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Racial and Ethnic Politics  
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by

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## RACIAL AND ETHNIC POLITICS IN AMERICA

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### INTRODUCTION

In this paper I examine the conditions under which racial and ethnic groups in America express their group identities through political action. Toward this end, I review first the socio-economic status model of political and electoral participation. In the discussion of this model, I open up for consideration the much broader range of types of political participation possible in society. I then hypothesize that there are an enormous variety of stimuli possible which provoke group based electoral and political behavior, and based on the political participation model -- an alternative model introduced in *Race and Ethnicity in Chicago Politics* (Pinderhughes 1987) -- briefly discuss some of the factors which explain their existence. Finally, using Black political behavior as an example, I specify some of the ways in which extensive group based political mobilization has occurred in the U.S.

### THE SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS MODEL OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The conventional model of political participation assumed that voting correlated positively with socioeconomic status. High levels of income, education and occupation correlated with high levels of voting. Declining indicators of socioeconomic status predicted declining levels of voting. Socioeconomic status also determined the type and intensity of one's political partisanship (Campbell, Converse, Stokes, and Miller 1960; Pinderhughes 1987, pp. 69-70; Walton 1985). For purposes of this paper, I will discuss two aspects of the model which have significance for racial and ethnic group political activity: its emphasis on socioeconomic status, and the rather narrow definitions of political participation that it implies.

Walton points out that the descriptions of voting patterns were based on an overwhelmingly White population of respondents. Even when social scientists studied second or third generation voters, they assumed they would come to resemble 'normal Americans,' that is, White Anglo-Saxon Protestants in their socioeconomically based political diversity, and in their lack of ethnically based group political demarcations (Dahl 1961). Dahl assumed that "ethnic politics equalled assimilationist politics, which 'emphasized the divisive rather than the unifying characteristics of voters and yet played upon the yearnings for assimilation and acceptance'" (Pinderhughes 1987, p. 67). Dahl's model assumed voters passed through an ethnic stage of political identification on their way to, by implication, a more mature stage of nonethnically based, socioeconomic patterns of political identification and participation.

Several examples of changes in participation and mobilization unrelated to socioeconomic variation are relevant. First, Andersen's work shows that rather than conversion of large numbers of already active ethnic voters "The Democratic party mobilized first- and second-generation ethnics more successfully than the Republicans did, and most of its increase in political support came from the newly mobilized rather than the converted"

(Anderson 1979, p. 103; Pinderhughes 1987, p. 70). In other words, ethnicity became increasingly important for political participation over time rather than of decreasing significance.

Second, by contrast "Black voters were already highly mobilized in the 1920s and 1930s in Chicago; in fact... Black turnout in presidential years was higher or equivalent to both ethnic and native White voters. [Unlike White ethnic voters] any expansion in Black Democratic support resulted from conversion rather than mobilization" (Pinderhughes 1987, p. 72). Unlike European ethnics, Black voters' political views involved group shift from one party to another in the 1930s, but the basis of the shift was by the racial group rather than by socioeconomic status within the group. In both cases, socioeconomic status was not the singular determinant of political participation and partisan identification.

More recent work by political scientists has reconsidered the socioeconomic model of voting when examining racial differences in political participation. Some research concludes that controlling for education, income and occupation shows "Black voter participation equals or exceeds that of Whites" (Pinderhughes 1985, p. 530; Nie and Verba 1972; Baxter and Lansing 1981; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Other research (Cavanagh 1985; National Black Election Study, 1984) shows that there are fewer significant differences in voting among Blacks by socioeconomic status than among Whites. However, Walton argues that the socioeconomic status model has not been validated for Black voters because of the relatively small numbers of Black respondents in the numerous surveys on which most of the socioeconomic theories have been based (Walton 1985, pp. 79-81). The numbers of Blacks have been too small, geographically limited, idiosyncratic, or most importantly, such surveys have been blind to the severe structural constraints within which "Black politics" existed.'

A second issue related to the early model of political participation is the definition of political behavior. The earliest models of political participation defined and limited behavior to electoral activity with highly constrained expectations about what the developmental pattern of participation would be. An important question is what form political participation takes in varying racial and ethnic communities. Researchers should look to specific information on patterns of group history, or the ways in which society responds to the group to develop general theory, and make no prior assumptions about the character or dimensions of political participation. It is also best to be cautious in applying findings about Blacks to successive racial or ethnic groups.

These earlier models assumed political participation was expressed primarily through electoral politics, that is, voting for public office. First this is a very narrow definition on which to base the development of political ideas, the selection of political leaders, the aggregation of information about politics, or the dissemination of policy choices (Almond and Verba 1965). Secondly, some communities for a variety of reasons may have a more complex set of political institutions for carrying out these functions, or for the functions they may choose to address than the electoral arena.

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1. Only the National Black Election Study has attempted to generate a sample size of methodological significance; I am aware of the research plans on the part of my fellow panelist Franklin Gilliam to conduct an SRC oversample, but Walton says of this type of strategy "the mere doubling, or tripling of the Black percentage in the population would not resolve the error" (1985, p. 81).

The major point is that assimilation to one standard of behavior should neither be presumed nor denied on the part of the researcher. If one assumes assimilation is the process through which each group will necessarily proceed, and that it involves only politics in the electoral arena, then the researcher will miss much of what may be happening in a particular 'community', because the person will key observations to only one set of expectations.

Secondly, a group may well have a set of values, or developed specialized institutions to deal with politics; it may have some relation to totally unspecialized groups which handle political issues, but observers must not presume there is any pre-existing structure or type of political institutions. Similarly, if politics is defined as only including voting or party organization, then researchers may miss a great deal which is politically significant to the group and to its definition of politics. Aldon Morris' study of the civil rights movement (1984), for example, draws attention to the important role of Black churches and other nonpolitical groups in the organization and development of infrastructures which permitted the political mobilization of Black populations in cities all over the south. A search for highly specialized political organizations governing the mobilization of the Black population at the local level, and communicating those interests at the national level, would produce meager results; however, the absence of such institutions need not lead to the conclusion that no institutions address these areas of concern (Pinderhughes 1983; 1987).<sup>2</sup> Emmett Carson argues that voluntary organizations and interest groups were explicitly restrained in some cases and outlawed in others by state and local governments (Carson 1987).

In 1972, Verba and Nie broadened their definition of politics beyond voting to include campaigning, cooperative activity (which includes community organizing), and contacting public officials (Verba and Nie 1972, pp. 162-66; Travis 1983, p. 9, 15). Other kinds of activity might be included under the cooperative activity category, such as religious organizations, infrastructure building, and political mobilization (as defined in the literature field). The latter is a critical part of Black electoral politics and has preceded recent successful Black mayoral elections in Chicago and Philadelphia (Pinderhughes 1985; Morrison 1987). Further discussion of this will occur in the final section on political mobilization.

The socioeconomic status model of political participation deserves serious reexamination. Assimilation does not follow any specific pattern, but may vary by group and its occurrence does not require political disintegration of the groups. Finally, political behavior includes, but is by no means limited to, electoral behavior; it ought to be broadened to consider contacting, cooperative, campaigning, and other activities.

Next I turn to a specific discussion of the variety of stimuli which may precipitate group based political behavior.

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2. Reed (1986, p. 44) challenges Morris' emphasis on the church arguing that it was not the "chief institutional force behind" activism. While Reed is correct that the church had not been politically active before the 1950s and it was not universally included in protest, it is also clear that the Black church played a major role in providing institutional support and resources for the Civil Rights Movement. See also Hamilton (1972), Walters (1979), and Frazier (1974).

## THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION MODEL

In Race and Ethnicity in Chicago Politics (Pinderhughes 1987), the political participation model specified a number of interactive variables which affected levels of group based political participation. According to this model, in order to predict the impact of a group within a specific political environment, both internal and external factors to the group must be considered.

Electoral behavior, especially group based electoral participation is the product of a complex variety of stimuli. There are no easily predictable patterns which explain what happens when a group "arrives" in the United States that lead to its involvement on a collective basis in political activities.

Earlier students of group politics including Dahl (1960) and James Q. Wilson (1960) focused on group adjustments as if the groups were independent variables in the process of becoming part of the American political process, and they assumed that each group necessarily moved towards nondiscriminatory political integration. The political participation model postulates that political participation evolves not only through characteristics internal to the group itself, but also because of and through the impact of external factors, namely the way in which the larger society shapes the group and its entry into that environment.

For example, a primary aspect to these issues is whether there is indeed a cohesive group. While this might seem a test of only modest dimensions, some of the early European ethnic groups such as Poles and Italians arrived in the U.S. prior to the creation of Polish and Italian nation-states. While there may have been culturally identifiable similarities in such types of people, they had not previously expressed them in political terms in the lands of their origin. Moreover, while Poles and Italians faced some identifiable discrimination as southern and eastern Europeans within the U.S., American society rarely compelled most of them to live in neighborhoods dominated only by members of their own group, blocked some but not all of their group from participating in the industrial labor market or in business, and rarely if ever proscribed one of their numbers from running for or serving in city wide office or in areas where they represented non-Poles or non-Italians. In short, there were some residential, and labor market barriers to entry for Poles and Italians but too few to generate a homogeneous set of political responses for all members of each group.<sup>3</sup> Marguerite Barnett has argued that only Blacks faced a consistent pattern of racial hierarchy and collective identification in all locations within the United States, while European ethnics faced inconsistent patterns of discrimination or privilege (Barnett 1976).

In other words, to some extent Poles and Italians did not see their groups as bases for political organization and expression. They were not uniformly denied social, economic or political entry on the basis of their group identity by the broader society (external factors), and their 'group' history did not provide them with a highly integrated group identity when they arrived in the country (internal factors). Consequently their political identity was not manifested in singular partisan identification, high agreement on political issues or goals, or consolidated group support

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<sup>3</sup>See Pinderhughes (1987), Chapters 2 and 4 for discussions of Italians and Poles in Chicago.

for singular leaders or political institutions. Blacks typically have strong agreement on all these measures.

In understanding how group based political expressions may occur, it is useful to draw on some of the variables in the political participation model. A combination of internal and external stimuli produces political expression first to generate group coherence and secondly to direct its expression toward the political arena. Direct access to other spheres of influence may reduce or mitigate the interest of the group in politics. In describing contemporary Black politics in New York, Martin Kilson has argued recently, for example, that "The racial limits on Black entry into entrepreneurial and professional roles creates an oversupply of persons seeking mobility through politics" (1987, p. 526).

If there are sufficient external stimuli, recognition of the group by the society in the creation of barriers to entry or of other patterns of discrimination, internal factors which encourage or reinforce group cohesiveness and political mobilization, and demographic factors such as that the group's size is large enough to generate some attention<sup>4</sup> in the political sphere, the possibility of political ethnicity increases.

External factors measure group access to the economic marketplace and to the political arena, those which determine residential settlement patterns. If there are weak or powerful barriers to group entry into the labor market, or into the operation of private businesses, if the political environment is highly competitive, or monopolized by a unified political organization, new groups will experience respectively increasing or decreasing difficulties in carving out space for themselves.

Internal factors evaluate leadership institutions and individual leaders, political socialization, partisan identification and political issues. The existence of politically active groups depend on the development or existence of distinctive group norms in all these areas. For there to be a group, these factors must be distinguishable from those in the larger society. Where there are no distinctive group norms, or they affect those individuals who are identifiable by national origins, but not by institutional, normative, political values or social behavior patterns, or political beliefs then it is unlikely their "identity" will be reflected in the political arena.

Contemporary examples of such a 'group' might be "Hispanics" whose numbers include a vast array of peoples of differing histories, races, geographic origins and national backgrounds. To say that one speaks Spanish is a classification of sorts, but not one which coheres with singular sets of internal variables described above. Black and White Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, Chicanos, Panamanians, Bolivians, and Colombians can not be expected to have a singular impact upon the politics of a city or region unless they begin to intermarry and to form a coherent whole new group and society responds to them as a cohesive "group". There is some evidence that the Puerto Rican and Mexican American populations of Chicago are beginning this process, and may eventually form a cohesive new group (Latino Institute 1986, p. ii; Flores and Attinas 1988).

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4 The reader should note that I use the word ethnicity sparingly and only to refer to subgroups among Europeans, among Blacks or among Asians. All groups do not fit neatly into overarching racial categories, or specific subracial ethnic units, Mexican Americans are one example, but I prefer to use the term race to refer to Blacks, Asians, or Europeans, and ethnic to Italians, Poles, Japanese or Chinese.



Language politics is becoming an acutely sensitive issue in many locales and intersects with racial and/or ethnic group membership. Byran Jackson recently reported on the results of English only balloting (Proposition 63) in California elections (1988). Statewide, 71% of Hispanics opposed the English only requirements, while Asians voted in favor of them. Jackson hypothesized that support and opposition correlated with positive and negative attitudes toward ethnic assimilation. In other words, because of their opposition to English only requirements, Mexican Americans and other Spanish speaking groups oppose assimilation while Asians, which include large numbers of Chinese, Japanese and Koreans, support assimilation (because of their support for English only).

It is difficult to interpret what positions on this one piece of legislation mean for several reasons. Support for English only need not translate into support for assimilation as Asians are a considerably smaller proportion of the population than Mexican Americans. The former may feel language protections for some may not translate into language protections for all, especially for smaller groups; they could be forced to learn Spanish as well as English, but perhaps in exchange receive no privileged status for Korean or Chinese. Since Spanish is widely spoken in California, Mexican American opposition to English only would merely further validate their existing linguistic preference, and be unlikely to impose any new such requirements upon them.

Benjamin Marquez (1987) argues that there has been mixed support for assimilationist, group identification positions within the Mexican American population, while the extensive presence of linguistically identifiable Korean businesses in concentrated areas of Los Angeles, suggest they may be extremely comfortable in group based economic networks as in individual penetration of the economic marketplace.

The appearance of unity created by linguistic similarities is deceptive at least at this point. Hispanics are not a political group as such as was indicated above. Even Mexican Americans incorporate several distinct generations creating the bases for political heterogeneity within the single nationality group. Long term residents of the territory that was once part of Mexico and is now American, early twentieth century immigrants and their children who have become well established and interested in political and social assimilation and mid to late twentieth century immigrants have distinctive political attitudes. These groups have radically different experiences of their nation's history and of the U.S. upon their 'arrival' (Marquez 1987). While the League of United Latin American Citizens, La Raza, and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund are political organizations representing Mexican Americans they incorporate a multi-generational range of social and economic experiences both within the group and imposed upon the group within the United States. Within L. U. L. A. C., for example, there were members who claimed Mexican Americans

were little different than other Americans. Not waiting for Anglo society to embrace them wholeheartedly, they sought to integrate themselves by engaging in such community activities as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H Clubs, Little League Baseball, the March of Dimes and the Red Cross... Manuel C. Gonzalez, a charter member of the organization, once suggested that the primary purpose of the LULAC was to function as an 'Americanization Program' (Marquez 1987, p. 87-88).

By the 1960s and 1970s Chicano organizations decried LULAC's emphasis on cultural and social assimilation in favor of group based identification.

While these internal factors may encourage some group diversity, the coexistence of factors external to the group, and the existence of discrimination based on either language or group identity against Mexican Americans, may reduce in-group differences on political beliefs and strategies. Even as past generations of Mexican Americans are identified and politically mobilized however, successive generations of immigrants, many of whom are illegal aliens, complicate the politicization and mobilization process. In this case there is political ethnicity but it is not an especially homogeneous form of group expression.

There is great political diversity within the Black population. There are powerful recurring divisions on political values, strategy, beliefs and on the usefulness of electoral participation, but these have been substantially reduced by the continuing presence of external discriminatory factors which have isolated Blacks and have reinforced their willingness or even their ability to approach the political arena in other than a group based orientation (Hamilton and Carmichael 1967; Pinderhughes 1987, pp. 109-40; Kilson 1987, pp. 527-28). Analysis of racial or political orientations on one dimension, and economic orientations along a second, for example, revealed thirty-one coalitions for Black groups (Pinderhughes 1987, pp. 124-30). A third dimension of attitudes toward and interest in cultural identification with Africa would add considerably more complexity.

Another factor which is historically specific and which explains why Blacks are so homogenous, is the process by which the group entered the country, which shapes both the size of the group and the extent to which there are internal variations in socialization, and identification within groups. A group from a geographic location of close proximity and easy access to the United States, is more likely to have continuing migration than one of more distant. In the former case, that immigration may be of several types: informal such as illegal border crossing, new "groups" created by political action such as the victory of the United States over Mexico in the War of 1848, and the acquisition of land in what became the southwestern United States, introduced a population of former Mexican citizens into the U.S. This occurred not by the actual movement of the population, but by the re-arrangement of America's political boundary (Barrera 1979, pp. 1-13).

These first Chicanos have been succeeded by waves of immigrants drawn by work in industrial factories in the midwest, and by available work in western cities. While American immigration policy not only did not encourage Mexican immigration, but implemented a deportation policy in the 1920s and 1930s, the surplus agricultural population in Mexico, combined with increased attractiveness of jobs in the north, has led to continued immigration over the last decades.

By contrast the great distance from Africa combined with the considerable legislative opposition has consistently kept legal and illegal immigration from Africa to a minimum. Beverly Hawk shows that in every decade from 1820 through 1970, immigration from Africa has remained virtually undetectable, less than one percent of the total. In the 1970s, as Table 1 shows, the numbers rose to a high for this entire period: 1.7% (Hawk 1987, pp. 7-9).

Racial politics in the United States has never included the option of increasing Black political influence by immigration. Congress revised immigration regulations in 1965. The 1965 legislation

removed the national quota system which had prevailed since 1921... According to the preference system, reunification of families was a priority making it possible for newly naturalized citizens to bring

relatives into the country... [or] those immigrants who held technical skills or degrees were in demand in the America work force... (Hawk 1987, p. 2).

This new act no longer imposed national quotas or distinguished among Asians, Africans and Northern Europeans. In the same years as the 1965 Voting Rights Act was passed, civil rights ally, Emanuel Celler reassured his colleagues who were worried about an influx of non-White immigrants: "There will not be comparatively many Asians and Africans entering the country... since (they) have very few relatives here" (Hawk 1987, p. 3). Because of the "cultural amputation" (Hawk 1987, p. 5) of African Americans from their relatives on the continent, and because only a small proportion of Africans meet the occupational skills requirements specified by the legislation Congress closed the door to an increase in the non-European population. The possibilities for an expansion in the relative size of political influence available to Europeans, Mexican Americans, and Asians, are therefore highly limited for Black Americans.

On the other hand these immigration limitations with the exception of Caribbean immigrants, have created an extremely homogeneous Black American population. Relatively small proportions of the ancestors of contemporary African Americans arrived after the 1860s when the last of the slave ships sailed into southern harbors. Most Blacks or their ancestors have been exposed to highly conservative rural agricultural life with extremely constrained systems of racial hierarchy and collectivism. Two thirds now live in southern, western or northern urban areas, and forty percent had settled in the urban north by the decades after World War II. Separation from one's home and family in Africa, mixing of the various tribal groupings after capture, the middle passage, sale into slavery, the gradual development of a distinctly Afro-American population subject to pervasive social, economic, political and cultural controls in the South, and twentieth century migration to cities in the North and West, created an unusually differentiated population group within White American society. Such a group had and has distinctive leadership institutions, and leadership styles, clear patterns of political socialization, distinct kinds and types of partisan identification, and responsiveness to political issues. This has tended almost uniformly throughout the American cities and rural areas as the limitations on Black political participation have been lifted, to result in group based political expressions of great similarity (Walton 1985, National Black Election Study 1984; Pinderhughes, 1987).

With the exception of locations where there is genuine Black political ethnicity, Black voting is relatively homogeneous under certain conditions of political mobilization. In Boston, for example, Toni Travis reports on the multi-ethnic character of the Black population including American Blacks of different economic variations, West Indians, and Cape Verdeans (1983, p. 113, 316). New York has a more complex community of Black ethnics because of the large number of Caribbean immigrants who have settled in the city for several generations.

#### CITIES WITH EXTENSIVE GROUP BASED POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

In recent decades, Gary, Newark, Detroit, Atlanta, New Orleans, Chicago, Philadelphia and Baltimore have mobilized in support of the election of Black mayors. These mayors have been elected with the support of a small proportion of White voters, but without the almost universal loyalty and turnout of nearly all Black voters, they could not have won. Table 2 shows

the year of election, percentage Black in the electorate and percentage loyalty of Black support for a Black mayoral candidate in Cleveland, New Orleans, and Chicago. The percentages suggest quite dramatically the fallacies in the socioeconomic model; with a Black candidate, who addresses issues of substantive interest to the Black population, who also mobilizes that population using the complex array of political and nonpolitical organizations available, Black turnout rises well above the norm in American politics, and Black voter loyalty is literally stratospheric.

An important indication of the fact that the patterns in Chicago's 1983 mayoral election, Cleveland's 1967 mayoral election and New Orleans's 1977 election are not automatic is that successive events have shown the rapid development of considerable intragroup conflict. Black candidates such as Harold Washington in 1977 were unable to mobilize Black voters in unified fashion. The consequences for political control are greatest in these cities where Blacks are close to a minority or are a bare majority of the electorate; where they are significant majorities such as in Gary, Newark, Detroit or Washington, D.C., Black mayors were elected and re-elected for several terms in succession. In Chicago, Cleveland and New Orleans intragroup conflict quickly transformed the first victory Black mayoral into a delicate balancing process. Blacks in cities such as St. Louis and New York City have yet to successfully mobilize their Black populations in support of a single victorious Black candidate.

#### CONCLUSION

This paper has addressed the limitations of the socioeconomic status model of political participation in explaining group based electoral behavior. The political participation model is proposed as an alternative strategy for describing the factors which shape the likelihood that racial or ethnic groups will express their group identity in the political arena and will do so in ways that include but are by no means limited to voting. Specific references to Blacks, Asians, Mexican Americans and other groups were used to indicate the situations in which "group" might indicate (a) cultural similarities, but not political expressions, (b) some but not singular political expressions, and (c) both cultural similarities and homogeneous political expressions of group identity. Even in this latter case, strong external and internal factors supporting group based political expression, do not guarantee continuing political unanimity.

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TABLE 1  
Immigration Migration to the United States 1821-1980

Years	Total	Immigration from Africa	% of Total
1821-1830	143,439	16	.01
1831-40	599,125	54	.009
1841-50	1,713,251	55	.003
1851-60	2,598,214	210	.008
1861-70	2,314,824	312	.01
1871-80	2,812,191	358	.01
1881-90	5,246,613	857	.01
1991-00	3,687,564	350	.009
1901-10	8,795,386	7,368	.08
1911-20	5,735,811	8,443	.14
1921-30	4,107,209	6,086	.15
1931-40	528,431	1,750	.33
1941-50	1,035,039	7,367	.71
1951-60	2,515,479	14,092	.56
1961-70	3,321,677	28,954	.87
1971-80	4,493,314	80,779	1.7

Source: Beverly Hawk 1987, 7-9, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 1982. Washington DC 1985.

TABLE 2  
Black Urban Mobilization

Year	City	Mayor	% Black in Elec.	% Black in Winning Coalition	
				----- Turnout	Loyal ty
	Gary	Richard Hatcher			
1967	Cleveland	Carl Stokes	40	81.7	
	Newark	Sharpe James			
	Detroit	Coleman Young			
	Atlanta	Maynard Jackson			
1977	New Orleans	Ernest Morial	42	76	98
1983	Chicago	Harold Washington	43	77	98
	Philadelphia	Wilson Goode			
	Baltimore	Kurt Schmoke			