



African American *Politics*

Kendra A. King

African American Politics

KENDRA A. KING



polity

Copyright © Kendra A. King 2010

The right of Kendra A. King to be identified as Author of this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in 2010 by Polity Press

Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press
350 Main Street
Malden, MA 02148, USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-3280-3

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-3281-0(pb)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 9.5 on 13 pt Swift Light
by Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire
Printed and bound by MPG Books Group, UK

The publisher has used its best endeavours to ensure that the URLs for external websites referred to in this book are correct and active at the time of going to press. However, the publisher has no responsibility for the websites and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live or that the content is or will remain appropriate.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publishers will be pleased to include any necessary credits in any subsequent reprint or edition.

For further information on Polity, visit our website: www.politybooks.com

Acknowledgments

African American Politics has been a labor of love that has taken me on my own personal journey of doubt and faith. I am grateful that faith has prevailed and that I have been blessed with such an awesome opportunity to share my perspectives on the political development, evolution, and empowerment of African Americans. I'd like to thank my editor Louise Knight of Polity Press. From our initial conversation, it seemed as if Louise and I knew each other as we found a synergistic like-mindedness, perspective, schoolgirl friendship and comradeship in things both political and personal. I'd also like to thank Emma Hutchinson of Polity Press for all of her editorial assistance, direction, and genuine goodwill, encouragement, and commitment to this project. I also want to thank Dr William E. Nelson, Jr, my major professor in the Department of Political Science at the Ohio State University. Dr Nelson taught me to think beyond the surface, ask the question behind the question, and most importantly, view the political landscape from an analytical mindset that begs to raise the question of who will/is caring for the powerless. The professor I am today has undoubtedly been impacted by his stern yet sensible, direct yet charismatic, and formidable yet friendly disposition both inside and outside of the academic arena.

I'd also like to thank my students at the University of Georgia and Oglethorpe University. So many of you have been a source of inspiration, encouragement, reconsideration, and rejuvenation as every day I am blessed to "go to life." I'd be remiss if I did not acknowledge several students who have been extremely instrumental on this collective journey – T. Ruth, C. "Alonna" Davis, J. Rand (UGA), T. Lawhead (UGA), C. Green, J. Cross, J. McDaniel (UGA), A. Niland, R. King, and C. Huff – *thank you!* Finally, I remain thankful to the President of Oglethorpe University – Lawrence M. Schall – whose visionary leadership led to the creation of a Junior Faculty Sabbatical program which provided me with the time needed to complete *African American Politics*.

On a more personal note, I'd like to thank my family for their love, support, encouragement, and *prayers* throughout this entire process. To my immediate family, Jacquelyn, Benjamin, and Olufunmilayo, and BMK, Jr. (aka Markosysis), I love you very much! Mom, thank you for making me respect the value of hard work, independent thinking, and finding a way or making a way. Bejay – my twin in heart – "you know!" Funmi, always remember that a heart of love may come in a broken vessel, *still* the spirit of Christ remains strong. Nana Logan

– the first writer in the family – thank you for your unconditional agape love, support, and listening ear! Dad, I am grateful for reconnection as it provides a foundational window of understanding as I *now* know “I be stunnin’ like my daddy.”

I’d also like to thank Bernice A. King for your spiritual deposit, mentorship, and genuine commitment to my holistic growth and development. I appreciate the investment and know that I am better as a result of having been entrusted to receive the deposit of your anointing. To Bishop Eddie L. Long, I will forever be grateful for “Welcome to the Age of Possibilities.” Thank you for boldly declaring what thus says the Lord. I am also extremely appreciative of Dina Marto of Def Jam and Six Degree Relations. Thank you for believing in this project and connecting me with Too \$hort, The YoungBloodZ, Killer Mike, and Bryan-Michael Cox, all of whom provided rich analytical depth for the chapter on the politics of hip-hop. To my friends, close associates, and homeys, you know – thanks for being in my life and adding value to this side of the journey.

Finally, I want to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; you have shown me unequivocally that “in you I live, move, and have my being.”

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
1 Introduction	1
Part I	9
2 African Americans and Democracy	11
3 African Americans and Dollars and Sense	29
4 African Americans and Voting Behavior	43
Part II	57
5 African Americans and Congress	59
6 African Americans and the President	79
7 African Americans and the Judiciary	97
8 African Americans and Political Parties	114
Part III	135
9 African Americans and Interest Groups	137
10 African Americans and the Civil Rights Movement	152
11 African Americans and the Black Church	171
12 African Americans and the Politics of Hip-Hop	188
Part IV	205
13 Where Do We Go From Here?	207
<i>Glossary</i>	221
<i>References</i>	228
<i>Index</i>	235

Illustrations

PLATES

Plate 3.1	Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, pastor, civil rights leader, and youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize	30
Plate 3.2	An African American family	33
Plate 4.1	Sean “P. Diddy” Combs – hip-hop mogul	49
Plate 5.1	Members of the Congressional Black Caucus	69
Plate 6.1	President Lyndon B. Johnson and African American civil rights leaders	86
Plate 9.1	Dr Cornel West, public intellectual	149
Plate 10.1	Malcolm X, minister and national spokesperson for the Nation of Islam	167
Plate 11.1	Bernice A. King (youngest daughter of Dr Martin L. and Mrs Coretta Scott King, Jr); one of 15 delegates selected to meet Pope Benedict XVI during his 2008 tour of the United States	173
Plate 11.2	Bishop Eddie L. Long, Elder Vanessa Long and Elder Bernice A. King during the “Stop the Silence” march in Atlanta, GA	178
Plate 12.1	Kanye West, hip-hop artist and trendsetter	199
Plate 13.1	Hurricane Katrina survivors	210
Plate 13.2	Mrs. Rosa Parks, one of the catalysts of the Montgomery Bus Boycott	215
Plate 13.3	Mrs Coretta Scott King, wife of Dr Martin L. King, Jr, founder of the Martin Luther King, Jr Center for Nonviolent Social Change, and humanitarian campaigner	217
Plate 13.4	President Barack Obama, the 44th president of the United States of America	220

TABLES

Table 2.1	Mean length of state sentencing by race (felonies)	12
Table 2.2	An overview of the four models of governance in America	14
Table 2.3	The Civil War Amendments	23
Table 2.4	Cost-benefit analysis of symbolic and substantive representation	26

Table 3.1	Home ownership by race, 2005–1996	35
Table 3.2	Poverty rates by race, 2005–6	35
Table 3.3	Percentage of families in poverty, 2005–6	36
Table 3.4	Median income by race: three decades	37
Table 3.5	Labor force statistics, 1984–2004	38
Table 3.6	50 years of educational attainment by race (% of earned 4-year degrees)	39
Table 4.1	African American degree completion percentages	48
Table 4.2	2007 NAACP opinion poll	54
Table 5.1	The US House of Representatives and Senate at a glance	60
Table 6.1	Cabinet level departments	82
Table 6.2	Executive Office Substantive Policy support rankings	92
Table 6.3	Executive Office Cabinet Level appointment rankings	92
Table 6.4	African American top five issues	93
Table 6.5	2004 presidential election voter registration and turnout, by race	93
Table 6.6	African American supporters of Hillary Clinton	94
Table 6.7	African American supporters of Barack Obama	95
Table 8.1	2008 Democratic Party Platform – Renewing America’s Promise	123
Table 8.2	2008 Republican Party Platform – Country First	123
Table 8.3	States with the highest numbers of Black elected officials, 2001	127
Table 8.4	African American Mayors: populations over 100,000	128
Table 8.5	2006 African American members of the Georgia General Assembly	130
Table 11.1	African American Mega-churches (partial listing)	183

FIGURE

Figure 8.1	The three faces of political parties	118
------------	--------------------------------------	-----

BOXES

Box 4.1	Frederick Douglass – West India Emancipation Speech, August 3, 1857	45
Box 5.1	Congressional Powers (Article I, Section 8)	61
Box 5.2	Edmund Burke’s Speech to the Electors of Bristol (delivered November, 1774)	62
Box 5.3	Black Reconstruction Era Congressional Legislators	66
Box 5.4	Senator Barack Obama Speech – The National Council of La Raza, July 22, 2007	76
Box 6.1	Executive Order 10925	83
Box 7.1	Emancipation Proclamation	100

Box 8.1	Franklin D. Roosevelt New Deal Coalition Relief Programs	120
Box 8.2	Congressional Black Caucus 110th Congressional Agenda	124
Box 8.3	Cox vs. Taylor: Whose Line Was It?	131
Box 9.1	A partial list of interest groups	140
Box 9.2	A partial list of African American interest groups	145
Box 10.1	Supreme Court Ruling in Brown vs. Board of Education (May 17, 1954)	156
Box 11.1	Isaiah 61: 1–3	184

Introduction

For the past eight years I have had the wonderful opportunity to teach African American politics on the college and university level at both a large research institution – The University of Georgia – and most recently at a small, private, liberal arts university – Oglethorpe University. In both of my professional academic experiences, I've noticed some interesting commonalities as it relates to the study, analysis, and discussion of racial politics in the United States of America. First, a large portion of students in both environments have been misinformed and seemingly misguided as Carter G. Woodson (1933) contended in *The MIS-Education of the Negro* as it relates to the political ambitions, desires, setbacks, obstacles, and accomplishments of African Americans in the United States. One seemingly never-ending example is affirmative action. In both of my academic environments it has not been uncommon for students to believe that affirmative action is a government-mandated and enforced quota system that hires and promotes unqualified African Americans at the expense and detriment of qualified Whites. Rarely have my students been aware of the history of the presidential executive order, the changes that occurred as a result of *Bakke vs. University of California Regents* (1978), or the data which solidify the fact that the greatest beneficiaries of affirmative action policies in the United States have been White women.

Another commonality I've experienced in both environments is that students tend to have pre-established opinions about the economic, political, and educational failures and successes of the African American community. For example, many students believe that African Americans are not doing as well as other groups because they do not work hard enough. Interestingly, the “not working hard enough” beliefs are in alignment with national survey data trends that reflect the same beliefs related to African Americans. A final commonality I've experienced in both environments is the tendency of African American students to engage in fight or flight as they either become overly defensive of the African American liberation struggle in America – sometimes to the point of intimidating all other voices (fight) – or, as in other instances I've witnessed, African American students completely shut down to the point that they have become clock watchers who leap from their seats as soon as our 75 minutes have expired (flight).

In spite of these occasionally awkward yet always interesting scenarios, over the course of my academic journey I've personally witnessed students in both

environments engage in a change of heart concerning their initial thoughts and predispositions. It is my sincere belief that the change of heart is the result of the creation of a learning environment which sheds light on the complicated mix of pain, promise, triumph, testing, shame, and success that has all been a part of the African American political, economic, and sociocultural experience in America. In this regard, the classroom environment becomes a laboratory of genuine dialogue, exchange, exposure, and uplift as I seek to take my students on a journey of intellectual empowerment and emancipation that allows them to be both the judge and jury as it relates to the African American experience. I have sought to do the same thing in *African American Politics* in that I hope to take you – my readers – on a journey of the political successes, failures, and persistent challenges of the African American collective community in America.

A ground rule about our journey

Both my personal and professional academic experiences have led me to believe that discussions of race, similar to discussions of politics and religion, produce some of the most severe “knee-jerk” reactions since everyone has an opinion about racial topics and issues. As such, similar to the discussion etiquette I establish in my courses on African American Politics and the Politics of Hip-Hop, I’d like to establish a ground rule at the beginning of our journey.

To be clear, our ground rule is actually a disclaimer. In particular, it is important to share with you – the reader – that *African American Politics* is not another in a long list of “so-called” victimization books that blames the infamous (White) “man” for all of the ills and misfortunes of African Americans. As *African American Politics* is designed to provide analytical insight into arguably one of the most complex political cadres in America, it is important for the reader to approach the book from the vantage point of it being an exploratory analysis of how Black people have navigated the thicket of political institutions, structures, policies, and leaders that shape and guide American political, economic, and sociocultural life.

In this regard, *African American Politics* is designed to shed light on both the problems and promises of Black politics predominantly in the post-civil rights era. Using both historic and present-day political phenomena as its backdrop, *African American Politics* incorporates US Census data, a variety of election survey data, landmark Supreme Court rulings, speeches, personal interviews, and political commentary as a means of capturing the compass of the collective interests and sometimes contrasting ideologies of the Black community in the United States.

One of the underlying themes expressed in this book is the importance of recognizing and understanding the difference between symbolic and substantive political acts/policies. Nearly four decades after Dr Martin Luther King, Jr delivered his “Give Us the Ballot” speech, and despite the election of a Black

man to the highest office in the land, African American political incorporation and empowerment in America remains highly symbolic and relatively limited in terms of “actual” political power. There are a variety of examples of the limitations of African American political power we will examine throughout the book. However, one glaringly disappointing example of the limited power of African Americans occurred during the 2000 presidential election fiasco. Although there were documented cases around the nation of African Americans being denied the right to vote, African American members of the House of Representatives could not get even one member of the United States Senate to support their election recall proposal. The failure of a member of the US Senate to align with African American members of the US House of Representatives denied these members the ability to exercise power and protect the political interests of their constituencies. The film *Fahrenheit 911* provides an excellent portrayal of the pain and frustration of the African American representatives as one by one they spoke on the floor of the House, presided over by former Vice-President Al Gore, to no avail.

Keeping this example in mind, the reader is challenged to look beyond the surface level of seemingly positive political gains, i.e., the post-civil rights era election of African American members of Congress, and explore what, if any, substantive (tangible) political gains have been accomplished as a result of an increase in the number of Black elected officials in the United States. Moreover, the book hopes to provide a compass for and road map of African American political success as well as of areas of growth in the midst of the election of the nation’s first African American president – Barack Hussein Obama.

Terminology

I will use both the term African American and Black interchangeably throughout the text. I have opted to use both terms as each has its own historical and political significance and potency. For example, it is virtually unthinkable to discuss the more radical political ideologies of Huey Newton absent the use of the term “Black” in relation to his party’s mission and Ten Point Plan. Similarly, it is rather unthinkable, given all of the political correctness of the 1990s, to discuss the positive gains of Blacks absent the introduction of the term “African American.” As such, this text will incorporate both terms, using one as opposed to the other when and where the author deems such use necessary.

African American Politics also uses biblical references to characterize some of the historical experiences and journeys of Blacks in America. These references are purposive in that one of the most distinguishable characteristics of the African American experience in America has been the reliance on “faith in God” and the implementation of spirituality as a means of overcoming racial, political, economic, and sociocultural oppression. Further, the Black Church has been the most viable and long-standing African American institution in the United States. The Black Church, especially during the movement from slavery through

civil rights, served as an intra-community producer of both economic, leadership, and demographic resources. Today, the Black Church, specifically Black Mega-ministries, have become multi-million dollar corporations that use their spiritual influence in a variety of political, economic, and social capital arenas.

Finally, I use the term “hip-hop” to reflect a holistic lifestyle of music, dance, language, clothing, and artwork. In *African American Politics*, “hip-hop” connotes the interchangeable relationship between the five elements of the genre as well as the political influence and acts of some of its key voices including Jay-Z, Outkast, P. Diddy, Kanye West, and Nas.

Overview of chapters

African American Politics is divided into four thematic areas. Part I sets the foundation and framework of our journey as it details a variety of factors that impact African American political behavior and participation both historically and in the post-civil rights era. As such, chapter 2 provides an overview of democracy in America, examines both traditional (pluralism and elitism) and non-traditional (colonialism and coalition politics) models of governance as a means of accessing the political inroads, incorporation, and empowerment of African Americans, and explores the differences between, as well as significance of, symbolic and substantive policies on African American political outcomes. In an effort to illuminate the theoretical frameworks introduced in the preceding chapter, chapter 3 details the inability of “political acts” to produce substantive social and economic gains for African Americans. In particular, chapter 3 employs socio-economic data from the US Census in an attempt to shed light on the ways in which historical legislative acts including The Civil Rights Act of 1964, The Voting Rights Act of 1965, The Fair Housing Act of 1968, and the Community Reinvestment Act of 1991 impact the racial divide in key areas such as home ownership, college education, and income in America. We conclude Part I by providing an examination of African American voting behavior and participation and the ways in which group consciousness, linked fate, and the Black utility heuristic play a deterministic role in the political agenda of African Americans. Chapter 4 also examines the impact of the hip-hop community on African American voting behavior, the impact of the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections on African American voting behavior, and the future of African American voting behavior and participation.

African Americans and American political institutions

The second theme of *African American Politics* deals with the nature of the relationship between African Americans and American political institutions. Chapter 5 begins with a basic introduction of the purposes and functions of the United States Congress as well as the constitutional requirements of office for members of the United States House Representatives and the Senate.

Additionally, the chapter explores some of the inroads and challenges faced by African American members of Congress from the Black Reconstruction Period to the present, the creation, development, and leadership of the Congressional Black Caucus, and the political activity and power of Black elected officials at the local, state, and national level.

From the insidious comments of former Supreme Court justice Roger Taney to what some contend was the hyperactivity of the Warren Court, in chapter 6 we explore the seemingly schizophrenic, on-again/off-again nature of the American judiciary as it relates to African American political incorporation and empowerment. Additionally, chapter 6 explores the ways in which African American liberty and justice remain subject to the political currents of US Supreme Court justices, public opinion, and larger institutional and structural tides. In chapter 7, we explore the executive branch and the ways in which this long-standing institutional structure has both assisted and denied African Americans in their quest for political incorporation and empowerment. Dating back to the mixed political bag of Abraham Lincoln to the largely symbolic acts of former President Bill Clinton to the political charades and contradictions of the Bush II administration, chapter 7 also examines the political leadership of presidential administrations on African American politics.

Chapter 8 begins with an overview of the purpose, objectives, and political scope of political parties. Chapter 8 also examines the relationship between African Americans and the two major political parties and the ways in which the Democratic and Republican Party have evolved over time in relation to the political inclusion and empowerment of Blacks in America. Chapter 8 also discusses the role of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), the nature of Black conservatism in America, and the rise of Black Elected Officials (BEOs) in the post-civil rights era. Finally, chapter 9 begins with a discussion of the role and nature of interest groups as well as the resources and incentives of interest groups. Chapter 9 concludes with a discussion of African American interest groups, recent African American interest group activity, and the rise of alternative voices of African American interest articulation including the Black Church and the hip-hop community.

Behind the veil of African American political activism and leadership

The third part of *African American Politics* delves into the non-traditional political activity and activism of African Americans in the post-civil rights era. Chapter 10 predominantly focuses on the civil rights/Black Power movement of the 1950s and 1960s and the ways in which non-traditional political activism and leadership served to reshape and realign the political landscape of America. Additionally, chapter 10 examines the leadership styles and strategies of African American leaders and organizations including Dr Martin L.

King, Jr, Malcolm X, Huey Newton, Fannie Lou Hamer, the NAACP, SCLC, the Black Panther Party, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Chapter 10 concludes with a discussion of the viability of protest politics as a means of African American political activism, leadership, and service delivery in the post-civil rights era. In chapter 11, we explore the role of the Black Church and the ways in which it has served as a long-standing leader of African American political voice, leverage, and incorporation.

Chapter 11 also details the rise of Black Mega-churches and the ways in which they have been able to utilize their spiritual capital to advance political, economic, and sociocultural agendas of transformative change. Additionally, chapter 11 highlights several African American Mega-ministries, explores the controversial "Stop the Silence" march of 2004, and examines the apparent divide between the traditional civil rights vanguard and the Mega-church leadership elect.

Part III concludes with one of the most innovative approach to the study of African American political activism and leadership as we explore the impact of the hip-hop community on African American politics. Chapter 12 also explores the ways in which hip-hop has provided a voice to those impacted by political and economic events as well as the ways in which the culture has been impacted by political invitations and access granted as a result of its global and economic veracity over the past 30 years. Finally, chapter 12 examines whether the social and economic capital of hip-hop can be transformed into a powerful political engine of change in the post-civil rights era.

Where do we go from here?

The final chapter of *African American Politics* also encapsulates our final theme in that it seeks to provide some concluding thoughts about the future of African American politics in the new millennium and beyond. Utilizing Dr Martin L. King, Jr's landmark 1967 SCLC 10th Anniversary keynote address – "Where Do We Go from Here?" – chapter 13 looks at the ways in which the African American community can align together to engage in the politics of growth as well as utilize pre-established access, influence, and power to impact the economic, political, and sociocultural life of African Americans in the United States.

Author's hope

It is my hope that *African American Politics* piques the reader's interest to raise questions and engage in discussion about the political participation, behavior, and incorporation of Blacks in America. I also hope that students, scholars, activists, and everyone reading this book obtain a better understanding and appreciation of the economic, political, and sociocultural strides and setbacks of African Americans from slavery through freedom and into the new

millennium. Moreover, similar to the experiences of many of my students, I also hope that you will gain new perspective on and depth of knowledge of Black political life in America. Finally, I hope that this book becomes an instrument for discussion, debate, and healing as it relates to the peculiar phenomenon of “race” in America.

