸ Leah Daughtry, interview by author, Washington, DC, March 29, 2006.

¹⁶⁹ Bill Keller, “God and George W. Bush,” *New York Times*, May 17, 2003.

¹⁷⁰ “Overheard,” Freedom from Religion Foundation, ffrf.org, <http://ffrf.org/fttoday/2001/april01/overheard.html>

social programs by the end of the 20th Century. Consequently, Black churches had the potential to benefit greatly from faith-based initiative funding.

President Bush's announcement that he intended to make faith-based initiatives a domestic priority sparked a firestorm of both criticism and praise in the Black faith community. Prominent Black pastors, including Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., who criticized it, thought it would make churches beholden to the government while those who supported it believed it was an important acknowledgement of their work in the community. During President George W. Bush's first term, the relationships the White House nurtured with Black pastors through the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives enabled them to reach out to a particular segment of Black churches which they hoped would expand their base of support in the next election. The Bush administration used the promise of faith-based initiative funding to seal their appeal with conservative Christians and gain the loyalty and support of certain Black pastors and churches during the 2004 election.

Faith-Based Initiative Origins

Before making the connection between faith-based initiatives and the 2004 election, it is important to provide a historical backdrop for the concept. Although George W. Bush the candidate began talking about Faith Based Initiatives in 2000, he did not invent the model. Faith Based Initiatives are derived from "Charitable Choice," a significant component of the 1996 Welfare Reform law. According to Jo Renee Formicola, Mary C. Segars and Paul Weber in *Faith-Based Initiatives and the Bush Administration: The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*, Charitable Choice "is a

legislative provision designed to remove unnecessary barriers to the receipt of certain federal funds by faith-based organizations that provide social services” and consists of four important principles.¹⁷¹

The first is the notion that faith-based providers should be allowed to compete for funding on equal footing with secular providers regardless of their religious affiliation. This was of particular importance because faith-based organizations were considered an invaluable component of the safety net proponents of welfare reform hoped would catch families coming off the “rolls.” Next is the provision that seeks to protect religious organizations from being pressured to change their “culture and symbols” as a condition of receiving contracts and funding. Synagogues, for example, would not be forced to cover or remove the star of David from rooms where they held programs. The third component of Charitable Choice protects program clients and participants from discrimination by religious organizations. Furthermore, this component mandates that individuals who object to the religious nature of a program must be “provided with a secular alternative.” Separation of church and state is the foundation of the final component, which insists that government funds flow directly to programs and not to “inherently religious activities” like Bible Study.

Bob Wineburg, the author of *Faith-Based Inefficiency*, maintains that the seeds were planted for both Charitable Choice and Bush’s faith-based initiative during the Reagan administration. He used as evidence the fact that President Reagan said in a speech he delivered in the spring of 1982 that “churches and voluntary groups should accept more responsibility for the needy rather than leaving it to the

¹⁷¹ Jo Renee Formicola, Mary C. Segers and Paul Weber, *Faith-Based Initiatives and the Bush Administration: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 6.

bureaucracy.”¹⁷² Reagan delivered this speech to a mostly white audience of one hundred clergy but less than a month before this event he hosted seventy-five Black ministers from across the country. Wineburg argues that these events, combined with the 1980s domestic budget cuts “that sent local human service systems into a tizzy” were an indication of things to come.¹⁷³ What began as a few speeches calling for more support from local churches would become a part of the growing conservative “personal responsibility” mantra used to attack what they claimed was a failing “welfare” state.¹⁷⁴

While the evidence he presents—a few speeches to Black and white ministers—is thin, his discussion of Don Eberly is intriguing. Eberly worked in both the Reagan Administration and George W. Bush’s administration. Interestingly, for the latter he served as the Deputy Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and had this to say in *The Soul of Civil Society*, which he co-authored with Ryan Streeter:

The drive against the central welfare state in recent years has been driven by much more than concern over rising costs. It has been fueled by a desire to push back against the bureaucratization of America. The encroachment of... ‘social service professionals’... suffocates citizenship and discourages local nonprofessional caregivers from getting involved in healing and renewing the lives of the poor.¹⁷⁵

The first part of this excerpt is almost identical to the words President Reagan uttered a full twenty years earlier giving some credence to Wineburg’s claim that over the course of those years, conservatives have sought to limit federal aid to the poor while

¹⁷² Wineburg, 62.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Wineburg, 60.

¹⁷⁵ Wineburg, 60.

decrying the inadequacies of “big government.” The fact that Charitable Choice was included in the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, which eliminated modern day welfare, further supports his notion that Bush’s faith-based initiative was the 21st Century manifestation of a late 20th Century conservative concept.

Thus it was already mandated in Federal law through Charitable Choice, that faith-based organizations should not suffer discrimination when they competed for contracts to provide social services.¹⁷⁶ Bush’s faith-based initiative proposal was almost identical to Charitable Choice. Even before the Charitable Choice provision of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act there were faith-based groups receiving support from the government for their programs. However, according to Formicola, these organizations were incorporated separately from their churches and agreed to “keep separate books, to refrain from evangelizing, and to follow federal nondiscrimination standards in hiring.”¹⁷⁷ What made George W. Bush’s faith-based initiatives different from Charitable Choice and so controversial was that they did not ask religious organizations to fulfill those same requirements and conditions in order to receive government funding. Consequently, faith-based initiatives took on a life of their own in spite of their foundation in Charitable Choice, a concept that was already in play and supported on both sides of the aisle. Charitable Choice was one of the most popular domestic policy issues during the 2000 presidential campaign and both major party candidates supported the concept.

Bush’s support of the less constrained version of Charitable Choice was a reflection of his personal religious beliefs. As a born again evangelical Christian—

¹⁷⁶ Formicola, 5.

¹⁷⁷ Formicola, 4.

someone who experienced a spiritual rebirth, accepted Jesus Christ his personal Lord and savior and was committed to spreading his Gospel—he believed in the power of God to change lives and viewed religious organizations as conduits for that change. This belief played out during his time as governor of Texas where his support of intense faith-based rehabilitation programs foreshadowed his commitment to making faith-based initiatives the hallmark of his domestic policy. Under his leadership as governor, Texas became one of the first states to partner with religious organizations to help them serve the community. He allowed both “religious and non-religious groups to apply for social service contracts.”¹⁷⁸ His comments in his autobiography about a program called “Teen Challenge,” that attempted to address teen drug addiction through religious conversion, confirmed he was an early supporter of faith-based programs. “What caught my attention was how ridiculous it seemed for the state drug and alcohol agency to shut down a drug and alcohol program that was successfully fighting addiction.”¹⁷⁹ Mark Noll, mentioned in the previous chapter, suggests that Bush also had an affinity for programs like Teen Challenge because they provide the kind of supportive environment that helped him once he “turned from alcoholism.”¹⁸⁰

As Governor, Bush also initiated and signed a piece of legislation that “required governmental agencies to develop welfare-to-work partnerships with faith-based groups in a way that respected the unique religious character of those

¹⁷⁸ Formicola, 26-27.

¹⁷⁹ George W. Bush, *A Charge to Keep: My Journey to the White House* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 213.

¹⁸⁰ “The Jesus Factor,” *Frontline*, December 10, 2003.

groups.”¹⁸¹ Again, his emphasis was on the very aspect that previous faith-based overtly religious programs were required to temper through Charitable Choice. Bush’s support for Faith-Based programs when he was governor, combined with his desire to connect with the faith community in general and evangelical in particular, made his focus on Faith Based Initiatives during the 2000 general election seem like a perfect fit.

Faith-Based Initiatives: An Early Presidential Priority

In keeping with Bob Wineburg’s theory, Bush’s support of faith-based initiatives also provided a way for him to indirectly champion shrinking the welfare state by “encouraging the private sector to help people help themselves and using government as a catalyst for an end rather than an end itself.”¹⁸² The campaign believed this would appeal both to the conservative base (which included evangelicals) and religious Black and Latino voters.¹⁸³ It became clear, not long after the Florida recount, but even before his eventual inauguration, that faith-based initiatives would be Bush’s top domestic priority once elected. In addition to seeking the counsel of conservative scholars, including Marvin Olasky author of *Compassionate Conservatism*, for which Bush wrote the introduction, about the concept, he also started testing the waters with people in the religious community. Although his popularity with African Americans was low, this issue served as an unofficial olive branch to Black pastors. It accomplished two things: it was a

¹⁸¹ Formicola, 27.

¹⁸² Terry M. Neal, “Doubts Raised Over Bush’s Faith-Based Commitment,” *Washington Post*, February 22, 2005.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

symbolic gesture, but also served the very specific purpose of introducing an agenda to influential pastors who would spread the word that the Bush administration would be friendly to Black churches.

He met with a group of influential Black pastors before he was inaugurated. It was no mistake that these pastors were the leaders of Pentecostal churches and megachurches with huge congregations, many of which were much less aligned with the traditional Black political agenda. Bishop Charles Blake, the pastor of one of Los Angeles' largest churches and one of the most important leadership figures in the Church of God in Christ, was in attendance along with Pastor Tony Evans who had a significant Christian radio following.¹⁸⁴ Bush's critics claimed it was a way for him to reach out to the Black community, which was still reeling from the Florida recount and the knowledge that African Americans in the state had been disenfranchised.

On January 29, 2001, nine days after the inauguration, Bush officially made faith-based initiatives his signature domestic policy. Few outside of the preexisting faith-based programs were aware of Charitable Choice, so it appeared that this was a brand new concept. He accomplished this through two executive orders. In the first he created the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and appointed University of Pennsylvania Political Science Professor John Dilulio to head it. He used the second executive order to establish faith-based centers in five cabinet agencies: Justice, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Education and Health and Human Services. Here is an excerpt from the speech he gave to announce these bold measures:

¹⁸⁴ Dana Milbank and Hamil R. Harris, "Bush, Religious Leaders Meet; President-Elect Begins Faith-Based Initiative, Reaches for Blacks," *Washington Post*, December 21, 2000.

Government has important responsibilities for public health or public order and civil rights. And government will never be replaced by charities and community groups. Yet when we see social needs in America, my administration will look first to faith-based programs and community groups, which have proven their power to save and change lives. We will not fund the religious activities of any group, but when people of faith provide social services, we will not discriminate against them. There are still deep needs and real suffering in the shadow of America's affluence, problems like addiction and abandonment and gang violence, domestic violence, mental illness and homelessness. We are called by conscience to respond.¹⁸⁵

Much of this statement was an almost word for word description of the components of Charitable Choice which held that “faith-based providers are eligible to compete for funds on the same basis as any other providers, neither excluded nor included because they are religious.”¹⁸⁶ However, since most Americans knew nothing about Charitable Choice, this concept seemed innovative even as it made many people uneasy. In the past, the faith community was treated like other constituents, usually handled by the White House office of Public Liaison. This new creation was quite a departure from that standard because unlike Public Liaison, the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives office was actually housed in the White House not the Old Executive Office Building next door. Because of its immediate creation, announcement and proximity to the oval office, it appeared that it was literally and figuratively, the President’s personal project that would take priority over other traditionally influential constituencies including White Ethnic, Hispanic, Asian-Pacific and African American outreach. The fact that Bush only met with the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) twice during his first term in office and skipped

¹⁸⁵ George W. Bush, “On the Creation of a White House Office for Faith-Based and Community Groups,” *New York Times*, Jan 30, 2001.

¹⁸⁶ Formicola, 6.

the national NAACP Convention during the campaign, reinforced this notion with those in the African American community.

Almost simultaneous with his launch of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiative, Bush started his “minority outreach agenda” which included a summit for 400 urban ministers. The gathering of hundreds of lay people, several of them evangelical churches, was important enough to the administration and Republican Party that the Republican leadership was well represented at the event. Senator Trent Lott of Mississippi, the majority leader; Speaker J. Dennis Hastert of Illinois; and Representative Tom DeLay of Texas, the majority whip, all attended and gave speeches. One could argue that this summit was unrelated to the Faith Based Initiative office and simply one component of minority outreach efforts, but that argument seems naïve, given the natural link between faith-based initiatives and Black churches, many of whom provide invaluable services to their communities. Doubts about whether the Bush White House truly wanted to foster an authentic relationship with the Black church would surface throughout the 2004 election as well as during early debates over Bush’s efforts to institutionalize faith-based initiatives.

Critics and Supporters

When Bush used an Executive Order to create the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and establish faith-based offices in the five agencies, which could not be reversed, his decision was met with both support and criticism. The stakes of the discussion were raised once Bush and his administration made it clear they wanted to institutionalize faith-based initiatives through legislation.

The fundamental issue of separation of church and state was at the core of the debate over faith-based initiative legislation. Those who supported his agenda believed strict adherence to the separation of church and state limited the productivity and good works of religious groups across the nation. The critics were the loudest.

Conservative evangelicals feared Bush's program would lead to the regulation of faith-based groups, muffling their spiritual message and altering their "religious character." They wanted to protect the autonomy of religious institutions. They feared religious affiliated programs that accepted federal monies would be at risk for too much government intervention, which might adversely affect their message and mission. Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr. articulated it best at the National Baptist Convention of America when he said, "Once he puts his federal grant in your church, he comes back three months later . . . looking for your books. Behind federal money comes federal monitoring," he argued at the meeting in Fort Worth, Texas, adding, "The church must not trade its independence for a donation."¹⁸⁷ Pastor Dennis Wiley echoed Jackson's sentiment when asked about his views on faith-based initiatives:

I've always held the government at arm's length because I think that I see a very important part of my role as a pastor to be prophetic. I've noticed that they're too many ministers who have too cozy of a relationship with the government or certain political figures. I think it takes away the edge from our being able to speak truth to power, being able to really address and challenge the government in terms of doing what it needs to do and challenging those in political office as well.¹⁸⁸

Other progressive critics, like Washington, DC based Housing

¹⁸⁷ Ken Herman, "Bush's Faith-Based Initiatives: Black Clergy Could Add Surprising Support," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 11, 2001.

¹⁸⁸ Pastor Dennis Wiley, interview by author, Washington, DC, May 29, 2008.

activist Jim Dickerson, harshly criticized what to them looked like a thinly veiled political move to get more votes. Dickerson was among the group of pastors invited to the White House early on to discuss faith-based initiatives with Oklahoma Congressman J.C. Watts, the only Black Republican in the House of Representatives, and House Majority Leader Dick Armey. He had this to say about the meeting:

I listened, but it was quickly obvious this was just a smokescreen to recruit Blacks and minorities into the Republican party by bribing them with money and access to power -- even while covering up cuts in vital social programs and giving big tax cuts to the wealthy.¹⁸⁹

A long-time community-housing activist, Dickerson was quite familiar with pre-existing faith-based programs. He was perplexed by the notion that faith-based programs were being discriminated against, since he had always seen what he believed was a balanced relationship between such programs and the Federal government. Many of these programs had their roots, not in “compassionate conservatism,” but in the civil rights movement.¹⁹⁰

Many critics feared a different kind of autonomy of groups that would receive funding. Some religious leaders expressed concern that the government could conceivably be funding the “discriminatory theory and practices of certain religions.” These religions could for example, refuse to hire people to run their programs who are from a different religious background. Richard Foltin, Legislative Director and Counsel for the American Jewish Committee expressed this concern at a meeting at the Jewish Council for Public Affairs attended by John DiIulio in February of 2001.

¹⁸⁹ Neal Peirce, “Pioneering Minister Blows Whistle on Bush Faith-Based Initiative,” *stateline.org*, March 14, 2005.

¹⁹⁰ Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, From the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2005), 5.

He lamented that the government could end up awarding grants to organizations that discriminate in hiring practices. By restricting jobs to the faith of the providing group, these religious groups would be "putting up a sign, 'No Jew Need Apply' or 'No Catholic Need Apply.'"¹⁹¹ This concern was further complicated by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, an exemption that allows religious institutions to discriminate, based on religious faith, in their hiring practices. At the same meeting in February of 2001, leaders of Jewish organizations also expressed concern about the Nation of Islam receiving government funds because they "voiced anti-Semitic views."¹⁹²

Religious leaders further right of center spoke out against government funding extremist religious groups, which could compromise the nation's security. For example, Rev. Jerry Fallwell argued that government funds should not go to Muslim faith-based ministries because "the Muslim faith preaches hate."¹⁹³ Regardless of their concerns over other faiths, conservatives were very interested in evangelism. In fact, evangelism was the line of demarcation between liberals and conservatives. The former believed it would amount to "mandatory conversion."

Even Protestant Christians doubted other faiths would be able to escape discrimination if they applied for funding from a conservative administration, which they assumed, would leave much of the implementation to state and local officials. In other words, there was concern about the potential for rampant lack of oversight, which could result in federal funding solely for Christian-based rather than the

¹⁹¹ Thomas B. Edsall, "Jewish Leaders Criticize 'Faith-Based' Initiative; U.S. Aid on Social Services Groups Would Undermine Church-State Separation, Official Told," *Washington Post*, February 27, 2001.

¹⁹² Formicola, 9.

¹⁹³ *Journal of Church and State*, Summer 2001.

broader scope of Faith-based programs. As Rev. J. Richard Short, pastor of Covenant Presbyterian church in Portsmouth, Virginia asked, “Who is going to sit at the table and decide which applications get funded?”¹⁹⁴

Programmatic Evangelism and Evaluation

The administration and Office of Faith-Based and Community affairs was caught in a precarious position. If they said evangelism was allowed, they would win big with conservatives but risk their wrath if they didn't. Obviously, the converse was true for liberals. Furthermore, evangelism was not merely a philosophical issue. Because there were people, including George W. Bush and Marvin Olasky, who believed programs that made a “personal transformation” and relationship with Jesus Christ the focal point of client rehabilitation, evangelism was in play as a legitimate concern for both sides. For example, opponents of programmatic evangelism feared it would be too difficult to protect the “religious liberty” of clients if there was such an absolute belief in the efficacy of conversion.¹⁹⁵

Those who were wary of faith-based initiatives because they believed it eroded the foundation of the separation of church and state, were troubled by an apparent contradiction in the Bush administration's support of them. On one hand, the Bush administration argued that evangelical faith-based programs were more effective than secular programs because they were life transforming. Typically, religious worship, preaching and proselytizing were at the core of this transformation, which was both internal (spiritual) and external (behavioral). In fact, for evangelicals,

¹⁹⁴ *Journal of Church and State*, Summer 2001.

¹⁹⁵ Formicola, 176.

proselytizing or spreading the “good news” gospel of Jesus Christ is their mandate. On the other hand, Charitable Choice and the launch document for the Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives, clearly stated that proselytizing would be prohibited. The existence of religious organizations with successful separate programs complicated the debate.

A real concern with Bush’s belief in the transformative power of such programs was the difficulty with which their success could really be measured. A prison program called Inner Change based in Texas was an example of one of these programs. Inmates and guards shared in a series of interviews that they observed a decided difference in the behavior of those who participated in the program which teaches that a better future is dependent on a Christian conversion, and those who did not. The former were said to be “calmer, happier and more hopeful about their future” but still had the same amount of discipline problems as others.¹⁹⁶ For the Bush campaign, the inmate’s improved attitudes were examples of how faith-based programs can change lives and do so more effectively than secular programs, which are missing the religious component. Logically it follows then that for Bush, the overtly religious components of such programs, including preaching, proselytizing and worship led to the inner transformation, which is crucial to a successful program. Yet federal funding of such overt religious worship is explicitly prohibited in the 1996 Charitable Choice provision and Bush’s faith-based initiative. This contradiction, between the President’s belief in and past support of overtly religious programs, and the Office of Faith-Based and Community initiatives promise to

¹⁹⁶ Hanna Rosin and Terry M. Neal, “Converting Convicts to Christians; Texas Blesses Use of Strict ‘Christ-Centered’ Agenda at Small Prison,” *Washington Post*, November 27, 1999.

prevent the funding of such programs, was yet another reason for the controversy surrounding potential legislation.¹⁹⁷

As was mentioned earlier, Catholic Charities is an example of a faith-based “large service-providing non-profit” that had been receiving government funding for years. For critics of the initiative whose concerns were less political and more pragmatic, such well-established programs would clearly have an advantage when applying for faith-based funds. Programs like Catholic Charities had developed “standards of professional competency,” had no faith requirement and employed licensed and trained professionals to work with clients. According to Formicola, people who were familiar with these larger programs were concerned about how smaller programs and churches without the same level of infrastructure and that relied heavily on volunteers, would be able to meet fund management and staffing responsibilities. Also, the Bush administration focused a great deal on “performance-oriented” programs, which meant the programs necessarily had to have the capacity to evaluate and report their success or failure.

Ironically, small financially challenged churches that needed the most assistance would be the least able to afford outside program evaluation and would therefore be ineligible for funding.¹⁹⁸ This was underscored by a survey of 750 Black churches published by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies to ascertain how they viewed faith based initiatives. The survey, which was conducted between 2005 and 2006, found that non-denominational churches with 1,701 or more members were more likely to be aware of faith-based initiative funding restrictions

¹⁹⁷ Formicola, 174.

¹⁹⁸ Formicola, 176.

and requirements and were also more likely to submit applications. As discussed in the chapter on the Black church, most megachurches have adopted a corporate culture as a way to help them meet the needs of their large congregations and handle their financial and business affairs efficiently. Consequently, most megachurches already have the substantial infrastructures necessary to navigate funding requirements and avoid legal pitfalls, supporting the Joint Center's findings.

However, the vast majority of Black churches in the Baptist, Methodist and Protestant congregations have smaller congregations with less than 125 members.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, many of these smaller churches have minimal staff and part-time pastors making it nearly impossible for them to take the necessary steps to research and apply for grants. According to Lawrence Mamiya's 2006 "Pulpit & Pew: Research on Pastoral Leadership" report, 43% of all Black clergy are bivocational and the vast majority of them serve in small churches with less than one hundred members.²⁰⁰ In other words, applying for grants is expensive and if smaller churches have to choose between paying staff and bills or retaining an outside consultant, they will most likely choose the former.

The White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives attempted to address this concern with the Compassion Capital Fund from which money would be used to train individuals how to gain access to social service dollars.²⁰¹ To ensure that smaller or first time applicants would not be left out, the OFBCI decided to fund "intermediary" institutions which would distribute grants to smaller or inexperienced

¹⁹⁹ David A. Bositis, "Black Churches and the Faith-Based Initiative: What They Need to Know and What They Know," *Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Report* (2007), 3.

²⁰⁰ Lawrence Mamiya, "River of Struggle, River of Freedom: Trends Among Black Churches and Black Pastoral Leadership," *Pulpit & Pew: Research on Pastoral Leadership*, 2006, 32.

²⁰¹ Formicola, 131.

churches and organizations. A perfect example of this concept was the Foundation for Community Empowerment in Dallas, Texas. As one of these intermediaries that received Compassion Capital Fund money, it awarded Pastor Bryan Carter's church a \$10,000 capacity building grant. According to Pastor Carter, he had to attend at least six-three hour training sessions where he learned about different aspects of capacity building including information on strategic planning, fundraising and general tips for running a successful non-profit. After completing the training, his church applied for the funding, and was awarded the grant.

Several Black pastors who publically supported faith-based initiatives were less concerned about the details and more interested in the assistance. Some African American clergy including then President of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Dr. Robert Franklin, an umbrella group for six major African-American seminaries, were focused on the "immediate good to be achieved" by faith-based initiatives and were not as concerned about government meddling.²⁰² Based on his data, Republican pollster Frank Lutz agreed with this notion that many Black churches were more grateful for the help than they were suspicious of its ramifications. When interviewed by the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* Lutz claimed that Black churches "are the most faith-based segment of the population there is and they not only appreciate what Bush is doing but they support it."²⁰³

He did not, however, mention whether his data factored in religious denominations within the Black church. One could argue that Black churches of all denominations were natural targets for the Bush administration because of their

²⁰² Herman, March 11, 2001. Findings in Mamiya's Pulpit and Pew report support his claim.

²⁰³ Ibid.

proclivity towards social outreach. Seventy-one percent of Black churches across the nation are involved in the kind of social outreach that would benefit from faith-based initiative funding. Many of them are on the front lines in the nation's urban centers and rural areas. Lutz believed that Bush's efforts to help Black churches through faith-based initiatives were not politically driven. But he was nevertheless confident that the President would reap the political benefits that would likely come from the programmatic assistance.

Faith-Based Initiative Policy versus Faith-Based Politics

Just as there was external tension, there was also internal tension within the White House between White House OFBCI Director John DiIulio and the political team receiving pressure from conservative supporters of Bush who wanted evangelism to be allowed in faith-based initiative programs. DiIulio made it clear from the beginning of his time at the White House that he did not support programs with an evangelical component. This issue was brought up during a meeting where DiIulio answered questions about faith-based initiatives. At the meeting, Lynn Lyss of the National Council of Jewish Women, questioned DiIulio about a Texas church-run anti-drug program that specifically attempted to convert clients to believe in Jesus to cure their addictions. According to Lyss, this program received money from Texas after then Governor George W. Bush lifted restrictions governing state grants to local programs. When asked if the Federal government would award funding to such

programs through faith-based initiatives DiIulio said, "the answer to your question is a strong no."²⁰⁴

Another source of conflict between DiIulio and the Bush White House was his belief that government had a duty to carry the majority of the weight of social programs. He made his stance clear in a speech he gave before the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in Dallas in March of 2001. According to DiIulio, the nation's churches had neither the infrastructure nor resources to cover the cost of the country's essential social programs and to burden them would "abdicate the legitimate responsibility of government."²⁰⁵ Here, in an excerpt from his speech he argues, in a remarkable departure from the small government theory supported by the Bush White House and conservative movement, that faith-based initiatives cannot be viewed as a replacement for government support:

Even if all 353,000 religious congregations in America doubled their annual budgets and devoted them entirely to the cause of social services, and even if the cost of government social welfare programs was magically cut by one-fifth, the congregations would barely cover a year's worth of Washington's spending on [social] programs and never even come close to covering the program costs.²⁰⁶

These were remarks given by a man who was a policy intellectual. DiIulio's acuity and command of domestic policy issues was one of the core reasons Bush brought him to the White House. However, his intellectual and policy prowess were also responsible for forming an almost immediate tension between himself and the more

²⁰⁴ Thomas B. Edsall, "Jewish Leaders Criticize 'Faith-Based' Initiative; U.S. Aid on Social Services Groups Would Undermine Church-State Separation, Official Told," *The Washington Post*, February 27, 2001.

²⁰⁵ Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, From the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2005), 203.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

politically focused staff of the White House. An anonymous source commenting about the tensions within the White House between DiIulio and staffers talked about how differently they viewed the role of the government. “The view of many people [in the White House] is that the best government can do is simply do no harm, that it never is an agent for positive change. If that's your position, why bother to understand what programs actually do?”²⁰⁷

Many outside of the White House and academic circles did not know that John DiIulio brought a particular interest towards Black churches and their programs with him to the White House office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. In the spring of 2001, those outside of the White House would find out that there were certain Black ministers, academics and urban social workers who had a strong connection to DiIulio, when they voiced their support for him at a press conference that preceded a meeting with President Bush. The ministers read from a group-authored letter that included this strong statement:

We respectfully challenge and dissent from the sectarian and divisive rancor that has come from some public figures among religious conservatives. These individuals seek to deny faith-based groups in the Black community the opportunity to enter into constructive, non-sectarian alliances with public institutions, in order to serve more effectively those in greatest need.²⁰⁸

As much as this letter made it clear to the rest of the country that these pastors supported faith-based initiatives, it also sent a signal to the White House that they respected John DiIulio. DiIulio was able to take advantage of Karl Rove’s desire to broaden Republican support by acknowledging and inviting Black ministers into the

²⁰⁷ Ron Suskind, “Why Are These Men Laughing?” *Esquire Magazine*, January 1, 2003.

²⁰⁸ Franklin Foer and Ryan Lizza, “The Bushies’ Faith-Based Brawl,” *New Republic*, April 2, 2001, 14-17.

fold. Aware of the President's damaged image because of the 2000 election Republicans welcomed opportunities to find allies outside traditional African American leadership circles. Civil Rights veteran Walter Fauntroy's pointed accusation of exclusivity supports this assertion. An initial supporter of faith-based initiatives Fauntroy was widely criticized for standing next to the President as he signed the Executive Order to create the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. By Bush's second terms Fauntroy was speaking freely about his "disillusionment" with the initiative which occurred when it became clear to him that "the people who were let in were selective and were evangelical."²⁰⁹

Consequently the Bush administration went after Black evangelicals who were led by a previously untapped group of pastors. Megachurches were a fairly new phenomenon in the 1990s during the Clinton administration. By 2001 charismatic megachurch pastors including T.D. Jakes had reached significant prominence but had not been courted by the White House.

While Rove's motives were political, for DiIulio, the inclusion of urban Black ministers was a logical component of his mission to promote "ideas and policies to partner government with faith-based institutions."²¹⁰ The Bush administration replicated some of the Clinton administration religious outreach programs in order to connect with a new set of Black churches and ministers. Former Bush campaign and White House staffer Tiffany Watkins recalls helping to organize a Black pastors roundtable which was part of a larger effort to "reach out to everybody early."²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Adrienne Washington, "Obama Faith-Based Efforts Eye Evangelicals," *Washington Times*, July 20, 2008.

²¹⁰ Ron Suskind, "Why Are These Men Laughing?" *Esquire Magazine*, January 1, 2003.

²¹¹ Tiffany Watkins, interview by author, Washington, DC, August 29, 2008.

John DiIulio was particularly keyed into the connection between Black churches and social outreach because of his academic research on the inner city and working relationship with Rev. Eugene Rivers who ran the faith-based Ten Point Coalition in Boston, Massachusetts. Rivers supported faith-based initiatives and was not shy about sharing his assertion that Black churches and their pastors should benefit from federal funding. He was also keenly aware of the potential political ramifications of Bush's support of faith-based initiatives. There was the possibility that his support would result in a competition between the two parties for the support of Black churches and their congregations. Seeming pleased about the attention Black churches were receiving from the Bush administration and hopeful that it might generate some two-party competition, Rev. Eugene Rivers offered this observation. "Democrats always thought they had a proprietary right to Black churches. This will highlight some fissures that exist on the liberal-left side."²¹²

In the summer of 2001, in what many deemed a setback for the new Bush White House, John DiIulio resigned as the Director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. While DiIulio attributed his decision to leave to a desire to spend more time with his family, White House insiders and close associates said he was frustrated by how little true support and commitment he received as he attempted to put meat on the faith-based program bones. By the time of his departure, DiIulio was already unpopular with many conservative Christian groups because he was steadfast in his warning that social service programs that were evangelical in nature would not be eligible for government grants. Thus he met with opposition from

²¹² Dana Milbank, "Bush to Host Black Ministers; Faith-Based Initiatives May Circumvent Civil Rights Leaders," *Washington Post*, December 19, 2000.

people who had been supportive initially but turned against the proposed legislation. People including Marvin Olasky, a well-respected Christian conservative, went public with their displeasure and DiIulio was somewhat shocked by how “contentious” things became.²¹³

Faith-Based Initiative Funding Controversies

Leading up to the 2002 mid-term elections, James Towey, John DiIulio’s successor in the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was criticized by Barry W. Lynn, Executive Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, for appearing with Republican congressional candidates in six states including Arkansas, Illinois and Florida. While his purpose for traveling to those states was to discuss publicly funded grants to religious groups, he also made contributions to faith-based programs in some of those districts. Lynn offered a biting criticism of Towey’s travels saying, “The faith-based office is conducting seminars in congressional districts that just happen to have very close races coming up.”²¹⁴ And referring to the Compassion Capital Fund said, “They’ve created a kind of faith-based slush fund and they’re dangling it around the country.”²¹⁵ An article in the *Boston Globe* put it even more plainly:

The White House, fearful that African-American voters will cost Republicans control of Congress in 2002, is executing a carefully choreographed plan that uses the new Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to engage Black clergy and build support for the party in their congregations and neighborhoods.²¹⁶

²¹³ Elizabeth Becker, “Head of Religion Initiative Resigns,” *New York Times*, August 18, 2001.

²¹⁴ Formicola, 149.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Mary Leonard, “Bush Targets Support of Blacks Faith-Based Efforts

These observations foreshadowed a similar strategy that many believe the Bush administration executed with the same political motivation two years later during the 2004 Presidential election.

As faith-based efforts during President Bush's first term became increasingly associated with partisan Republican efforts and events, it became more difficult to argue that it was not politically driven. It is not unusual for such mixing of political activity and non-partisan efforts to occur during an election year. But for such cross over to occur involving faith-based initiatives, an already controversial issue, sent an interesting message: that faith-based funding could in fact be used as incentive for political support. While the Bush administration capitalized politically on the connections they made through faith-based initiative workshops and funding, it became increasingly clear that supportive Black pastors and churches received less than they were promised they would.

For example, during the 2000 Presidential campaign, Bush promised that in his first year in office he would provide \$1.7 billion for groups that cared for the poor, \$6.3 billion worth of tax cuts to encourage "giving" and \$200 million for a Compassion Capital Fund to assist local faith-based organizations through five agencies. In all he promised to spend \$8 billion dollars a year to support faith-based programs. David Kuo, a former White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiative staffer who worked under DiIulio and Towey, claims a very small percentage of that funding actually found its way to faith-based programs. For example, the \$200 million Bush promised would go to the Compassion Capital Fund,

Focus on Churches," *The Boston Globe*, March 11, 2001.

was reduced to \$100 million and finally to \$30 million. According to Kuo, that last amount was the sum total of all the money that was actually available for distribution to churches by 2004.²¹⁷ Furthermore, in June of 2001, close to the start of his first term, the tax incentives Bush promised were omitted from the \$1.6 trillion tax cut legislation.²¹⁸ However, when the White House released figures about their funding output to programs, the report painted a very different picture.

In spite of Towey's insistence that his office was committed to "maximum transparency" in their reporting, several scholars highlighted gaps in the numbers and called for more accurate and complete data.²¹⁹ For example, the White House reported that five agencies gave a total of over one billion dollars to faith-based groups in 2003 but did not indicate how that figure compared to grants distributed in 2003. Lisa Montiel, a researcher at the Roundtable on Religion and Social Policy thought it was important to know whether funding had increased or decreased since the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives opened in 2001. Similarly, Carol De Vita of the Urban Institute wanted to know "whether the portion of federal funds received by religious groups" was rising or declining. Again, the White House offered percentages for 2003 (various agencies awarded from 2 percent (Labor) to 24 percent (HUD) of all their grants to faith-based groups in fiscal 2003) but did not provide information for previous fiscal years.²²⁰ In the following excerpt from *Tempting Faith*, Kuo disputes Towey's 2003 figures and points to another empty

²¹⁷ David Kuo, *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 212.

²¹⁸ Allen, Cooperman, "Ex-Aide Questions Bush Vow To Back Faith-Based Efforts," *Washington Post*, February 15, 2005.

²¹⁹ Allen Cooperman, "Grants to Religious Groups Top \$1.1 Billion; Administration Lauds Initiative," *Washington Post*, March 10, 2004.

²²⁰ Cooperman, *Washington Post*, March 10, 2004.

billion dollar funding promise President Bush made during his 2003 State of the

Union address:

It was exciting...Unfortunately, the excitement was tempered by two realities. First there wasn't really any money available. The Iraq War was eating up countless billions, and the president's tax cut, combined with a less than booming economy, meant that government revenues were through the floor. That is why two of the items—the million mentors for disadvantaged kids in middle schools and the mentors for all 1.5 million kids with a mother or father in prison—were combined into one program. Second, the numbers weren't what they seemed...When the President announced our \$400 million dollar program for mentoring, it was actually a four-year program: \$50 million in each of the first and second years, \$100 million in the third and \$200 million in the fourth. Even if the program is included in the president's budget it won't necessarily get funded. It is just a proposal.²²¹

Kuo goes on to recall that the White House never signaled they were a budget priority or made a commitment to the programs, which “disappeared” within a month. As had become a trend in his administration, neither Bush nor the White House of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was held accountable for these “ghost” programs which were over before they began. Since they kept the press at arm's length, and news cycles, which focused on the “big stories” changed so rapidly, no one caught on to the series of grand announcements the President made about programs that never came to fruition.

Through faith-based initiatives the Bush administration promised support to thousands of programs in need, mostly to no avail. Faith-based initiatives, had they been fully or even half-way funded, could have been transformative for Black churches and other religious institutions stretching their resources to meet the needs of people suffering as a result of poverty, joblessness, drug addiction or a lack of

²²¹ Kuo, 226.

quality healthcare. What made the offenses exposed by DiIulio and Kuo particularly egregious, were the social programs that were simultaneously being cut. At the same time the administration slashed funding for housing and community development programs and eliminated literacy and education programs, it was knowingly underfunding faith-based initiative programs it claimed should fill in the gap.

In spite of this criticism, it is true that programs received funding as a result of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

The administration could and did accurately report that they provided support to faith-based programs across the nation. Where that support was provided became an issue of interest as the 2004 presidential cycle neared. As critics of faith-based initiatives kept a close eye on funding and where it was disseminated, they began to complain that program support was politically driven. According to a *Washington Post* article published in June of 2004, even aides to President Bush admitted that support for faith-based programs would help his reelection bid and “encourage evangelical Christians to mobilize to keep him in office.” They were also clear that such efforts “could give the ticket inroads in African American communities.”²²²

When it was reported that significant funding went to programs located in 2004 election battleground states, the connection between electoral politics and faith-based initiatives was more than plausible. Thomas Edsall reported in a 2006 *Washington Post* article that churches in Wisconsin and Florida, received a combined total of over three million dollars leading up to the 2004 election. Both men, Bishop Sedgwick Daniels and Bishop Harold Calvin Ray, were early supporters of Bush and Ray was even a delegate to the 2004 convention. In the same article, Edsall

²²² Allen, *Washington Post*, June 2, 2004.

mentioned several conservative organizations that received funding, including The Youth Institute for Youth Development which received \$7.5 million dollars over three years and used the money to award smaller grants to conservative organizations and groups. Even as reports like this one called attention to “strategic” programmatic funding, other reports surfaced indicating that the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and its agency branches were using “smoke and mirrors” to create the illusion of fulfilled promises.

While some in the media and critics followed faith-based initiative funding trails closely during the 2004 election, conferences planned by the White House and sponsored by the agencies flew under the radar. According to Kuo, the first White House conference on federal funding was held in Atlanta and was very successful. Over 2,500 people attended, at least half of whom were African American. Representatives, mostly from smaller religious and social service organizations, showed up to learn how to accurately complete funding applications and avoid legal difficulty. In spite of presentations Kuo described as “mind-numbingly boring,” attendees were extremely appreciative of the information and hopeful they may be able to fund new or expand existing programs.²²³ But based on the significantly reduced Compassion Capital Fund, Kuo estimated that less than 5 people out of the 2,500 attendees who applied for grants had a chance of receiving them. Nevertheless, the White House sponsored over twelve of these conferences between 2003 and 2004, attracting 20,000 people and covering every battleground state. A conference was held in Miami, an important city in one of the most critical battleground states, ten days before the election. Funded by the agency faith-based

²²³ Kuo, 210.

initiative offices, they occurred without media coverage or scrutiny. However as a former U.S. Labor Department political appointee, Leah Daughtry heard about the conferences which she discusses here:

The AMEs and Baptists would call the campaign and say you gotta do something because they're in our community they're having forums, they'll come in, during election time, September, October go into a city and have a grant writing workshop. Now what grants are the government giving in October of an election year? None. But you got em' sitting there. And so they get to do their spiel so the WH invites them to a grant writing workshop. In September. Now, it's so obvious but, if the Department of Labor sponsors it, who's gonna say anything?²²⁴

An important question the authors of *Faith Based Initiatives and the Bush Administration: The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* asked, was whether funding for social service programs actually increased to accommodate the anticipated influx of applications after the faith-based initiative launch in the various agencies. According to the authors, other long-time social service providers that received federal funding including Catholic Charities USA were skeptical of the President's original plan because "they saw no appreciable increase in funding and thought faith-based organizations were being invited to compete for a static amount of federal funding."²²⁵ For people like Jim Dickerson, who were familiar with the government's pre-existing relationship with such organizations, Bush's passionate commitment to make funding accessible to faith-based groups seemed misleading:

Every social program I've been part of these past 40 years had been explicitly 'faith-based' in one form or another and used government money. We've never been discriminated

²²⁴ Leah Daughtry, interview by author, Washington, DC, March 29, 2006.

²²⁵ Formicola, 175.

against because of our faith.²²⁶

When Kuo released *Tempting Faith* in 2006 it was initially criticized by the White House as salacious but turned out to be accurate in its central assertion that the administration had simply not lived up to its faith-based initiatives funding promises. Most of the so-called “new” programs Bush had touted over the years were being funded through existing budgets. For example, in 2005, Bush mentioned a \$150 million gang prevention program in his State of the Union Address. According to Kuo, funding for the three-year program was actually being taken from the already dwindling \$100 million Compassion Capital Fund request.²²⁷ Even before Kuo exposed the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives’ shortcomings in his memoir, there was public outcry from some Black pastors in the faith community against Bush’s failure to deliver on his promises. In 2003, more than thirty religious leaders who initially supported his faith-based initiative sent a damning letter to the President voicing their frustration over the administration’s betrayal of their trust:

Mr. President, 'the good people' who provide such services are feeling overwhelmed by increasing need and diminished resources. And many are feeling betrayed. The lack of consistent, coherent and integrated domestic policy that benefits low-income people makes our continued support for your faith-based initiative increasingly untenable. Mr. President, the poor are suffering, and without serious changes in the policies of your administration, they will suffer more.²²⁸

²²⁶ Neal Peirce, “Pioneering Minister Blows Whistle on Bush Faith-Based Initiative,” *stateline.org*, March 14, 2005.

²²⁷ Cooperman, *Washington Post*, February 15, 2005.

²²⁸ E.J. Dionne, Jr., “Faith-Based Talk -- Where’s the Action?” *Washington Post*, June 10, 2003.

The Unfortunate Legacy of Faith-Based Initiatives

This criticism was a clear indication that some in the faith community were aware of how programs were receiving much less than what was promised. However, those promises were made before the September 11th attacks. Kuo acknowledged that the focus shifted to the war but was also quick to point out that the administration's commitment to Faith-based programs and funding was expressed to the nation with an urgency that was not supported by action and significant new appropriations even before September 11th.

Although President Bush was fulfilling at least a portion of his campaign promises through the agencies he designated to disseminate faith-based funding, he attempted to take his signature domestic policy priority to the next level by institutionalizing it through legislation. However, both David Kuo and John DiIulio confirmed after their departures that the Bush White House had neither the policy expertise nor the desire to commit to the political machinations necessary to garner widespread bipartisan support for a bill. According to DiIulio, the Bush White House never really transitioned out of campaign mode. In that environment, particularly as it related to domestic affairs, "political calculation" trumped policy. In other words, ideas and rhetoric about faith-based initiatives were offered to the public through carefully crafted speeches and press conferences but those ideas were not supported by a process that involved the critical analysis necessary to produce sound policy proposals.

DiIulio places Karl Rove at the center of this environment in which “on-the-fly policy-making by speechmaking” flourished.²²⁹ In his unprecedented role as senior advisor to the President, Rove demonstrated that he clearly had a working knowledge of a plethora of policy concerns. However, here DiIulio criticizes both Rove and those working with and for him in the Bush administration for confusing that knowledge for “genuine expertise:”

Karl Rove and his people, who consistently talked and acted as if the height of political sophistication consisted in reducing every issue to its simplest Black-and-white terms for public consumption, then steering legislative initiatives or policy proposals as far right as possible. These folks have their predecessors in previous administrations but in the Bush administration, they were particularly unfettered... When policy analysis is just backfill to support a political maneuver, you'll get a lot of oops.²³⁰

DiIulio went on to describe how the Bush White House supported legislation they knew would not make it out of the House in order to appease their base:

The White House winked at the most far-right House Republicans, who, in turn, drafted a so-called faith bill that (or so they thought) satisfied certain fundamentalist leaders and Beltway libertarians but bore few marks of compassionate conservatism and was an absolute political nonstarter. It could pass the House only on a virtual party-line vote, and it could never pass the Senate. Not only that, but it reflected neither the president's own previous rhetoric on the idea nor any of the actual empirical evidence....I said so, wrote memos, and so on....As one senior staff member chided me at a meeting at which many junior staff were present and all ears, 'John, get a faith bill, any faith bill.'²³¹

The apparent lack of desire to craft a bill that would pass the House and Senate suggests that the administration cared more about the appearance of making the attempt. Since funding of programs was not dependent on the bill, its failure did not

²²⁹ Suskind, January 1, 2003.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

significantly impact the various offices of community and faith-based initiatives housed in the agencies.

President Bush and the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives were met with much resistance throughout their attempts to institutionalize faith-based initiatives. Yet the White House Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives survived all eight years of the Bush administration and was responsible for the creation of nine additional Offices of Faith Based and Community Initiatives in federal agencies for a total of thirteen. Unfortunately, as has been discussed, it never lived up to its promise. The dubious legacy of the White Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives also indicated the degree to which Bush's personal beliefs and values were trumped by politics and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to Kuo, President Bush was not fully aware of just how underfunded his faith-based initiatives were.²³² Could he then be justly accused of failing to back up his faith with "works"? As will be discussed in the next chapter, he clearly benefited politically from those promises and therefore more churches and pastors should have benefitted from their fulfillment.

Historically, second presidential terms—which do not operate under the weight of re-election pressures—provide a significant opportunity for presidents and their administrations to dedicate more energy and resources towards issues of particular interest to them. Much of what can now be considered successful about Bush's faith-based agenda developed and thrived during his second term. Program evaluation, accountability and execution all improved and flourished between 2005

²³² Kuo, 239.

and 2008. However, figures documenting new funding allocated specifically for faith-based programs remained ambiguous.

According to a 2006 survey done by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, fifty percent of Black churches bring in under \$250,000 annually. Only a little over one tenth of all Black churches reported an annual revenue of more than one million dollars. These figures illustrate the fact that a small minority of Black churches actually had the existing capacity and infrastructure to handle large grants. It also explains why African American church participation in faith-based initiatives was actually low, even as Jay Hein, the Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in 2006, claimed “interest” was high.²³³ The results of this survey support the argument that the promise of funding to Black churches was much more significant than the actual dissemination of grants. Certain Black churches, discussed earlier, benefited from faith-based initiative funding. Unfortunately, many of the Black churches that were “interested” in the federal assistance President George W. Bush claimed was their right to receive, saw a small fraction of the \$8 billion he promised to allocate per year. Most of them received nothing. Interestingly, the two domestic issues that were “top priorities” during Bush’s first term, faith-based initiatives and the constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage were never institutionalized in the form of legislation.²³⁴

²³³ Michael A. Fletcher, “Few Black Churches Get Funds; Small Percentage Participate in Bush’s Faith-Based Initiative,” *Washington Post*, September 19, 2006.

²³⁴ Neal, February 2, 2005.

“If the KKK was opposing same-sex marriage, Reverend Daniels would ride with them.”²³⁵

“Who said you can vote on the rights of other people? When has that been okay? That has to be questioned.”²³⁶

“But God’s plan it seems to me has been more for us to be coequal and to share the resources that God has blessed us to have on this earth and to be able to live to our full god given potential.”²³⁷

Chapter Five: Same-Sex Marriage

Same-sex marriage was one of the most provocative issues debated and discussed during the 2004 election. While same-sex marriage was mentioned during the primaries it garnered the most attention during the general election when both Democratic Presidential candidate John F. Kerry and President George W. Bush were forced to state their positions on the issue in front of the millions of Americans watching the debates on television.²³⁸ Although the issue of same-sex marriage had much of its own momentum around the country because of state based activism the Bush reelection campaign capitalized on that momentum and used it to appeal to certain Black churches and pastors who often hold more conservative views about homosexuality. Using networks established throughout Bush’s first term, the campaign specifically targeted evangelical churches and megachurches with a values message that diverted attention away from traditional “kitchen table” domestic issues. As a result, same-sex marriage became the issue many of these churches and their

²³⁵ Frank Phillips and Raphael Lewis, “A Hunt for Middle Ground: Travailing Voices Confidence on a Marriage Accord Today,” *Boston Globe*, March 11, 2004. In this excerpt Rev. Daniels is speaking about himself in the third person.

²³⁶ Dr. Ron Buckmire, interview by author, Washington, DC, October 19, 2008.

²³⁷ Pastor Dennis Wiley, interview with author, Washington, DC, May 29, 2008.

²³⁸ President George W. Bush and Senator John F. Kerry participated in three presidential debates which took place on September 30, 2004, October 8, 2004 and October 13, 2004 respectively.

members used to determine who they would support in the 2004 election. While polling indicates the majority of Black churches and their members did not flock to the Republican Party en masse because of this strategy, it is clear that some in the Black faith community publicly aligned themselves with Bush because of his anti-same-sex marriage stance. This support can be linked to his significant increase in African American votes in key states. This chapter will focus on the Bush campaign's successful use of same-sex marriage as a wedge issue as well as the cultural and historical context in which the controversy unfolded.

Their success can be attributed to three phenomena. First, President Bush came out in support of a federal constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage making his position on the issue clear at the beginning of the election year. Second, for the first time in decades, the RNC did not concede all support of African Americans to the Democratic Party. Instead they went after what they viewed as the most logical target: socially conservative African American evangelical Christians. They targeted their message to evangelicals and megachurches, knowing they would be more likely to connect with Bush around the issue. Finally, as the campaign progressed and ministers continued to voice their opposition publicly, the media and Democratic activists began to question whether they represented a significant segment of the Black church community. In 2004, ministers spoke out publicly against same-sex marriage in Massachusetts, Texas, Ohio and California. The intensity with which they voiced their opinions on the subject contributed to increased national visibility around the issue.

The lack of a coordinated response from Black ministers aligned with the Kerry campaign and DNC contributed to the public perception—and in some cases reality—that the same-sex marriage issue was driving African Americans to support President Bush.

This chapter's focus on the relationship between same-sex marriage and Black protestant Christians who opposed it in the 2004 election also provides another opportunity to complicate simplistic conceptions of the Black church. Black pastors held rallies and press conferences in cities across the country including Boston and Dallas, in the candidates' home states, condemning same-sex marriage as immoral. While the diversity of denominations and churches within the Black church makes it difficult to know how representative these pastors were of African American protestant Christians as a whole, historical and cultural trends regarding the treatment of homosexuality within the church provide some clues. I will pause here to discuss these trends before turning to a brief history of the same-sex marriage issue after which I will examine how the aforementioned phenomena contributed to the Bush campaign's successful use of the controversy as a wedge issue.

Homosexuality, Homophobia and the Black Church

According to several quantitative and qualitative studies conducted over the past twenty years, the majority of African Americans oppose homosexuality.²³⁹ In "Whosoever Will": Black Theology, homosexuality, and the Black political church," Todd C. Shaw and Eric L. McDaniel, argue that general

²³⁹ Persons, 137.

opposition to homosexuality within the African American community is connected to concerns about its impact on Black heterosexual marriage, the Black family, and raising children as well as its potential damage to already compromised images of Black masculinity, sexuality and gender roles.²⁴⁰ They cite studies that have identified a strong correlation between church attendance and African American intolerance of homosexuality. Historically, religion has often guided African American perceptions about homosexuality and been used to explain why it is wrong, obscuring many of the above visceral fears and concerns it evokes.

Shaw and McDaniel maintain that the three mainline Black Protestant denominations espouse interpretations of the Bible that view “homosexuality” as a sin and likely an “abomination.”²⁴¹ Here Pastor Dennis Wiley confirms the prevalence of these interpretations:

And then there’s a kind of biblical literalism or fundamentalism that is prevalent in many of our churches so that the Bible has become such an essential reference in our churches and in our communities, that people don’t approach it from a historical critical perspective.²⁴²

Using biblical “evidence” including Leviticus 20:13 and Romans 1:26-27, these churches teach that homosexuality is unnatural and goes against God’s purpose in creating man and woman.²⁴³ Consequently, homosexuality is often viewed as an illness or disease that can be “cured,” or a choice that can be corrected rather than a

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 168.

²⁴¹ Persons, 139.

²⁴² Pastor Dennis Wiley, interview by author, Washington, DC, May 29, 2008.

²⁴³ Leviticus 20:13: If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.

Romans 1:26-27: For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

biological phenomenon that cannot. This issue arose during the campaign season when Black pastors speaking out against same-sex marriage balked at comparisons being made by same-sex marriage proponents between the gay rights and civil rights movements. A common retort Black pastors who strongly opposed same-sex marriage gave to such comparisons, was that gay people had a choice to be gay but Black people could not select their skin color. African American gay rights activist Ron Buckmire says that “the infectious model of homosexuality” is also prevalent in the Black community.²⁴⁴ In this model adults express their fear that if children are exposed to gays and lesbians they will somehow become homosexual. According to Buckmire, opponents of same-sex marriage exploited this fear and used images of children in their ads during the Proposition 8 campaign in California.

However, Black protestant Christians do not have a monopoly on these views about homosexuality. They are consistent with the larger Protestant community. According to a 2003 Pew Research center study, over 50% of both Black and White protestants believed that “homosexuality was a lifestyle choice as opposed to a matter of biology.”²⁴⁵ Shaw and McDaniel include other reports from the Joint Center and the Policy Institute for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. However, based on the inconsistency in the data, the authors refer to research done by Schulte and Battle which concludes that “American religious orthodoxy” is a much larger determinant of homophobia than race, especially since there is rarely more than a ten point difference in percentages between them. Nevertheless, the significant role of the Black church in shaping African American attitudes about homosexuality cannot be denied. This

²⁴⁴ Dr. Ron Buckmire, interview by author, Washington, DC, October 19, 2008.

²⁴⁵ There was an eight point difference with 60% of Blacks versus 52% of whites expressing this view.

hard-line opposition to homosexuality in most Black churches has subsisted while African American gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered men and women have been a part of their congregations. They have not only filled the pews on Sunday but often been active in various ministries. Consequently, Black gay men and women have been and continue to be a part of the Black church tradition, but often as a silenced group within a broader church community that does not approve of a significant part of their identity.

As Shaw and McDaniel explain, Black gays and lesbians who belong to these churches “risk enduring homophobic sermons or alienation if their homosexuality is ever openly disclosed.”²⁴⁶ Meanwhile, heterosexual members and leaders of the church who are often aware that there are gay and lesbian members in the congregation, accept their presence and embrace them as fellow Christians as long as they remain silent about their sexual orientation. This “don’t ask, don’t tell” phenomenon has been well documented and is often discussed outside of the church in academic and informal environments. Here Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr. confirmed the prevalence of this unfortunate dynamic when recalling a disturbing but typical experience he had at a Black church where he was a guest in the pulpit:

I was with a pastor of a church one Sunday and he knew several members of his church and choir, musical staff were gay and we all rejoiced in the singing and in their talent. Then at some point he left his central message and started preaching about homosexuality... We accept the service of people who are gay, the talents of people who are gay, the tithes of people who are gay and then attack them as a testimony of our religiosity. And that is hypocritical.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Persons, 41.

²⁴⁷ Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., interview by author, March 18, 2009.

It has been documented that homophobia in the Black church marginalizes Black gays and lesbians and reinforces a dangerous intolerance for heterosexual members, which can lead to everything from broken families to hate speech and crimes. However, both inclusive mainline Black churches and Black “gay-led” congregations exist as well. The former are typically what Shaw and McDaniel refer to as “Black Political Churches” which “see a political identity as one of their many salient identities—spiritual salvation being foremost.”²⁴⁸ These churches are led by ministers like Rev. Dennis Wiley, who along with his wife, Co-pastor Christine Wiley, espouses a theology that is inclusive of people of all socio-economic backgrounds, races, gender and sexual orientations. Here Pastor Wiley shares his progressive views about same-sex marriage:

My philosophy on gay marriage is that I am fully supportive of it. I don't see how you can genuinely say that you're inclusive that you're really welcoming and affirming human beings into your fellowship if you allow them to be included up till a point. And then when it comes to perhaps the most important decision that a human being can make in terms of who he or she will spend the rest of his or her life with in a committed monogamous, loving relationship, then the church says no.²⁴⁹

Gay-led Black churches, many of which were founded in the late seventies and early eighties, focus on the Bible's message of love and acceptance and eschew narrow interpretations of a text that has been used throughout history as a tool of subjugation and division. Gay-led churches that focus on an “ethic of love” include Unity Fellowship Church, which has 15 congregations across the nation and Metropolitan Community Churches which has congregations in over 40 states.

²⁴⁸ Persons, 142.

²⁴⁹ Pastor Dennis Wiley, interview by author, Washington, DC, May 29, 2008.

Yet within the Black church tradition, these inclusive and gay-led Black congregations, though growing in number, are anomalies. Figures from the Black Pride Survey discussed in the Shaw and McDaniel article support this assertion. In the survey, 43% of all respondents said they had negative experiences within Black churches, 31% indicated both negative and positive experiences and 26% claimed they had positive experiences.²⁵⁰ Clearly, the vast majority of Black Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal and nondenominational churches do not condone homosexuality. Based on data regarding levels of religiosity within the Black church it is feasible to assume that more evangelical churches within these denominations would fall closer to the “homosexuality as a curable disease or addiction” end of the spectrum while many mainline churches would exist just to the left at the “don’t ask, don’t tell” point on the continuum.

It could be argued that same-sex marriage, an issue about same-sex couples being able to marry each other and receive the same rights as heterosexual couples is at the opposite end. According to this hypothetical spectrum, with the exception of the aforementioned anomalies, both mainline and evangelical churches would oppose same-sex marriage. In other words, it is quite plausible that in 2004, the issue of same-sex marriage struck a chord with conservative evangelical Black Pastors as well as mainline and non-denominational pastors who felt morally bound to oppose it. However, as will be discussed later in the chapter, pastors of mainline churches who may have been opposed to same-sex marriage, did not come out against the issue.

²⁵⁰ Persons, 144.

Same-Sex Marriage: A Brief History

As has already been mentioned, the tensions which grew within the Black church community over the issue in 2004, were a reflection of the controversy brewing in the larger Christian community and on the national stage. The debate over “same-sex marriage” did not arise spontaneously during the 2004 presidential election. Therefore, just as it was important to begin the chapter with a discussion of homosexuality and the Black church, it is important to provide a historical context for the issue that garnered so much attention that year.

Like most issues of national significance, the struggle for full marriage rights for same-sex couples is one component of a larger movement. The current same sex marriage issue stems from the more “conservative” branch of the original organized gay rights movement, which was born in the early 1980s and focused primarily on achieving progress through established political channels. Its leaders, including San Francisco City Councilman Harvey Milk believed that equality and equal rights would be achieved most effectively from “within.” Taking cues from the Civil Rights and Women’s movements, gay rights activists lobbied politicians, sought public office themselves and used the judicial system when necessary to further their cause.

Although less visible and overtly pernicious than violent hate crimes against gay men and women, a historically egregious form of discrimination gay couples experienced occurred when their partners became ill or died and they had no legal rights to make decisions or claim property. Furthermore, they could not claim each other on health insurance policies or file taxes jointly or enjoy any conveniences that married heterosexual couples were entitled to and benefited from. It became clear that

a push for same-sex marriage rights in the courts created an arena in which many of the gay community's equal rights grievances could be articulated and hopefully addressed by the government.

Over the last thirty years, gay rights court cases have run the gamut from litigation focused on sodomy laws to suits brought by couples who directly challenged states that did not allow them to apply for marriage licenses. Within the last decade, among some of the most famous cases were *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health* (2003) and *Lewis v. Harris* (2006).²⁵¹ In *Goodridge*, a lesbian couple applied to the Massachusetts Department of Health for a marriage license and was denied because the state did not recognize same-sex marriage. Julie and Hillary Goodridge sued the department arguing that the denial "violated their right to individual liberty and legal equality as guaranteed by the Massachusetts Constitution."²⁵² The basis for the state's opposition to same-sex marriage was anchored in its belief that same-sex marriage would not promote procreation or ensure a good child-rearing environment and would negatively impact state financial resources. The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court decided 4-3 in favor of the couple stating that the state's constitution "requires the government to offer the protections, benefits and obligations conferred by civil marriage to two individuals of the same sex who wish to marry."²⁵³ Chief Justice Margaret Marshall explained in the majority opinion that the only basis for the state's exclusion of same-sex couples

²⁵¹ "The Constitutional Dimensions of the Same-Sex Marriage Debate," *Pew Forum* November 21, 2008.

²⁵² "The Constitutional Dimensions of the Same-Sex Marriage Debate," *Pew Forum* November 21, 2008.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

from the institution of marriage was a disapproval of their lifestyle which the court held was not a “constitutionally adequate reason” for denying marriage benefits.

The plaintiffs in *Lewis*, inspired by *Goodridge*, filed suit in New Jersey, where the state Supreme Court found that the state’s constitutional guarantee of “legal equality” required the legislature to grant the same rights and benefits to same-sex couples as were enjoyed by opposite-sex couples. However, unlike in *Goodridge*, the court left it to the legislature to decide whether those rights should be extended through civil unions, or same-sex marriage. The New Jersey state legislature would go on to pass a measure allowing gay couples to enter into civil unions not same-sex marriage. On the state level, other gay couples seeking equal rights found some solace in civil unions and domestic partner designations.

As of January of 2009, New Jersey, Vermont and New Hampshire allow civil unions and California has domestic partnerships. Although they are often assumed to be almost identical to marriage, there is a significant difference between Civil Unions and Same-sex marriage. Benefits granted through Civil Unions, like shared health insurance and the right to visit a partner’s hospital room, do not offer the same amount of state-wide benefits that same-sex marriage does. This explains why Civil Unions are often thought to be a poor alternative to same-sex marriage, which offers all of the transferable rights and benefits that married heterosexual couples are guaranteed by the state. The domestic partner designation raises similar concerns.

Yet even in the two states, Massachusetts and Connecticut, where same-sex marriage is currently legal, gay couples do not have access to the federal benefits associated with marriage because of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA),

signed by President Clinton, which stated that “The Federal Government may not treat same-sex relationships as marriages for any purpose, even if concluded or recognized by one of the states.”²⁵⁴ Consequently, couples married in Massachusetts, Connecticut and California, cannot take advantage of the more than 1,000 federal benefits of marriage including family leave and immigration rights for spouses. Significantly, the two things that all three of the designations share, are the fact that none of them are transferrable to other states and none of them enable access to federal benefits. In other words, if a gay couple marries in Massachusetts or another couple has a domestic partnership in Vermont, neither couple can file joint federal taxes and if either couple moves to Georgia, their rights will not move with them.

So even as states legally acknowledge and allow same-sex marriage and domestic partnerships and civil unions are celebrated, the state-to-state limitations and federal exclusions are crippling to many gay couples. However, for several states where there is strong state-wide opposition to same-sex marriage, the federal exclusions guaranteed through DOMA do not go far enough. These states have responded by changing their constitutions to ensure a singular interpretation of marriage. Currently, 30 states have constitutional amendments using language that restricts marriage to one man and one woman. A majority of the 30 states with constitutional amendments also include language that has the potential to adversely impact other legal same-sex relationships including civil unions or domestic partnerships.

²⁵⁴ “Same Sex Marriage, Civil Unions and Domestic Partnerships,” *National Conference of State Legislatures, ncsf.org*, November, 2008.

Same-Sex Marriage and the 2004 Presidential Election

Passage of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 1996 is a clear indication that same-sex marriage was a controversial issue before the 2004 Presidential election. In fact, it was a large enough part of the political and public discourse that in the 2000 presidential election, both Vice President Al Gore and George W. Bush stated their positions on the issue. Gore made it clear during the 2000 campaign that he was in support of civil unions but against same-sex marriage. In that election, Bush's position on Same-sex marriage was that it was an issue that should be left to the states to decide. Yet, nothing compares to the attention the issue received in the 2004 election when it seemed to take on a life of its own. Questions from the moderator Gwen Ifill in one of the presidential debates and the vice presidential debate, resulted in tense moments between the candidates.

Same-sex marriage was also another area where Senator Kerry was accused of “flip-flopping” because while he and his running mate Senator Edwards clearly stated that they believed marriage was between a man and a woman they were both in favor of “partnership benefits” as he explained during the debate:

We both believe that -- and this goes onto the end of what I just talked about -- we both believe that marriage is between a man and a woman. But we also believe that gay and lesbians and gay and lesbian couples, those who have been in long-term relationships, deserve to be treated respectfully, they deserve to have benefits.²⁵⁵

According to Sean Cahill in *The Future of Gay Rights in America*, the views expressed during this debate about same-sex marriage were representative of both the Republican and Democratic views on the issue as far back as four election cycles.

²⁵⁵ *Commission on Presidential Debates*, <http://www.debates.org/pages/about.html>

Here Cahill describes how Republican activists and candidates have openly denounced same-sex marriage and gay rights since the 1990s:

Pat Buchanan denounced same-sex marriage and legal protections for gay people at the 1992 Republican convention; six other speakers also denounced gay people and/or legal protections for gay people. In 1996, Republican candidates criticized efforts by same-sex couples to gain access to the institution of civil marriage, and Congress debated and passed the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act. In 1999 and 2000, Republican candidates denounced the Vermont high court ruling in support of equal benefits of gay couples, and then Governor George W. Bush announced his opposition to sexual orientation nondiscrimination laws, which he portrayed as “special protections.”²⁵⁶

The issue received such remarkable attention and coverage in 2004 because the Bush reelection campaign under the direction of Karl Rove, was purposefully positing it as a clear difference between the two candidates. To underscore that difference, President Bush came out in support of a constitutional amendment in early 2004. Although it appeared that Bush confidently backed the amendment, at the time, officials close to the White House claimed his advisors carefully weighed the decision and delayed the announcement. He talked about the issue for six months in private before officially throwing his weight behind it. During a primary debate back in 2000, Bush, when asked about his position on same-sex marriage, was quoted as saying, “Don’t try to trap me in this states’ issue like you’re trying to get me into.”²⁵⁷ But the day after announcing the start of his general election campaign in 2004 he used his proclamation of support for the amendment to accuse Senator John Kerry of waffling on the issue of same-sex marriage.

²⁵⁶ H.N. Hirsch, ed., *The Future of Gay Rights In America* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 49.

²⁵⁷ Mike Allen and Alan Cooperman “Bush Backs Amendment Banning Gay Marriage; President Says States Could Rule On Civil Unions,” *The Washington Post*, February 25, 2004.

In 1996 Senator Kerry was one of 14 senators who voted against the Defense of Marriage Act which President Clinton signed. Since the act denied federal recognition of same-sex marriages which was consistent with Kerry's 2004 stance that a federal amendment was unnecessary but slightly inconsistent with his statement that, "I believe, as a matter of belief, that marriage is between a man and a woman" the Bush reelection campaign said he was flip-flopping.²⁵⁸ In retrospect Bush's labeling of Kerry as a waffler on this issue was a stretch, particularly because it appears that Kerry's personal belief did not translate into a desire to deny gay couples certain rights through supporting either DOMA or a constitutional amendment.

Ironically, Bush's accusation of Kerry may have effectively diverted attention away from the shift in his own position on the issue. Apparently, the benefit of Bush potentially appealing to evangelical Christians outweighed the cost of entering the discussion about what he had previously argued was an issue for states to decide. Representative Marilyn Musgrave (R-CO) introduced a version called the Federal Marriage Amendment which White House Press Secretary, Scott McClellan said was in line with the President's "principles."²⁵⁹ Musgrave's amendment was also heavily supported by conservative evangelical groups including the Alliance for Marriage, a non-profit organization that promotes marriage and reforms "designed to strengthen the institution of marriage". The Alliance for Marriage had been lobbying for an amendment since 2001 and found a willing sponsor in Representative Musgrave.²⁶⁰

In spite of his prior position on same-sex marriage, on February 24, 2004 President Bush announced his support for a constitutional amendment that would

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Allen, February 25, 2004.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

clearly define marriage as the union of a man and a woman. In his speech, Bush argued that same-sex marriage would weaken society:

The union of a man and woman is the most enduring human institution, honored and encouraged in all cultures and by every religious faith. Ages of experience have taught humanity that the commitment of a husband and wife to love and to serve one another promotes the welfare of children and the stability of society. Marriage cannot be severed from its cultural, religious and natural roots without weakening the good influence of society. Government, by recognizing and protecting marriage, serves the interests of all.²⁶¹

Same-Sex Marriage: A Wedge Issue

While Bush placed the symbolic power of the White House behind the amendment banning same-sex marriage, he said state legislatures should determine what kind of rights and benefits gay couples are entitled to. He stopped short of condoning civil unions and domestic partnerships but the amendment would enable states to support and allow such arrangements. Often overlooked in the hoopla surrounding Bush's support of a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage is the protracted process it involves. Such amendments require two-thirds vote in either chamber of Congress in addition to ratification in 38 states, which is extremely difficult to accomplish. But by coming out in support of the constitutional amendment, even if it had little chance of happening, Bush appealed to his base and kept the issue in the national spotlight. His support of the amendment sent a message that he was opposed to same-sex marriage. The Bush campaign used this clear stance to energize evangelicals, who they knew would get behind the issue.

²⁶¹ Allen, February 25, 2004.

According to a USA Today article published on September 27, 2004, Karl Rove desperately wanted to motivate the “4 million Christian conservatives who had failed to vote, despite GOP expectations, in the 2000 election.”²⁶² As Bush’s top political strategist, Rove clearly thought Same-sex marriage would energize some of those “missing voters” from the 2000 election. According to Pastor Bryan Carter, Rove and the Bush campaign tapped into an issue that many Black Christians were passionate about:

I think that some parties, I think the conservative party knows our value system and I believe that there’s certain hot buttons in our culture that historically attract churches and I feel like those may have been utilized to influence us or to attract us to certain agendas.²⁶³

They also believed the Bush campaign was using same-sex marriage as a wedge issue to divide potential Kerry supporters within the Black community and to shore up support of Bush’s evangelical supporters. However, Deal Hudson, former publisher of the Catholic magazine *Crisis* and Catholic outreach advisor to the Bush reelection campaign writes in *Onward Christian Soldiers: The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States* that this accusation was misplaced. According to Hudson, the Massachusetts Supreme Court’s decision in *Goodridge* to allow same-sex marriage in November of 2003 is what injected the issue into the 2004 campaign.²⁶⁴ White House staffer Ralph Reed confirmed this stating, “The gay marriage issue was not on anybody’s radar screen until eight

²⁶² Walter Shapiro, “Ohio Churches Hope Marriage Ban Prods Voters To Polls,” *USA Today*, September 27, 2004.

²⁶³ Pastor Bryan Carter, interview by author, March 3, 2009.

²⁶⁴ Deal W. Hudson, *Onward Christian Soldiers: The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2008), 89.

members of the Massachusetts Supreme Court decided to redefine marriage.”²⁶⁵

However, the fact that the issue was not originally a part of the campaign strategy did not preclude the Bush Reelection team from incorporating it into their outreach, especially after Bush signed on to the idea of the federal amendment.

As the campaign season heated up and Black pastors opposing same-sex marriage received more attention, it became clear that this issue was striking a chord with Black evangelical Christians. The Bush campaign had used their outreach staff over the course of the campaign—the four years of Bush’s first term—to make ministers feel like they were part of a community. They had essentially stored the political capital they accumulated over four years and were able to cash in during the campaign as conservative and evangelical Black pastors came out against same-sex marriage and simultaneously aligned themselves with President Bush. These conservative pastors who were actively involved in the Bush reelection campaign, including Bishop Harry Jackson, pastor of Hope Christian Church in College Park, MD, were speaking out against it publicly, while simultaneously using same-sex marriage as a way to bring other pastors into the Republican fold. The image of a group of Black ministers crowded around a microphone speaking out not in favor of rights for a marginalized group, but against them, was perplexing to many progressive Americans.²⁶⁶ How could Black preachers who, because of the central role Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. played in the civil rights movement, had become a symbol for the struggle for racial equality, be so vehemently opposed to same-sex marriage?

²⁶⁵ Hudson, 89.

²⁶⁶ John McElhenny, “Church Groups Rally on Same-sex marriage,” *The Boston Globe*, March 8, 2004.

Inherent in the question is the notion that these pastors believed same-sex marriage was a civil rights issue: they didn't. Furthermore, shock and confusion at their outspoken opposition to same-sex marriage, further supported the argument expressed in previous chapters that Black churches and pastors are often stereotyped as monolithic rather than complex entities. Here, Rev. Leah Daughtry discusses the fundamentalist theology of Pentecostal churches, many of which lean towards Lincoln and Mamiya's "otherworldly" and "privatistic" dialectics which devalue a connection to the social concerns:

It makes absolutely no sense that the people who are in the worst economic shape would vote against what seems to be in their personal interest. George Bush is not in control of their finances and neither was Bill Clinton as far as they're concerned. God blesses you with what he wants you to have. That's the theology. If you get that, then you understand why they can't vote against their economic interests. Because actually they think they're voting in favor of their economic interests by voting for the person whose moral authority lines up with theirs.²⁶⁷

Same-Sex Marriage and Black Evangelical Churches

While it may not have been a top issue for most voters, the issue of same-sex marriage certainly seemed to be generating a lot of attention in the African American church. Black pastors held press conferences in Massachusetts, Illinois and California expressing their outrage over same-sex marriage and comparisons between the gay rights movement and civil rights movement.²⁶⁸ Later in the campaign season, as Rev. Jackson, Sr. toured Black churches across the country expressing his support for John Kerry, he remembers encountering pastors who voiced their concerns about same-sex

²⁶⁷ Leah Daughtry, interview by author, Washington, DC, March 29, 2006.

²⁶⁸ Yvonne Abraham, "On This Issue, Allies are on Opposite Sides," *Boston Globe*, March 10, 2004.

marriage in the pulpit. When it was his turn to speak Rev. Jackson would attempt to place the issue alongside other issue he felt were of greater significance to their everyday lives:

In 2004 I would go to certain churches in Ohio and other states on Sunday morning sometimes with 2,000 people. I'd hear the reverend say some strong thing about how he was against same sex marriage. So I would ask the church members how many of you in here today support Medicare? All the hands went up. Support livable wages? All the hands went up. Support affirmative action? All the hands went up. Are against the war in Iraq? All the hands went up. How many of you have ever been invited to a same sex marriage? No hands went up. How does an issue that is not on your agenda become the basis for your vote? No one's ever asked you to perform one or to attend one. So why would you take a moral abstraction over Medicare, jobs, wages, education and affirmative action? Everybody just kind of laughed because you realized it was a straw man issue.²⁶⁹

Democratic activists became increasingly concerned about the amount of attention the issue was receiving in churches like these and feared that it could hurt their candidates in battleground states. Their fear was that the cultural issue of same-sex marriage would eclipse economic and social justice issues.

In what, according to polls, was shaping up to be a close contest, both parties and campaigns had to proceed with caution, even as they tried to stay true to their core base constituents. As early as March of 2004, John Ritter of USA Today observed that "Republicans don't want to appear intolerant...Democrats want to avoid a 'gay party' label."²⁷⁰ In the same article, Matt Foreman, former Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force along with other gay rights groups expressed concern about conservative's use of same-sex marriage as a divisive strategy. Here, Rev. Daughtry, who was working with the Kerry team in 2004,

²⁶⁹ Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., interview by author, March 18, 2009.

²⁷⁰ John Ritter, "Gay-Marriage Backers Seize Opportunity," *USA Today*, March 22, 2004.

describes how the campaign and Democratic Party were not equipped to deal with the damage the issue was doing to their outreach efforts until it was too late:

In many ways we were blindsided. We didn't understand how big a wedge this was. We think we can explain away everything intellectually. That's our party, we're gonna talk it to death. So if you can just make people understand then it will all be fine. No this is hitting an emotional chord with folks and they weren't targeting everybody. This is a very precise and targeted message for a set of people for whom this will resonate. And we had no comeback for that.²⁷¹

The Democrats were simply not prepared to deal with this momentum resulting from the Bush campaign and Republican Party's substantial outreach to Black evangelical pastors. Furthermore they were never able to formulate a unified message of their own around the issue of same-sex marriage and left Black pastors who were loyal to the party with no talking points with which to respond.

Would the issue of same-sex marriage drive a wedge between some African American voters and the Democratic party? The general consensus appeared to be that the issue certainly had the potential to do just that. There were certain Black churches and Black pastors who latched on to the issue rather than more traditional liberal issues including poverty, joblessness and inequities in the criminal justice system. In some churches same-sex marriage took the focus off of domestic issues that disproportionately affect African Americans and removed the sense of urgency that was present in the 2000 election. Pastor Carter, who leads an historically active and nondenominational megachurch, recalls how pervasive the issue of same-sex marriage became for Black pastors like him who opposed it biblically:

²⁷¹ Leah Daughtry, interview by author, Washington, DC, March 29, 2006.

For many of us in the Black church it became our whole determination between who we voted for...was based on who was going to enforce the marital issue. I believe you've got to look at it holistically and I don't think that happened. What happened was we had rallies in our city where this is what we talked about and we stood in our pulpits and tried to declare this is the way to go but in turn we just missed out on anything else. So we made that the chief issue. Because we've got people in our church that hold to this values piece you know and so they vote based on abortion and they vote based on the marriage issue. That's all they see is the abortion and marriage. They want me to always to lean that way but I tell them it's more to it than just those two issues.²⁷²

The question is whether their fervor over same-sex marriage actually translated in to more or less Black votes for Kerry and Bush. Based on the statistics it can be argued that the small increase in Black votes for Bush was much less significant than the dip in votes for Kerry. Even with polling data we cannot be completely sure why Black voters did not turn out for Kerry to the extent they did for Gore.

Same-Sex Marriage Rights as Civil Rights

In their efforts to gain support for same-sex marriage, proponents drew comparisons between their struggle to attain full marriage rights for gay couples and the modern civil rights movement when African Americans struggled to attain equal rights. This strategy was not new, as North American movements and such movements all over the world have adopted the language and central tenets of the movement. For example, in most recent years conservatives have used civil rights catch phrases like "racial justice" and "equal playing field" to win support for everything from dissembling affirmative action in higher education to championing

²⁷² Pastor Bryan Carter, interview by author, March 3, 2009.

the end of public assistance. Just as there was an outcry against what many have considered a misuse of “sacred” language by conservative groups since the 1990s, several Black pastors expressed outrage at the use of civil rights language and imagery by same-sex marriage advocacy groups. According to Ron Buckmire, the fact that “when you see an activist in the media espousing the gay rights position it’s a white person,” made the comparisons even more dubious for many Black pastors.²⁷³

There were two popular arguments offered by those who opposed the comparison. The first was that the gay movement was conveniently “appropriating” the language and symbolism of the civil rights movement which is particularly offensive because same-sex marriage is wrong and a “sin before God.” The second was that African Americans who were at the center of the civil rights movement could not change their race while gay people could change their behavior.²⁷⁴ Bishop Paul Morton of a New Orleans Baptist church stated it most clearly when, at a meeting in Washington, DC organized by the Traditional Values Coalition he said, “You insult African-Americans when you say that this is a civil rights issue. I can’t change the color of my skin, but you can change your lifestyle.”²⁷⁵

To the contrary, those in the gay rights movement who have used the comparison as a strategy argue that settling for anything short of achieving full marriage rights, and all of the benefits that accompany them, is akin to accepting the same kind of rampant inequality that women and Black Americans fought against.²⁷⁶

Jennifer Mills-Knutsen, an assistant minister at the Old South Church, a Boston

²⁷³ Dr. Ron Buckmire, interview by author, Washington, DC, October 19, 2008.

²⁷⁴ Clemetson, March 1, 2004.

²⁷⁵ Deb McCown, “Black Pastors Assail Gay Analogy,” *Washington Times*, May 18, 2004.

²⁷⁶ Ritter, March 22, 2004.

church that has been progressive for over three hundred years, offered an interesting perspective. She argued that same-sex marriage “is not a religious issue” but a civil rights issue that should be addressed by the state. Mills-Knutsen believes that marriage rights should be applied equally to gay and “traditional” couples and the only role the church should play is deciding whether to perform same-sex weddings.²⁷⁷ Here, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., who as a young man was an active participant in the civil rights movement, echoed Mills-Knutsen’s sentiment:

We live in our faith and under the law and all Americans deserve equal protection under the law...access to education, to healthcare to speech under the equal protection of the law and ultimately you cannot choose another person’s marriage partner under the law. Your faith may not agree with that but we don’t live under your faith, we live under the law.²⁷⁸

It is quite ironic that some old guard civil rights leaders, including former U.S. Congressman Walter Fauntroy, expressed resentment towards same-sex marriage proponents for appropriating language from the modern civil rights language while the former, in opposing same-sex marriage, appropriated the language of white conservatives. This reverse messaging by same-sex marriage opponents was on display in May of 2004 in Hillsborough County Florida when Black pastors, there to speak out against a small group of gays who were at the courthouse applying for marriage licenses, used language like “vocal minorities” to describe gay rights activists. Those press conferences and the ensuing media coverage created a buzz around the issue and its impact on Black voters well past the election. Was the outrage of these Black pastors shared by the majority of African Americans across the nation or limited to more socially conservative African American Christians? To

²⁷⁷ McElhenny, March 8, 2004.

²⁷⁸ Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., interview by author, March 18, 2009.

these ministers, and many others just like them all across the country, gay men and women should not be afforded the privilege of comparison to Black civil rights activists and leaders who struggled for full rights before them. To them, homosexuality is a lifestyle choice, and an abominable choice at that.²⁷⁹

For other religious leaders who opposed same sex marriage the whole controversy was about pushing a broader gay “agenda” which according to Jerry Johnston, senior pastor at suburban Kansas City, Kansas First Family Church included, “increased political recognition and clout, promotion of homosexual lifestyles in the schools and intimidation of the pulpit.”²⁸⁰ Johnston’s suspicions, as extreme as they may sound, tapped into what may have been the true foundational fear of many Black church leaders: that same-sex marriage was only the tip of the iceberg. In other words, the acceptance and legalization of same-sex marriage would open up the flood gates for gay people and activists to flaunt and impose their “choice” and lifestyle on everyone. If the gay agenda was validated by the state and Federal government then conversely, their religious teachings and biblical foundation would be invalidated. Furthermore, same-sex marriage threatened to shake the aforementioned moral high ground many Black pastors have been able to operate from as a result of the Black church’s role in the civil rights movement. According to Ron Buckmire what often goes unacknowledged by these same people is that in many

²⁷⁹ Mary Jo Melone, “Same-Sex marriage Debate Rife With Irony, Contradiction,” *St. Petersburg Times*, May 19, 2004.

²⁸⁰ Brian MacQuarrie, “Kansans Set to Vote On Same-sex marriage Ban,” *Boston Globe*, April 4, 2005.

cases they are holding fast to their “heterosexual privilege” and essentially saying that “they want this special word (marriage) reserved just for them.”²⁸¹

The Morality of Black Churches

Because the activist and progressive history of a few churches and pastors is applied to them all, the Black church has developed a certain “moral authority.” A good example of the first extreme are the obligatory visits—mentioned in earlier chapters—presidential candidates must make to Black churches during campaign season.

While these visits are politically savvy, the image of a candidate pictured in a Black church pulpit or shaking hands with a well respected Black pastor is invaluable, not just because of its meaning to Black Americans of a certain generation, but to any Americans for whom the Black church symbolizes peaceful progress. This plays out in cultural, political and intellectual discourse as evidenced by an excerpt from Jo Renee Formicola's *The Politics of Values: Games Political Strategists Play* where she talks about the future of the Black church within the context of recent political happenings:

Even though the Black church may choose to enlarge its moral agenda in the future and increasingly consider matters of personal morality, it will continue to unify its members politically. Regardless of what its detractors may say about how the Black church should proceed within the political process, its prophetic history cannot be denied: It has always spoken truth to power, and will continue to do so in the future.²⁸²

²⁸¹ Dr. Ron Buckmire, interview by author, Washington, DC, October 19, 2008.

²⁸² Jo Renee Formicola, *The Politics of Values: Games Political Strategists Play* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 96.

That “moral agenda” includes opposition to same-sex marriage, which Formicola spent much of the chapter discussing. However, in this case she dismisses it as an issue of “personal morality” and without differentiating between denominations or traditions, asserts that the Black Church’s “prophetic history” lives on. There are those who would argue that part of that prophetic history must necessarily include “speaking truth to power” on behalf of gays and lesbians as some of the inclusive and progressive Black churches do. For Pastor Wiley, that truth includes acknowledging that while same-sex marriage is often used as a wedge issue to distract African American attention away from kitchen table issues, it is a real issue for Black gays and lesbians:

I think that we run the risk sometimes of on the one hand of saying to the religious right, which is true, that you all throw this up in our face to distract us from some of the other issues that we need to be dealing with. But on the other hand there’s the danger that we trivialize this issue and minimize its significance and forget that these too are human beings who are seeking justice who are seeking a quality of life that is meaningful and purposeful and who have the right to exist just like everybody else.²⁸³

Just as it was more convenient for Formicola to use the “moral authority” characterization than to delve into the complex details of Black church variation, it became easier for journalists and pundits to go to the opposite extreme, focusing disproportionately on Black churches in their post election coverage where they highlighted the impact of same-sex marriage on turnout for Bush.

²⁸³ Pastor Dennis Wiley, interview by author, Washington, DC, May 29, 2008.

Election 2004 Hindsight

Following the election, pundits, party activists and voters were all anxious to find an explanation for the close election. What or who was to blame for the second presidential election in a row when Democrats found themselves on the losing side of a close election that was not decided on election night? Did Kerry fail to gain enough votes because of the “Swift Boat” advertisements or because the Republican strategy to label him a “flip-flopper” was successful? Was the American public unconvinced that Kerry and Edwards could take over the reins in the middle of the war in Iraq and safely and successfully chart a course towards peace as well as victory? In the days, weeks and months following the election, most of the commentary focused on what the Bush campaign did successfully which was not unusual. Political strategists and pundits touted the Republican party and Bush campaign for employing innovative targeting strategies and tactics. Among those strategies was campaign manager Ken Mehlman and Karl Rove’s focus on activating untapped evangelical voters from the 2000 election. Before polling data could be accurately analyzed and generated, the role same-sex marriage played during the campaign was also given significant weight.

On the state level, several states included initiatives banning the practice on the ballot. On election day, eleven states had referendums on their ballots and all of them passed with the overwhelming majority passing by more than 65%. Of the eighteen so-called “battleground” states in the 2004 presidential election, four of them, Arkansas, Michigan, Ohio and Oregon had ballot initiatives banning same-sex marriage. The referendum which received the most attention was in Ohio, the state

where Bush won by such a small margin that Senator Kerry did not concede until November 3, 2004, the day after the election. Some argue that these initiatives localized the issue and gave local politicians something closer to home to rally voters around which they could also connect positively to Bush and negatively to Kerry.

Cheryl Jacques, president of the Human Rights Campaign at the time, argued that the number of states that succeeded in putting state constitutional amendments on the ballots were part of a national Republican Party and Bush campaign strategy. According to Jacques, the numerous ballot initiatives were “all about the president energizing his base and dividing and conquering in this election.”²⁸⁴ Jacques was inferring that local Republican party apparatuses took their orders to mobilize voters around these ballot initiatives from the national party. While it is hard to say whether the Party or Massachusetts case sparked local action, the Republican Party and Bush campaign clearly used the momentum generated by the issue to their advantage with Black churches and evangelical Christians.

Lisa Schiffren, writing for *The New York Times* in February of 2004, made the excellent point that statistically speaking, Americans of “every age group, income level and educational background” were overwhelmingly opposed to same-sex marriage. At the center of the article was the notion that same-sex marriage could hardly be a wedge issue since there was so much consensus about it across racial, ethnic and class lines. According to Pew Research Center for the People and the Press statistics in the article even among Democrats, 52 percent to 37 percent opposed

²⁸⁴ David D. Kirkpatrick, “Foes of Same-Sex marriage Want More Outrage,” *International Herald Tribune*, May 17, 2004.

same-sex marriage.²⁸⁵ Both Schiffren and Ritter argued, based on polling data, that six months out from the general election, same-sex marriage was not a top issue for most voters. Polls showed the economy was the number one issue for 29% of voters, while they indicated same-sex marriage was the number one issue for only 5% of voters.²⁸⁶

This issue of American popular opinion about same-sex marriage came up in an PBS interview African American host Tavis Smiley did with Ed Gillespie, Chair of the Republican Party, on February 6, 2004. Gillespie denied that same-sex marriage was being used as a wedge issue to gain support from the African American community. Instead, after admitting the issue came up when he met with Black pastors earlier that day, Gillespie focused his comments on the “unelected activist judges in the state of Massachusetts (who) say that there should be full marriage rights conferred upon gay couples.” He asked whether those judges should have the right to “tell the rest of the country what we should do relative to this issue,” referring to states that decided to go beyond DOMA and place referendums on the ballot defining marriage as between a man and a woman, precluding those states from having to recognize same-sex marriages sanctioned in other states. Gillespie also referenced an often quoted statistic during the election cycle that 2 out of every 3 Americans do not believe in same-sex marriage.

There were several factors which should have complicated the analysis of Black churches and the 2004 election. Most significant was the fact that, as has already been argued, Black churches are far from politically one dimensional. Many

²⁸⁵ Lisa Schiffren, “How The Judges Forced The President’s Hand,” *New York Times*, February 29, 2004.

²⁸⁶ Ritter, March 22, 2004.

Black churches are made up of Black Christians who are simultaneously socially conservative and politically liberal. Same-sex marriage is an issue that illuminates both of these characteristics and makes it difficult to statistically pin down the opinions of most Black Christians. For example, Lynette Clemetson pointed out in a March 2004 *New York Times* article the fact that “many Blacks opposed to same-sex marriage...support equal benefits for gays as a matter of economic justice.”²⁸⁷ Just as such beliefs belie the notion that individual Black Christians thought in lock-step, the strategies of Gay rights activists and conservative operatives make clear how wide the political spectrum of Black churches actually is.

Reports and research claiming that the same-sex marriage issue had little or no impact on turnout for either candidate did not break down their data by race. For example, The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in their report entitled, “Same-Sex marriage, Civil Unions and the 2004 Presidential Election” held that “same-sex marriage did not cost John Kerry the presidential election...and had little net effect on the outcome of the election.”²⁸⁸ Out of fourteen categories the only one that mentions race is “White Protestant Conservatives.”²⁸⁹ Polling fell victim to the same problem. Most of the newspaper reporting on the issue of same-sex marriage was not broken down according to race. For example a Washington Post-ABC News poll released on February 25, 2004 found that 46 percent of “respondents” favored an amendment banning same-sex marriage and 45 percent opposed it. The article went on to say that support for the amendment had risen 8 percentage points from a similar poll taken in

²⁸⁷ Clemetson, March 1, 2004.

²⁸⁸ *National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Report*
http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/same_sex_marriage_2004_election

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

the previous month with no mention of racial or religious breakdowns in the poll either.²⁹⁰ There is some evidence that Black evangelicals were less opposed to same-sex marriage than white evangelicals at one point. A 2003 Pew poll found 83% of white evangelicals were opposed to same-sex marriage, followed by 64% of Black evangelicals.²⁹¹

Republicans were celebrated for what was viewed as a deliberate strategy to push for ballot measures across the country which could drive more socially conservative voters to the polls where they would identify with Bush's position on the issue and pull the lever for him in the process. Conversely, gay rights activists fought back claims that their fight to seek full marriage rights and benefits, cost the Democratic party the election. Although both arguments were rather simplistic, they received quite a bit of attention in the mainstream media. Several mainstream newspapers, including the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* ran stories the day after the election and throughout the month of November. This was exacerbated by the fact that same-sex marriage had been labeled a wedge issue in the months leading up to the election. Even Kerry went so far as to accuse Bush of using same-sex marriage as a wedge issue to motivate his religious right supporters and play on their fears.

Both conservatives and gay rights activists were factions that sought the support of the Black church in the 2004 election. However, neither group had historically had a successful or significant relationship with them in the past. It appears that one group was able to successfully form a broad alliance with many in

²⁹⁰ Allen, February 25, 2004.

²⁹¹ Persons, 262.

the Black church while the other remained largely marginalized. Same-sex marriage advocates sought the support of more liberal leaning churches while their opponents cozied up to more conservative Black churches. Both factions used civil rights as the connection, the former affirmatively and the latter negatively. Advocates used civil rights language and imagery to appeal to more liberal churches. Conservatives suggested that such language and imagery was being misused in support of an issue that is unworthy of the comparison. When convenient, both factions suggested that their support from either socially liberal or conservative churches was evidence that “The Black church” as a whole was behind their efforts.²⁹² Meanwhile, the Democratic Party’s message was absent.

According to Ronald Walters in *Freedom is Not Enough* the Bush campaign succeeded in penetrating historically Democratic counties in battleground states. Even in places like Palm Beach County Florida where he didn’t win, African American voters and Democratic Party leaders made note of how the Republican Party and Bush campaign were making a concerted effort to reach African Americans. While one person who Walters mentions specifically referenced the positive impact faith-based initiatives had on some African Americans in the community who ended up voting for him, he also quoted another South Floridian woman who said she admired the President because he was a Christian and “not for gay marriage.”²⁹³ According to the long time African American Democratic Party activists I interviewed for this study, this woman expressed a sentiment they heard in African American communities and churches as they traveled across the country making appearances on

²⁹² Clemetson, March 1, 2004.

²⁹³ Walters, 179.

Kerry's behalf. In retrospect, Herman and Daughtry believed that the Kerry campaign and Democratic Party made a grave mistake by not working with supportive Black pastors to craft a unified message they could take back to their membership "because they were troubled."²⁹⁴

In late June of 2006, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., Rev. Al Sharpton and Rev. Joseph Lowery were the most notable ministers in attendance at the National Conference and Revival for Social Justice in the Black Church in Dallas, Texas. At the conference, both Sharpton and Jackson spoke out against Christian conservatives who focused on moral values issues including abortion and "gay-marriage" to the exclusion of "larger moral issues such as the war, voting rights, affirmative action and poverty."²⁹⁵ In front of a captive audience of hundred of Black pastors, they stressed the importance of keeping social issues that were disproportionately affecting the African American community at the forefront of their message and efforts, particularly in the lead up to the midterm 2006 elections. Similar to the views Jackson expressed to the author, Sharpton dismissed same-sex marriage as a non-priority for Black churches saying, "There are no gay people coming to our churches asking to get married, but there are plenty of people coming with problems voting or their sons in jail."²⁹⁶

The controversy at Pastor Wiley's church over union ceremonies discussed earlier is just one example that contradicts Jackson and Sharpton's argument, which fails to recognize the existence of African American gay and lesbian couples who

²⁹⁴ Alexis Herman, interview by author, Washington, DC, January 12, 2006.

²⁹⁵ Julia Glick, "Black Leaders Criticize Christian Conservatives over Moral Issues," *The Christian Post.com*, June 27, 2006. (<http://www.christianpost.com/church/Politics/2006/06/black-leaders-criticize-christian-conservatives-over-moral-issues-27/index.html>)

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

desire to join their lives in the same meaningful way that African American heterosexual couples do. In the future, African American faith, political and thought leaders must find a way to stress the primacy of social justice issues without negating the importance of same-sex marriage which Jackson and others have described as an issue of “equal protection under the law.”²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., interview by author, March 18, 2009.

“They didn’t have to win us all, they just had to pull off two or three percent, which is what they did. It made a difference.”²⁹⁸

“Some years down the road, who knows how many, twenty-five, fifty or so, we’ll look back on this issue of same-sex marriage and I believe that there will be a shift, there’ll be a change.”²⁹⁹

“President Barack Obama is now Mr. President not Mr. Brother. We will agree with him most of the time but there’ll be times when the prophetic voice must speak truth to whoever is in power.”³⁰⁰

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The Republican Party and Bush campaign’s targeting of Black churches in the 2004 presidential election presented a conundrum for John Kerry and the Democratic Party. They were neither used to nor prepared for Republicans competing for votes from a crucial segment of their base on the national level. The Bush Administration, Republican Party and later Bush reelection campaign, formed a powerful trio that established and maintained relationships with certain evangelical Black pastors. These pastors became an invaluable resource to the Bush campaign and Republican Party who used them to energize other Black evangelical pastors and Christians around moral values issues, the most significant of which was same-sex marriage. In keeping with Fredrick C. Harris’ theory that religious institutions often “mobilize African Americans into the political process,” the religious values of these pastors and their congregants motivated them to support President Bush.³⁰¹ In this instance “the nature and context of political action,” which Harris stressed was key to

²⁹⁸ Leah Daughtry, interview by author, Washington, DC, March 29, 2006.

²⁹⁹ Pastor Dennis Wiley, interview by author, Washington, DC, May 29, 2008.

³⁰⁰ Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., interview by author, March 18, 2009.

³⁰¹ Fredrick Harris, 8.

understanding how religion affects African American political engagement, was conservative and grounded in what they believed was their Christian duty to limit rather than expand the rights of gay people.³⁰²

At the time Harris' *Something Within* was published, megachurches and the growth of Pentecostal churches were still considered "emerging trends."³⁰³ Harris characterized them both as decidedly less civically active and concerned with issues of social justice. This supports Rev. Daughtry's claim that while Pentecostal and megachurches were on the rise during the 1990s, the Clinton administration did not court them because of their novelty and political ambiguity. By 2001, both segments of the Black church had established a formidable presence in urban and rural African American communities. Consequently, widespread recognition of their power and influence in these communities coincided with Bush's first term. Recognizing their untapped political potential, the Bush administration used the lure of the White House and the promise of faith-based funding to bring them into the Republican fold.

The Expansion of the Black Church Tradition: Black Evangelicals and the 2004 Election

The 2004 election demonstrated the continued power and relevancy of the Black church in American politics. It also illuminated the importance of recognizing the diversity and complexity of its various denominations, theologies and practices along with the rapid growth of nondenominational megachurches and Pentecostal churches. Although the vast majority of African Americans protestant Christians

³⁰² Fredrick Harris, 10.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 181.

remained loyal to the Democratic Party, the evangelical strain of many Black churches, especially nondenominational megachurches and Pentecostal churches, made a significant impact in 2004. Evangelicals were the common denominator of the churches and pastors the Bush administration and campaign targeted during the election. They tapped into a segment of the Black church tradition that Democrats were aware of but dismissed as unimportant because of their past ambivalence to politics.

Conscious of the growing number and influence of megachurches across the country, the Republican Party and Bush campaign built relationships with other charismatic pastors who in turn, helped portray the President as someone who shared their moral values. For many Black evangelical Christians, it was more important to support President Bush because of his values than to vote their “personal economic interests.”³⁰⁴ His opposition to same-sex marriage meant he was a “believer” like them, and could be trusted to steer the country towards salvation. Evangelical pastors reinforced this sentiment in pulpits across the country to the dismay of many main-line Black pastors who waited in vain for the Democratic Party and nominee to respond.

For African American evangelicals in 2004, moral values equaled opposition to same-sex marriage. The same-sex marriage issue gained traction in these Black evangelical churches and charismatic megachurches, which reflected a larger trend of social conservatism across Black denominations. Their relative new political activism and the primacy of moral values in their doctrine and practices was the perfect

³⁰⁴ Leah Daughtry, interview by author, Washington, DC, March 29, 2006.

convergence of factors for the Bush campaign: They fit the profile of the “suspected” Republicans the campaign built their strategy around.

Historically, this select group of African American pastors and churches existed on the fringes of the Black church tradition. Many megachurches were criticized for their impersonal edifices and for espousing “prosperity gospel” that focused on attainment of individual wealth. According to Leah Daughtry and scholar Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, independent Pentecostal churches were ostracized because of their fundamentalist worship services and theology.³⁰⁵ They were also more likely to attract poor members. Both charismatic megachurches and Pentecostal churches were younger strains of the Black church tradition and were typically defined by how they differed from mainline congregations. For at least some megachurches and Pentecostal churches, the Bush administration and campaign embraced them for the very reasons they were often criticized.

Many of the pastors in mainline denominations had developed a level of political sophistication through their interaction with local, state and national politicians. They understood the spoken and unspoken desires and expectations of elected officials who courted their support. In short, they knew their value and had become pretty adept at navigating the political terrain. Leah Daughtry and David D. Daniels, III argue that in contrast, the vast majority of Pentecostal churches and pastors lagged far behind and while “Black Baptist and Methodist leaders debated political strategies for social change...many Black Holiness and Pentecostal leaders

³⁰⁵ Gilkes, 107.

were debating the appropriateness of clergy entering the political arena at all.”³⁰⁶

Consequently, those who did enter the political terrain during Bush’s first term were both unfamiliar with the environment and enraptured by the access they had to the president and White House.

This proved to be a dangerous combination because their political naiveté prevented them from demanding a more balanced relationship with the administration where there would be some reciprocity. These Pentecostal and megachurch pastors did not understand the importance of applying pressure and holding the President and his administration accountable for their faith-based promises. Intoxicated by the access they gained to the White House, they were too afraid of losing that access to realize that they were worth much more to the President than he was to them. Their support buoyed his image and lent a great deal of moral authority to his faith-based initiative efforts while the access the President gave them—with the exception of a few pastors who actually received faith-based initiative funding—amounted to empty bragging rights that they had been to the White House or had met the Commander in Chief. This contributed to the perception following the 2004 presidential election that many of these Pentecostal and megachurch pastors who had both supported President Bush’s faith-based initiatives and spoke out vehemently against same-sex marriage during the campaign had been manipulated and had no comprehensive legislation, funding or programs to show for it.

³⁰⁶ David D. Daniels, “Doing All the Good We Can”: The Political Witness of African American Holiness and Pentecostal Churches in the Post-Civil Rights Era,” *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America*, 164.

Meanwhile, mainline pastors who had enjoyed access to the White House during the Clinton administration were shut out and becoming increasingly frustrated with John Kerry who did not seem to appreciate their political value.

The Republicans engaged traditionally apolitical Black megachurches and independent Pentecostal churches around moral values. Thus, strains of the Black church tradition that had previously eschewed politics, found themselves immersed in a presidential campaign. Future studies should interrogate the relationship between 21st Century mega and Pentecostal churches and politics. Consequently, more quantitative and qualitative studies of Black megachurches, denominations and evangelicals are needed. Future studies should also complicate the term “evangelical” and investigate why many Black Christians subscribe to evangelical theology and practices but reject the label.

The 2004 Bush Reelection Campaign

Plagued by an increasingly unpopular war and a troubled economy, the Bush team ran an intense and focused campaign. The Bush campaign stayed on the offensive which kept the Kerry campaign in a defensive stance for most of the general election cycle. Under the direction of Karl Rove and Ken Mehlman, the Bush campaign stayed focused on their strategy to target right leaning voters and “suspected Republicans.” President Bush proved to be a strong candidate who was able to convey a consistent message that the American people would be safer with him in office and could trust that they would always know “where he stood” on

issues.³⁰⁷ President Bush was also good on the campaign trail and he thrived in informal settings where he connected with voters around “gut values.” He conveyed a sense of authenticity and confidence the latter of which was crucial to his efforts to convince the American people that he could win the war in Iraq.

The Republicans did not try gain the support of all African Americans, most of whom were loyal to the Democratic Party. They focused their efforts on evangelical Black Christians who filled Pentecostal churches and megachurches on Sunday mornings and were more neutral politically and socially conservative. The Republicans began implementing their strategy as soon as Bush was elected in 2001. Furthermore, the Bush Administration used the charm of the White House and promise of faith-based initiatives funding to elicit the support of Black pastors throughout Bush’s first term.

The seductive power of access to the White House cannot be underestimated and as the incumbent, Bush was able to capitalize on that power by meeting with Black pastors in the White House and inviting them to events. Essentially, the Bush administration replicated the Clinton administration’s outreach efforts, except they allowed access to a much more select group of evangelical and megachurch pastors including T.D. Jakes, Bishop Eddie Long and Rev. Creflo Dollar. That access to the President translated into their loyalty and support during the election.

John Kerry was a weaker campaigner and proved, as Al Gore had four years before, that having a stronger command of the issues was not enough to sway voters who felt a personal connection with President Bush. As a result, Kerry struggled to find his footing with African Americans. Unfortunately, the Kerry campaign’s

³⁰⁷ Sosnik, 13.

outreach to African Americans in general and Black churches in particular, did not begin until the fall of 2004. Nevertheless, he received 88% of the Black vote. Democratic Party veterans including Leah Daughtry and Donna Brazile believed, given the economic climate and Iraq war, that the percentage should have been higher. Brazile openly criticized the Democratic Party's African American outreach strategy and warned that a failure to overhaul it could be disastrous in future elections.

Future studies and analyses of presidential elections must include more detailed information about African Americans in general and African American Christians in particular. Such studies, which should address class and educational levels, are critical to understanding the evolving role of African Americans in presidential politics.

Faith-Based Initiatives: Underfunded Programs and Unfulfilled Potential

Bush broke new ground by creating an Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives and placing it in the White House. He showed his commitment to faith-based initiatives by creating offices in multiple agencies through executive orders. The controversy over details of the initiatives including implementation, evangelism and funding, plagued the initiative for much of Bush's first term. However, the insularity of the White House, combined with the fact that some churches did receive funding through the Compassion Capital fund, kept the initiative from becoming a complete failure.

By his second term, information began to surface about two unfortunate elements of the initiative. First, the White House was accused of using its Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives for political purposes. Critics cited the number of churches that received funding whose pastor's were public supporters of the president.³⁰⁸ The location and timing of faith-based initiative grant workshops scheduled in the lead up to the 2002 and 2004 elections were also questioned. Second, critics of the initiative, advocacy groups and former staffers including David Kuo, accused the administration of misleading the public about the amount of funding that was actually available for dissemination to churches applying for grants.

While some Black churches did receive federal funding through faith-based initiatives, the White House was never able to clarify how much of that funding was new versus reallocated from existing programs. The Bush administration used the promise of faith-based initiative funding to seal their appeal with conservative Christians and gain the loyalty and support of Black pastors and churches during the 2004 election. But President Bush failed to fulfill his promise to help support pastors and churches across the country that were providing vital services to their communities. Consequently, by the end of his second term, it appeared that the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives would be a dubious rather than celebrated part of his presidential legacy.

Same-Sex Marriage: A Moral Values and Civil Rights Issue

³⁰⁸ These pastors included Bishop Harold Ray of Redemptive Life Fellowship Church in West Palm Beach, FL and Bishop Sedgwick Daniels of Holy Redeemer Institutional Church of God in Christ in Milwaukee, WI.

President Bush announced his support of a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage at the beginning of 2004, making his position on the issue clear. The Bush campaign then used the issue to garner support in the African American community. They went after what they viewed as the most logical target: socially conservative Black evangelical Christians. As the campaign progressed and ministers continued to voice their opposition publicly, the media and Democratic activists began to question whether they represented a significant segment of the Black church community.

In 2004, ministers spoke out publicly against same-sex marriage in states including Massachusetts, Texas, Ohio and California. The intensity with which they voiced their opinions on the subject contributed to increased national visibility around the issue. The lack of a coordinated response from Black ministers aligned with the Kerry campaign and DNC contributed to the public perception—and in some cases reality—that the same-sex marriage issue was motivating African Americans to support President Bush. For many Black evangelicals, same-sex marriage eclipsed other issues which disproportionately impacted their lives including the economy, healthcare, public education and the criminal justice system.

While conservative views about homosexuality cut across denominations, this study also discussed inclusive Black churches that welcome gay members along with gay-led churches. The existence of these churches, along with the demonstrated diversity of Black churches in general, suggest that the pastors who spoke out against same-sex marriage were not representative all Black pastors. To that end, future studies must emphasize the spectrum of beliefs and opinions about homosexuality

that exist within the Black church tradition. To date, most studies have either focused on mainline churches or evangelical churches. Because same-sex marriage will likely remain a significant political issue in the future, comprehensive studies that collect data from a large cross section of Black churches are needed.

The Challenge of Political Forecasting

The 2% increase in African American votes Bush received between 2000 and 2004 was far from insignificant. What seemed like a small percentage belied the significant increases in African American votes he received in states including Ohio, Pennsylvania and Florida where support went from single to double digits.³⁰⁹ Anecdotal information and interviews with people who were active during the 2004 campaign also provided insight into what was happening “on the ground” and in Black churches across the country. All of the above helped illuminate the fact that *the* Black church neither won the election for Bush nor lost the election for Kerry. What emerged as a more important dynamic was how the Bush campaign energized a particular segment of the Black church tradition and how their participation made a significant impact on both campaigns. It was this disruption of past political trends and strategies that made the 2004 election so intriguing.

It is clear that the Bush team ran a more effective campaign based on a risky and innovative strategy. However, the extent to which independent variables impacted the outcome of both campaigns, must be considered. For example, had the Massachusetts supreme court ruled on same-sex marriage at the beginning of 2005

³⁰⁹ Persons, 265.

instead of the end of 2003, is it possible that the issue would not have been as salient during the election cycle? What if Hurricane Katrina had occurred in 2004 instead of 2005? Would the administration's woefully slow response to the disaster have cost Bush the election? We will never know the answers to these questions, but posing them may help to prevent the tendency to heap absolute praise or blame on campaign efforts post election.

When I began my research for this study, I speculated that the Republican Party would build on the momentum they gained with African Americans during the 2004 election cycle. They had an opportunity during Bush's second term to set the stage for the 2008 election by continuing their outreach to Black evangelicals and courting other segments of the African American population that exit polling data indicated might be supportive of certain Republican tenets. Once the 2008 election cycle officially began in mid 2007, I watched to see how they would activate their African American "coalitions." As the campaign season progressed and the field of candidates narrowed on both sides, it became apparent, based on the absence of the kind of public discussions about diversifying the party that were occurring in 2004, that my initial theory was wrong.

Perhaps the Republican Party conceded defeat when Hillary Clinton, who had substantial support in the African American community and Barack Obama, who had a long shot at making history as the first African American Democratic presidential nominee, emerged as the front runners. They may have believed the Bush administration's abysmal response to Hurricane Katrina's aftermath did too much damage to their image with African Americans. What is also likely is that Mehlman's

commitment to diversify the party, left with him in 2006. As with most institutions, when innovative ideas are not institutionalized they exist only as long as the leaders who support them are present.

It took four years for the Bush administration and Republican Party to develop and implement a solid—albeit narrow—African American outreach effort. It will certainly take the Republican Party much longer to build consensus among its base around the importance of committing resources to diversity and making ideological room for African Americans. While former Maryland Lieutenant Governor Michael Steele’s recent election as the first African American chairman of the Republican National Committee is a symbolic step in that direction, the challenging and invariably uncomfortable work remains.³¹⁰

The Impact of Barack Obama’s Candidacy on This Study

The 2008 presidential election shifted the American political landscape. The Democratic Party’s nomination of Barack H. Obama coupled with his victory on election day changed the course of American politics forever.

Obama’s Faith & Black Church Outreach

³¹⁰ “Michael Steele Elected RNC Chairman,” *USA Today*, January 30, 2009. Within weeks of his election Steele, who has been known to make off-the-cuff comments stated that he planned to preserve the party’s “conservative principles” but wanted to use them to attract people of color and younger voters in urban-suburban hip-hop settings.” His remarks resulted in criticism from Republican activists who questioned his ability to provide serious leadership following a major electoral loss.

An active member of Chicago's Trinity Church of Christ, presidential candidate Barack Obama spoke openly about his religious awakening, inspired by the sermons of his then pastor Jeremiah Wright, in his memoir *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*.³¹¹ Unlike his predecessor and colleague Senator John Kerry, candidate Obama was both comfortable talking about his "faith" and successful in conveying that faith to the public. Similar to 2004, in 2008 "moderate evangelical" voters were considered reachable by both the Democratic and Republican Parties and the Obama campaign went after them aggressively.³¹² John Broder of The New York Times outlined their evangelical outreach strategy in July of 2008:

Between now and November, the Obama forces are planning as many as 1,000 house parties and dozens of Christian rock concerts, gatherings of religious leaders, campus visits and telephone conference calls to bring together voters of all ages motivated by their faith to engage in politics. It is the most intensive effort yet by a Democratic candidate to reach out to self-identified evangelical or born-again Christians and to try to pry them away from their historical attachment to the Republican Party.³¹³

As early as July of 2007 a Time magazine poll found voters believed that of all the presidential candidates Obama was a "strongly religious person" second only to former Governor Mitt Romney.³¹⁴ The ease with which he discussed his faith also appealed to progressive white Christians like Barbara Brandt who voiced

³¹¹ Rev. Jeremiah Wright, former head pastor of Trinity Church of Christ became the center of much controversy after excerpts from his "fiery" sermons appeared on the internet. Rev. Wright, who as pastor consistently preached from the Black Liberation theology tradition, was criticized for his post September 11th sermon in particular in which he criticized America for its indignation over the tragedy in light of its own violent acts against oppressed people and other countries.

³¹² Ariel Sabar, "Barack Obama: Putting Faith Out Front," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 16, 2007.

³¹³ John M. Broder, "Courting Evangelicals Once Loyal to Bush," *New York Times*, July 1, 2008.

³¹⁴ Sabar, July 16, 2007.

excitement over Obama's candidacy when she said, "It's time we stand up to the conservatives. We're just as Christian as they are."³¹⁵

The Obama campaign reached out early to Black churches of all denominations and sizes under the direction of Joshua DuBois, the director of religious affairs and former associate pastor of a Pentecostal church in Massachusetts.³¹⁶ The fact that the campaign had someone with direct ties to the Pentecostal church running religious affairs, speaks to how important evangelicals were to the Obama campaign's outreach efforts. This was confirmed by Pastor Carter who recalled the Obama campaign reaching out to him in the spring of 2007, just a few months after he announced he was running for President. As a result of his early and consistent outreach, Obama enjoyed widespread support from Black churches and pastors across denominations.

However, there were some Black pastors who expressed frustration over what they believed was the unfortunate trend of African Americans supporting Obama because of his race rather than his beliefs about abortion and the "homosexual agenda."³¹⁷ In July of 2008 five pastors of conservative Pentecostal churches and megachurches voiced their concerns that Black Christians were "so excited to see someone who looks like them even though they are not getting someone who believes like them" in the *Washington Times*.³¹⁸ They were quick to add that Republican nominee John McCain's "lack of spiritual input" made it

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Broder, July 1, 2008.

³¹⁷ Julia Duin, "Black Pastors Wary of Obama," *Washington Times*, July 4, 2008.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

difficult for them to tell their congregants that he was “the right guy.”³¹⁹ However, the Obama team did such a thorough job in both reaching out to pastors early and conveying the message that their candidate was a man of faith, that Black pastors who opposed him did not receive much media attention.

Over the course of his twenty-one month campaign, Obama proved to be a formidable candidate. Validating Sosnik, Dowd and Fournier’s *Applebee’s America* theory that effective candidates convey a sense of authenticity and confidence, Obama used his personal history to connect with voters and unflappable countenance in debates and town hall meetings to convey a sense of steadiness under pressure. Like Bush, he was a “natural campaigner” who appeared at ease in rural and urban settings alike. The campaign used the fact that he was a husband and father of two young daughters to portray him as a “regular” American. Unlike Bush, Obama had a solid command of both foreign and domestic party issues which helped compensate for his relative youth and inexperience compared to his primary and general election opponents.

The Obama campaign also succeeded in making current and potential supporters feel like they were a part of a community, another element Sosnik, Dowd and Fournier argue is crucial to winning campaigns. They did this by using the internet and web-based social networking sites like *Facebook* to organize supporters and volunteers around issues and events. The campaign stayed in constant contact with anyone who signed up on their website, sending daily updates and occasional video messages from candidate. Supporters could log on to the campaign website to see pictures and footage of rallies Obama attended which

³¹⁹ Ibid.

made them feel like they were a part of this “movement for change.” Of particular significance is how well the Obama campaign used the internet to raise money, much of which consisted of contributions under \$200.³²⁰ The campaign made it a point to advertise that fact, ensuring that its “community” of supporters felt like they, not big donors, were responsible for Obama’s momentum.³²¹ The Obama campaign raised an unprecedented \$745 million over the course of the election cycle which allowed them to implement a fifty state versus battleground state strategy. They spent almost double the amount of money that McCain spent on ads.³²² Obama’s victory could not be attributed solely to his fundraising strategy or outreach strategy. Here, Ira Teinowitz, writing for the Advertising Age following the election explained it well:

The key was not just having the right advertising, correct strategic decisions, a precedent-breaking get-out-the-vote effort or an amazing ability to raise funds. It was the mastery of coordinating those individual elements.³²³

Faith-Based Initiatives

Interestingly, during his campaign, candidate Obama pledged to retool faith-based initiatives. During his transition, President-elect Obama created an advisory committee “involving people with differing perspectives on the most

³²⁰ Jim Kuhnennn and Jim Drinkard, “Obama Raised \$745 Million, Twice as Much as McCain,” *Houston Chronicle*, December 5, 2008.

³²¹ Almost 50% of his donors gave \$1,000 or more.

³²² Steve McClellan, “Obama Creates New Campaign Template,” *Adweek*, November 10, 2008.

³²³ Ira Teinowitz, Ira “The Team That Brought You the New President; How Plouffe, Axelrod and the Rest of the Gang Built a Master Campaign,” *Advertising Age*, November 10, 2008, p. 55.

contentious issues” including hiring practices and proselytizing.³²⁴ It remains to be seen whether a new and improved version of President Bush’s initiative will emerge, but Obama’s pledge to improve rather than eliminate the program has already received both praise and criticism.

Same-Sex Marriage

Same-sex marriage was much less of a factor in the 2008 election. This was due primarily to a focus throughout the campaign on soaring unemployment rates, an unstable economy and the costly war in Iraq, all of which had worsened significantly since 2004. However, throughout the election year, a battle was waging in California over the same-sex marriage ballot measure Proposition 8. The measure, which was included on the ballot using the language “only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California,” passed with 52% voting yes and 48% voting no.³²⁵ Gay rights activists and opponents of the measure were “crushed” and attempted to make sense of the numbers following the election.

Among the explanations they offered, was the high turnout of African Americans who showed up to vote for Barack Obama but simultaneously voted in favor of Proposition 8. Exit polls showed that well over 50% of African Americans who turned out voted yes. Because they accounted for 10% of all voters in California on election day, some same-sex marriage activists argued that

³²⁴ Jane Lampman, “Obama Likely to Retool Bush’s Faith-Based Initiative,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 5, 2009.

³²⁵ Dan Morain and Jessica Garrison, “Backers focused Prop. 8 Battle Beyond Marriage,” *The Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 2008.

overwhelming African American support of the measure tipped the balance. As with same-sex marriage in 2004, there was a clear correlation between African-American support for Proposition 8 and their religious beliefs.

In their post-election coverage mainstream newspapers including *The San Francisco Gate* and *Los Angeles Times* focused on multiple African Americans like Denise Fernandez who said “I came out because of my religious beliefs...I believe a Christian is held accountable, and we have to make a difference.”³²⁶ Therefore, much of the coverage fueled the notion that African Americans were responsible for the passage of Proposition 8, in spite of polling data indicating that age had an even more significant impact.³²⁷

Although same-sex marriage was not as prominent on the national stage in 2008 as it was in 2004, Proposition 8 was a clear indication that it will remain a controversial and divisive political issue. It could also prove to be a challenge for President Obama in the future if Pastor Carter’s sentiments are consistent with other Black pastors who supported him but take issue with his support of gay rights:

I believe God loves everyone, but I still believe that sin is sin, regardless of where we are and I think we have to be very careful, I think President Obama has to be very careful in how he deals with this. A lot of people have said that he may be the greatest advocate for gay, lesbian and bisexual issues than anyone else has been. And that may be the case, but from a pastoral perspective, I have to continually try to hold to my biblical values about that.³²⁸

³²⁶ Marcus Wohlesn, “Exit poll: Black Voters Back Calif. Marriage Ban,” *San Francisco Gate*, November 5, 2008.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Pastor Bryan Carter, interview by author, March 3, 2009.

Post Election, Post-Racial?

Obama led a well organized campaign that started early and finished strong. On election day, November 4, 2008, he won 365 electoral votes and 53% of the popular vote. It was the first time a Democratic presidential candidate had won over 51% of the vote since Lyndon Johnson won 61% of the vote in 1964.

In the lead up to election-day and in post election coverage Obama's candidacy was discussed in the context of what some were calling a "post racial" America.³²⁹ Journalists and pundits asked if his nomination and subsequent victory meant the country had moved past its obsession with race and legacy of racial oppression. The debate continued, in spite of the historic speech he gave on race during the height of his primary race against Hillary Clinton in which he offered that he had "never been so naïve as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle."³³⁰

Future studies of Obama's campaign must push past the temptation to reduce an examination of his candidacy to such a problematic and simplistic concept. In the months and years that follow it will be interesting to see how President Obama is critiqued and how his presidency is examined by scholars. It will also be intriguing to observe whether social justice progressives hold him accountable for inaction around issues of importance to them. Rev. Jackson's argument that the "prophetic voice" must "speak truth to whoever is in power,"

³²⁹ Robin Givhan, "Edging (At Times Clumsily) Toward a Post Racial America," *Washington Post*, March 16, 2008.

³³⁰ Barack H. Obama, *Transcript* "A More Perfect Union Speech," March 18, 2008.

suggests that Obama will be challenged to uphold the progressive positions he espoused during the campaign.³³¹

³³¹ Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., interview by author, March 18, 2009.

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