

The Faith of Black Politics: The Relationship Between Black Religious and Political Beliefs

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Abstract

Scholars argue that the Black church produces religious messages that foster racial cohesion; however, recent examinations of Black religion note the heterogeneity of the messages and beliefs advanced by Black churches. Several argue that this heterogeneity in Black religious beliefs is reflected in Black political beliefs. This study examines the linkage between heterogeneity in Black religious beliefs and heterogeneity in Black political attitudes. Offering measures of the social gospel, prosperity gospel, and Black theology, we demonstrate that each religious belief system is related to different aspects of Black public opinion. The social gospel is linked to continuing the legacy of the civil rights movement, while the prosperity gospel is associated with a departure from its legacy. Meanwhile, Black theology is linked to racial empowerment and extending the boundaries of Black politics.

Keywords

religion, politics, measurement, public opinion

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Introduction

In response to President Trump's actions immediately following his inauguration, the Bishops Council of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church released a statement condemning a variety of his Executive Orders. In their rebuke of the early days of the Trump administration, they stated,

We ask that every member of this denomination, and people who are committed to justice and righteousness, equality and truth, will join with us to thwart what are clearly demonic acts. Indeed, the words of the Apostle Paul to the believers at Ephesus apply today, "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against . . . the rulers of the darkness of this present age, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Council of Bishops, 2017, p. 1)

In direct contrast to the AME Council of Bishops, Bishop Wayne T. Jackson, of Great Faith Ministries in Detroit, provided candidate Trump with one of his rare visits to a Black church. During the visit, Bishop Jackson presented Mr. Trump with a Jewish prayer shawl that he reportedly prayed and fasted over (Butler, 2016). Bishop Jackson, along with other Black clergy such as Mark Burns of South Carolina and Darrell Scott of Cleveland (Weigel, 2016), defended Mr. Trump, going so far as to state that Trump's wealth is a sign that he is "blessed by God" (Gjelten, 2017).

These two examples highlight changes in both the Black church and Black politics in the 50 years since the end of the civil rights movement.¹ Scholars have increasingly called attention to the fragmentation of the Black political (Dawson & Francis, 2016; Harris, 2012; Spence, 2015; Tate, 2010) and religious community (Harrison, 2005; Lee, 2005; Mitchem, 2007; Pinn, 2002). Scholars of Black politics have found that the civil rights movement's message of racial and class solidarity has faded. Furthermore, the movement's emphasis on the need for government involvement to help solve the race problem has given up ground to those who view the wounds of Blacks as self-inflicted. Regarding the Black church, the response from the AME Church is in sync with the image of the Black church as an institution that defends the marginalized.² However, the actions of Bishop Jackson, Rev. Burns, and Rev. Scott are becoming more common examples of the Black church. Just as Black politics has witnessed a declining commitment to racial and class equality, the Black church's message of social and spiritual salvation is losing its prominence to a theology that emphasizes individual faith and material accumulation. Some contend that these changes are not coincidental. They argue that changes in the Black political discourse are manifestations of changes in the Black religious discourse (Harris, 2012; Harris-Lacewell, 2007a, 2007b; Spence, 2015).

This study provides an empirical examination of this proposition. Focusing on three religious belief systems that scholars have linked to divisions in Black public opinion—the social gospel, prosperity gospel, and Black liberation theology—this study examines the extent to which religious beliefs are associated with differences in group identity and support for strategies to achieve racial equality. The social gospel, for instance, argues that salvation is about a relationship with the divine and working to achieve social equality, and is closely linked to the civil rights movement and many of the romanticized periods of the Black church and Black politics (Harris-Lacewell, 2007a, 2007b; Harris, 2012). In opposition, the prosperity gospel argues that people of faith will be rewarded with wealth and health in heaven and on earth. It has been linked to the rise of racial conservatism among Blacks and the rise of neoliberalism among Black elites (Harris-Lacewell, 2007a, 2007b; Spence, 2015). Black liberation theology argues that there is a parallel between the experiences of Blacks in America and the persecution biblical figures, and has been linked calls for a radical change, such as Black nationalism and Black feminism (Calhoun-Brown, 1999; Cone & Wilmore, 1993; Reese, Brown, & Ivers, 2007; Reese & Brown, 1995).

This article begins by contextualizing the study of Black politics, emphasizing the importance of racial and class solidarity and strategies for addressing racial inequality. Next, we discuss the literature on the Black religious experience, the history of the abovementioned religious belief systems, and how we expect them to be related to Black political attitudes. To test our assertions regarding link between religious belief systems and political attitudes, we employ a survey of Blacks that allows us to measure support for these belief systems, group identity, and strategies. Our analyses reveal that these divergent religious belief systems are politically relevant, as support for each of these belief systems is associated with levels of group solidarity as well as strategies for achieving racial equality. We conclude the article with a discussion of what these results mean for the study of Black politics and future research regarding both the Black religious and political experiences.

Group Identity and Strategies for Freedom

The racialization of slavery, creation of laws controlling race relations, and continued social separation between Blacks and Whites have cemented the importance of race in America and made Blackness a political issue (Dawson, 1994; Harris-Lacewell, 2004; Smedley, 1999). As a by-product of racial subjugation, Blacks also suffer economically, causing class issues to be an important part of the Black political agenda (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006; Shapiro, 2004). The racialized image of poverty further reinforces this connection,

resulting in conversations about the poor being implicitly or explicitly about Blacks (Gilens, 1999). These factors, along with many others, have contributed to a dual agenda in Black politics that emphasizes both racial and economic equality (D. C. Hamilton & Hamilton, 1997).

Beyond group cohesion, Blacks are continually engaged in debates about how to advance the race. Myrdal (1944) experienced this when he highlighted the fragility of the Black economy to a group of Black business and community leaders who attempted to demonstrate a growing Black economy. He notes that the once harmonious group “decomposed into the wide and glaring spectrum of American Negro ideologies.” These ideologies ranged from blaming poor Blacks to calls for racial separation (p. 34). As Dawson (2001) and Harris-Lacewell (2004) point out, these divisions did not end with the civil rights movement. The various ideologies about Black advancement are still being debated today as Black leaders continue to promote ideologies such as Black nationalism, Black conservatism, and Black feminism.

Black nationalists focus their call for political action on race and racial oppression. Adherents’ views of the world are highly racialized, and they believe that Whites undermine Black interests (Dawson, 2001). Because of this mistrust of other groups, self-reliance and determination are key components, which once manifested itself in a mass exodus from the United States, such as Henry McNeal Turner’s or Marcus Garvey’s call for Blacks to return to Africa. More commonly, nationalists emphasize building sovereign local communities that protect the cultural, economic, and political interests of Blacks, such as the Black Power Movement (Brown & Shaw, 2002; Dawson, 1994, 2001; Hall, 1978; C. V. Hamilton, 1973). Critics of Black nationalism argue that it is divisive and supports the rejection of mainstream America for a fictional Black utopia (Aberbach & Walker, 1970; Cruse, 1984; Davis & Brown, 2002; Dawson, 2001). For instance, many of those who followed Turner in his emigration to Africa after the Civil War were unable to find success and had to return to the United States. Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association was decimated due to an unqualified and inexperienced leadership. Furthermore, some point to its problematic engagement with gender and sexuality—Black nationalists have often suppressed addressing issues of the subjugation of Black women, sexuality, and problems of the patriarchy (Cohen, 1999). Because of this, detractors have framed Black nationalism as an immature expression of racial pride.

Black conservatism also emphasizes self-reliance; however, it argues that attention to racism is a distraction. Believing that American political and economic institutions ensure equality, they see no need for government

involvement in the race problem. Dawson (2001) positions modern Black conservatism as the opposite of the civil rights movement and groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The premise of Black conservatism is that a strong work ethic and moral behavior is all that is needed for Blacks to climb the American social, political, and economic ladder. Ben Carson, Ward Connerly, Mia Love, Condoleezza Rice, Clarence Thomas, and C. Delores Tucker serve as the contemporary leading figures of Black conservatism; however, many of its ideals can be traced to slavery (Lewis, 2005). Jupiter Hammond, a slave on Long Island, asserted that the moral failings of free Blacks and their inability to assimilate into White culture contributed to the continued enslavement of Blacks (Lewis, 2013). As slavery ended and Jim Crow swept the South, Booker T. Washington and William Hooper Councill criticized those who called for a political response to their oppression (Woodward, 1971). Instead, they emphasized morality, education, and skill development as an alternative to political activism (Dawson, 2001; Marable, 1983; Watson, 1998). Black conservatism's opponents argue that its leaders have sacrificed the freedom of other Blacks for personal gain (Marable, 1983; Philpot, 2017).

Reacting to the narrow scope of ideologies such as Black nationalism and Black conservatism, as well as their toxic elements of masculinity and homophobia, Black feminism contends that the problems of Blacks are not confined to race or effort but a multitude of forces (A. Walker, 1983). Black feminists argue that emphasizing racial pride or respectability ignores the variety of forces affecting Black lives (Dawson, 2001; Harris-Lacewell, 2004; A. Walker, 1983). Emphasizing the intersectional nature of Black lives, Black feminists argue that Black leaders must be aware of multiple forms of marginalization, such as race, gender, and class (Crenshaw, 1991; Williams, 1998). They argue that Black nationalism's emphasis on race ignores the plight of Black women, while conservatism's emphasis on respectability reinforces oppressive gender roles and ostracizes the poor. The Black Lives Movement, which has made intersectionality a core component of its activism, serves as a modern example of Black feminism (Collins, 2016; Jackson, 2016). Brittney Cooper's (2017) work on Black women's intellectual history and discourse serves as another cutting edge example. Like Black nationalists, Black feminists support the idea of racial self-determination (Collins, 1996). However, its emphasis on gender equality positions it as critic of the masculine notions advanced in Black nationalist rhetoric. Furthermore, its emphasis on empowering those classically viewed as deviants, such as the poor and homosexuals, puts it at odds with Black conservatism (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Dawson, 2001; Harris-Lacewell, 2004).

The Multidimensional Nature of the Black Religious Experience

As a product of racial segregation and one of few places of Black independence, the Black church and its religious message have developed on a distinctively different track than that of their White counterparts (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Paris, 1985). As scholars have demonstrated, Black religious practices and beliefs are qualitatively different from those of Whites (Cavendish, Welch, & Leege, 1998; McDaniel & Ellison, 2008). Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) call this distinctive religious experience the “Black Sacred Cosmos,” which is similar to Whites regarding orthodoxy but different with regard to theological emphasis. They contend that the Black religious experience places greater emphasis on community and social justice. This argument falls in line with past observations of the Black church (Drake & Cayton, 1970; Morris, 1984; Paris, 1985), along with recent studies of how Blacks apply religion to politics (McDaniel & Ellison, 2008; McKenzie & Rouse, 2013; Philpot, 2017).

Because of these factors, the Black church and Black religion have come to symbolize Black politics. Mays and Nicholson (1933/1969) argue that the Black church serves as a symbol of racial consciousness and self-determination. The church generates connections across class lines by providing a place for poorer and low-skilled Blacks to acquire training, recognition, and networking among the class ranks. Many of the civic skills gained in the Black church (such as fundraising, public speaking, and more) are portable to the political arena (Calhoun-Brown, 2002; McClerking & McDaniel, 2005; Tate, 1993; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). As they state,

[it] is the place where the Negro banker, lawyer, professor, social worker, physician, dentist and public-school teacher meet the skilled and semi-skill tradesmen, the maid, the cook, the hotel man, the butler, the chauffeur and the common laborer; and mingle with them (p. 287)

In contrast, other scholars argue that this is an incomplete picture of the Black religious experience. Du Bois (1990), Myrdal (1944), and Frazier (1964/1974) suggest that the Black religious experience is multidimensional, as some churches reflect the image presented by Mays and Nicholson (1933/1969), others advance antipodal messages. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) acknowledge this in their discussion of the “dialectical tensions” that Black churches must contend with. How churches choose to deal with these tensions generates variation across churches and creates the complexity of the Black religious experience (McDaniel, 2008).

When discussing the Black religious experience, the social gospel is often credited as the predominant belief system of the Black church (Morone, 2003; Paris, 1985; Wallis, 2005). The message of the social gospel may be summarized by three core components: social solidarity, equality, and action. The activities and rhetoric surrounding the civil rights movement exemplify the Black church embracing the social gospel, as Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference argued that it was a religious duty to ensure equality (Morone, 2003; Morris, 1984). Preceding King, individuals such as Richard Allen, Reverdy C. Ransom, and Howard Thurman advanced its principles (Dorrien, 2016; Goddard, 1999; Thurman, 1976). They developed a Christianity that emphasized Black dignity, and insisted that “authentic Christian faith [was] incompatible with racial prejudice” (Dorrien, 2016, p. 199). Its modern-day manifestation can be seen in the writings and works of Rev. William Barber and his Moral Monday’s protests in North Carolina (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016).

While the social gospel’s role in the Black religious experience has been glorified by academics and progressives, it has been ridiculed by conservative theologians who believe that it ignores the key elements of religion. Critics argue its emphasis on collective sin ignores the dangers of individual sin (Lischer, 1995). Others argue that the social gospel is just a way to justify troublemaking. King’s *Letter From the Birmingham Jail* illustrates this clash between supporters of the social gospel and Black clergy who emphasize individual morality and dismissed his actions as rabble rousing (King, 1999). Others criticize the social gospel for not allowing people to enjoy their lives. They argue that it is about doom and gloom, and makes people feel guilty for appreciating the better things in life (Harris, 2012; Harris-Lacewell, 2007a; Harrison, 2005).

In contrast to the social gospel’s focus on combatting inequality, the prosperity gospel emphasizes individual faith. It argues that God will bless the faithful with financial and physical prosperity. Its central beliefs assert that Christ’s death and resurrection indicate that Christians can attain perfect health and flourish financially (Bowler, 2013; Harris, 2012; Harris-Lacewell, 2007a; Tucker-Worgs, 2011). Christians who express a strong faith will be divinely favored, and will be blessed with material possessions and good health, while those who sin will be punished. The prosperity gospel’s popularity has grown substantially in the Black community. McDaniel (2016) finds that while its level of support is significantly lower than the social gospel, Blacks are significantly more supportive than Whites.

Its popularity has made it a target, as its critics argue that it undercuts the advancement of Blacks by creating an illusion that racism and classism are the products of poor faith as opposed to social structures (Harris, 2012;

Harris-Lacewell, 2007a). They contend that it provides a false hope that problems can simply be prayed away (Hendricks, 2006). For instance, Creflo Dollar, who has a weekly attendance of 30,000, and several wide-selling books and nationally televised programs (Bowler, 2013), vehemently claims that strong faith is the only way to vanquish racism. Dollar further argues against seeking redress from the government for past wrongs, such as slavery (Dollar, 1997). Eddie Long, who had a weekly attendance of 25,000 and a national audience (Bowler, 2013), told a group of civil rights veterans that they should “forget racism” (Blake, 2006).³ Furthermore, the argument that poverty is caused by sinful behavior diminishes claims that express solidarity with the poor (Harris-Lacewell, 2007a; Spence, 2015). Arguing that the growth of the prosperity gospel had grown at the expense of the social gospel, Glaude (2010) pronounced the Black church “dead.” Glaude contends that the growth of prosperity gospel has rendered it irrelevant to the Black experience.

A third religious tradition is Black liberation theology, which shares similarities with both the social and prosperity gospels. Black liberation theology places the Christian experience in the Black experience and argues that true Christians identify with the Black experience. Like the social gospel, it emphasizes equality, but like the prosperity gospel, it assumes a special connection with the divine. Formalized during the Black Power Movement, it argues that there is a religious imperative for Blacks to empower themselves (Harris, 2010). James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore are credited with formalizing this belief system, but it is built upon a long history of rhetoric from Black clergy. To disassociate freedmen and women from the influence of their former masters during Reconstruction, Henry McNeal Turner, a bishop in the AME Church, preached, “God is a Negro” (C. E. Walker, 1982). Similarly, Marcus Garvey created a Negro Catechism, and insisted that Blacks should see God as Black (Jacques-Garvey, 1992; Raboteau, 2001).

Scholars have found support for a connection between Black liberation theology and Black empowerment. Calhoun-Brown (1999) finds that African Americans who think of Jesus as Black are more likely to shop in Black stores or vote for Black candidates. McDaniel (2008) finds that clergy and members who stress the importance of Black images of religious figures are more supportive of Black churches being politically involved. Shaw and McDaniel (2007) find that those who embrace aspects of Black liberation theology are more accepting and welcoming of homosexuals. Even though scholars have demonstrated its role as a liberalizing force among religious Blacks, critics contend that its emphasis on race alienates other groups (Forbes, 2010). Others argue Black liberation theology imposes the Black experience on the interpretation of scripture, and assumes that the Black

experience's morality is beyond reproach (Evans & Gorman, 1987; Skinner, 1974). The fiery nature of Black liberation theology has created significant controversy when exposed to the mainstream American discourse. The 2008 firestorm surrounding Reverend Jeremiah Wright, the former pastor of Barack Obama and an adherent of Black liberation theology, demonstrates the polarizing nature of this belief system (McKenzie, 2011).

The Faith of Black Politics

There is a fundamental connection between religious and political beliefs. Both contain causal narratives of how society should be organized and provide guidelines of appropriate behavior. Both explain internal bounded rationality within groups, often misinterpreted by outgroups as irrationality (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Dawson, 2001; Harris-Lacewell, 2004; Leege & Kellstedt, 1993). Religion's ability to emulate the role of an ideology brings it into the political arena as a medium through which Black political action can be studied (Harris-Lacewell, 2004, 2007a, 2007b). It provides a sense of identity and indicates who is in the group and who opposes the group. The causal nature of religious belief systems provides followers with a sense of societal rights and wrongs, and reassures followers they are supported by a supernatural being (Benson & Williams, 1982; Harris-Lacewell, 2007a, 2007b).

Because of this, we expect differences in the support of religious belief systems to be associated with differences in Black attitudes. Specifically, we contend that the variation in Black feelings of racial and class solidarity, as well as beliefs about the optimal strategy for solving the race problem, may be explained by support for religious belief systems. The social gospel's emphasis on ensuring equality and its link to the civil rights movement should be associated with higher levels of racial and class solidarity. Social gospel supporters should also be less supportive of ideologies that run contrary to the goals of civil rights leaders, such as Black conservatism and Black nationalism. In contrast to the social gospel, the prosperity gospel maintains that poverty and illness are caused by poor faith. Scholars have linked its growth with a trend in Black politics that has shifted away from the class and racial solidarity of the civil rights movement. This suggests that prosperity gospel supporters should express lower levels of solidarity with Blacks and the poor, and will be more likely to promote ideologies such as Black conservatism. Black liberation theology, which was formalized during the Black Power Movement, interprets Christianity from the Black experience and expresses a zeal to end all forms of oppression. These factors imply that supporters of Black liberation theology will express higher levels of racial and class

solidarity, and will be more supportive of Black nationalism and Black feminism. From these assumptions, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Supporters of the social gospel and Black liberation theology will express higher levels of racial solidarity, while prosperity gospel supporters will express lower levels of support.

Hypothesis 2: Supporters of the social gospel and Black liberation theology will express higher levels of solidarity with the poor, while prosperity gospel supporters will express lower levels of support.

Hypothesis 3: Social gospel supporters will express lower levels of support for Black nationalism and Black conservatism.

Hypothesis 4: Prosperity gospel supporters will express higher levels of support for Black conservatism.

Hypothesis 5: Black liberation theology supporters will express higher levels of support for Black nationalism and Black feminism.

Data

To assess the relationship between these religious beliefs and Black political thought, we use the Religious Worldviews Study Survey Pilot. This online survey was administered through Qualtrics in August 2012. The study consisted of responses from 484 Blacks who identified as Christian. After reviewing the results, we identified 342 valid observations. The survey respondent population matches well with general census data on the Black population in terms of age and gender; however, our sample contains a high level of college-educated respondents. To account for this, we weight the sample based upon age, sex, and educational attainment using 2010 Census data.

Measures of Religious Belief Systems

We have focused on three religious belief systems—the social gospel, prosperity gospel, and Black liberation theology. The social gospel and prosperity gospel measures are adopted from McDaniel (2016). The social gospel measure ($\alpha = .68$; $M = .54$) is comprised of eight items: four positively worded and four negatively worded. The positively worded items indicate a religious duty to protect the less fortunate and reduce inequalities. The negatively worded items relate to beliefs about the more individualistic and otherworldly aspects of religion. The prosperity gospel measure ($\alpha = .66$; $M = .43$) is comprised of six items: four positively worded and two negatively worded. The positively worded items reflect a belief that health and wealth can be achieved

through proper expressions of faith, and those who are unable to achieve these goals either lack morality or do not express their faith properly. The negatively worded items reflect the belief that one's faith is not directly linked to success. The Black liberation theology measure ($\alpha = .82$; $M = .57$) is adapted from the work of Cone (1997) and others who have articulated this religious ideology. It is comprised of six positively worded items that reflect the belief that there is a special connection between the experiences of Blacks and biblical figures.⁴ The items for each of these measures, which can be referenced in Table 1, were combined into an additive index. For ease of interpretation, these indices and all variables presented are standardized to range from 0 to 1 (Achen, 1982).

An examination of the relationship between the ideologies fits expectations. The social gospel has a weak negative correlation with the prosperity gospel ($r = -.02$), and a positive and significant correlation with Black liberation theology ($r = .17$). The prosperity gospel measure positively correlated with Black liberation theology ($r = .31$).

Dependent Variables

As we have argued throughout this article, race and class are core aspects of Black politics, and we expect variations in Black religious beliefs to influence the extent to which Blacks express racial and class solidarity. We assess racial and class solidarity for Blacks and the poor using measures of linked fate and polar power for each group. Both measures are taken from Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson (1989) and Dawson (1994). The polar power measure reflects the extent to which the respondent believes that a group has a power differential with another group. To measure this, we subtract the perceived level of Black influence from the perceived level of White influence. The measure ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates that Blacks have more influence than Whites, .5 indicates that they have the same level of influence, and 1 indicates that Whites have more influence than Blacks. The measure of class polar power subtracts the influence of the poor from the rich. The results in Figure 1 demonstrate that the respondents have a high level of connection with Blacks and the poor. The Black- and poor-linked fate measures have means of .63 and .50. Regarding polar power, the race measure has a mean of .79, while the class measure has a mean of .89.

To assess variations in Black political thought, we measure support for the three ideologies discussed above. The measures used are adapted from Dawson (2001). The Black nationalism measure ($M = 0.33$) is a 7-point item which reflects the needs of African Americans to take control of their local communities. The Black conservatism measure ($M = .41$) is a three-item

Table 1. Question Wording of Items in Religious Belief System Measures.

Social gospel	% good
God instructs us to protect the poor.	60.5
Failure to confront social unfairness is a sin.	26.6
Social justice is at the heart of the Gospel.	35.9
God is more concerned about individual morality than social inequalities. ^a	34.8
Addressing social issues distracts people from achieving salvation. ^a	21.0
Building the Kingdom of God on earth is only about bringing people to Christ, not changing social structures. ^a	34.8
Social and economic fairness are the core teachings of Christ.	33.6
We should only be concerned about bringing people to Christ, not equality. ^a	25.4
Prosperity gospel	
God rewards those who live moral lives with material possessions.	17.7
God punishes those who have been immoral by taking their material possessions.	13.6
The reason why people of faith fail is because they do not express their faith correctly.	22.0
Your faith only provides spiritual growth, not earthly rewards. ^a	30.6
Whether or not you are faithful, the risks in life are still the same. ^a	30.2
Poverty and illness are indications of sinful behavior.	8.9
Black theology	
God can be known through the experiences of Black people in America.	36.2
Black people hold a special place in God's plan.	47.1
Like Jesus, Black leaders have been punished for speaking the truth.	56.6
Churches should only portray Christ and other biblical figures as Black.	15.3
Christ's experience in the Bible is similar to the Black experience in America.	35.6
Black leaders, such as Frederick Douglas and Martin Luther King, were God's prophets.	51.7

Note. Respondents were asked, "We'd like to know if you think each statement is a good or bad way to describe your beliefs." There are seven response categories ranging from *extremely bad* to *extremely good*. The percentages reported are those who stated the statement was slightly good, moderately good, or extremely good at describing their beliefs.
^aNegatively worded item.

measure which reflects the belief that African Americans are no longer victims of racism, and that many of the problems in the Black community are self-inflicted. Finally, the Black feminism measure ($M = 0.71$) is comprised

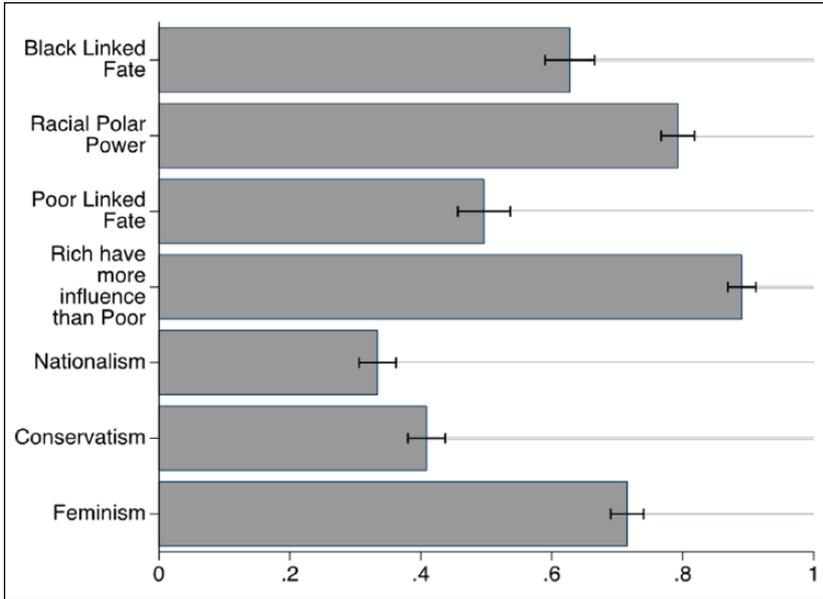


Figure 1. Mean scores of racial solidarity and ideology measures.

of two items reflecting the belief that the problems of the Black community are multidimensional, and that Black feminists provide support for the Black community.

Covariates

Support for these political and policy beliefs is shaped by social experiences and religious practices (McDaniel, 2016), so we account for demographic and religious covariates. The demographic covariates are age, sex, education, and income. A quick analysis of the demographic variables demonstrates that the mean age of the respondents is 42.8 years, 55% of the respondents are female, 25.9% have a college degree, and median family income is US\$30,000 to US\$39,999. The religious covariates are measures of religiosity, biblical literalism, and the percentage of the congregation that is Black. Religiosity is a four-item measure comprised of the frequency of church attendance, Bible reading, prayer, and the importance of religion. Biblical literalism reflects the extent to which respondents believe the Bible to be the literal word of God. The racial composition of the respondents' congregation is measured by the percentage of the congregation they report to be Black. An analysis of the

measures indicates that the respondents hold the Bible in high regard, are religiously active, attend racially homogeneous churches. The majority (51.3%) believe that the Bible is the literal word of God, the religiosity index has a mean of .67, and the mean racial makeup of their congregation is 71% Black. Furthermore, 50.2% of the respondents report attending a church where 85% or more are Black.

Results

Broadly, our results demonstrate that even when accounting for religious and social demographics, religious belief systems have qualitatively different relationships with group attachment and ideological support. To conserve space, the results from the analyses are presented as a series of scatter plots with error bars. If the error bar does not cross over 0, then the reported coefficient is interpreted as being significant at the specified level. Because the social gospel (SG), prosperity gospel (PG), and Black liberation theology (BT) are the main variables of concern, they are the only variables displayed in the figures. The full models can be referenced in the appendix. Beginning with group solidarity, the results in Figure 2 indicate that Black liberation theology has a consistent positive and significant relationship with Black-linked fate and racial polar power. This suggests that those who are supportive of Black liberation theology are more likely to see their life outcomes as connected to other Blacks and are more likely to perceive a power imbalance that favors Whites. Prosperity gospel supporters, on the other hand, are less likely to report believing their life outcome is connected to other Blacks and a racial power imbalance. This relationship is only significant regarding polar power but fits with earlier expectations and concerns from social commentators who argue that the prosperity gospel erodes racial solidarity. The social gospel, as expected, is positively correlated with both measures, but neither relationship is significant (p values = .12, .70, respectively). This insignificance may be a consequence of accounting for Black liberation theology in the model. As discussed above, we expect them to behave similarly regarding group cohesion. Furthermore, they are positively correlated with each other. When Black liberation theology is removed, the relationship between the social gospel and Black-linked fate is significant (p value = .02); however, the relationship with polar power is still not significant. We also tested whether accounting for Black liberation theology influenced the significance of the relationship between the prosperity gospel and the measures of racial solidarity. These analyses find that including or excluding Black liberation theology from the model does not change the relationship.

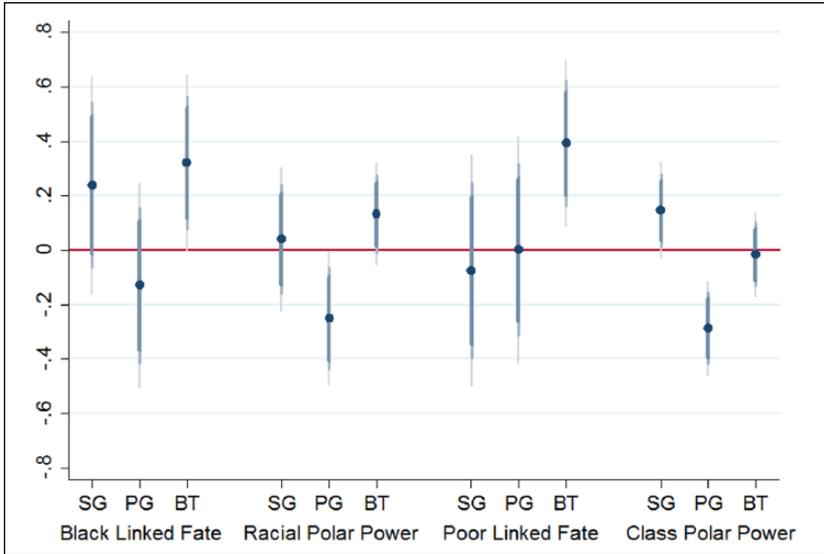


Figure 2. OLS analysis of the relationship between religious belief systems and group solidarity.

Note. The thickest line represents significance at the .05 level; the second thickest line .01 level; the thinnest line .001 level. If the line crosses over 0, it is not significant at the specified level. The significance levels reported are from two-tailed tests. OLS = ordinary least squares.

Regarding solidarity with the poor, our results demonstrate the expected relationships. Black liberation theology is associated with a higher belief of linked fate with the poor, while the social and prosperity gospels have opposing views regarding a class power imbalance. As in the case of Black-linked fate, Black liberation theology supporters express a stronger belief that their lives are connected to the lives of the poor. Regarding the power struggle between the rich and the poor, Black liberation theology supporters do not distinguish themselves from those who oppose it. Social gospel and prosperity gospel supporters do not separate themselves from skeptics regarding poor-linked fate. However, they are clearly antagonistic with each other regarding the class power struggle. Social gospel supporters are more likely to believe that there is a power imbalance that favors the rich over the poor, while prosperity gospel supporters are less likely to support this belief. These results lend support to the argument that the growth of the prosperity gospel is a sign of fundamental changes in Black politics—being associated with lower levels of racial and class solidarity indicates that support for the

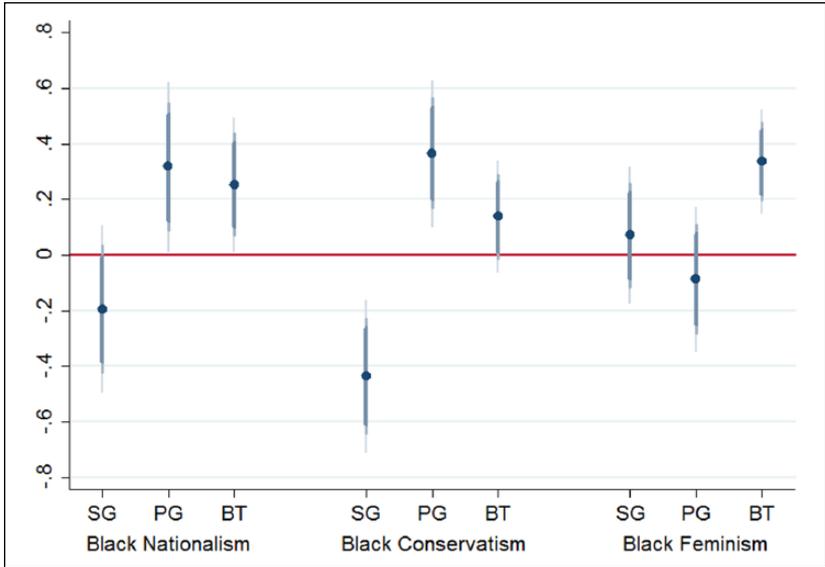


Figure 3. OLS analysis of the relationship between religious belief systems and Black political ideologies.

Note. The thickest line represents significance at the .05 level; the second thickest line .01 level; the thinnest line .001 level. If the line crosses over 0, it is not significant at the specified level. The significance levels reported are from two-tailed tests. OLS = ordinary least squares.

prosperity gospel leads Blacks away from the central tenets of Black politics established during the civil rights movement.

Transitioning to the relationship between religious beliefs and political ideologies, the results in Figure 3 fit with expectations but offer some surprises. Beginning with their relationship with Black nationalism, the social gospel and Black liberation theology have the expected relationships. Black liberation theology is positively associated with support for Black nationalism, and the social gospel is negatively associated with it. Surprisingly, support for the prosperity gospel also has a positive relationship with support for Black nationalism. Given that the prosperity gospel is associated with lower levels of racial solidarity, this finding is perplexing. One of the reasons for this relationship may be that both the prosperity gospel and Black nationalism share an “us versus them” worldview—Black nationalists are skeptical of non-Blacks (Davis & Brown, 2002), and prosperity gospel supporters view themselves as a group set above others (Bowler, 2013). In addition, studies of the prosperity gospel in other nations have demonstrated that its presence is linked

to nationalistic thinking (Coleman, 1993). Furthermore, empowerment is a central theme in Black nationalism, and supporters of the prosperity gospel argue that empowerment is at the heart of their message (Lee, 2007; Mitchem, 2007; Pinn, 2002). This emphasis on empowerment may translate to racial politics.

The analysis of Black conservatism fits with expectations regarding the social and prosperity gospels; however, the relationship between conservatism and Black liberation theology is unexpected. Fitting our assumptions, the social gospel is negatively correlated with support for Black conservatism. Given that the social gospel is so closely linked to the civil rights movement, and that Dawson (2001) argues that Black conservatism is the antipodal position of the King and other leaders, this should be expected. This line of reasoning also supports the positive relationship between the prosperity gospel and Black conservatism. As discussed above, critics frame the prosperity gospel as the antithesis of the social gospel and the civil rights movement. This result adds empirical support for critics who argue that it has moved Black religion and politics to a position that is antagonistic to traditional Black politics (Harris, 2012; Harris-Lacewell, 2007a; Spence, 2015). The positive relationship between Black liberation theology and conservatism is unexpected; however, a closer examination finds that the positive relationship is driven by one aspect of Black conservatism. Black liberation theology is only positively and significantly correlated with the belief that some Blacks are not trying hard enough. The prosperity gospel, on the other hand, is positively and significantly correlated with all three items comprising the measure. Furthermore, the Black liberation theology measure is similar to religious nationalism (McDaniel, Nooruddin, & Shortle, 2011), which may contribute to group policing.

Finally, our results indicate that both the social gospel and Black liberation theology have a positive relationship with Black feminism, while the prosperity gospel has a negative relationship. However, the only significant relationship is between it and Black liberation theology. While Black liberation theology has been heavily criticized for being overly masculine and ignoring the role of women (Mitchem, 2002), it has evolved to be inclusive of all marginalized groups (Shaw & McDaniel, 2007). Additional analysis of the results finds that similar to the analysis of Black-linked fate, the social gospel's positive relationship with Black feminism is significant (p value = .08) when Black liberation theology is not accounted for. This suggests that while these belief systems are distinct, they are associated with progressive thinking.

In totality, these results support the belief that the fractionalization of the Black church is associated with the fractionalization of Black politics. Social gospel supporters, who demonstrate higher levels of racial and class

solidarity along with a rejection of racial separatism and conservatism, are in line with the status quo established by the civil rights movement. The prosperity gospel and Black liberation theology, on the other hand, diverge from the status quo. As feared by its critics, prosperity gospel beliefs are associated with deteriorating both racial and class solidarity and support for conservatism. Prosperity gospel supporters are also more supportive of racial separatism, but it is not clear if this driven by beliefs about empowerment or a sense of superiority. Black liberation theology is not only associated with higher levels of both racial and class solidarity but it is also associated with racial separation, conservatism, and feminism. These relationships appear to signal that Black liberation theology supporters are inconsistent in their thinking. However, a closer examination revealed that their commitment to conservatism is about effort, not opposition to government's role in achieving racial justice. Furthermore, the positive relationship between Black liberation theology and Black feminism is stronger (p value = .03) than the positive relationship with conservatism. This suggests that followers of Black liberation theology not only embrace their blackness but are also supportive of a progressive agenda that empowers all marginalized groups.

Discussion and Conclusion

The civil rights movement is considered by many to be the greatest collective triumph of Blacks to organize and force the nation to address racial inequalities.⁵ The Black church has received a great deal of praise in helping achieve the movement's goals. More so, the church was not just a place for physical resources, such as meeting halls and funding, but it was also a source of the psychological resources needs to create and sustain the movement. Preaching a religious ideology that emphasized social justice, churches recruited and kept people committed the movement. However, in the five decades since the movement ended, scholars and commentators have noted how both Black politics and religion have been drawn away from social justice. The attention of many Black political and religious elites has emphasized individual gain and supported policies that undercut the goals of the movement.

Like many of the scholars who have noted this change, we do not view the change in Black politics and religion as a coincidence. Given the importance of religion and the church in Black life, it is difficult to argue that the changes are happening independent of each other. Using a unique survey of Black Americans, we examine the extent to which the differences in Black public opinion are linked to differences in support for religious belief systems.

Focusing on the relationship between the social gospel, prosperity gospel, and Black liberation theology with attitudes regarding group identity and how to best solve the race problem, we find that these religious and political beliefs are linked to each other. Social gospel supporters are more likely to express attitudes associated with the civil rights movement, while prosperity gospel supporters are less likely. Supporters of Black liberation theology are similar to supporters of the social gospel in that they are more likely to express racial and class solidarity. However, Black liberation theology supporters are more likely to support ideologies that are out of sync with the rhetoric of the civil rights movement, such as Black nationalism and Black feminism.

These results highlight the nuances of Black religion and Black politics. From an outsider's perspective, both appear to be monolithic with little disagreement. However, this study demonstrates that the proverb "Still waters run deep" should be applied to the Black religious and political experiences. Importantly, this study does not demonstrate causality. While several scholars argue that changes in Black politics are a consequence of changes in the Black church, our data do not allow us to uncover the causal relationship. However, it does provide evidence supporting those who have drawn a connection between them. We believe that empirically establishing this connection is vital to continuing the discussion of the relationship between religion and politics. While we are unable to disentangle the symptom from the illness, we provide markers illuminating where individuals supporting these theologies or political ideologies may be found.

Future work on the connection between Black religion and Black politics should pay greater attention to these connections, and develop methods for establishing the causal narrative. These works should also pay close attention to how these theologies are implemented in politics. As scholars such as Du Bois (1990), Pattillo (2007), and Spence (2015) have demonstrated, much of the action of Black politics is at the local level. Scholars should work to understand how the presence of churches and religious leaders who advocate these theologies influences government policy. While we demonstrate that the connection between these theologies and attitudes is important for understanding Black political discourse, we do not know if they are important for explaining policy decisions in areas with a vibrant Black political power base. As we continue to dissect the various components of the Black experience, we must continue to demonstrate its dynamic nature and relate it to the continued struggle to achieve racial equality.

Appendix

Table A1. OLS Regression of the Relationship Between Religious Belief Systems and Group Solidarity.

	Black-linked fate	Racial polar power	Poor-linked fate	Class polar power
Social gospel	.239 (.154)	.040 (.102)	-.075 (.164)	.146** (.068)
Prosperity gospel	-.129 (.145)	-.251*** (.095)	.001 (.160)	-.288*** (.066)
Black theology	.322** (.124)	.132* (.072)	.393*** (.118)	-.016 (.059)
Age	-.155 (.095)	.134* (.070)	.030 (.100)	.067 (.048)
Female	.040 (.047)	.040 (.033)	.014 (.051)	.029 (.028)
Education	.240*** (.082)	.015 (.065)	.241*** (.085)	-.024 (.052)
Income	.051 (.084)	.038 (.068)	-.004 (.092)	-.028 (.059)
Biblical literalism	-.026 (.082)	-.043 (.054)	-.074 (.087)	-.034 (.047)
Religiosity	.220* (.113)	-.018 (.085)	.082 (.125)	.014 (.083)
% Black congregation	.048 (.076)	.091* (.055)	.042 (.079)	.096** (.042)
Intercept	.120 (.142)	.678*** (.105)	.157 (.145)	.870*** (.070)
N	338	338	338	338
Log likelihood	-108.34	21.19	-133.99	78.37
R ²	.12	.09	.08	.11

*p < .1. **p < .05. ***p < .01, two-tailed.

Table A2. OLS Regression of the Relationship Between Religious Belief Systems and Black Political Ideologies.

	Nationalism	Conservatism	Feminism
Social gospel	-.195* (.116)	-.436*** (.106)	.071 (.095)
Prosperity gospel	.317*** (.116)	.367*** (.101)	-.087 (.100)

(continued)

Table A2. (continued)

	Nationalism	Conservatism	Feminism
Black theology	.254*** (.093)	.138* (.077)	.337*** (.071)
Age	.001 (.071)	-.088 (.062)	.014 (.057)
Female	-.035 (.033)	.016 (.033)	.008 (.029)
Education	.054 (.068)	.047 (.064)	-.063 (.052)
Income	-.039 (.071)	-.062 (.064)	.051 (.059)
Biblical literalism	-.097 (.071)	-.078 (.065)	-.119** (.051)
Religiosity	.014 (.091)	.121 (.094)	.156** (.070)
% Black congregation	.073 (.049)	-.129** (.055)	.207*** (.049)
Intercept	.180* (.104)	.514*** (.113)	.349*** (.101)
N	338	338	338
Log likelihood	-7.40	1.97	46.30
R ²	.13	.19	.21

* $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

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Notes

1. Here, it is important to note that the “Black church” does not refer to a formal institution but a collective identity referring all predominantly Black Christian congregations (Calhoun-Brown, 2002).
2. Reed (1986) and others argue that this image of the Black church is a myth and never existed. Others argue that this is just one of many images of the Black church, and that the actions and rhetoric of the Black church are contingent upon

- time and place (Du Bois, 1990; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; McDaniel, 2008; Nelsen, Yokley, & Nelsen, 1971).
3. The early 20th-century incarnations of the prosperity gospel, advanced by Grace and Divine, incorporated messages of racial and social justice. It is the most recent incarnations that are resistant to this language. The exception to this is Frederick K. Price, one the main figures in advancing the prosperity gospel in the Black community, who has committed a series of works dedicated to the role of religion in promoting racism (Price, 1999).
 4. The items in the Black liberation theology measure are limited because they do not account for the tenets of liberation theology. The measure used for this study embodies beliefs in a special connection between Blacks and the divine. Because of this, the measure more closely resembles a form of Black religious nationalism. Even with these limitations, we contend that the measure presented captures many of the core elements of Black liberation theology. In future studies, we hope to develop a more complete measure that fully captures the tenets of Black liberation theology.
 5. Here, we find it important to note that the civil rights movement is not unanimously regarded as a success. For instance, many Americans do not believe that Black civil rights have improved or that the goals of the movement have been achieved (McCarthy, 2015; Saad, 2008).

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