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African Americans and Democracy

> We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. – That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.
>
> Declaration of Independence, 1776

In order to effectively understand the role, purpose, and potential power of African Americans in the American political system, it is important to establish a clearly defined framework that details the tenets, structures, and systems that influence and shape democracy in America. To be certain, there are several tenets that shape American democracy. By democracy, we refer to a system of government (a hierarchical system of decision and policy-making that maintains societal order through mutually beneficial systems wherein citizens consent to be governed through representatives) whereby "We the People" elect men and women to serve as proxies of political, economic, and sociocultural interest.

The term democracy is derived from two Greek terms – "demos" and "kratia" – and means rule of or by the people. In theory, rule of or by the people has been established in that every two, four, or six years people are able to exercise their choice by campaigning, voting, participating in elections, and exercising their political rights as detailed in the first ten amendments to the US Constitution. In practice, however, American democracy, especially the universal incorporation and participation of African Americans in the political system, has been obstructed by several factors. First, African Americans have endured the persistence of institutional limitations such as the refusal of certain states to recognize their rights as guaranteed in the US Constitution, established via Supreme Court rulings, and implemented through both the executive and legislative branches of government. Second, African American political involvement and incorporation has also been obstructed by man-made fear and intimidation tactics. It is widely known that during the era of the Black Codes and Jim Crowism, extra-legal fear and intimidation methods such as the hanging of nooses and cross-burnings were common instruments used to keep Black people oppressed and afraid to exercise their political

Table 2.1 Mean length of state sentencing by race (felonies)

	White	Black
All offenses	37 months	40 months
Violent offenses	71 months	84 months
Robbery	85 months	100 months
Aggravated assault	41 months	48 months
Murder	221 months	254 months

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004

and legal rights (Franklin and Moss, 2000; Barker, Jones, and Tate, 1998; and Walton and Smith, 2007).

Given the historical legal and extra-legal tactics used to suppress and subvert African American political involvement, some contend that African Americans have operated under a facade of democracy in America. In this context, a facade represents the superficial and symbolic presentation of equality which distributes markedly different democratic tenets such as liberty, freedom, and justice. One controversial facade of democracy that persists is in the criminal justice system where African American criminal defendants receive harsher and longer sentences for crimes in spite of the claim that the justice system, and more importantly the law, is color blind (Mauer, 2006).

If, in fact, democracy is a facade it not only hinders certain groups of people, it also interferes with the primary purposes of government which are to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, and secure the blessing of liberty (US Constitution, 1787). Beyond the ways in which the facade of democracy limits these four purposes of government, the danger of such a system is that it also can determine who actually governs in America.

Who governs in America?

The question of who governs in America is not new. Most notably, two well-known political scientists – E. E. Schattschneider and Robert Dahl – both explored the question of who governs in an effort to shed light on who rules in America. According to E. E. Schattschneider, America operates via a pluralist system that has a very strong "upper class bias." Schattschneider attributes the bias to the lack of participation of lower classes of American citizens. "[A]bstention reflects the suppression of the options and alternatives that reflect the needs of the non-participants . . . *whoever decides what the game is about decides also who can get into the game . . .*" Consequently, "every study of the subject supports the conclusion that non-voting is a characteristic of the poorest, least well-established, least educated stratum of the community" (Schattschneider, 1975: 103).

In contrast to Schattschneider, in a 1967 study of local politics in New Haven, Connecticut, Robert Dahl concluded that all citizens have an opportunity to influence the American political system and subsequently govern. According to Dahl, all groups and classes of people have the ability to participate through involvement with organized interests groups as these groups compete to gain power within the electoral arena through electing people to office as well as shaping public policy on the local, state, and national level (Dahl, 2000). The views of both Schattschneider and Dahl are two of the most widely embraced theories of American governance as espoused through elitism and pluralism. Still, these two dominant views do not capture the full scope of possibilities related to who governs in America. In the next section, we will examine several lenses of analysis related to this critical question in American democracy.

Four lenses of analysis

There are several lenses of analysis that need to be explored in order to effectively address the question of who governs in America. Although a one-dimensional approach to the question can assume that any individual aged 18 years or older (who is a registered voter in America) governs via popular elections and other mechanisms of political participation, even political novices understand that the political system is a little more complicated than one individual casting his or her vote on a modern, computerized voting machine.

A more advanced response to the question, however, suggests that, in America, the question of who governs may be best addressed through an analysis of competing models of political incorporation and empowerment. In this section, we will examine four different models of governance – pluralism, elitism, colonialism, and coalition politics. Although some may contend that coalition politics should be viewed as a subsection of pluralism, we will examine each as an individualized model of governance and assess the benefits and limitations of each theory. Additionally, each model will be reviewed in terms of the ways in which it helps shed light on the political behavior and participation of African Americans, offering insight into the ways in which African Americans as a collective political force mobilize resources and community members to develop a clearly defined, resonant, and substantive political agenda and voice in America.

Pluralism

The pluralist model claims that in a democracy all members of society have an opportunity to use their political mobilization skills and political muscle to influence political outcomes and public policy in America. The pluralist model holds that both individuals and groups (in some instances conflicting individuals and groups) through competitive, democratic processes have an

Table 2.2 An overview of the four models of governance in America

Pluralism	Governmental systems are equal as all people have an equal opportunity to influence political systems through organized groups
Elitism	Government is controlled by a small group of powerful, wealthy, and influential group of key leaders and economic/business stakeholders
Colonialism	Governmental systems are maintained by a dominant group of people who exert power, control, and influence over a subordinate group of people
Coalitions	Governmental systems are influenced by the cooperative and strategic alliances of diverse groups which unite around common issues and causes

equal opportunity to sway political outcomes by lobbying key political leaders and decision-makers on behalf of their group interests. In his examination of the power structure of New Haven, CT, Robert Dahl concluded that the pluralist model worked. He reached this conclusion because there was no single group of power brokers controlling policy outcomes in the city. In fact, Dahl's research highlighted the positive effect of competing spheres of interest on local government decision-making and political participation.

The impact of pluralism on African American political participation can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s and the rise of Black electoral politics on the local level. Most notably, the use of coalition or rainbow politics has been most evident in cities like Cleveland and Gary where some of the nation's first Black mayors were elected into office. The Black, Brown, White, and female coalitions responsible for using their collective influence to change the faces in electoral politics on the local level were undoubtedly instrumental in boosting the impact and significance of descriptive representation in America. In this regard, the most profound benefit of the pluralist model is its ability to garner the collective resources of diverse people and groups (groups who historically have been in competition with each other) to transform old political systems, machines, and institutions that have been historically closed to African American faces and leaders and members of the community that work to "influence" Black interests.

Limitations of the pluralist model

While, on the surface, the pluralist lens provides an interesting explanation for the ways in which groups – no matter how far removed from the political system – are able to gain access to the decision-making arena, upon closer examination, the pluralist model is limited in its ability to effectively provide tangible political incorporation and empowerment for African Americans.

The first limitation of the pluralist model is that it fails to effectively take

into consideration long-standing institutional and structural barriers. As Barker, Jones, and Tate (1998) assert, pluralists fail to examine the historical legacy of slavery, Jim Crow laws, separate but equal laws, and extra-legal fear and intimidation tactics in Black political participation. In other words, an examination of pluralism that only speaks to incorporation in the post-civil rights era does not effectively address the centuries of purposive, manmade, and government instituted exclusion and non-incorporation of Black interests on the local, state, and national level.

Further, the pluralist model as an effective model of African American political access and incorporation is limited because a system designed around the notion of access is not effective if and when one's political rights are usurped, hindered, or harassed as was the case during the 2000 presidential election. Arguably, when thousands of African Americans were denied the right to vote as a result of fallacious claims of improper identification as well as a host of other smoke-and-mirror tactics, including voter intimidation and obstructionist tactics, pluralism is no longer effective as a tool of political incorporation. In this regard, the pluralist model fails to acknowledge the subtle influence of both institutional racism and modern-day Jim Crow techniques designed to frustrate and alienate African American voters from participating in politics at all levels.

Moreover, pluralism as a model of African American politics is limited in that it does not clearly delineate the strong influence of interest groups and "good old boy" networks on politics. In other words, the pluralist model fails to account for the impact of pre-established institutional networks, political relationships, and the roles of power and wealth which extend far beyond the parameters of the theoretical model. In this regard, pluralism does not take into account the long-standing history of "junior partnerships" and "second-tier" political and economic relationships African Americans have been subjected to in cities such as Atlanta, Cleveland, and Los Angeles (Stone, 1989). Moreover, pluralism fails to adequately address the fact that part of the reason traditionally disenfranchised groups still choose not to participate in politics is that, beyond the rhetoric of "every vote counting," in practice some people remain convinced based on past patterns that (1) pluralism still has a way to go before all groups have an equal opportunity to influence outcomes; (2) pluralism remains limited because of the strong impact and influence of multinational corporations and business entities that are more powerful and influential than organized groups; and (3) pluralism has failed to adequately overcome the long history of uneven political, economic, and sociocultural enfranchisement of African Americans.

Elitism

Another well-known model of analysis related to who governs in America is elitism. Elitism asserts that democracy in America is controlled by a small

group of wealthy and influential individuals who use their positional power to influence and control public policy and high-level decision making. According to C. Wright Mills (1956), America's power elite consists of a small group of military, business, and political influencers that implement domestic and foreign policy decisions for the nation. In sum, elitism holds that power in America is maintained by a few influential individuals/corporations and not the masses through organized interests. In effect, elitism is the complete opposite of pluralism in that the model only allows a predetermined, predominantly economic minority to govern American institutions, determine public policy, and implement democratic ideals.

Limitations of elitism

Although elitism has not been complementary to African American political participation, it is necessary to examine the model, especially given all the political correctness of the 1990s and the open-and-closed door conversations by many political pundits, commentators, media outlets, chat rooms, and bloggers who maintain that racism is a thing of the past and that America is the land of equal access and opportunity for all people. The history of African American political power details the limited influence and infiltration of Blacks in key economic, political, and sociocultural institutions and organizations. Even in instances when African Americans have been a part of "elite" administrations and organizations, they have tended to operate in highly symbolic, top-down organizational networks where real decision-making abilities appear non-existent or limited at best.

In *We Have No Leaders: African Americans in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, Robert C. Smith and Ronald Walters detail the purposive decision of President Reagan's Black political appointees to separate themselves from promoting or supporting an African American agenda. In an effort to distance the executive branch from previous administration political appointees, the four African Americans appointed during President Reagan's tenure in office "would carry out their official responsibilities and would not as Blacks seek to shape administration policies on race issues unless such issues came within the purview of their official duties" (Smith and Walters, 1996: 154). In other words, there was to be no collective action by Blacks in the Reagan administration on behalf of Black interests.

Moreover, as evidenced in C. Wright Mills's definition of the "power elite," the problem with elitism is that it appears to represent a "closed" circle of pre-established political influencers and power players. According to Marcus D. Pohlmann, elite theorists recognize a certain degree of competition between interest groups; however, they reach very different conclusions about just how open and fair it all is.

> While power does not always equate precisely with one's amount of power resources, the
> two correlate often enough to allow the conclusion that those with the most political

power resources generally will dominate governmental decisions. Thus, a combination of resource-rich corporate elites and governmental officials, most drawn from the white upper strata of society, will share many interests and work in unison to frame the political agenda in a way that will guarantee that their interests will be served (Pohlmann, 1999: 24).

Given its exclusive, top-down system of governance, elitism does not work as an effective model of African American political participation.

Colonialism

Another lens of analysis to examine the question of who governs in America is colonialism. The colonial model asserts that there are two distinct groups of people – a dominant group and a subordinate group; the powerful and the powerless. The powerful (dominant group) are able to control the powerless (subordinate group) through force, if necessary, as well as through the use of punishment (loss of life, employment, status) and sanctions. Those who operate through the use of the colonial model also use government legitimacy and authority to maintain existing power relationships by manipulating and controlling the political, economic, and sociocultural structures of the nation as well.

By some accounts, the connection between African Americans and colonialism extends back to the mid-1400s and included Dutch, Portuguese, and British control and usurpation of power throughout the continent of Africa. The goal of these groups was to further expand the industrial and economic empires of their nations through the exploitation and sale of the continent's natural resources of gold, diamonds, cocoa, coffee, tea, and massive amounts of cheap labor (Markovitz, 1987). In terms of African American politics, colonialism was widely introduced during the 1960s through the Black Panther Party and other Black liberation groups who claimed that Blacks in America were being dominated by the powerful through segregation, discrimination, and institutional racism. In *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, Carmichael and Hamilton assert that Blacks in America existed in a colonial state of domination and oppression.

> There is no American dilemma because black people in this country form a colony, and it is not in the interests of the colonial power to liberate them. Black people are legal citizens of the United States with, for the most part, the same legal rights as other citizens. Yet they stand as colonial subjects in relation to the white society. Thus institutional racism has another name: colonialism. (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967: 5)

Perhaps even more insulting to African Americans during this era was the fact that in the midst of their ongoing struggle for basic human rights they watched helplessly as former colonized nations such as Ghana gained their independence while American leaders rallied around "with-all-deliberate-speed" ideologies which translated into as slow as possible in relation to African American economic, political, and voting rights. As Dr King stated:

> It would be fortunate if the people in power had sense enough to go on and give up, but they don't do it like that. It is not done voluntarily, but it is done through the pressure that comes about from people who are oppressed. If there had not been a Gandhi in India with all of his noble followers, India would have never been free. If there had not been an Nkrumah and his followers in Ghana, Ghana would still be a British colony . . . there are always those people in every period of human history who don't mind getting their necks cut off, who don't mind being persecuted and discriminated and kicked about, because they know freedom is never given out, but it comes through the persistent and the continual agitation and revolt on the part of those who are caught in the system. Ghana taught us that. (Carson, 1998: 30–1)

As both India and Ghana proved, there are instances when the subordinate group, depending upon its level of group consciousness and efficacy, will rise up and rebel against the dominant governing system as African Americans ultimately did during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

Limitations of the colonial model

The main limitation of the colonial model is that most power players (including elites) dismiss it as nothing more than emotional rhetoric that is not grounded in the truth. The proliferation of an alleged colonial model in America by members of the Black Panther Party can be easily dismissed as divisive race-based politics designed to cause a tear in the beautiful tapestry of the "evidences" of American truth, which include the Declaration of Independence, the US Constitution, and the equal protection clauses of the 5th and 14th Amendments. The reason some elected officials and paid political voices refuse to acknowledge that perhaps two types of government – one of the powerful and one for the powerless – exist is that it may be difficult for some American political leaders and institutional voices to accept the fact that things such as redlining, driving while Black (DWB), and "three strikes and you're out" laws, as well as other institutional mechanisms, have been consciously or unconsciously aimed at African American constituencies.

Moreover, even if modern use and implementation of the colonial model is dismissed, defenders of American liberty and equality are hard pressed to defend the discriminatory practices of the federal government and its denial of federal housing loans to African Americans after the Great Depression. As Dennis Judd and Todd Swanstrom contend in *City Politics: The Political Economy of Urban America*:

> From the 1930s through much of the 1960s, the federal government helped finance a suburban housing boom that was effectively put off limits to blacks. Federal administrators worked hand in hand with local developers and financial institutions to enforce restrictive covenants that prohibited property from being sold to blacks, and they also made it virtually impossible for blacks to secure the federally subsidized mortgages that fueled the suburban booms. (Judd and Swanstrom, 2005: 107).

As the authors maintain, the denial of federal housing loans forced Blacks to live in high rise housing projects (concrete jungles as remixed by hip-hop

artists) or to compete over the older, second-class and second-rate homes left behind as a result of White flight to suburban communities.

In spite of the evidence of the persistence of a dominant–subordinate power relationship in major American institutions, it seems as if modern-day discussions of the impact of colonialism continue to be sideswiped by political pundits and other agenda setters who quickly point to the "headlines" of Black political, economic, and sociocultural advances from the 1960s to the present. While the inroads and accomplishments of African Americans in every area of life over the past 50 years is phenomenal, the fact remains that during this same historical time periods both individuals and institutions worked in concert to limit and subject African Americans to a separate, uneven, and, at times, hostile system of governance and political incorporation.

Moreover, even when overt oppressive mechanisms have been absent, many who argue against America's use of colonialism fail to recognize two key ingredients of the model – acquiescence and political repression – both of which have been evidenced throughout the African American freedom movement. As John Gaventa asserted, "A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something detrimental to B's best interests" (Gaventa, 1980: 5). Using Gaventa's model to capture the state of African American political incorporation and involvement, it seems that well after the constitutional elimination of separate but equal laws and practices, African Americans still engaged in practices detrimental to their interests until the incorporation of the direct action phase of the civil rights movement.

Coalitions

The final lens of analysis that we will use to offer insight into the question of who governs is the coalition (rainbow) politics model. Although the coalition model is a direct outgrowth of the pluralist model, it is necessary to examine it as an isolated entity as it seeks to go beyond the generality of the pluralist model and specifically focuses on minority group empowerment through majority group alliances and shared power and/or electoral/political alliances. The coalition politics model is based on the belief that racial and/or minority groups with shared ideological predispositions can join forces to positively impact the political arena as well as political decision-makers (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb, 1984; Sonenshein, 1990; Gomes and Williams, 1992; McClain and Stewart, 2005). There are several benefits of the coalition politics model as a governing tool. First, traditional coalitions unite a broad range of groups and interests to influence policy as was evidenced in the nation's most well-known New Deal coalition. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal was a multidimensional coalition of Catholics, Protestants, Blacks, blue-collar workers, the poor, and the unemployed. The New Deal coalition was responsible for providing a relative amount of symbolic power to African American leaders. For example, President Roosevelt appointed Mary McCleod Bethune as an

advisor. Another benefit of the coalition model is that it can eliminate group competition amongst people of similar economic/political/social status by allowing them to rally around a host of valence issues (issues that universally impact voters regardless of socio-economic status) and common community concerns such as crime, violence, electoral representation, and employment opportunities.

The coalition politics model, to be sure, is limited. Namely, the assumption that diverse racial groups will come together in support of a common cause minimizes the impact of group competition which makes interracial and intra-racial coalitions difficult to establish and maintain. Moreover, in times of political or economic scarcity, groups tend to work against, not for, each other. Another limitation of the coalition politics model is that it does not necessarily address the issue of coalitional shifts. If groups coalesce around "issue-specific" agendas, what happens once the issues are resolved? Further, as Hanes Walton and Robert C. Smith contend in *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom*, coalition politics models presupposed three things:

1. African Americans share similar interests with other oppressed groups;
2. a viable coalition can be achieved with the haves (powerful) and the have nots (powerless);
3. moral and ethical appeals can sustain coalitions (Walton and Smith, 2007: 83–8);
4. history has shown that coalitions based on these three assumptions are short-lived at best as racial and minority groups tend to focus more on the short-term, "what is in it for me?" objectives instead of long-term, tangible group benefits including substantive policy gains.

Additionally, the coalition politics model fails to consider the negative effects of shifting interests, the tendency of dominant members of the coalition to engage in "father knows best" political paternalism, and the problems that arise when group members infuse politics with issues of morality. One of the dangers and limitations of "moral and ethical" (Walton and Smith, 2007: 86) political coalitions occurs when group members are at odds over the implementation of policy. One area of controversy surrounds churches (group members) connected to the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives – a federally funded program of the Bush II administration that provides grants to religious organizations and interests. Although the Black Church is one of the largest faith-based initiatives beneficiaries, many of these churches were divided in terms of their political support for President Bush. Although President Bush declared war on same-sex marriages, stem cell research, and a woman's right to choose, many African American political and spiritual leaders contend that leaving children behind (referencing Bush's "no child left behind" fiasco) is just as immoral as some of the knee-jerk reaction, traditional Republican-agenda issue items such as abortion.

Coalition politics and the future of who governs in America

In spite of its limitations, I believe the coalition politics model has the greatest potential to be an effective governing model of African American political participation and governance in America. I believe such is the case because the coalition politics model speaks to the heart of African American politics which has always sought to use a variety of political allies and tools to uplift and empower as well as work towards the eradication of injustice and inequality for all groups. Given the growth and influence of the Latino population, I think the coalition model still has the potential to serve as a catalyst for change and genuine political power for groups that have had to overcome a series of failed political models, false political promises, and the resulting facade of democracy which has limited their ability to have their say in the democratic marketplace.

Why examine who governs?

My purpose in examining a variety of models of governance of African American political participation has been several-fold. First, the examination is helpful as it sheds light on the institutional ebbs and flows African Americans have endured to become active participants in American politics. Whereas on the one hand, African Americans are encouraged to "hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal" (Declaration of Independence, 1776) on the other hand, African Americans have had to forge new paths of political incorporation and empowerment because American political institutions and leaders failed to extend the rights and privileges of governance to them.

Second, an examination of who governs highlights the limitations of traditional models of American political participation and behavior. The political history of African Americans details that sole reliance on traditional methods of political participation such as voting have not been an effective means of substantive political incorporation and service delivery. As the 2000 presidential elections showed, voting is not enough. Moreover, modern racialized political issues such as the Georgia voter ID law also speak to the need to broaden and expand their political allies. In this regard, African Americans must diversify their political interests and continue to diligently seek both traditional and non-traditional methods of political incorporation and empowerment.

Finally, an examination of competing models of governance highlights the gap between theory and practice that continues to plague the African American political experience in America especially as it relates to the nation's most prized and praised political tenets.

The gap between theory and practice

Arguably, one of the greatest tragedies of American democracy is that, in spite of the greatness of the nation's political tenets, there still remain significant

gaps between theory and practice as it relates to the overall application and extension of rights to all of America's beloved sons and daughters. The first gap between theory and practice lies within the language of the Emancipation Proclamation. The Emancipation Proclamation declared that all persons categorized as slaves were free and that their freedom would be both recognized and maintained by the executive government.

> And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons. (Emancipation Proclamation, 1863)

The post-Civil War history of Blacks in America, however, portrayed a different story of executive branch behavior. Although President Lincoln did commit to protecting the interests of Blacks, the majority of his executive branch promises ultimately translated into powerful political rhetoric that did not, in practice, reflect what was promised to Blacks in the language of the Emancipation Proclamation. It must be noted that President Lincoln's initial response to the growing tensions amongst the races was to engage in a Black colonization project in Central America. He wrote, "There is an unwillingness on the part of our people, harsh as it may be, for you free colored people to remain with us . . . It is better for us both . . . to be separated" (Hammond, Hardwick, and Lubert, 2007).

Beyond President Lincoln's attempt to relocate former slaves to Central America, many Blacks were denied the full scope of the proclamation as slave owners engaged in a variety of insidious acts designed to overturn Lincoln's executive order. Additionally, thousands of Black soldiers, especially in the South, were denied "equal" pay and were not received well by some of their White military counterparts.

> And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defense; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages. And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service. (Emancipation Proclamation, 1863)

Arguably, it is one thing to be "received" into the armed services and an entirely different thing to benefit from the rights and privileges offered by the institution. The military experiences of Blacks reflected the unwillingness of the armed services to extend institutional courtesies to its darker-hued comrades and further reinforced the political symbolism of certain political acts.

Another gap between theory and practice can be found within the language of the United States Constitution. Although it can be argued that the theoretical nature of the language of the Constitution was never intended to be "literally" interpreted, the fact remains that there is an enormous gap related to the political, economic, and sociocultural incorporation of African

Table 2.3 The Civil War Amendments

Amendment XIII
Section 1: Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.
Section 2: Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.
Amendment XIV
Section 1: All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.
Amendment XV
Section 1: The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.
Section 2: The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.
Source: US Constitution

Americans. The gap is couched within the first 50 words of the Constitution of the United States of America: "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America" (US Constitution, 1787). The founders stated that the Constitution was established in order to "form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, and insure domestic Tranquility." The fact remains, however, that the practices (i.e., the continuation of slavery) cancelled out the true intentions of their political tenet as the maintenance of the institution of slavery (and the well-known fact that it was one of the great silences of the Constitution) proves that the practices of the founding fathers were in direct conflict with the tenets of justice and tranquility etched in the preamble.

The final gap between theory and practice is found within the language of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments – also known as the Civil War Amendments. These three amendments, passed over a five-year period (1865–1870), were designed to politically empower African Americans after the highly divisive Civil War. The amendments clearly establish a framework for the elimination of slavery, the extension of citizenship and due process to African Americans, and voting rights for African American males. However, the practical application of these laws was delayed upwards of 100 years as

Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, landmark Supreme Court cases such as Plessy vs. Ferguson, separate-but-equal, and fear and intimidation tactics were used to keep the Negro in his place.

In short, the Civil War Amendments did not protect African Americans from manmade and extra-legal (above and beyond the law) tactics such as the grandfather clause, poll taxes, court order sanctions, and even death for refusal to end Negro agitations and engaging in rabble-rousing. The aforementioned examples of the gaps between theory and practice in American political tenets and policies are just a glimpse of the ways in which the Lockean "natural rights" of African Americans were denied and/or abridged in an effort to maintain a system of domination and subordination in the United States.

Symbolic versus substantive representation

One of the most compelling arguments in support of African American inroads in the post-civil rights era has been the highly visible profiles of Blacks in every major arena of American life. Over the past 40 years, African Americans have gone from the backburner to the forefront of American political life. Whereas Fannie Lou Hamer was shut out of the Democratic National Convention in 1964, Barack Obama and Al Sharpton were headliners at the 2004 Democratic National Convention in Boston. African American political inroads are not limited to the Democrats. President Bush's appointment of Condoleezza Rice (National Security Advisor) and Colin Powell (Secretary of State) were seen as significant efforts on the party of the Republican Party to solidify their openness to Black leadership as well as to develop relationships with and court the African American vote. Without a doubt, African Americans have experienced increased levels of political visibility on the local, state, and national scene. The question remains, however, if such visibility has translated into substantive political power and service delivery for the subset.

Symbolic politics

One of the dangers in having a highly visible cohort of African American political leaders and influencers is that it may be assumed, given their airtime and ad space coverage, that Blacks in America are doing well. And, for the most part, African Americans have progressed tremendously since the John Kerryesque flip-flopping of former President Lincoln. In particular, the political strides of African Americans in the post-civil rights era have been phenomenal with more than 4,000 Black elected officials serving at the local, state, and national levels of government. The political inroads of African Americans are not limited to the Democratic Party. No one failed to recognize the history making presidential appointments of George H. W. Bush in his landmark appointment of two African Americans until Rice's subsequent replacement of Powell as Secretary of State upon General Powell's resignation from office.

If one were to base African American political, economic, and sociocultural incorporation and empowerment based on the high profile nature of Black presidential appointments, elected officials, and politically engaged artists and entertainers like Sean "P. Diddy" Combs, it would be logical to conclude that African Americans in the post-civil rights era have "overcome."

The reality, however, as recently expressed by *New York Times* guest column-ist Henry Louis Gates, is that the symbolic status of Blacks, including the high-profile appointments of Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice, does not translate into Black substantive representation. If in fact, symbols represent something that may not actually exist, it can be very dangerous, especially from a politi-cal standpoint, to translate African American visibility (symbolism) in certain arenas into actual (substantive) political, economic and sociocultural incorpo-ration and empowerment in America.

Undoubtedly, political symbolism can be an effective means of appeasing the masses as well as fostering inclusion and diversity. According to David Easton (1953), political symbolism is one of the tools used by institutional systems to maintain institutional norms and stability. Easton contends that in certain instances the government can engage in policy that gives an illusion of change when in fact nothing other than a facade has been created to mask the truth. The Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act of 1978 serves as an excellent example of symbolic politics at its best. Birthed on the heels of the Urban League's first national post-civil rights era Black agenda conference, the initial legislation was designed so that "adult Americans able and willing to work have the right to equal opportunities for useful paid employment; that the federal government is responsible for guaranteeing this right and for assuring that national full employment is attained and maintained; and that other national economic goals shall be pursued" to level the economic playing field and ensure "full employment" opportunities for historically underrepre-sented groups of people including African Americans (Pub. L. 95-523, October 27, 1978, 92 Stat. 1887, 15 USC, 3101).

Additionally, the Act was designed to eliminate income disparities resulting from higher rates of unemployment for Blacks. By the time former President Jimmy Carter endorsed the Humphrey-Hawkins Act, this "full employment" legislative act was a mere skeleton of its original intent and character. As Robert C. Smith and Ronald W. Walters contend,

> The final version of the bill endorsed by Carter retained the language guaranteeing full employment as a right and a 4 percent target goal for adults; but in exchange Carter got language included that put controlling inflation on equal footing with reducing unem-ployment, and authority for the president to modify the bill's goals or timetables in the third year after passage. It also removed any language dealing with direct authorization of expenditures . . . by the time the bill reached the floor of the House for debate it was largely symbolic. (Smith and Walters, 1996: 201)

The highly symbolic nature of Black legislative agendas is a by-product of sev-eral factors including the absence of a genuine rainbow coalition on Capitol

Table 2.4 Cost-benefit analysis of symbolic and substantive representation

	Costs
Symbolic representation	Does not translate into real political, economic, or sociocultural value; can represent an image or illusion of power; does not provide a long-term solution for the tangible and transformative access, power, and influence in the political system; geographic districts may be manipulated in order to elect descriptive representatives
Substantive representation	Representatives may not descriptively look like those they represent; fewer racial, ethnic, and gender minorities may be visibly present in elective offices; certain group members may be unwilling to participate in politics as they do not feel and/ or believe they are adequately represented
	Benefits
Symbolic representation	Powerful source of group consciousness, racial identity, and representation as people see images of self and are motivated/inspired to participate in politics; electoral numbers/demographics of racial, ethnic, and gender minorities increase; all groups are being represented in American politics and reflect democratic tenets of equality, justice, and due process
Substantive representation	Tangible public policy and legislative benefits are provided to racialized electoral districts; representatives engage in transformative not transactional politics as they usually have the support of a broad coalition of interests in their home district and engage in strategic alliances on both sides of the political aisle on Capitol Hill

Hill to broker the holistic legislative needs of minority groups. In spite of the limited nature of many aspects of symbolic politics, some political scientists argue that it is a necessary component of the African American ascension from protest to politics. Specifically, Dr Katherine Tate argues that the symbolic presence and representation of Black faces and interests in Congress are an essential component of the Black political agenda and essential to the long-term viability and inclusion of the Black agenda within American politics.

> Without Black members taking part in the legislative process, the symbolic interests, such as the congressional medals to Rosa Parks, would not be there. Martin Luther King's birthday becoming a national holiday symbolized the role he played in transforming the country into a true democracy. As a national holiday, it becomes difficult to diminish his place in history and the role of African Americans generally in America. Their absence would contribute further to the symbolic marginalization of Blacks' place in American society and in history. (Tate, 2003: 110)

The impact of symbolic politics on African American political behavior is certain. African Americans tend to vote for candidates who symbolically appear to represent their collective interests (Swain, 1993; Tate, 1993, 2003). Perhaps an extension of the rise of New Black Politics (Black electoral politics focused

on unifying the Black vote, especially the Black underclass vote), symbolic politics, including Black-elected officials and political appointees, does impact Black voter turnout and Black voting behavior. The two presidential bids of Jesse Jackson represent one example wherein a wide variety of economic and politically divergent African Americans rallied together around the collective agenda of a Black man running for the highest office of the land. Some contend that the presidential success of Senator Barack Obama is yet another example of the positive impact of political symbols as Obama's campaign touched a broad range of issues that appealed to a cross-section of interests. Still, many wonder what course of action President Obama will take to address issues specific to the African American community as his presence alone does not change the economic, political, and sociocultural difficulties that have been a part of the Black experience in America. It must be noted, however, that political theorist Hanna Pitkin (1972) devalues the use of political imagery and symbolism and contends that citizens are best represented when elected officials act in their best interests as opposed to merely descriptively representing them (Swain, 1993).

Where do we go from here?

The struggle for Black political representation in America continues. Although the obvious "signs" of separation are long gone, African American political incorporation and empowerment remains limited at best. One of the greatest challenges African Americans have faced is the inability to use traditional models of governance to gain access to the political system. Both pluralism and elitism have proven to be effective models of political empowerment and incorporation and, in some respects, have subtly worked against Black incorporation. Ironically, in spite of overt denials of such a system of governance, it seems that in America, African Americans have been subjected to a system of colonialism that has either denied access to this group of citizens and/or changed the rules of the games just as Blacks were about to benefit from the purposes and tenets of American government. It seems that the most beneficial model of governance for African American political incorporation has been the coalition (rainbow) model of politics which unites divergent groups around a collective theme of valence issues and concerns. It was the Franklin D. Roosevelt New Deal Coalition of the 1930s, the Civil Rights Coalition of the 1950s and 1960s, the Jesse Jackson Rainbow Coalition of the 1980s, and the New Millennium Coalition of 2008. President Barack Obama has brought issues of fairness, equality, justice, and tangible incorporation of African American political and economic interests to the forefront of our nation. Still, African Americans are expected to be simultaneously cognizant and transcendental of the race and the race-based nature of American politics.

The failure of the American political system to, in actuality, create a true space and place for Black interests is reflective of the bittersweet relationship

between this political subset and the nation. In the final analysis, the potential of Black political interests and political alignments is contingent upon the ability of America to self-correct some of its "ugly ways" related to its tendency to engage in top-down, dominate–subordinate models of political behavior. The reality is that until an earnest effort towards collective consciousness and "win-win" coalition politics is pursued, the interests of out-groups will continue to ebb and flow without any significant ability to spring forth into new rivers of political, economic, and sociocultural realities.

Points to ponder

1. What are some of the key components of democracy?
2. In what ways have democratic institutions helped and hindered African American political participation?
3. Briefly detail the four lenses of who governs and how they impact African American political participation and behavior.
4. What are the major differences between symbolic and substantive representation? Do you believe that both add value to the overall African American political experience? Elaborate.

Key phrases and people

democracy	symbolic politics	colonialism
coalitions	elitism	pluralism
Fannie Lou Hamer	substantive politics	the power elite
		the Civil War Amendments