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Comparing the Community Involvement of Black and White Congregations*

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Have the extra-religious functions of black congregations become attenuated in recent decades? We have addressed this question here via a comparative analysis of black and white churches with the only extant national probability sample of U.S. congregations. We found that in 1988 black congregations were not more active in secular activities *in general*, but they were significantly more active in *certain kinds* of non-religious activity: (a) activity directed at serving disadvantaged segments of the immediately surrounding community, and (b) civil rights activity. The observed differences between black and white congregations in these activities were not explained by differences in congregational size, resources, urban/rural setting, or southern/non-southern location. These results support the idea that black congregations continue to perform non-religious functions within their communities, although an intriguing interaction between race and a congregation's founding date points to important variation within black religion.

INTRODUCTION

What is the institutional position of black congregations within African-American communities? Historically, at least, there is universal consensus on the answer to this question: In the past, black churches have been the most vigorous institutions within African-American communities. A long history of persecution and extremely limited opportunities for organizing secular social, political, and economic organizations has produced black churches which performed functions and tasks beyond those traditionally religious. In addition to being centers of community religious life, black churches historically have been the primary sponsors of secular social services, sources of autonomous indigenous political leadership, and reservoirs of organizational and human resources, especially during the Civil Rights Movement (Du Bois 1903; Frazier [1964] 1974; Lincoln 1974; McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

However, the contemporary position of the black church is a more contentious issue. Several sociological observers have argued that the historical institutional centrality

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of the black church within African-American communities has recently been compromised, especially in urban settings, by increased competition from secular organizations better situated to meet the needs of differentiated urban communities, and by enhanced opportunities for black Americans in secular social, political, and economic spheres. This thesis of an increasingly limited institutional role for the black church has been variously expressed. Frazier ([1964] 1974:76), for example, has written:

[T]he Negro church could not perform the functions of the new types of associations necessary to life in the city. . . . As a consequence, the Negro church has lost much of its influence as an agency of social control. Its supervision over the marital and family life of Negroes has declined. The church has ceased to be the chief means of economic cooperation. New avenues have been opened to all kinds of business ventures in which secular ends and values are dominant. The church is no longer the main arena for political activities which was the case when Negroes were disfranchised in the South. . . . In a word, the Negroes have been forced into competition with whites in most areas of social life and their church can no longer serve as a refuge within the American community.

Mukenge (1983:25) has offered an even stronger statement of this thesis:

The functional [attrition] of the black church is due to the inability of the denominational bodies to meet *all the needs* of their clientele because the church's resources were limited by economic conditions, the needs of black people were differentiated, and other organizations with access to more resources increased in number and responsiveness to black people. (emphasis in original)

Mukenge concludes that the "functional attrition of the black urban church" is such that the "pre-eminent" role of the black church "as we move through the last decades of the twentieth century [is] maintaining mental health and psychological stability" (204).

Most recently, Nelsen (1988:407) has written:

With the urbanization of the black church caused by the migration of blacks to the urban South and North . . . the church could not meet all the functions required in the complex urban environment and it had no monopoly to do so. . . . The higher rates of being unchurched on the part of blacks in the metropolitan non-South can be marshalled as evidence that increasingly in that context the black church is becoming differentiated to provide the religious function and that blacks have become involved in and turn to other institutions for the meeting of other needs.

However, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:9ff) have challenged this thesis about the declining institutional centrality of black churches, arguing that social and political functions have been only partially differentiated from congregations:

The important fact about the development of these secular institutions such as the NAACP or National Urban League is that they were often founded with the help and support of Black Church leaders; their memberships also often overlapped with Black Church membership. . . . In other words, a partial differentiation of these institutions, spheres, and functions occurred, which did not require a complete separation from the Black Church. . . . Most social scientific views of religion in modern society assume a posture of complete differentiation, where the spheres of the polity and the economy are completely separated from religion, do not intersect, and have very little interaction. . . . Our contention is that such a view of complete differentiation when applied to the Black Church confuses the historical uniqueness of that institution, and leads to a misinterpretation of the data and to a misunderstanding of black churches and black culture.

Lincoln and Mamiya developed this thesis by drawing on the standard theoretical account of the social forces which led religion and religious institutions to sociological prominence in African-American communities: (a) centuries of racial discrimination and

violence against black economic and political efforts; (b) the relative paucity of secular institutions to compete with the church; and (c) the substantial social need confronting the churches. They differ from Frazier and others not in claiming that these factors had *historical* importance; that is an uncontested fact. Rather, Lincoln and Mamiya believe these factors *still* operate to maintain the functional centrality of the black church within African-American communities.¹

Distinguishing between social control/socialization functions of the black church and other social/economic/political functions helps us to move this debate forward. It is quite possible that the social control functions of black churches have become attenuated while at the same time these churches continue to provide a wide range of community services. Nelsen's analysis, for example, demonstrates clearly that black individuals who live in cities are much less likely to be "churched" than are black individuals who do not live in cities. (Those who live in non-southern cities are the least likely to be "churched.") While these data probably indicate that the social control function of the black church has indeed been attenuated, this individual-level evidence does not directly support the claim that black churches are failing to perform other community functions beyond the strictly religious.

In this paper we engage this debate with respect to community activities other than the social control/socialization function. Within this limit, we present evidence to support the Lincoln and Mamiya position against the Frazier et al. thesis: The analysis to follow suggests that black congregations continue to do more than provide narrowly religious services to their communities, even if it is true that these congregations no longer dominate the socialization of many African-American individuals.

We approach this issue from a new direction in that we offer a comparative analysis of the community involvement of black and white congregations. In the following section we describe our approach.

THE COMPARATIVE DIMENSION

Implicit in the debate over whether black congregations continue to be actively involved in African-American community life is the issue of whether they participate more than white congregations in the non-religious life of their respective communities. To claim that the community activities of black congregations have been attenuated is to imply that these congregations have become more like white congregations, in that churches would be only one among several vehicles for social/political activities. To claim that the historical and sociological forces which created the institutional centrality of the black church still obtain is to imply that black congregations remain more active institutionally in their communities than do white congregations.

Although there is a substantial and growing body of data and literature that facilitate

1. We do not wish to draw too sharp a line between Frazier, Mukenge, and Nelsen on the one hand, and Lincoln and Mamiya on the other. Particularly with Nelsen, the primary difference might be one of emphasis. That is, perhaps Nelsen can be read as emphasizing the *increasing* differentiation of social/political functions away from the black church, while Lincoln and Mamiya emphasize the extent to which that differentiation remains *partial*. Still, this difference in emphasis is worth noting. Moreover, with other authors (e.g., Mukenge, who describes the urban black church in terms of virtually complete differentiation), Lincoln's and Mamiya's disagreement is more than one of emphasis.

comparing the religiosity of black and white *individuals* (e.g., Taylor 1988a, 1988b; Nelsen 1988; Ellison and Sherkat 1990), there is virtually no literature that directly compares black and white *congregations* regarding the extent of their community involvement.² Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:187ff) wrote:

Although there is no comparable data yet, we suspect that black churches, on the whole, are more socially active in their communities than white churches and that they also tend to participate in a greater range of community programs. (emphasis added)

In this paper, we offer comparative data to support this suspicion, although not without qualification.³

A comparative perspective leads us to qualify Lincoln's and Mamiya's expectation that black churches are more actively involved *in general* in their communities than are white churches. We find it necessary to qualify that expectation because it is not theoretically justified to predict that black congregations will be more involved in *all* sorts of non-religious activity than will white congregations. Why should we expect that forces which have produced the institutional centrality of black churches (i.e., stunted opportunities for secular organization, location in a more troubled social setting, etc.) would lead black congregations to be more involved in the "sanctuary" movement, for example, or more likely to sponsor initiatives in international education or programs for the protection of the environment? The theoretical account outlined above leads instead to the prediction that black congregations will be involved more than white congregations in *certain kinds* of secular activities: (a) activity devoted to addressing the disadvantaged segments of the immediately surrounding community, and (b) civil rights activity.

The expectation of race differences in these activities follows directly from the usual account of the distinctiveness of African-American religion. Institutional centrality in a socially needy environment, and absence of competition from other organizations, should lead most directly to social service provision in a local setting. The historical legacy of congregational involvement in the Civil Rights Movement should lead to increased involvement in contemporary civil rights activities. Moreover, these are the kinds of activities which Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:186-7) found black congregations engaging in at rather high rates.

Both theoretical and empirical considerations, therefore, point to race differences in certain kinds of community activities rather than to race differences across the entire range of activities traditionally considered to be non-religious. Finding differences between contemporary black and white congregations would support the Lincoln and Mamiya contention that twentieth-century social forces such as urbanization and differentiation have not completely obviated the range of community functions performed by black churches. Failing to find such race differences would support the alternative position that black congregations have been pushed into an ecological niche more like

2. See Carson (1990) for a very preliminary attempt to address this issue empirically by using aggregated individual-level data.

3. Waters (1992:106) also has emphasized the importance of comparative analysis: "Some of Lincoln's and Mamiya's insights into the black religious experience hold true only for that community; others are as true for white Americans. Without adequate comparative data we cannot tell the difference."

that of white churches, a niche in which they represent one among several organizational options for social, political, and economic activity.

DATA AND MEASURES

The Sample

The data analyzed here are from a unique data set collected in 1988 by Gallup in conjunction with Independent Sector. Telephone directories were used to produce a sampling frame of 294,271 religious congregations in the nine census regions, excluding Alaska and Hawaii. This sampling frame was limited to congregations; it did not include denominational organizations, religious charities, or religiously affiliated institutions. It was not, however, limited to Christian congregations.

The sample frame was stratified by census region and, within region, by metropolitan vs. non-metropolitan location, producing 18 strata. A total of 4,205 congregations were randomly sampled within these strata. An initial telephone survey collected basic data (e.g., size, founding date), and then a more extensive questionnaire was mailed. After one follow-up mailing, a telephone survey was administered to congregations that did not return the mailed questionnaire. This sampling and surveying strategy produced a usable *N* of 1862, a response rate of 44%. The initial stratification and multiple data collection waves made it desirable to weight the sample to enhance its representativeness. All analyses reported here use the weighted data.⁴

The Variables

The primary independent variable was the predominant race of the congregation. For the purposes of this analysis, black congregations were those with at least 80% black membership; white congregations were those at least 80% white. In the interests of clarity, we eliminated more racially mixed congregations as well as congregations whose membership was predominantly Hispanic, Asian, or American Indian. This yielded 1529 white congregations (coded 0) and 58 black congregations (coded 1).⁵ All analyses reported here used this subset of predominantly black and predominantly white congregations. The relatively small number of black congregations in this sample renders quite impressive any finding of statistically significant race differences in congregational activity.

Congregational activities were reported with a set of 22 items. For each, informants (usually religious professionals from the sampled congregations) were asked to indicate whether or not their congregations participated in that sort of activity.⁶ These items

4. See Hodgkinson et al. (1988, 1990) for a more detailed description of this sample. We are painfully aware of the limitations of these data and we will call attention to several as we proceed. Nevertheless, this sample is the only extant national probability sample of U.S. congregations. That we were able to tease interesting and theoretically important results from these data testifies to their value despite the problems.

5. Once the weight is applied, the *N*s become 1516 for white congregations and 61 for black congregations.

6. A subset of the sample were asked whether or not they engaged in a wider range of activities (36 rather than 22 items). This subset, however, included only 23 black congregations. Due to the loss of statistical power entailed in using this wider set of activities, we limited our analysis to the 22 items asked of the entire sample.

measured congregational involvement in non-religious educational activities, human services, social action, international relations, cultural programs, and health care. Each item was coded 1 if the congregation did engage in that activity, and 0 otherwise. We constructed two scales from these items. The first simply summed all 22 items, creating a gross measure of the extent of congregational involvement in community activities.⁷

Although black congregations did score slightly higher on this scale (9.62 vs. 9.49), the difference was neither statistically significant nor substantively important. The unqualified Lincoln/Mamiya hypothesis (that African-American churches are more involved than are white churches in all sorts of secular activities) was not supported. In the absence of a theoretically grounded expectation of such broad differences, this is not surprising.

However, following the logic outlined above, we expected that black congregations would: (a) engage in more activities directed at providing social services to disadvantaged segments within their immediately surrounding communities; and (b) participate more in civil rights activities. To verify these expectations, we constructed a second scale composed of four items that straightforwardly measured these types of activities. The four items measured whether or not the congregation participated in (a) providing meal services, (b) housing/shelter for homeless, (c) community development, and (d) civil rights and social justice activities. Of the items available to us, these are the ones which *prima facie* tapped the activities in which we expected black congregations to be more involved than white congregations. These items were summed to form a scale measuring congregational involvement in local community social service and in civil rights. This scale ranged from 0 to 4; its overall mean was 1.6. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .70.⁸

Black congregations had a significantly higher mean on this scale than did white congregations (2.30 vs. 1.57; $p < .01$). We take this as support for our qualified hypothesis that black congregations are more actively involved than are white congregations, but only in certain types of secular activity.

The discovery of this zero-order effect prompted us to introduce control variables in an attempt to explain the observed race difference. Ideally, we would have liked good measures of all the variables believed to be theoretically important in producing multi-function congregations: urbanicity, region, degree of competition from other organizations, neediness of the local environment, etc. However, since we were performing secondary analysis with data collected for other purposes, we were limited by the

7. The actual items were: elementary education; secondary education; meal services; day-care; housing/shelter for homeless; housing for seniors; recreation/camp programs for youth; family counselling; civil rights and social justice; community development; right to life; family planning/abortion; international relations; relief abroad; international education; international health assistance; refugee-related programs; cultural groups; environment quality protection; institutional health care; programmatic health assistance; public education on disease.

8. We excluded several items (e.g., elementary education or family counselling) for reasons that might not be obvious. We were not confident that positive responses here represented engagement in secular education (as opposed to religious education) or in counselling services to the community (as opposed to "pastoral" counselling for members). This kind of vagueness in question wording is one of the limitations of these data. We conducted empirical checks to be sure that our results are not dependent on any idiosyncratic feature of this scale. In addition to the results reported below, we estimated all regression equations using various alternative versions of the dependent variable: three-item scales that removed one or another of the four original items, and five-item scales that added one or another plausible item. None of these changes substantively altered the results we report here.

available measures. Fortunately, several relevant variables were measured. In the remainder of this section, we will describe these measures and the rationale for including them in the analysis.

Engaging in a range of community activities obviously requires human and material resources, operationalized as congregational size (number of families) and dollar revenues in 1987. Black congregations in this sample were slightly larger on average than were white congregations, so it is worthwhile to attempt to rule out the possibility that size differences produced the race difference in community involvement. Size was measured in the survey by the following nine-level variable indicating the number of families or households within each congregation:

1. Less than 100;
2. 100-199;
3. 200-299;
4. 300-399;
5. 400-499;
6. 500-999;
7. 1,000-1,999;
8. 2,000-2,999; and
9. More than 3,000.

This coding imposed a transformation on raw congregational size which assumed that the marginal effect of size on the range of a congregation's activities decreases as size increases. This is the same assumption underlying logarithmic transformations, and it is quite appropriate here. Adding 100 families to a 1000-family congregation would mean much less than adding 100 families to a 100-family congregation.

Material resources were measured simply by reported 1987 revenues in dollars, logged to pull in the outliers. White congregations in this sample, not surprisingly, showed higher mean revenues than did black congregations (\$182,550 vs. \$130,146; $p < .05$).⁹ This variable was introduced as a control to explore whether or not the availability of money would suppress the race difference. That is, perhaps the zero-order race difference in secular community activity would be even larger if black congregations were not on average poorer than white congregations.

We also used a dichotomous self-reported item indicating whether or not congregations were located in large cities. Black congregations were substantially more likely than white congregations to be located in large cities (46% vs. 14%; $p < .001$). It is not clear, however, whether urban settings should increase or decrease the secular involvement of black congregations relative to white. On the one hand, as we indicated above, some have hypothesized that the transformation of the black church from a primarily rural to a primarily urban institution might result in a *loss* of secular functions, since there are more alternative sources of secular activities in cities than there

9. It seems clear that larger congregations were over-represented in this sample. However, we do not believe this constitutes a damaging bias for our purposes because the bulk of community activity undertaken by churches is likely borne by these larger congregations. The bias would be problematic only if it operated differently for black churches and for white churches (e.g., if the over-representation of larger congregations was more extreme for black than for white churches). We see no reason to believe that this is the case.

are in non-urban areas (e.g., Nelsen 1988:407). On the other hand, a large city presents an array of social problems different from those in suburban or rural areas, and this might prompt congregations to engage in *more* secular social service. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:186-7) found that, with one exception, whenever there is a significant difference in rates of community involvement between urban and rural black churches, it is urban churches which participate at a higher level.¹⁰

We found the latter argument (i.e., urban congregations face needier environments) compelling, especially since it is backed up by Lincoln's and Mamiya's rural/urban comparative data. We therefore used this dummy measure (large city = 1) as a control variable. The point was to investigate whether or not black congregations participated at a higher level in secular local social service activities simply because they were more likely to be located in large cities.

We also included region as a control variable. If it is true, as Nelsen (1988) has argued, that southern congregations engage in a wider range of community activities than do non-southern congregations, then the observed race difference could be produced by the fact that black congregations in this sample were significantly more likely to be southern than were white congregations (66% vs. 37%, $p < .001$). Congregations located in the census regions of South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central were coded 1 on our region variable; congregations located in other regions were coded 0.

The Civil Rights Movement is believed to have left a lasting legacy for the activities of black congregations. While it might be plausible to expect that congregations formed in the post-Civil Rights era would score higher on the dependent variable (because they began organizational life in an environment that fostered a higher level of secular involvement), nevertheless, black congregations are no more likely than white congregations to have been founded since 1960. Hence, organizational "cohort" will not explain the zero-order race effect. However, this environmental effect is likely to have differential importance for black and white congregations. In other words, the environmental difference between pre- and post-1960 is likely to be more salient for black congregations than it is for white congregations. We wanted to discover interactions of this sort, so we included organizational cohort in our analysis. We operationalized organizational cohort with a dummy code where 1 = a congregation established after 1960 and 0 = a congregation established in 1960 or before.

Finally, we employed the only variable available in these data that measured a cultural rather than a structural or environmental phenomenon: how "liberal" or "conservative" a congregation is. This variable is operationalized with a ten-point scale, where 1 = "very liberal" and 10 = "very conservative." Black congregations were significantly more "liberal" than were white congregations (5.1 vs. 6.8; $p < .001$). This was a weak variable, however, in that it did not distinguish theological conservatism from political conservatism, a confounding that tempted us to ignore this measure altogether.¹¹ We included it because, unlike all the other variables, it goes some way towards "explaining"

10. The exception, interestingly, is "cooperation with civil rights organizations," which rural congregations reported doing at a higher rate than did urban churches (53% vs. 40%).

11. The exact item reads: "I would like you to describe your congregation or institution on a ten-point scale; if "1" means very liberal and "10" means very conservative, which number would best represent your congregation or institution? You may use any number from 1 to 10."

(in a statistical sense) the observed race difference, but we included it late in our analysis so that its interpretive problems would not cloud our primary results.¹²

RESULTS

Table 1 and Table 2 provide some basic descriptive results. Table 1 presents the overall percentages of congregations that participated in each activity for which the null hypothesis of "no difference" between black and white congregations could *not* be rejected. This was true for 15 of the 22 secular activities measured. The remaining seven items are listed in Table 2, which gives significantly different black and white percentages separately.

TABLE 1
RATES OF SECULAR ACTIVITY FOR ITEMS WITH NO RACE DIFFERENCES
(WEIGHTED *N* = 1577)

Activity	Percent of Congregations Engaging in Activity
Elementary Education	36.6
Secondary Education	31.7
Day-care (pre-school)	30.4
Housing/Shelter for Homeless	31.5
Housing for Seniors	18.2
Family Counselling	78.3
Family Planning/Abortion	28.6
Promoting Friendly International Relations	43.0
Relief Abroad	71.7
International Education	49.4
International Health Assistance	42.7
Cultural Programs (dance, theatre, etc.)	42.0
Environmental Quality Protection	26.5
Institutional Health Care (hospitals, clinics, etc.)	56.2
Programmatic Health Assistance (for mentally retarded, physically handicapped, etc.)	44.2

These results provide initial support for the idea that black and white congregations participate in different sorts of secular activities. Black congregations were significantly more likely to participate in meal services, civil rights activities, community

12. Conspicuously absent from this list of control variables are a congregation's denominational affiliation and the social class composition of its membership. The latter data were not collected; the former were collected but stripped off as part of a prior agreement among the denominations that funded this survey. Needless to say, the value of these data would have been tremendously enhanced had social class information been collected and denominational information retained.

TABLE 2
RATES OF SECULAR ACTIVITY BY RACE

PANEL A	Percent of Congregations Engaging in Activity		
	% black	% white	% total
Activities in which more Black Congregations Participate			
Meal Service	50.1*	37.8	38.3
Civil Rights and Social Justice	59.1***	40.2	41.0
Community Development	72.7***	44.0	45.1
Public Education on Disease	46.3*	34.2	34.6
PANEL B			
Activities in which more White Congregations Participate	% black	% white	% total
Recreation/camp programs for youth	61.0***	80.1	79.3
Right to Life	34.4*	47.2	46.7
Refugee Related Programs	17.7***	35.0	34.4

* $p < .1$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$

Note: Weighted n of black congregations = 61;
Weighted n of white congregations = 1516;
Total weighted N = 1577

development initiatives, and public education on disease. White congregations were significantly more likely to participate in recreational programs for youth, right-to-life actions, and refugee-related programs. These results are suggestive: Black congregations are more active in civil rights activities and in social service directed at the more disadvantaged segments of immediately surrounding communities. The activities in which white congregations participate at higher levels are activities with targets or constituencies well outside the local environment (right-to-life and refugee programs), or are activities targeted at a group internal to the congregation.

However, we did not want to rest on such *post hoc* interpretations of these single-item results. Instead, we developed a scale (described above) combining items that indicate most directly the underlying construct on which theoretical considerations lead us to expect a race difference: participation in (a) social service directed at disadvantaged segments of the local community, and (b) civil rights. This scale constitutes a theoretically informed variable that is as conceptually "clean" as these data allow. It made the performance of multiple t-tests, with the accompanying problems of inference, unnecessary. It also permitted us to use a regression framework to explore possible explanations for the zero-order race difference.

Our analytical strategy was straightforward. We used dummy-variable regression to establish the zero-order result that black congregations scored higher than did white

congregations on this scale. We then introduced relevant control variables into the model in an attempt to explain this race difference by reference to organizational and environmental differences between black and white congregations. We also created interaction terms to investigate whether any of these control variables operated differently for black vs. white congregations. Our results are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
EFFECTS OF RACE AND OTHER VARIABLES
ON LOCAL COMMUNITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVITIES
(WEIGHTED $N = 1200$)

MODEL:	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Intercept	1.57***	1.23***	.03	.10	.04	.06	.05	.77
Race β	.09	.08	.09	.08	.09	.09	.12	.09
b	.73***	.66***	.69***	.64***	.67***	.67***	.93***	.69***
Size		.18	.12	.13	.12	.12	.11	.08
		.15***	.10***	.10***	.10***	.09***	.09***	.07**
Revenue (logged)			.08	.07	.08	.08	.08	.09
			.26**	.25*	.26**	.27**	.27**	.30**
Large City				.03	.03	.03	.03	.03
				.11	.11	.11	.11	.12
South					-.03	-.03	-.03	-.02
					-.08	-.08	-.08	-.06
Founding Date Post-1960						-.03	-.01	-.01
						-.08	-.05	-.03
Race x Founding Date							-.07	-.07
							-1.09**	-1.06**
Conservatism Scale								-.18
								-.12***
R ²	.01	.04	.04	.04	.05	.05	.05	.08

* $p < .1$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$

Model I establishes the zero-order effect. Black congregations scored a statistically significant .73 points higher on this five-point scale than did white congregations. Recall that the dependent variable here and throughout is our four-item scale, with values ranging from 0 through 4. An increase of .73 therefore represents about a 15% difference in the mean scores of black and white congregations. By this measure, African-American congregations are more likely to be involved than are white congregations in local community/civil rights activities.

Model II adds our size measure, testing whether or not the race difference occurs because black churches are on average larger than white churches. Size did have a significant effect in the expected direction: For every one-unit increase on the size scale, con-

gregations participated in .15 more secular activities. More importantly, however, the race difference is not explained by size. The difference in community activities between black and white churches remains a statistically significant .66, with controls for congregational size.

Model III adds our other measure of organizational resources: logged 1987 revenues. Here again, the direct effect of this variable was in the expected direction; there was a positive effect of revenue on secular community involvement and civil rights activity ($p < .05$). For every one-unit increase in the log of revenue dollars, there was a .26 increase in our dependent variable. Yet, the race difference remained essentially unchanged. Differences in financial resources do not seem to suppress the race difference in local community/civil rights involvement.

It also is interesting to note that financial differences only partially explained the size effect, reducing it from .15 to .10. Even with controls for financial resources, bigger congregations scored significantly higher on our measure of secular involvement. This is consistent with another major finding from this same data set, to wit, that congregations are very dependent on volunteer labor (Hodgkinson et al. 1988). Bigger congregations have larger pools from which to draw volunteers, and that seems to have a positive effect on community activity, even with controls for the size of the financial resource base.

Model IV adds our community-type variable. The sign of this effect was in the expected direction (congregations in large cities scored higher on our dependent variable), but the effect did not reach significance at even the .1 level. We cannot say with confidence that being located in a large city increases community/civil rights involvement. Clearly, urbanicity does not explain the race effect. Perhaps a more precise measure of social conditions in a congregation's environment would perform better in this regard.

Models V and VI add the region variable and the variable of the congregation's time of origin. Location in the south had no significant effect on a congregation's participation in community activities. Neither did differences in regional location explain the race differences in community activity. Likewise, the coefficient associated with founding date was neither statistically significant nor substantively different from zero, and the race difference remained unchanged when this variable was included.

It is worth pausing here to compare the standardized coefficients within Model VI. These coefficients demonstrate that race has an effect of comparable magnitude to the effects of size and finances (.09, .12, .08, respectively). It is notable that the race variable compares this favorably with two of the usual causal forces in theories of organizational behavior: size and money.

Model VII adds a term measuring the interaction between race and founding date.¹³ It is easiest to grasp the meaning of this significant interaction by focusing on an equation that includes only race, founding date, and the interaction between them. Estimating this equation yields:

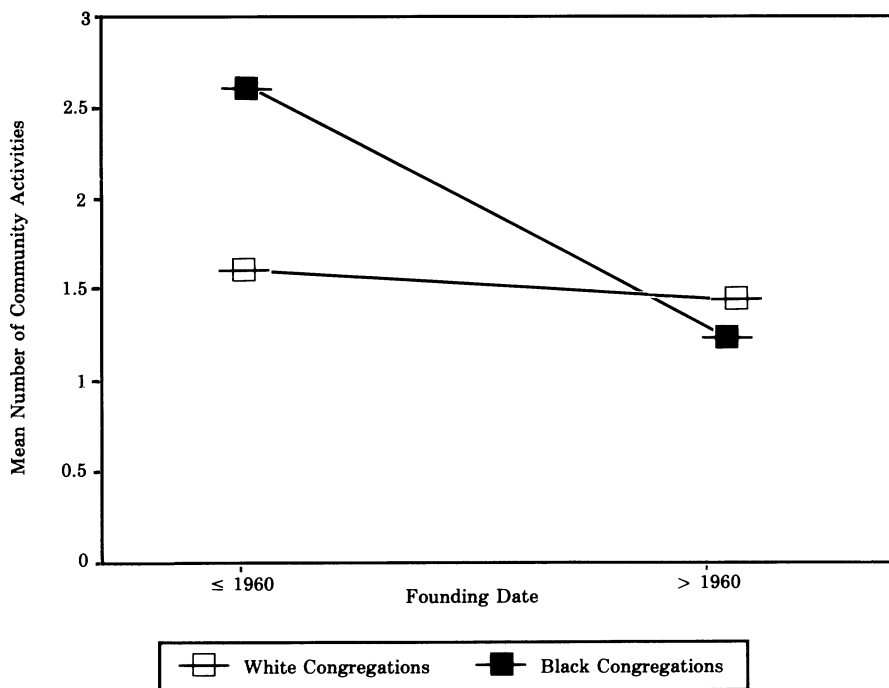
$$Y = 1.61 + .99 (\text{RACE}) - .14 (\text{DATE}) - 1.18 (\text{RACE*DATE})$$

Once we recall that race was coded 1 for black congregations and 0 for white congrega-

13. We created six interaction variables in order to look for interactions between race and each of the six control variables. Of these six terms, only the interaction between race and founding date reached statistical significance.

tions, and founding date was coded 1 for a post-1960 founding date and 0 otherwise, it is easy to use this equation to calculate the average number of activities for each of the four subgroups. These means were: (a) 1.61 for white congregations established in 1960 or before; (b) 1.47 for white congregations founded since 1960; (c) 2.60 for black congregations founded in 1960 or before; and (d) 1.28 for black congregations founded since 1960. These means are displayed graphically in Figure 1.

FIGURE I
RACE BY FOUNDING DATE INTERACTION



As is clear from the pattern in Figure 1, founding date had a significant effect for black congregations but not for white congregations. Moreover, the direction of this effect was unanticipated. Black congregations formed in 1960 or earlier had significantly higher scores on our community activity scale than did black congregations established since 1960. Instead of supporting the idea that congregations founded in a post-civil rights era would be more likely to be actively involved in community activities, this result suggests that it is the older, more established black congregations which are institutionally more active within their communities.

For reasons described above, we offer Model VIII with some hesitation. The liberal/conservative scale had a strong and significant negative effect: For every unit more "conservative," congregations performed .12 fewer activities on our four-item scale.

Moreover, when this variable was introduced, the race difference declined noticeably from .93 to .69, a 26% drop.

Perhaps it is not surprising that congregations labeled as more conservative by informants are congregations less involved in secular affairs. In some sense, what it means to be a more conservative congregation is that collective efforts are limited to specifically religious activities, and the "world" is left to take care of itself.¹⁴ Fundamentalist activism notwithstanding, these results suggest that secular involvement might still be the province of "liberal" churches. It is interesting that this effect partially explains the race difference. However, the vagueness of the liberal/conservative scale and the problem of causal order accompanying any such variable warrant caution in interpreting these results further.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is not the case that black congregations engage at higher rates than do white congregations in secular activities *in general*. The broad generalization that black congregations are more involved than white congregations in all kinds of secular activities therefore seems too unrefined. However, we found compelling evidence that black congregations are more likely to be involved than white congregations in *certain kinds* of traditionally non-religious activities: civil rights activities and those activities that are directed at disprivileged segments of their local communities. These are exactly the kinds of activities for which the theoretical account of the development of African-American religion would lead us to expect race differences.

This race effect is not explainable by the organizational or environmental variables available to us. Specifically, this difference is not attributable to black congregations' (a) larger size, (b) more urban location, or (c) more southern location. Differences in revenue do not suppress the race effect. Founding date is related to community activity for black congregations but not for white congregations. Older, more established black congregations are more actively involved in their communities than are newer black congregations. The race difference is partially explained by a liberal/conservative scale, but it is not clear what this indicates, except that informants from congregations more involved in these activities tend to describe those congregations as more "liberal," and black congregations are more likely than white congregations to be seen as more "liberal." We take these results as providing strong support for the qualified version of Lincoln's and Mamiya's hypothesis, namely, that black congregations are more actively involved in their local communities and in civil rights activities than are white congregations. The reasons for this involvement, furthermore, are not reducible to mundane organizational or environmental differences.

Contrary to the expectation of Frazier and others, black congregations in 1988 did not yet match their white counterparts in the extent to which they did (or did not) participate in the secular affairs of their communities. This cross-sectional finding does not, of course, definitively contradict the historical claim that today's black congregations are institutionally less central to their communities than were yesterday's black

14. See Kelley (1986) for elaboration of this connection.

congregations. It certainly is possible that while 1988 black congregations are not yet indistinguishable from white congregations in this regard, at the same time the historical trend is moving in that direction. Nevertheless, the social forces that have been posited as responsible for attenuating the community functions of black congregations (urbanization, competition from secular organizations, etc.) have now operated for decades. One might think that if the extra-religious activities of black congregations were truly threatened by these forces, by 1988 it would have been more difficult to find race differences than it proved to be in this investigation. Our results suggest that (with the probable exception of social control) the extra-religious functions of black churches are more entrenched and less likely to be obviated than some have previously thought.

A further comment on the founding date interaction is in order. We see this result as consistent with the idea that there are important differences *within* black religions in the propensity to become actively involved in the non-religious affairs of communities. Nelsen and Nelsen (1975), for example, have found that a "sectlike orientation" among African-Americans is inversely related to militancy, while a "churchlike orientation" is positively related to militancy. Similarly, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:224) have found a denominational effect on whether or not black clergy respondents approve of church participation in civil rights activity: More than 90% of clergy within each of the six Baptist and Methodist denominations approved of such activity, while only 78% of clergy within the more sectarian Church of God in Christ approved.

Since the Church of God in Christ and other black pentecostal groups have grown faster in the last 20 years than have the mainline Baptist and Methodist groups, we suspect that our result showing a significantly lower participation in community affairs among more recently established black congregations reflects the same phenomenon discovered by the Nelsens and supported by Lincoln and Mamiya. That is, the relationship between religion and participation in the social, political, and economic affairs of communities depends on the type of black religion. More established, "churchlike" congregations are more likely to be involved in the secular affairs of their communities than are more "sectlike" congregations. This point should produce caution among those who would generalize about "black religion" as a homogeneous whole. Regrettably, the absence of denominational information in this sample makes it impossible to use these data to investigate further this important issue.

Our primary contribution in this paper has been to present evidence supporting the idea that black congregations in fact participate more actively than do white congregations in certain secular affairs of their communities. Previously, this idea was based only on impressionistic anecdotal evidence or on data drawn only from black congregations. The data used here permit, for the first time, direct systematic comparison of random samples of black and white congregations. We hope these results will prompt additional comparative analyses of black and white congregations. There is some indication, for example, that white congregations might be more actively involved in activities directed at non-local issues and targets. We suspect, although we have not yet explored it fully, that white congregations are more involved in national and international issues such as "sanctuary" programs for refugees. Further specification of the differences between the kinds of secular activities typically engaged in by black and white congregations will be a fruitful area for research. Such research would paint a

clearer picture of the distinctive roles played by black and white congregations within their respective communities. We offer this paper as a single brushstroke on that canvas.

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