African Americans and the Progressive Movement

A Background Report for Strategic Communications

Robert P. Jones, Ph.D.
Director and Senior Fellow

Dan Cox
Policy & Values Research Associate

April 2006

www.centerforamericanvalues.org
At People for the American Way Foundation
The Center for American Values in Public Life
The mission of the Center for American Values in Public Life is to advance bold progressive ideas rooted in fundamental American moral and religious values. The Center achieves this goal by conducting rigorous research and analysis, innovative message testing, and movement-building collaboration.

The Center is dedicated to promoting a progressive vision of American public life that hears in the diversity of our voices fundamental values that have the potential to bring together a lasting progressive majority to work for a better, more just America. The Center celebrates the vibrancy and pluralism of American religious life and affirms an appropriate public role for religion that is consistent with our basic constitutional principles. As a nonpartisan educational and research project founded by People for the American Way Foundation, the Center is a collaborative partner in building progressive intellectual infrastructure and advancing the progressive movement.

The African American Ministers Leadership Council
People For the American Way Foundation created the African American Ministers Leadership Council (AAMLC) in 1997 with the guidance and active leadership of Board member Rev. Timothy McDonald of Atlanta's First Iconium Baptist Church.

The mission of the AAMLC is to create and sustain a progressive ministers’ alliance that will:
- Counter the Religious Right's efforts to secure the support of Black churches through disingenuous use of so-called “moral values” and faith-based initiative incentives;
- Increase ministers’ skills through training on media, communication, messaging, nonpartisan voter registration and GOTV, advocacy and public policy;
- Strengthen the leadership of individual progressive African American ministers, enhance their visibility and influence in the public debates, and increase their ability to educate, mobilize, and increase the civic engagement of their communities;
- Unite progressive African American ministers across the country into a cohesive network that can bring added power to their efforts for change.

AAMLC is unique because it represents a sustained, ongoing effort to support, strengthen, and mobilize churches, the most influential institutions within the African American community. The inspiring ministers who make up this network are the true leaders of the program, setting priorities, actively recruiting other members, and serving as much needed voices to convey progressive values in meaningful ways to persons of faith and the broader community.

About This Document
This working document, and the collaborative methodology of which it is a part, is representative of the heart of the work of the Center for American Values in Public Life, which utilizes its own original research and analysis, the best of existing survey research and focus group research, academic literature, and input from leading experts in order to provide multiple lenses on the state of knowledge about demographic constituencies of strategic importance to the progressive movement.

Major sources for this document include the following:
- The Center’s own focus groups among progressive ministers from 17 states (Out of the Boat and into the Storm: A National Conversation with African American Ministers, October 2005);
- The 1996 National Black Politics Study and leading academic analyses of this key study;
- Two recent surveys of African Americans (CBS/BET survey and Human Rights Campaign survey);
- Presidential election national exit polls, the National Election Study and U.S. Census Bureau information;
- Surveys and analyses by the Joint Center for Political an Economic Studies, the National Urban League, the Pew Research Center, and others;
- Leading scholarly studies of African American politics, culture, and religion.

This document is certainly not meant to be the last word on any of the issues covered, and we hope it will spark debate. We have endeavored to gather a diverse set of materials that would serve as a primer to spur creative thinking about strategic communications with this important core progressive constituency.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The extreme Religious Right and its political allies have embarked on a concerted effort to recruit African Americans to conservative causes with a two-pronged, religion-based strategy that focuses on same-sex marriage and faith-based initiative funding.

Despite some signs of economic progress, African Americans still experience significant and persistent equality gaps—an indication that for many African Americans, the American dream is still “a dream deferred.” Campaign outreach patterns and national political party priorities have done little to convince African Americans that their issues are central to the wider progressive movement.

Over three-quarters of African Americans express disillusionment about American promises of equality and express feelings of alienation from public life. African Americans still widely support the basic tenets of American liberalism, but they support an egalitarian form of liberalism that differs from mainstream liberalism in its emphasis on equality over liberty and community over the individual. Moreover, support for liberalism is tempered by disillusionment. These high levels of disillusionment also provide increasing support for community nationalism, which is the most influential ideology on black public opinion.

In terms of national political typologies, the majority of African Americans fall in the Conservative Democrats and Disadvantaged Democrats typology groups.

The most important issues for African Americans are issues relating to economic security—job opportunities, increasing the minimum wage, and access to quality education and health-care.

A majority of African Americans believe that homosexuality is morally wrong, oppose same-sex marriage, and resist equating the struggle for equal rights for gays and lesbians with the civil rights movement. However, very few (< one percent) rank same-sex marriage as an important issue; African Americans generally support antidiscrimination laws that are about upholding human rights; and the key difference may be which frame, the morality of homosexuality or the discriminatory nature of anti-gay laws, is most operative in the public debate.

Younger African Americans of the Hip Hop generation are more politically independent and individually oriented than the older generation; they are less connected to traditional forms of Black culture (e.g. the Black church); a majority do not believe they can make a difference in their communities, and many feel isolated not only from mainstream society but also from older Black leaders.

African Americans have a long tradition of using strong moral language in politics, appealing to what is right and just. The vast majority of African Americans are also highly religious and look to religion for guidance in everyday life. Historically, religion has not only provided an important lens for seeing the world, but religious institutions have served as central social institutions and “the cultural womb” of the black community.

The traditional Gospel of Liberation that made the Black church the heart of the civil rights movement and encourages political action for social justice is being challenged by a growing Gospel of Prosperity that threatens to turn the Black church away from political action toward individual prosperity.
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AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT: STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

African Americans have consistently supported political parties that championed not only equal rights but economic equality and progress. In 1936, African Americans realigned their partisan affiliation from the Republican Party of Lincoln to the Democratic Party of FDR with his “New Deal.” Since that time, African Americans have perennially supported Democratic candidates and progressive causes, and have been the bedrock of progressive coalitions, especially since 1964 when Lyndon Johnson made the passage of civil rights legislation a priority and the 1965 Voting Rights Act ensured greater political enfranchisement.

Heading into the 2004 elections, surveys showed deep disapproval among African Americans with the Bush administration’s conservative policies. Four months before the election, Bush had an 82 percent job disapproval rating among African Americans. The war in Iraq, arguably the signature policy of his first term, was exceedingly unpopular with African Americans, 79 percent of whom believed that the war was not worth the costs. Moreover, an overwhelming 84 percent of African Americans did not believe that Bush was legitimately elected in 2000 (CBS/BET Monthly Poll 2004). The exit polls revealed that African Americans voted strongly for Kerry (88 percent), and although African Americans made up only 13% of the population, they made up 22% of Kerry’s vote (Bositis 2004a).

Yet despite the unpopularity of many of the Bush administration’s economic and foreign policies among African Americans, Bush managed to peel away slightly more African Americans from the Democratic candidate than he had four years earlier, increasing his vote share among African Americans in 2004 by two points (from 9 percent to 11 percent), (National Election Exit Poll 2004). And among some African American subgroups, the gains were more substantial. Among Black Protestants, Bush gained a full twelve points (from 5 percent to 17 percent), (Bliss Institute, 2004). In the key battleground states of Ohio and Florida, Bush made significant gains among African Americans as well, increasing seven points (9 percent to 16 percent) and six points (7 percent to 13 percent) respectively (Sangillo 2005).

Putting these numbers in context is important. Bush was only able to capture 8 percent of the Black vote in 2000, the lowest vote totals of any Republican candidate since Barry Goldwater (6 percent), who ran on a segregationist platform in 1964 (Bositis 2004b). And, it is important to note that even after these modest gains, Bush still only attracted 11 percent of this traditionally progressive constituency, a number that is in line with historical levels of support of Republican candidates at about 10 to 12 percent (Harris-Lacewell 2005).

It is also important, however, not to overlook findings that show the challenges between African Americans and the wider progressive movement. Progressives must understand historical developments, the present situation, the complexity of opinion and behavior trends, and shifting demographic characteristics that provide openings for conservatives to move African Americans away from the progressive movement.

- African Americans, especially African American people of faith, often hold a complex mix of liberal political views and conservative social views. As one participant in the Center’s focus groups among African American ministers described it, African Americans are “liberal” but “with conservative vibrations.”
- Although African Americans have been solidly progressive, they are becoming increasingly disillusioned with the priorities of both major political parties; according to a CBS News/BET poll less than half of African Americans (46.5 percent) thought a Kerry victory would result in more opportunities for them (CBS/BET, 2004).
- African Americans are also trending more Independent in party affiliation; nearly a third of African Americans under 30 considered themselves Independents in 2004 (CBS/BET 2004).
- As the Civil Rights generation is passing away, there is no clear consensus on new progressive leadership within the African American community. When a February 2006 AP/AOL poll among African Americans asked respondents to identify the most important African American leader, over one-third declined to cite anyone, two of the top three were Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell who are associated with the Bush administration, and the person receiving the highest number of responses (only 14 percent) was Jesse Jackson (AOL/AP Black Voices Survey 2006).
• Finally, the extreme religious right and its political allies are targeting African Americans for aggressive outreach. RNC Chair Ken Mehlman and Tony Perkins of the James Dobson-related Family Research Council have both publicly proclaimed their intentions to recruit African Americans. African American ministers in the

Center’s focus groups identified this conservative strategy as a two-pronged, religion-centered effort:

• An appeal to cultural issues such as same-sex marriage; A strategic use of Faith-based Initiative funding to recruit African American leadership, something a recent LA Times article called “a little known chapter in the playbook of Bush’s 2004 reelection campaign” (Hamberger, et. al. 2005).

In the Center’s focus groups among African American ministers, participants spoke of the need for a “reawakening” to complete the unfinished work of the Civil Rights movement and the importance of acknowledging and responding to the inroads being made by conservatives; they agreed that the present represented a critical “moment of opportunity” to “once again birth something glorious,” but they emphasized that this moment will only be realized if it is deliberately seized by progressives.

Most conservatives have acknowledged that it is unlikely that African Americans will completely reverse 40 years of voting habits. However, it is feasible that sustained efforts could yield small and significant gains for the conservatives. "It may not be 1,000 flowers, but they're blooming all over the place," said Republican National Committee Chairman Ken Mehlman. "I believe that there is a tremendous opportunity for the party to build on what we've done over the past couple of years to improve our performance in the African American community" (Hamberger and Wallsten 2005).

The divisions within the African community make targeted outreach strategies that much more crucial for progressives as well as conservatives. The African American community is not monolithic, and there are important cleavages along theological, generational, economic and ideological lines that conservatives have sought to exploit and that progressives need to understand. Even modest gains by conservatives in such a critical progressive constituency could be devastating to the progressive agenda when elections are decided by razor thin margins.¹

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**African Americans: Basic Demographics**

- Second Largest Minority group (just behind Hispanics) in U.S.
- 13 percent of total U.S. population, 36 million people
- 54 percent female, 46 percent male
- On average younger in comparison to the population as a whole
  - More than half (56 percent) are under the age of 35
  - About a third (32.8 percent) are under the age of 18
- Religion: 85 percent Protestant, 6 percent Catholic in eight major majority-Black denominations and members in a number of majority white denominations*

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 American Community Survey.
*Source: Pew Values Survey

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**ECONOMIC WELL-BEING AND INEQUALITY**

**Economic Status**

African Americans have made measurable economic progress over the last 40 years, with almost one-third reaching the middle class. There are more African Americans in the upper income bracket than ever before,

with the proportion of black households making $75,000 to $99,999 increasing fourfold between 1967 and 2003; during the same period, the proportion of white households in that range merely doubled. The number of African American households in the middle class has grown from about 20 percent in 1967 to about 30 percent in 2004, (Wheary 2005). The number of black-owned businesses jumped 33 percent between 1992 and 1997, more than four times the increase for all U.S. firms for the same period (Klein 2004).

Despite the significant economic achievement among some Blacks, the African American community as a whole is a long way from achieving economic or social parity with whites. Using a composite index measuring five areas of equality, the National Urban League (NUL) recently reported in their *The State of Black America 2006* that the overall status of blacks as measured by their five-part Equality Index was just 73 percent of their white counterparts, a measure that has remained relatively unchanged over the last few years (Jones 2006).

The shifting economic ground—the decline of manufacturing jobs beginning in the 1970s, the recession of the 1980s, increased debt, and the move to service jobs with few or no benefits such as health insurance—has made much of this progress unstable. Although middle class growth has increased overall from its 1967 benchmark of 20 percent, 1972 marked the beginning of a twenty-year period of relatively flat growth. As a PBS *Frontline* show titled “The Two Nations of Black America,” concluded, the effect is that, like trends in the wider population, “the middle class present in 1970 has been squeezed over a 20 year period, pushing families above and below the middle class lines. The promising news is that more families have been pushed upward, but we have not filled their places with families from the lower classes” (PBS Frontline 1997).

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*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 American Community Survey.
****Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division, August 2005.*

The widest disparities between Blacks and Whites are in economics, where the NUL Equality Index for African Americans was just 56 percent of their white counterparts in 2006 (National Urban League 2006). Since 1955, the black unemployment rate has been on average twice that of whites (Dawson 38); in 2006 the Black unemployment rate was 2.3 times the white unemployment rate (11.3 percent vs. 5 percent), (U.S. Census, CPS 2006). In 2004, an extraordinary 72 percent of African Americans were somewhat or very concerned that someone in their household might be out of work in the next 12 months (CBS/BET 2004). One in four Blacks lived in poverty, a rate that was relatively unchanged over the last few years and a rate that is nearly four times higher than whites (24.7 percent vs. 8.6 percent). Black households had the lowest median income in 2005 ($30,134) of any racial or ethnic group. The median income for white households was $48,977 and the median income for Hispanic households was $34,241 (CBS/BET 2004).
These household figures are affected by family structure. African Americans are less likely to be married than any other ethnic group (34 percent vs. 57 percent for whites), and higher proportions of African American households are single-mother households (19 percent versus 6 percent for whites). Single-mother households have the highest poverty rates of any household structure; in 2004, fully 45 percent of African American single-mother households were below the poverty line. (U.S. Census, ACS 2004).

The financial instability facing many middle class Black families is also significantly the result of disparity in wealth. Mary Patillo-McCoy, in her study of the Black middle class, found that Blacks just entering the middle class face an enormous disparity of wealth compared to similarly situated Whites who may have been middle class for generations (Patillo-McCoy 2001). The median net worth for blacks, the strongest measure of real economic security, was less than one-tenth what it is for whites ($6,166 vs. $67,000), (NUL 2006).

Thomas M. Shapiro summarized the significant difference between the economic security of whites and blacks as follows:

The white middle class stands for the most part on the two legs of good earning and substantial financial assets while the black middle class largely stands on the earning leg alone. Middle-class status is thus more precarious for blacks than it is for whites; blacks are more susceptible to falling from middle-class grace, less capable of cushioning hard times, and less able to retool careers or change directions. And they are far less able to pass long their hard-earned successes to their children (Shapiro 2006).

**Other Measures: Education, Health Care, Justice, and Civic Engagement**

The National Urban League’s (NUL) 2006 Equality Index for the educational status of African Americans was 78 percent of their white counterparts. For every ten whites who receive a college degree, only 6.3 Blacks do (NUL 2006). Only 17 percent of African Americans have received a college education or higher in 2004 (U.S. Census Bureau 2005).

The NUL Equality Index for Health status of African Americans was 76% of whites and is “impacted by higher rates of obesity, substance abuse and AIDS, plus less access to health insurance.” African Americans are five times as likely to die as a victim of homicide and are almost 10 times as likely to have HIV compared to whites (NUL 2006). In 2004, one in five (19.7%, 7.2 million) African Americans lacked health insurance—an status that is linked not only to poorer health outcomes but to economic vulnerability, since a single major health incident could be financially catastrophic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). This number is lower than the rate for Hispanics (32.7 percent, 13.7 million) but higher than the population as a whole (15.7 percent, 45.8 million) and almost double the rate for whites (11.3 percent, 22 million).

In his 1995 book *Beyond Black and White*, Manning Marable notes stark statistics on the African American community and the criminal justice system: “By 1992, 23 percent of all young African-American men between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine were in prison, on probation, parole, or awaiting trial” (Marable 1995). The NUL Social Justice index for African Americans, which contains mainly criminal justice measures, was 74% of whites in 2006. Once arrested, Blacks are three times as likely to be imprisoned as whites, and Blacks are sentenced to death four times as often as whites (NUL 2006).

NUL found only one category in 2005 where African Americans achieved a higher index than whites, Civic Engagement, with an Equality Index value of 1.04. While voter turnout is consistently about 10 points lower than white turnout (see below), Blacks are 13 percent more likely to volunteer in the military, 24 percent more likely to participate in labor unions, and twice as likely to be government employees (NUL 2006). In another area of civil society, involvement in religious institutions, African Americans are also more likely to attend religious services once per week or more than Americans as a whole (57% vs. 42%).

Despite some signs of growth, these equality gaps indicate that for many African Americans the American dream is still “a dream deferred.” These realities underpin one of the most consistent findings in Black public opinion over the last decade: a deep sense of disillusionment with the gap between American ideals and the realities of persistent racial inequality. Political scientist Michael Dawson noted that “no matter how the question is worded or how the data are analyzed, massive numbers of African Americans, well over three-
quarters of the black population, continue to believe in the fundamental unfairness of this society” (Dawson 304). Consistent with these findings, African Americans as a whole scored higher than any other demographic group measured on an “Alienation Index” in a 2004 Harris poll, with 74 percent (vs. 45 percent of whites and 62 percent of Hispanics) agreeing with five different statements expressing views about wealth, social integration, civic participation, and power.

AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL IDENTITY

The 2004 Election

African Americans were very interested in the 2004 election: roughly three quarters stated that they were paying close or very close attention to the campaign (CBS/BET 2004). Not surprisingly, turnout increased significantly in 2004 from four years earlier. Approximately 14.6 million Blacks voted in 2004, an increase of about 4 million votes over the 10.5 million votes cast in 2000 (Bositis 2004a).

Much of the increase in Black turnout was driven by young voters—almost half of the new Black voters in 2004 were under the age of 30. African Americans under 30 cast 1.6 million more ballots in 2004 (3.7 million) than 2000 (2.1 million), (Lopez, 2005). The increase of young Black voters was a boon to Kerry who received about the same support from this group as African Americans as a whole. Kerry’s strong support among young Blacks (88 percent) and young Hispanics (58 percent) gave him the edge with young voters under 30 generally—the only age group he won. White young voters under 30 supported Bush over Kerry, 55 percent to 44 percent (Lopez 2005).

Yet although they were interested, and supported Kerry in large numbers, most African Americans were lukewarm about his candidacy. Like most Kerry voters, African Americans who supported the Democratic candidate are perhaps best described as anti-Bush voters. In the summer before the election, only 27 percent of African Americans stated that they were excited about a Kerry candidacy (CBS/BET 2004).

Partisan Loyalty

African Americans have historically been and continue to be a reliable Democratic constituency. Recent polls have found that slightly more than three quarters of Blacks identify as Democrats, which actually belies the partisan strength of this group. African American support for Democratic presidential candidates is generally slightly higher than partisan identification. Since Jimmy Carter’s failed reelection bid in 1980, Democratic candidates for president have averaged an overwhelming 87 percent support from Black voters (Bositis 2004b).

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2 Harris Poll, “The Alienation Index,” November 9-12, 2004. The index is calculated by taking the mean of those who agree with the five statements: “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer;” “what you think doesn’t count very much anymore;” most people with power try to take advantage of people like yourself;” “the people running the country don’t really care about what happens to you;” and “you’re left out of things going on around you.” Interestingly, the Alienation Index score for Democrats was 67 percent versus only 26 percent for Republicans, suggesting that the index may be measuring alienation vis-à-vis the political party in power.
Voter Turnout

Despite the large increase of African American voters in 2004, the percentage of Blacks showing up at the polls still lagged behind white voters. Since 1980, Black voter turnout in presidential years has averaged almost 10 points lower (53.2 percent) than White voter turnout (62.9 percent), (U.S. Census Bureau, CPS 1964-2004).

Lower African American turnout at the polls is driven by a number of factors. As noted above, the socioeconomic status of African Americans is generally lower than the population as a whole, and lower socioeconomic status is generally correlated with lower voter turnout. The majority of Black voters live in the southern states that have more restrictive voting laws, and many African Americans in these states still experience overt efforts aimed at discouraging minority voting. Finally, campaign outreach patterns have done little to convince African Americans that their issues are central to either major political party or the wider progressive movement. In 2004, the Kerry campaign virtually ceded the entire South to Bush, choosing instead to focus on swing states like Pennsylvania and Ohio. Such a strategy has deleterious effects on political participation of Blacks, a majority of whom reside in these ignored states. Rep. Mel Watt, the newly elected head of the Congressional Black Caucus, voiced concerns about the effect this strategy has on Black America.

When you concede a state, you are doing two things. First, you're conceding that African Americans are not going to have any input into the presidential selection, at least at the Electoral College level. Second, you are not getting those African Americans mobilized in ways that can affect other things down the ticket—statewide races, judicial elections (Solow 2005).

Moreover, because Black voters have historically been so crucial to the electoral coalition of the progressive movement, continuing to rely on a strategy that neglects their importance in local and statewide elections could have potentially disastrous consequences. Black voters made up 22.1 percent of Kerry’s total in 2004, which means that about every fifth Kerry voter was African American. Black women, who represent a larger share of the electorate than Black men and who supported Kerry in higher numbers, comprised 13.1 percent of his total vote (Bositis 2004a).
CONSERVATIVE OUTREACH STRATEGIES TO AFRICAN AMERICANS

You’re seeing a bridge being built between African Americans and evangelicals who tend to be Republican. Right now that dialogue is focused on marriage, but as we share and learn, you’ll see it broadening.3

-- Tony Perkins of the James Dobson-affiliated Family Research Council

The leaders of the far religious Right and their political allies structured an outreach strategy in 2004 that indicated an understanding and appreciation of growing divisions within the African American community and a willingness to exploit these divisions for partisan gain. Key efforts from the far Religious Right and several high-profile policies emanating from the White House during George W. Bush’s first term reflected a concerted effort to find common ground within certain segments of the African American population. While Bush and the GOP were often criticized for offering little of substance to the African American community, there was a significant effort to emphasize issues of symbolic importance. Bush’s faith-based initiative, the proposal to privatize social security, and the emphasis on moral and religious values, especially under the banner of the ban on gay marriage, were all important elements of this strategy. Three groups that conservatives targeted openly and aggressively were young Blacks who tend to be more independent and less supportive of traditional Democratic issues like Social Security, upwardly mobile middle- and upper-class Blacks, and religious Blacks who maintain conservative positions on many cultural issues.

Bans on Same-sex Marriage and Adoption by Same-sex Couples

As the quote from Perkins above demonstrates, the foundation for the concerted outreach strategy by the far Religious Right and its political allies in 2004 rested significantly on the issue of gay marriage. In 2004, conservative activists successfully placed the issue of gay marriage on the ballot in 11 states. Shortly following the election, two groups of prominent African American ministers with ties to former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and the Heritage Foundation unveiled a “Black Contract with America on Moral Values” and a “Mayflower Compact for Black America,” both of which emphasized banning same-sex marriage. In 2006, conservative activists have taken steps to pass laws or secure November ballot initiatives on banning gay marriage in seven states and banning gay adoption in 16 states (Stone 2006).

The Black Contract with America on Moral Values emphasizes six key areas: family reconstruction, wealth creation, education reform, prison reform, health care, and African Relief. Bishop Harry R. Jackson, Jr., who presides over the 3,000-member Hope Christian Church in Lanham, MD, is the architect of the document. Bishop Jackson, a life-long Democrat, started the High Impact Leadership Coalition to reaffirm the centrality of values in the political debate, but his support for Bush was precipitated by the issue of same-sex marriage.

If the Democratic Party doesn't get smart and say, “There's some way to deal with this other than going after marriage” - if they don't make civil unions their clear position - they'll fracture their base. Forty percent of adults, and 47 percent of African-Americans, can be categorized as evangelical Christians. They may well feel compelled to vote [based on] moral values (Pitts 2006).

Although Jackson acknowledges that Bush and many conservatives have their work cut out for them in making real inroads within the Black community, he argues that “the old labels of Democrat and Republican, left and right, have outlived their usefulness” and he urges other African Americans to adopt his own motto that "whoever supports a moral platform is fine by me" (Pitts 2006). In an interview with Newsweek about the nature of his relationship with the Bush White House, Jackson quipped, “We're dating, and there's tremendous attraction, but we're not married yet” (Gilgoff 2005).

While some elements of the Black Contract with America, such as restoring rights to former felons, may be politically dicey issues for the GOP, the sponsorship of the document unveiling event demonstrates the support of the Religious Right and their political allies; the event was sponsored in part by the Traditional Values Coalition, which is led by Rev. Louis P. Sheldon, a white evangelical with close ties to RNC Chairman Ken Mehlman, Karl Rove, and others in the Bush administration.

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Similarly, “The 21st Century Mayflower Compact” calls upon African Americans to “pick up the mantle of responsibility and pledge ourselves to the task of strengthening our families, our communities and our nation in this generation.” The Compact calls upon government to “take the side of individuals to allow them more choices, more control and more ownership of their property.” Like the Contract with Black America, the first item in the Mayflower Compact is concerned with strengthening the family, which the document interprets as “strengthening of the separate and unique roles of fathers and mothers” and working “to pass a constitutional amendment that defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman.” Again, here the GOP ties are evident: Oliver Kellman, the group’s chairman, was advised by former house leader Newt Gingrich’s consulting firm in constructing and marketing the document in a series of town hall meetings in 20 states.

As these documents and their sponsors indicate, conservatives have demonstrated a willingness not only to speak openly to Blacks about cultural issues but also to claim that on these issues African Americans should feel at home among conservatives.

The Faith-based Initiative

The second major prong in the right-wing strategy revolves around Bush’s well-publicized faith-based initiative. In an article titled, “Grants Flow to Bush Allies on Social Issues: Federal Programs Direct at Least $157 Million,” The Washington Post reported that the “new beneficiaries of federal funding during the Bush years are groups run by Christian conservatives, including those in the African American and Hispanic communities…. Beneficiaries of more than $2 million each from the compassion fund include five organizations run by black and Hispanic leaders who endorsed Bush and Operation Blessing, a charity run by television evangelist Pat Robertson” (Edsall 2006).

The faith-based program was central to Bush’s strategy to appeal to African American people of faith, a subgroup that supported Bush at higher levels than African Americans as a whole; Bush’s support from African Americans who attended church at least once a week was 18 percent, almost double his overall support among African Americans as a whole (Exit Poll 2004). At an address to the National Urban League on July 23, 2004, Bush pitched his faith-based initiative, a program that while relatively small in scope had large symbolic value, particularly in the African American community:
I strongly believe the federal government must welcome programs of faith into the compassionate delivery of help and service to those who hurt. My community and faith-based initiative recognizes the true strength of this country is in the hearts and souls of our citizens; that we recognize that oftentimes there’s – a change of heart will change behavior and governments can’t change hearts. That changes when somebody who has heard a universal call to love a neighbor, puts their arm around somebody who hurts and says, I love you brother, I love you sister, what can I do to help you on your walk so your life is improved (George W. Bush 2004).

The Bush administration has given large, widely-publicized grants to prominent African American ministers while emphasizing its goal of funding small church organizations that have not received funding before; Maryland Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steele, one of Bush’s most prominent African American advocates, noted that this combination could provide a “compelling and long-lasting draw” to Black voters (Hamberger, et. al. 2005b).

Although it is difficult to quantify the success that the program had in bringing African Americans into the conservative fold, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that the initiative has had some effect. Both the Los Angeles Times and the Washington Post have documented several high profile correlations between receipt of faith-based money and support for Bush in key battleground states.

- Bishop Sedgwick Daniels, one of Milwaukee’s most prominent Black pastors, supported Democrats Bill Clinton and Al Gore in previous elections; in 2002, however, he received a call from the White House and subsequently became a GOP national convention delegate and appeared in 2004 on GOP fundraising flyers declaring the Bush was the candidate who “shares our values.” Daniels’ church was awarded $626,598 in 2003 and $824,471 in 2004 for a total of $1.5 million in federal funds through Bush’s faith-based initiative.

- Rev. Herbert H. Lusk II spoke from his pulpit at Greater Exeter Baptist Church in Philadelphia, PA, via satellite to the 2000 GOP national convention endorsing Bush’s faith-based initiative. Since Bush was elected, Lusk’s church has received over $1.4 million in faith-based initiative funding. Lusk also hosted the so-called “Justice Sunday III” event to support Bush’s Supreme Court nominee Samuel Alito in conjunction with extreme Religious Right leaders such as Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council.

- Bishop Harold Calvin Ray, one of Bush’s earliest 2000 supporters in the black community, has received $1.75 million over three years for his Florida-based National Center for Faith Based Initiatives, an intermediary group that dispenses funds to smaller organizations.

James Towey, Director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives, insists that there are no political motivations for funding, but there is very little accountability. Because Democrats blocked key parts of the legislation in Congress over separation of church and state concerns, Bush implemented much of the program by executive order in 2002. Administration record-keeping practices have made it difficult to track where the more than $1 billion in faith-based money has gone, and calls for more accountability have been ignored by Republicans. According to the Los Angeles Times, for example, the $1 billion the administration reported spending in 2003 included a caveat that it was a “hodgepodge of grants.” It did not include all faith-based grants, and it included numerous grants to agencies that are secular along with other groups that were already receiving money before Bush took office. Rep. Chet Edwards (D-TX), who has repeatedly been rebuffed in his attempts to get greater accountability measures in place to track funding, stated, ”I believe ultimately this will be seen as one of the largest patronage programs in American history” (Eckall 2006).

The ministers in the Center’s focus groups were clear that the lure of faith-based initiative money has the potential to subvert the traditional prophetic voice for liberation in African American churches and to put issues on the agenda that would not otherwise warrant much attention. For example, one minister argued that some of his fellow ministers “got aboard that bandwagon opposing gay marriage…quite frankly because they were well-paid to do it” (Jones, 2005).
ISSUES

Salient Issues: The Economy and Jobs
Although African Americans strongly oppose same-sex marriage and some other hot-button cultural issues, when asked which issues are important, African Americans rank these issues far below issues relating to the economy—job opportunities, minimum wage, education, and health-care.

The 2004 national election exit poll found significant differences in the issues Blacks and whites identified as the most important factor in their vote for president. The top three issues for African Americans were economy/jobs (32.6 percent), health care (13.9 percent), and Iraq (12.3 percent), while the top three issues for whites were moral values (24.4 percent), terrorism (20.9 percent), and economy/jobs (17.4 percent). The following table, which is ordered by the most important issues for African Americans, demonstrates these differences.

Two additional recent surveys conducted in 2004 identified economic issues as the most pressing concerns in the Black community. According to a poll commissioned by the Human Rights Campaign, a majority of African Americans thought that the greatest challenge to building strong Black families was lack of good jobs (29%) while one in five thought it was poor and unequal public schools. Throughout the 2004 campaign, the top four issues Blacks wanted the candidates to address were jobs (32 percent), health care (12 percent), and the Iraq war (11 percent)—exactly the same issues that African Americans said were most important in the exit polls. Less than 1 percent mentioned the issue of gay marriage as a top policy priority. (CBS/BET 2004).

African Americans are generally supportive of a strong role for government in addressing inequalities and providing opportunity. A CBS News/BET poll found that 76 percent believe that affirmative action programs should be continued for the foreseeable future. From 1987 to 2003, African Americans have consistently supported a strong role for government in ensuring equal opportunities and protecting the less fortunate. An astonishing 94 percent of African Americans believe that government should play a role in providing equal opportunity for all, and almost three quarters (73.2 percent) believe that government should help the needy (Pew Values Survey 1987 – 2003).
Wedge Issues: Same-sex Marriage

On many hot-button cultural issues African Americans are typically more conservative than the population as a whole, whether the issue is gay marriage, physician-assisted suicide, or stem cell research. On the issue of stem cell research Blacks are much less supportive of conducting research than the general public. Less than half (46 percent) support conducting stem cell research compared with 57 percent of the general public (Pew 2005). Blacks are also less supportive of physician-assisted suicide. Only 34 percent of Blacks favor allowing doctors to end the life of terminally ill patients, compared to 51 percent of the population as a whole (Pew 2005). The issue of abortion is more complicated. While African Americans are more likely than most other groups to believe that abortion is morally wrong, they support upholding Roe v. Wade by significant margins (63 percent to 34 percent), (Pew 2005).

The issue of same-sex marriage is particularly complex within the African American community. The following describes the complex views that exist simultaneously (documented below):

- A majority of African Americans believe that homosexuality is wrong, that sexual orientation is a choice, and that sexual orientation can be changed;
- Unlike most groups in the country, African Americans have become less supportive of gay rights over the last decade;
- Many African Americans resist direct comparisons between the gay rights movement and the civil rights movement;

However:
- African Americans do not consider same-sex marriage a policy priority; and
- African Americans are generally supportive of laws prohibiting antigay discrimination.

A recent study that examined 31 surveys stretching back more than three decades found that “nearly three-quarters of blacks say that homosexual relations are always wrong, and over one-third say that AIDS might be God’s punishment for immoral sexual behavior. Overall, Blacks are 11 – 14 percentage points more likely to hold both positions than are whites” (Lewis 2003). Yet, the same study also discovered that African Americans are more likely than whites to support laws prohibiting antigay discrimination.

The disinclination of African Americans to support discriminatory policies paradoxically does not translate into broad support of “gay rights,” especially for African American people of faith. Unlike almost every other demographic group—virtually all of which are trending more progressive in support of gay rights—Black Protestants (a group that represents more than 8 in 10 African Americans) are moving strongly in the other direction over the last decade. African Americans are virtually the only constituency in the country that has not become more supportive over the last dozen years, falling from a high of 65% support for gay rights in 1996 to only 40% in 2004.

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A comparison of five 2004 surveys with sample sizes large enough to measure African American opinion shows a majority of African Americans (range: 47 percent to 70 percent) oppose gay marriage, that approximately a quarter of African Americans support civil unions (range: 23 percent to 29 percent), and slightly less than a quarter support gay marriage (range: 17 percent to 28 percent). The Human Rights Campaign survey also asked a separate question about civil unions for gays and lesbians that found a nearly even split: 44 percent supported civil unions while 47 percent opposed. It is worth noting that the highest measure of opposition to gay marriage occur when there is no “civil unions” alternative in the question (range: 61 percent to 70 percent opposition); when civil unions is included, opposition drops significantly (47 percent to 53 percent), a 10 to almost 20 percentage-point drop.

Among African American people of faith, these numbers are lower: in 2004, a Pew survey found that 72 percent of Black Protestants supported traditional marriage, 10 percent supported civil unions, and 18 percent supported gay marriage.

5 All of these surveys had sample sizes large enough to measure African American opinion; the following is a list of the number of African American respondents in each survey: HRC (N = 600), CBS/BET (N = 1000), NES (N = 180), Exit Poll (N = 330), Pew (N = 487).
supported same-sex marriages (Bliss Institute 2004). Black attitudes towards homosexuals and homosexuality are reinforced by the messages religious African Americans receive in church. Almost half of all Black churchgoers in 2004 (47 percent) reported that their clergy regularly address issues relating to homosexuality, a 10 percentage point increase from 1996; this number is significantly higher than the number who reported hearing regular teachings about abortion (38 percent) or the death penalty (30 percent). Furthermore and importantly, these messages about homosexuality tend to be overwhelmingly negative (Pew 2003a).

This tension between opposing discrimination in general while rejecting the idea of “gay rights” and avoiding the language of “civil rights” was captured by one Black religious leader in the Center’s focus groups:

So I think that where I come down clearly for myself is the issue of human rights and not gay rights. I wouldn’t ever attend a ‘gay rights’ anything. I would attend something dealing with human rights… When gay [activists] start dealing with gay rights then the evangelical, the Christian right is going to take the opposite view: ‘No, not gay rights.’ If you deal with human rights, then gay rights will just become a part of that because you’re dealing with the fact that humans have certain rights that should not be violated (Jones 2005, 17).

Similar sentiments were expressed by the Congressional Black Caucus during the 2004 presidential campaign, when Senator Kerry compared the struggle to legalize same-sex marriage to the civil rights struggle during a town hall meeting in Jackson, MS (Debose 2004). Political scientist Nancy Wadsworth has argued that this aversion to comparing the struggle for gay rights with the civil rights movement is in part supported by the belief among a majority of African Americans that homosexuality is a choice, and therefore homosexuals as a group are not entitled to special consideration. Fifty-eight percent of Blacks believe that homosexuality is a lifestyle choice and the same number believes that sexual orientation can be changed (Pew 2003b). For this reason, Wadsworth argues that Blacks may be susceptible to arguments proffered by groups like the Religious Right that homosexuals are seeking “special rights” and that true civil rights ought to be restricted to legitimate minorities (Wadsworth 1997).

It is certainly worth noting that there is also a small but growing chorus of leaders within the African American community that have spoken out strongly in favor of full marriage equality. These include Rep. John Lewis, Rev. William Sinkford, Ambassador Carol Moseley Braun, Rev. Al Sharpton, Civil rights leader Julian Bond, and AAMLC’s own board member Rev. Timothy Macdonald among others. Additionally the National Black Justice Coalition began a campaign in 2003 to build Black support for marriage equality.6

Moreover, as noted above, same-sex marriage hardly registers as a policy priority among African Americans, and many African American leaders lament that the issue is “a distraction” from more pressing concerns facing their community and “a disgrace” that it has become so prominent (Jones, 15). What seems clear is that African Americans have little interest in pushing concerns about same-sex marriage to the top of the policy agenda, but once the issue is on the agenda, a majority of African Americans oppose these policies because they believe that homosexuality is morally wrong. The challenge for progressives is to note that despite these beliefs, African Americans also are more likely to support antidiscrimination laws that are about upholding human rights; the key difference may be which frame, the morality of homosexuality or the discriminatory nature of anti-gay laws, is most operative in the public debate.

DIVISIONS

African Americans are not a monolithic group, and communicating effectively with this important group requires an understanding of several key divisions in terms of generation, political ideology, and theology.

Generational Divisions

One of the major fault lines currently dividing African Americans is age and generational experience, separating the civil rights pioneers who fought institutionalized racism and a younger generation that has experienced more subtle persisting forms of racism. This next generation, often referred to as the “Hip Hop” generation, makes up a disproportionate size of the total African American population – forty three percent of African

6 See http://www.nbcoalition.org/about/history.html, accessed April 3, 2006, for a good timeline and list of Black leaders in support of marriage equality.
Americans are under the age of 25 – and face a markedly different social, economic, and political system and a new set of cultural influences, such as rap music, MTV, and professional sports icons, than their parents did (Kitwana, 2002).

One older religious leader expressed concern that the Black church, one of the dominant institutions in the Black community, is no longer being perceived as relevant to many young people.

The younger generation does not see the value in the church in its everyday life and therefore does not see the value of connecting to what has historically been central. If you look, every major social change we’ve forced in this nation has been through the church, has been through people of God coming together and organizing and strategizing, etc. But now we have a whole generation who doesn’t believe in the integrity of the voice of the church and doesn’t believe that the church really does speak a relevant message to their lifestyle, and to what it takes for them to actually be able to be in a place of access, a level playing field (Jones, 13).

**Short-term Individualist versus Long-term Structural Orientations to Solutions**

Bakari Kitwana has recently argued that one characteristic of the Hip Hop generation that distinguishes them from their parents’ generation is an individualist over communal orientation: “when many hip hop generation youth have to choose between personal financial success at the expense of what the older generation considers communal cultural integrity, individual gain comes first” (Kitwana 8).

This preference for immediate individualist solutions versus government-based long-term solutions can be seen across a number of issues. A significant majority of Blacks under 25 (71 percent) support school vouchers as the answer to failing public schools compared with just 42 percent of Blacks over 65 (Bositis 2001). An even larger majority of young Blacks (79.3 percent) support the partial privatization of social security (Bositis 2004b). About a third of Blacks under 25 would have preferred to use the Clinton administration’s budget surplus to provide immediate tax cuts than to shore up the Social Security system, compared to about one percent of those over 51 (Bositis 2001).

**Young Blacks: Civic Engagement & Politics**

Despite their strong surge in voter turnout in the 2004 elections, young Blacks are less likely to believe that the political system is working for them, and less inclined to believe they can make a difference by participating in their communities. According to a CIRCLE study, 63 percent of Blacks age 15 – 25 felt they could make little difference in solving the problems of their communities (Lopez 6).

In their political behavior, young Blacks are evincing a similar type of estrangement. Unlike the civil rights generation that remains committed to the Democratic Party both in self-identification and voting patterns, younger Blacks are much less inclined to have strong partisan attachments and more young Blacks identify as independents.
As David Bositis of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies noted, the problem is that “political independents—being less attached—are also less likely to register and cast a vote” (Bositis 2004b). Given that young Blacks historically have overwhelming supported progressive candidates, any attrition in turnout could be detrimental to the progressive agenda.

Leadership
In an engaging article entitled, “The Demise of Black Civil Society: Once upon a Time When We Were Colored meets The Hip Hop Generation,” Lisa Sullivan describes the nature of the generational divide as a crisis of leadership.

Most young African Americans born since the passage of civil and voting rights legislation in 1964 and 1965 have lost their confidence in the leadership of civil rights organizations. Many believe that traditional Black leaders lack the capacity, desire, and ingenuity to address the contemporary crises that destabilize Black working-class life and destroy Black neighborhoods and families (Sullivan 1996).7

Kitwana echoes this sentiment: “For hip hop generationers, it is difficult to find instances where Black baby boomers in the mainstream leadership are collectively making a difference in the lives of young Blacks, who constitute a significant portion of Black America” (Kitwana 184). Most young Blacks feel that their interests and the issues that most concern them are not being addressed by anyone. In a revealing survey question about the state of Black leadership, an AOL poll revealed that when asked to name the most important leader in the Black community, more than a third (34 percent) named no one, and the top leader named was an icon of the original civil rights generation, Jesse Jackson (14 percent), (AP/AOL 2006).

Political Ideology
In his work on black political ideologies, political scientist Michael Dawson notes, “The relative homogeneity of black public opinion has been generally considered one of the few certainties of modern American politics” (Dawson 44). The 1993-1994 National Black Politics Study, the most thorough existing study of Black Politics and Ideology, revealed that this assumption of homogeneity conceals the existence of a set of important overlapping and competing ideologies.

7 Robert C. Smith in We Have No Leaders, Albany: State University Press, 1996, similarly argues that as Black leaders became incorporated into existing power structures dominated by White elites they became subject to the dictates of the system and less able to represent the interests of their Black constituents.
This complexity can be seen partially in survey self-identification questions about political ideology. Surveys of African Americans have shown that only about a quarter of African Americans identify as liberal; about the same number identify as politically conservative, and a majority identify as moderate (CBS/BET 2004).

While acknowledging complexity along one axis is a step in the right direction, the most thorough scholarship by political scientists Michael Dawson (who directed the NBPS) and Melissa Harris-Lacewell demonstrates the existence of at least four distinct but overlapping black political ideologies: Nationalism, Feminism, Conservatism, and variants of Liberalism.8 These ideologies are a collection of beliefs, values, and attitudes that function as a lens through which individuals make sense of the world and assimilate new information; ideologies function as a natural language of “common sense” to tell a story to “ourselves and others about how the world works.”9

The following table lists the relative sizes of those who agreed with all of the component questions used by Dawson to construct each ideological scale:

| Relative Sizes of Black Political Ideologies (% who agreed with all component questions) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Liberalism                      | Disillusioned Liberalism Radical Egalitarianism |
|                                 | 40%               |
|                                 | 20%               |
| Nationalism                     | 37%               |
| Feminism                        | 19%               |
| Conservatism                    | 1%                |

Source: 1993-1994 National Black Politics Study (Adapted from Dawson, 83). Note that percentages do not equal 100% because respondents could have agreed with more than one set of ideological questions.

While no group or individual inhabits any one of these ideologies exclusively, these ideologies largely determine the menu from which groups and individuals select frames of meaning, and for many one ideology will be dominant. Understanding the influence of these lenses for seeing the world and for seeing potential solutions to problems is critical for understanding how general values and virtues are refracted in multiple ways and for understanding African American politics in general. Furthermore, as Michael Dawson has emphasized, because all of these ideologies with the exception of Conservatism contest the view that democracy in America is basically good, understanding them is critical for understanding and addressing the ways in which American democracy has not worked the way many white liberals assume it has (Dawson 14).

Liberalism

Black Liberalism, while related to mainstream American liberalism, has consistently criticized mainstream liberalism by placing a greater emphasis on equality (both of opportunity and outcome) and community (e.g., group rights) than on liberty and individualism. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, public opinion

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8 Both Dawson and Harris-Lacewell base their analysis on the 1993-94 National Black Politics Study (NBPS) and both identify Nationalism, Conservatism, Feminism, and variants of Liberalism as core contemporary black political ideologies. For the first three, I follow Harris-Lacewell because she is more focused on contemporary rather than historical ideologies. For analysis of Black Liberalism, I follow Dawson. Harris-Lacewell did not find an adequate way to measure her variant of Liberalism, Liberal Integrationism, in the NBPS data. Dawson’s treatment of Liberalism is also complicated. He divided his measure of Liberalism into two related ideologies: Radical Egalitarianism (defined as the opposite of Conservatism) and Disillusioned Liberalism. Harris-Lacewell, Melissa Victoria. 2004. Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

9 Barbershops, Bibles, and BET, 19. Harris-Lacewell argues that black political ideologies serve four interrelated tasks; they help individuals determine: 1) “what it means to be black in the American political system,” especially the degree to which being black limits life chances; 2) the political significance of race relative to other personal characteristics such as class and gender; 3) the extent to which Blacks should “solve their own problems” or look for institutional assistance; 4) the degree of “tactical separation from whites” necessary to advance African American group interests.
researcher Rokeach found that of all American values, African Americans “ranked equality at the top and liberty at the bottom, while whites did the opposite.” (Rokeach 1979).

Leaders as diverse as Frederick Douglas, W.E.B. DuBois, and most clearly Martin Luther King, Jr. have represented forms of Liberalism, and it is largely the framework in which the contemporary civil rights movement was spawned. At its heart, Liberalism believes that the American system is good in theory but that corrupt institutions have prevented African Americans from being included in the American dream. Liberalism believes that the best way to achieve group interests is to tie the interests of blacks to the interests of larger society and that the federal government is the appropriate tool for achieving this goal. Liberals support active organizing to demand equality but reject the use of violence except in self-defense (Dawson 17).

Dawson treats Black Liberalism in two variants, Radical Egalitarianism and Disillusioned Liberalism. Radical egalitarians are considerably to the left of mainstream liberalism, favoring a highly regulated capitalism and real, full equality of outcomes (Dawson 267).10 Dawson finds moderate to very intense support for Radical Egalitarianism. Dawson’s second liberal category, Disillusioned Liberalism, is the ideological home of the growing number of those who believe in theory in egalitarian principles but who no longer believe they are achievable. As Dawson notes, “there is a significant, if worrying, intersection of egalitarian attitudes and gloominess among grassroots African Americans” (Dawson 303); Dawson found that the disillusioned liberal scale cohered better than the Radical Egalitarian Scale.

**Black Disillusionment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American economic system unfair to poor people.</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal system unfair to blacks.</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American society unfair to blacks.</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American corporations unfair to blacks.</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial equality will not be achieved in my lifetime or at all in America.</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 1993-1994 National Black Politics Study (Dawson, 280).*

Because of its dissonant combination of egalitarian ideals with a high degree of pessimism about their practical realization, Dawson sees Disillusioned Liberalism as an unstable way-station that ultimately channels people into other ideological orientations. For those who remain active, a majority move toward Nationalism, which explicitly argues that the nation is racist and unfair to blacks; fewer move toward Feminism and Conservatism, or, they withdraw from activism altogether. These high levels of disillusionment create challenges for progressives in terms of the perception of failed progressive promises, and they also point to the need for real action by progressives to reintroduce a platform that is committed to sustained support for systemic solutions to alleviate racial inequalities.

**Black Nationalism**

Contemporary Black Nationalism has its roots in the work and writings of Marcus Garvey who declared the necessity of a separate black state in response to oppressive existing polities. Mid-century embodiments of this ideology include the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Black Panthers, some aspects of Malcolm X’s politics, and Louis Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam. While few contemporaries espouse the separate state strategy of Garvey, Black Nationalism emphasizes “the immutable and unique relevance of race, a perception of whites as actively resisting black equality, and an insistence on African American self-reliance through the creation of separate institutions.” (Harris-Lacewell 2004, 26). Thus, Nationalism harbors a stinging critique of liberalism, which at its best is promising in theory but has systematically excluded blacks in practice; at worst, Dawson notes, “liberalism is described as a dangerous language game designed to lure blacks and others to not only accede to their own oppression but to kill and die in the service of its maintenance” (Dawson, 87).

In her test of this ideology in the 1993-94 National Black politics study, Harris-Lacewell found that there is little support (14 percent) for the most separatist element of Nationalism, that Blacks should have their own

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10 Dawson notes that public opinion work in the 1960s and 1970s showed that of all American values, blacks ranked equality at the top and liberty toward the bottom, while whites reversed this ranking.
state. Harris-Lacewell, however, found that there is moderate support among a wide range of African Americans for four key Nationalist beliefs: “a sense of linked fate with blacks, a negative attitude toward whites, a belief in black self-reliance, and a rejection of the individualized bootstrap philosophy” (Harris-Lacewell 2004, 91, 94). By far the strongest measure was a negative relationship and attitude toward whites.

Dawson confirms the small support for separatist versions of nationalism, but he notes that other variants of nationalism are alive and well, and that they flourish when the nation is perceived, as it is currently, to have turned its back on its African American citizens. The most supported form of Nationalism is what Dawson calls “Community Nationalism,” which emphasizes black autonomy, self-determination, and building and control of political and economic institutions in the black community. It also “rejects separatism and withdrawal from the state, and sees itself as consistent with black liberalism” (Dawson 101); indeed, it is often the receiving ground for disillusioned liberals as their discontentment rises (Dawson 133).

Feminism

Like Conservatism, Feminism is a contested and less popular ideology among African Americans, and traces its beginnings to the work of women mid-century who were resisting both the patriarchy within the black liberation movement and the racism within the women’s movement. Black Feminists, for example, argued in the 1977 Combahee River Collective “Black Feminist Statement,” an early founding document, for an “intersectional framework” that could address the multiple sources of oppression that black women face in terms of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. Feminists thus have a complex view of the role of race and emphasize forming coalitions with other disadvantaged groups.

In the NBPS data, Harris-Lacewell found a reluctance of black women to use the label “feminist,” but more indirect measures of feminist ideology enjoyed moderate support. Surprisingly, Harris-Lacewell also found that distrust of whites is almost as important to Feminism as it is to Nationalism (Harris-Lacewell 2004). Subsequent experimental studies examined by Harris-Lacewell confirmed that when Feminism is operative in black political discussions, “it is tempered with a specific concern for black women and not expressed as a belief in cross-racial gender alliances” (Harris-Lacewell 2004, 135). Black Feminism is unique from the other ideologies in that it is much more recent, and therefore a less coherent ideology than others under consideration; it also differs from others in that it has largely developed within the academy and has enjoyed less widespread dissemination in black media and institutions of the black public sphere. Feminism enjoyed more support than Conservatism but not as much support as Nationalism (Harris-Lacewell 2004, 93).

Conservatism

Although Conservatism is often maligned within the African American community, it has historically existed indigenously, albeit in a minor role; its contemporary roots can be traced to the work of Booker T. Washington and it is represented in the writings of Mike Green, Thomas Sowell, and others and, less purely, in the public persona of Colin Powell. Harris-Lacewell summarizes this ideological viewpoint as follows. “Black Conservatives locate the source of black inequality in the behavioral or attitudinal pathologies of African Americans and stress the significance of moral and personal rather than racial characteristics to explain unequal life circumstances. They stress self-reliance, hope for a colorless society, and shun government assistance,” which they see as a seductive but destructive force in the black community (Harris-Lacewell 2004, 28). Moreover, Conservatives believe that the free market is not discriminatory and that America is a meritocracy, where good morals and hard work allow one to pull oneself up by one’s own bootstraps, and they emphasize a humanist versus race-centered orientation.

Although Conservatives are the most prominent black ideologues in the mainstream media, Dawson found “virtually no mass support” for their positions, (Dawson 302). Both Dawson and Harris-Lacewell found that Conservatism is the least popular ideology, although a small minority was found that adhered around a few Conservative core beliefs: a lack of sense of linked fate with blacks or women, positive feelings toward whites, and support for a bootstrap philosophy that emphasizes individual solutions to inequality (Harris-Lacewell 2004, 96-97). Harris-Lacewell also found that the strongest measure of this ideology is attitudes toward whites, with Conservatives seeking little or no strategic separation from whites—the opposite of Nationalists.

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Harris-Lacewell’s findings were from the National Black Politics Survey (NBPS). She used questions correlated to six core beliefs to measure the existence of Nationalism, Conservativism, and Feminism: black-linked fate, women-linked fate, black self-reliance, bootstrap philosophy, attitude toward whites, coalition with nonwhites. Harris-Lacewell was not able to develop a model to measure Liberal Integrationism in the survey. Barbershops, Bibles, and BET, 81.
Particularly with Conservatism, it is worth noting that the NBPS findings, although they are the most sophisticated view of Black political ideology we have, are now twelve years old. While several more recent indicators already considered indicate that there has been no mass shift in support for Conservatism, it remains an open question whether some measurable movement exists. Some shifts, such as the dramatic decline in support for gay rights, the shift toward Independent party identification status among young African Americans, and the larger shift in voting patterns among African American people of faith, are certainly cause for concern.

Relative Political Influence of Black Political Ideologies
Radical Egalitarianism is the most strongly supported ideology, but Dawson also finds that it has “significantly less impact on public opinion and preferences than either black nationalism or black feminism.” Finding the most vibrancy among black nationalism, Dawson notes, “Every other force is being out-organized by nationalist forces…. Liberalism has become a weak force in shaping the politics of the black community, even though a large percentage of blacks support the radical egalitarian program. Radical egalitarians have lost control of the black agenda…. The activism has gone out of radical egalitarianism” (Dawson 309). Dawson argues that any revival of Black Liberalism would need theoretical reworking, massive grassroots reorganizing, and would need to rethink its relationship to “an increasingly conservative Democratic Party” (Dawson 313).

In contrast, Black Nationalism has the strongest effect on public opinion because it offers a strong ideological alternative to disillusioned liberals and, importantly, because it is most strongly tied to black organizations and information networks. One major outstanding question, a place where more research is needed, is whether Dawson’s conclusion that “black conservatives of all stripes are the least likely ideologues to make major inroads in the immediate future,” still holds a dozen years after these measurements were made.

African American Representation in National Political Typologies
While these black political ideologies help identify major worldviews within the African American community, it is also helpful to understand where a majority of African Americans fall in terms of national political typologies. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, in conjunction with John Green, identified nine political typologies. In Pew’s typology, the majority of African Americans were classified as Conservative Democrats (36 percent) and Disadvantaged Democrats (26 percent). Understanding these two groups provides an additional lens to help locate African Americans in relation to their fellow citizens with whom they share basic values.

The Conservative Democrats typology group represents 14 percent of the adult population, and 89 percent of this group identify with the Democratic Party. This group is one of the few whose partisan identity is stronger than their partisan voting; they supported Kerry over Bush 65 percent to 15 percent. Older women (27 percent) and African Americans (30 percent) make up a significant portion of this group. Their defining features vis-à-vis other democratic leaning groups are higher levels of religiosity and conservative social views. They are moderate on foreign policy, regulation of the environment, and in the role of government in providing a social safety net, which is linked in part to strong beliefs in personal responsibility. Most in this group oppose gay marriage and acceptance of homosexuality but are not more conservative than average on abortion and stem-cell research. Just over half (51 percent) describe themselves as “strong Democrats” but 85 percent identify as conservative or moderate in terms of ideology. This group is highly religious, with 46 percent attending religious services at least once a week and 44 percent attending weekly Bible study or prayer group meetings.

The Disadvantaged Democrats typology group represents 10% of the population and 84 percent identify with the Democratic Party. Their levels of disapproval for Bush (91 percent) and their strong support for Kerry (82


13 In descending order, the rest of African Americans were distributed across the following groups: Liberals (8 percent), Pro-Government Conservatives (7 percent), Bystanders (7 percent), Upbeats (6 percent), Disaffecteds (6 percent), Social Conservatives (3 percent), and Enterprisers (<1 percent). For all of these percentages, n<100, meaning that these measures should be viewed with caution.
percent) are comparable to the Liberal typology group, which is largely affluent and white. Like the Conservative Democrats group above, nearly a third (32 percent) are African American. This group, however, is the least financially secure group of all the groups and strongly supports government efforts to help the needy. They are anti-business, strongly supportive of organized labor (71 percent approval of labor unions), and skeptical of an individual’s ability to succeed without impediments. Members of this group have low average incomes (32 percent below $20,000 household income) and 77 percent say they can’t make ends meet. They are also not well educated, with 67 percent having at most a high school degree. They have the highest unemployment rates of any group; fully 58 percent say that someone in their home has been unemployed in the past year.

Religious Divisions

C. Eric Lincoln’s and Lawrence H. Mamiya’s groundbreaking work, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, opens with the following words: A good way to understand a people is to study their religion, for religion is addressed to that most sacred schedule of values around which the expression and meaning of life tends to coalesce (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

For African Americans, religion serves both as an important lens for seeing the world and as a central social institution and source of cultural solidarity. A recent study using multivariate analysis of three different surveys found that race was a statistically significant predictor of religiosity; compared to whites, “black respondents demonstrated higher levels of both public (e.g., religious attendance) and private (e.g., reading religious materials) religious behaviors.” The study also made an important finding for communications, that African Americans “were also more likely to endorse positive statements or attitudes that reflected the strength of personal religious commitment (e.g., religious minded, importance of religion, religious comfort).” Likewise, analysis of the NES reveals that African Americans are much more likely than Whites to say that religion plays a central role in their life. More than 60 percent of Blacks say that they receive a great deal of guidance in their day-to-day living from their religion, almost twice the percentage (33 percent) of Whites (National Election Study 1948 - 2004).

In the African American community, in addition to its primary spiritual role, the church has often served as the hub of social, cultural, and political activity. As Lincoln and Mamiya note, “The black church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the black community. Not only did it give birth to new institutions such as schools, banks, insurance companies, and low income housing, it also provided an academy and an arena for political activities, and it nurtured young talent for musical, dramatic, and artistic development” (Lincoln and Mamiya 8).

Although “the Black church” is a useful heuristic shorthand for the central role that this set of institutions has played in African American culture, it is worth noting the wide variety of churches this term encompasses. Approximately 85 percent of African Americans identify as Protestant, primarily in eight majority-Black denominations: African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ), Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), Church of God in Christ (CGC), Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship (FGBCF), National Baptist Convention USA (NBC), National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA), and Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC). Additionally, approximately 6 percent identify as Roman Catholic (Pew 1987 – 2003).

14 Using multivariate analysis of three different surveys and controlling for variables commonly associated with religiosity (e.g. living in rural area, south, denominational affiliation) Taylor et al. (1996) found that race was a statistically significant predictor of religiosity.

15 Lincoln and Mamiya identify six pairs of dialectical tensions that all Black churches navigate in constituting their own culture and theology: 1) Priestly versus prophetic - the tension between activities concerned with worship and spiritual life versus involvement in political concerns; 2) Other-worldly versus this-worldly - the tension between an orientation toward heaven or the world beyond versus an orientation toward politics and social life in the here and now; 3) Universalism versus particularism – the tension between a universal Christian message of salvation for all and a particular awareness of black consciousness; 4) Communal versus privatistic – the tension between the historic tradition of black churches being involved in all spheres of members’ lives versus a focus on meeting only private individualistic needs of members; 5) Charismatic versus bureaucratic – the tension between an emphasis on the charismatic authority of a leader versus an emphasis on institutional authority; 6) Resistance versus accommodation – the tension between affirming a distinct cultural heritage versus adopting norms from wider society.
Like American religion generally, however, denominational differences are largely giving way to ideological/theological differences that occur within and cut across denominations. Ministers in the Center's focus groups spoke with some alarm about “a battle and a struggle within Black religion itself” and identified a widening fault line between a more traditional “gospel of liberation” with ties to the struggle for civil rights and a newer “gospel of prosperity” that has developed in many fast-growing Black mega-churches and emphasizes upward mobility and financial success (Jones 2005).

The gospel of liberation has been the mainstay of African American religion from its inception. As James Cone, one of its earliest and most articulate proponents summarized it, “From the time of slavery, black reflections on the Christian faith have emphasized the idea of liberation as the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Cone, 1986). The gospel of liberation emphasizes the story of Exodus in the Old Testament, where God led the people of Israel from slavery to the promised land; likewise, it notes that in the New Testament book of Luke, Jesus opened his ministry by talking about the disadvantaged, reading the following from the book of Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (Cone, 1986 v.). Liberation theology believes Christ takes the side of the poorest and most despised at any point in history; thus, Black liberation theology concludes that in the American context, Christ must be Black. As Cone famously argued over 25 years ago, “To say God is Creator means ... I am black because God is black!” (Cone 1990).

The gospel of liberation has always coupled private piety with social justice, preaching and singing not only about liberation in the next world but about the establishment of justice in this one. It emphasizes the prophetic role of the church, the importance of working for justice in the present, the importance of religion not only in the private sphere but as a force in public life, and the importance of the church as an alternative counterpublic, an institution of resistance to racism and discrimination.

The prosperity gospel, on the other hand, is a more recent phenomenon. The gospel of prosperity is proffered by many Black televangelists and charismatic ministers of Black mega-churches such as Creflo Dollar and T.D. Jakes; it has also been somewhat influential in the neo-Pentecostal movement that has run through many of the older African American denominations in the 1990s (e.g., prompting the tongue-in-cheek terms “AMEP” for “African Methodist Episcopal Pentecostal” or “Bapticostal”). Whereas the gospel of liberation offers vision of a Black Christ in solidarity with the oppressed, the prosperity gospel preaches financial security and freedom. In the prosperity gospel, as Melissa Harris-Lacewell has described it, “Christ is an investment strategy and a personal life coach whose power can be accessed by believers to improve their finances, protect their families, strengthen their faith, and achieve personal authenticity” (Harris-Lacewell 2004).

Especially in its mega-church incarnation, it is often organized around a charismatic and authoritative minister and is typically middle- and upper-class (Gilkes 1998). It emphasizes the priestly role of the church in meeting individual religious and psychological needs, personal responsibility, a link between personal morality and religiosity and financial success, and sees the barriers to success not in structural discrimination but in personal failings. While the Prosperity Gospel is not presently the dominant form in the Black church, like its secular cousin, political conservatism, its leaders are well-funded and highly visible, and this movement is growing rapidly.

Writing in the bulletin of the Martin Marty Center of the Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion at the University of Chicago, Melissa Harris-Lacewell found a critical empirical link between these theological orientations and political action: Data from [the 1993-1994 National Black Politics Study] supports the conclusion that liberation theology promotes political action while prosperity gospel reduces it. Survey respondents who believe that Christ is black are more likely to vote, contact public officials, attend protest demonstrations, and sign political petitions. Those who see God through the lens of the prosperity gospel are less likely to engage in all of these political activities (Harris-Lacewell 2004b).

16 Robert Wuthnow, (1988) has documented convincingly the declining differences between American denominations over the last 50 years. The current pro-life alliances between conservative Catholics and conservative evangelical Protestants, who earlier in the century had strong anti-Catholic views, is a prominent example of this trend.
In an update for the same publication a few months later, Harris-Lacewell summarized the differences as follows: When the black church offers a theology rooted in a social gospel tradition, emphasizing the alleviation of poverty, the advancement of racial and gender equality, and the promotion of peace as moral values, it leads to a progressive political agenda among African Americans. When black churches advance a pervasively individualistic conception of the gospel that breaks the link between moral reasoning and structural inequality, it leads to a conservative political agenda focused exclusively on private morality (Harris-Lacewell 2004a).

Patrick C. Harris, Director of the Center for the Study of African American Politics at the University of Rochester, echoes these concerns about the political implications of the growing popularity of the prosperity gospel in many Black mega-churches and radio and television ministries. Harris concludes, “What does seem clear is that if current trends in Black Protestantism continue, Black churches will no longer be the birthplaces of civic and political change they once were” (Harris 2004).

LOOKING AHEAD
This document is intended not to be the last word on any issue but the starting point of an active discussion. The purpose of this working document is not only to present relevant background material about African Americans, a critical progressive constituency, but also to highlight issues and values that would need to be incorporated into any progressive platform that hopes to appeal to African Americans.
APPENDIX A
Black Contract for America on Moral Values

Family Reconstruction
The family is the first biblical institution and the foundation of society. The family must be promoted by the protection of the traditional institution of marriage (one man and one woman, protection of the unborn and the successful adoption of children separated from their biological parents.

Wealth Creation
If infrastructure for indigenous businesses can be encouraged, the growth of homeownership for minorities, support for small businesses, community re-development, prison after-care programs, social security, and new jobs will transform minority communities.

Education Reform
Viable urban school choices must be provided that do not destabilize existing school programs (example charter schools). Higher education participation for blacks, reduction of urban drop-out rates and improvement of school participation must be encouraged.

Prison Reform
Stronger endeavors must be made to reduce the number of repeat offenders through legislative efforts such as the second chance act. In addition legislative efforts must also be made to eliminated the inequities in the “3 strikes” system. Community and church programs must be empowered to provide after care programming to allow for a smoother transition of offenders back into the community at large.

Health Care
Long term health education and affordable healthcare must be provided that acknowledges that higher disease and morality statistics in minority communities.

Africa Relief
The US government should support us by creating and enforcing the economic sanctions against those companies that are allowed to explore for oil and provide funds to the Khartoum government that is creating the atmosphere of unrest which allows black Christians to be killed based on the color of their skin and religious belief. Funds should be directed to support the logistical and social infrastructure of Sudan. Churches should begin to assist in raising money from private sector to stop the massive Christian genocide occurring in Sudan region. We applaud and support the President for his global AIDS initiative

APPENDIX B
The 21st Century Mayflower Compact

…We, as black Americans...covenant and combine ourselves together to create a Citizens' Responsibilities Movement [that] advocates that…that government take the side of individuals to allow them more choices, more control and more ownership of their property…. [We act]to achieve the following goals:

1. Strengthening the family and protecting our youth.
   …We will work to strengthen marriages, including the strengthening of the separate and unique roles of fathers and mothers. We will work to protect the institution of marriage against any forces that threaten to undermine it. We will work to pass a constitutional amendment that defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman….

2. Building a culture of community and civic engagement.
   …Government alone cannot solve the problems. One of the most effective ways communities have taken action to address these challenges is through community and faith-based institutions…. 

   We affirm the dignity of every human life. We will work to promote a culture of life in America so that one day every child, born and unborn, will be protected in law, and wanted, nurtured, and protected in life…. We support efforts to present a more positive and factual portrayal of black Americans.…

4. Strengthening opportunities to build wealth and accumulate assets.
   We believe that all Americans should be able to build wealth and accumulate assets that can be used by and passed on to their families…. 

5. Connecting to the mainstream economy.

   …We affirm that it is a great moral wrong to trap children in schools that are failing them. And if schools are failing our children, we affirm the right of parents to be empowered to choose another school…. 

7. Improving health and health care.
   …We believe that personal autonomy means that the primary responsibility for maintaining one's health rests with the individual…. 

8. Preventing incarceration and recidivism; rebuilding families and communities.

9. Standing united in the war against terrorism.

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