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> You have to understand… It goes against the general tenets of Christianity. How can you expect ministers to accept or acknowledge the behavior that causes AIDS? All we can do is take care of those who are sick—that is our Christian duty… For many of our poorly educated clergy, homosexuals and drug users are immoral, and that is the end of the story. An Anonymous Clergyman (Cohen 1999, 6-7)

Throughout history, dating back to slavery, blacks have been confronted with economic, political and social subjugation while living in the United States. During the course of this struggle, the black church has served as a place of refuge for the black community. The church, for example, served as the catalyst for the civil rights movement. Organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and Rev. Ralph Abernathy, worked tirelessly to tear down the barriers of inequality.

In recent years, however, the black church has, arguably, failed to provide the same type of leadership in the fight against HIV-AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus-acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). As indicated by the above epigraph, the AIDS virus has created a dilemma for the black church. Because AIDS is closely associated with two culturally and historically taboo behaviors, homosexuality and intravenous drug use, the black church has taken a socially conservative position on the issue. This is consistent with the conclusions drawn from a number of studies which conclude that a majority of blacks oppose homosexuality, primarily due to their religious beliefs (Cohen 1999; Fullilove and Fullilove III, 1999; Griffin 2000; and McDaniel 2004). The current research argues that this position can best be explained by individualistic attributions, which blames AIDS victims for their ailment, as opposed to structuralist attributions, which would point to the various social barriers that confront those at-risk populations. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),
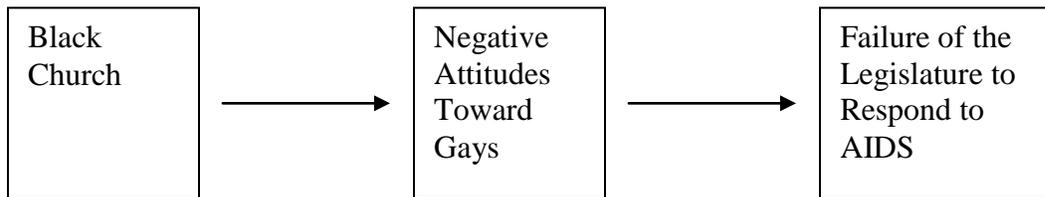
> of all racial and ethnic groups in the United States, HIV and AIDS have hit African Americans the hardest. The reasons are not directly related to race or ethnicity, but rather to some of the barriers faced by many African Americans. These barriers can include poverty (being poor), sexually transmitted diseases, and stigma (negative attitudes, beliefs, and actions directed at people living with HIV/AIDS or directed at people who do things that might put them at risk for HIV).

The CDC's acknowledgment of structural explanations for the contraction of the HIV/AIDS virus runs counter to the otherwordly ideology of traditional black Christendom. According to

this ideology, individual explanations, as opposed to structural explanations should be accepted when it comes to the deprivation and suffering of blacks (Ellison and Sherkat 1990). Hence, the otherwordly theological orientation would blame blacks for their promiscuous and risky behavior (e.g., homosexual activity and intravenous drug use), as opposed to blaming the poor living-conditions that confront many blacks. In addition, Allen, Dawson and Brown (1989) report a relationship between high levels of religiosity and negative stereotypes of blacks. It is a contention here that these negative stereotypes lead to socially conservative attitudes among blacks.

In *Boundaries of Blackness*, Cathy Cohen (1999) not only points to the white power structure as a culprit in the marginalization of blacks, but she also accuses blacks of policing other blacks. According to Cohen, black AIDS victims are also marginalized by indigenous black leaders, who have been reticent in the fight against AIDS. She refers to this type of behavior on the part of black elites as *secondary marginalization*. Secondary marginalization occurs when black leaders police less powerful members of the black community. Cohen argues that black leaders fail to address such problems as AIDS, because these issues are cross-cutting and differ from traditional civil rights concerns which have historically affected a larger segment of the black community. For Cohen, issues that impact the black community at-large are considered to be consensus issues, while cross-cutting issues can be defined as those issues that "disproportionately and directly affect only certain segments of a marginal group" (Cohen 1999, 13).

The research at hand takes both an individual and institutional approach to understanding the politics of AIDS in the black community. From the individual perspective, the logic is that the parishioners receive messages from the clergy and these messages shape their political behavior/attitudes (Djupe, Olson and Gilbert 2006). From the institution side, the notion is that by ascribing to a socially conservative ideology, specifically on the issue of homosexuality, the black community has failed to pressure elected officials to adequately address the AIDS dilemma that currently exists within the black community (Cohen 1999). The work here differs from Cohen in that I have chosen to examine the state level, as opposed to the Federal level. The overall model is illustrated as follows:

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┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
│ Black        │        │ Negative     │        │ Failure of the│
│ Church       │───────▶│ Attitudes    │───────▶│ Legislature to│
│              │        │ Toward       │        │ Respond to   │
│              │        │ Gays         │        │ AIDS         │
└──────────────┘        └──────────────┘        └──────────────┘
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Based on the above model, the clergy are expected to negatively influence their members on the issue of homosexuality, which in turn impacts their attitudes toward policies geared toward gays. Such attitudes prevent blacks from pressuring legislators to address HIV/AIDS related issues.

Given the focus of this analysis (i.e., the failure of the black community to respond to the AIDS crisis), the current research examines black respondents only (as it relates to the individual-level analyses). To be sure, prior research documents a chasm that exists between blacks and whites on issues related to social policies (see for example, Kinder and Sanders 1996). More pointedly, however, is the convention that the religious experience of blacks and whites differs substantially. According to Smith and Walton (2000, 48), "in the black community, in sharp contrast to the white, the church plays the dominate role in the socialization process." The remainder of this paper will first, assay the literature on racial identity to help us better understand Cohen's notion of cross-cutting issues. The paper will then presents a set of research questions, followed by a discussion of the data and methods used in this analysis. Finally, I will present the findings, followed by a brief conclusion.

AIDS as a Cross-Cutting Issue

In recent years, the AIDS virus has had a devastating impact on the African-American community. Since AIDS was first identified in 1981, roughly 38 percent of those dying from the disease have been African Americans. In addition, among the more than 1 million individuals who live with the virus, approximately half of them are black (www.Avert.org). These numbers are alarming given that African Americans represent just 12.3 percent of the United States (U.S.) population. To be sure, HIV has spread rapidly across the United States. In doing so, it has affected some states more than others. In 2004, the Kaiser Foundation reported that approximately 72 percent of all AIDS cases had been reported in just ten states, and most of

these cases were found in urban areas (Kaiser Foundation). In addition, AIDS has also been found to be a serious problem in the South. The large presence of AIDS in the South correlates highly with the large population of blacks who live in this region, many of whom are poor. Ironically, however, is the fact that this region also represents the largest number of back churches.

Racial Identification in the Black Community

Cohen argues that the AIDS issue has not gained contagion in the black community because it serves as a cross-cutting issue. Hence, despite the strong racial identity possessed by many blacks, AIDS is not seen to be a consensus issue for which a large segment of blacks would benefit. In other words, AIDS is not perceived to be an issue for which blacks should take ownership. Rather, AIDS is perceived to be an issue that would possibly exacerbate the image of African Americans because of the negative connotations associated with the disease, and would only benefit a small group of undeserving blacks. In other words, because AIDS is perceived to be contracted from irresponsible behavior, blacks believe that they should not take ownership of the issue, given the already high level of negative issues related to the black community. Here, a brief digression is necessary for the purpose of surveying the literature on racial identity in an effort to make Cohen's position more relevant to the current research.

Racial identification, as a construct, has taken on almost as many labels as there are researchers on the topic. Among the labels used are: linked or common fate (Tate 1993 and Dawson 1994), black consciousness (Gurin and Epps 1975; Miller, Gurin, Gurin and Malanchuk 1981; Gurin, Miller and Gurin 1980; and Gurin, Hatchett and Jackson 1989), and black nationalism/black autonomy/racial solidarity (Brown and Shaw 2002; Davis and Brown 2002; Dawson 2001). The common denominator between all of these labels is the shared experiences and unique world view possessed by blacks.

The linked-fate argument suggests that because of their shared experiences, visa-a-vie whites, an overwhelming majority of blacks believe that what happens to blacks as a whole will have an impact on their personal lives. For instance, using data from the National Black Politics Survey, Harris-Lacewell (2004) reports that 75 percent of black respondents believe that what happens to other blacks in the U.S., also has an impact on their individual lives. Hence, given their shared experiences, blacks are more likely to express "a sense of grievance as victims of

injustice" (Gurin et al. 1989, 497), rather than blaming themselves for the social and economic disparities between blacks and whites in the United States. Thus, unlike blacks who ascribe to an individualistic ethos, blacks who possess strong racial identities are more likely to blame the system rather than blame blacks for the social and economic disparities between blacks and whites in the United States.

While the literature on black racial- solidarity is well-developed, we know very little about the intra-group differences/cleavages within the black community. Here, we return to the work of Cathy Cohen (1999) who employs the theory of marginalization to explain existing attitudinal cleavages within the black community. Cohen's work is appropriate because it moves beyond the dominant paradigm of studying race relations as a function of the dominant group's regulation of the marginal group, to a discussion of the marginal group's regulation of their own group members. Cohen (1999) states that white stereotypes of blacks "have great staying power" (43).

A surprising number of studies have found that blacks are just as likely, and in some cases more likely, to provide negative stereotypes of other blacks. These negative stereotypes often fit neatly under the rubric of system justification. Parent (1985), for example, finds that more than half of all whites, 59.1 percent, and almost half of all blacks, 46.5 percent, believe that many of the problems faced by blacks in this country are a function of their lack of will power and motivation. Parent's data also reveal that approximately 53.7 percent of blacks, compared to roughly 78.1 percent of whites, agree that many of the problems that confront blacks are brought on by blacks themselves. Additionally, Sniderman and Piazza (1993) report that 40 percent of blacks compared to 21 percent of whites responded that blacks are irresponsible. These authors also find that roughly 59 percent of blacks describe blacks as aggressive or violent, compared to 52 percent of whites. Pride (1995) reports that 56 percent of blacks compared to 60 percent of whites responded that blacks do not get the better things in life because they simply do not try hard enough. These findings are consistent with the work of Hunt (1996), who concludes that blacks are more individualistic when compared to whites. According to Hunt, this may be a function of the acculturation to the dominant American ethos of individualism. In contrast, Parent (1985) expected blacks to be less individualistic than whites because blacks have life experiences from which they can base their judgment of black success and failure.

The aforementioned findings also run counter to the research examining black identity. According to Gurin, Hatchett and Jackson (1989) (*see* also Allen, Dawson, and Brown 1989), blacks who possess strong racial identity with other blacks are more likely to blame the failure of government for the lack of progress in the black community, as opposed to blaming blacks themselves. In operationalizing one of three dimensions of black consciousness, these authors evaluate the legitimacy/illegitimacy of social inequalities. In examining whether respondents reject the current social structure as legitimate or illegitimate, these authors offer two items: "if black people don't do well in life, it is because they don't work hard enough to get ahead" (the personal attribution) and "they are kept back because of their race" (the structural attribution)" (Gurin, et al. 1989, 83). When forced to answer one of the items, 62 percent ascribed to the structural attribution and 38 percent ascribed to the individualistic attribution.

Overall, Gurin et al. (1989) suggest that blacks who espouse individualistic attributions are atypical of blacks who advocate black interests. Specifically, these blacks were found to be more likely to disapprove of government intervention on behalf of blacks and were more accepting of the Republican Party. This led the authors to conclude that these attitudes are "congenial to a conservative ideology" (Gurin et. al, 1989, 200).

The discovery that individualistic attributions help explain black political behavior is interesting for a number of reasons. First, it runs counter to the existing research suggesting that racial identity leads to increased feelings of racial victimization, which is believed to be caused by systemic discrimination (Bledsoe, et al. 1995). Secondly, individualism is inconsistent with racial consciousness (Miller et al. 1981; and Robinson 1987), and with prior research suggesting that blacks and whites possess different "world views" (Holden 1973; and Dawson 1994).

Hypotheses

The purpose of this paper is to test whether blacks who subscribe to individualistic and low structural attributions are more likely to oppose progressive policies designed to protect gays and lesbians. Similarly, religiosity is employed to determine if blacks who attend church often are also more likely to oppose such policies. Lastly, I test whether legislators have responded to the AIDS crisis, via the introduction of bills. Formally, our hypotheses are presented as follows:

H_1: Blacks who score high on the individualistic attribution scale are more likely to oppose gay adoptions, when compared to those who score low on the scale.

H_2: Blacks who score high on the structural attribution scale (remember that it is coded in the opposite direction) are more likely to oppose gay adoptions, when compared to those who score low on the scale.

H_3: Blacks who attend church frequently will be less likely to support progressive policies for gays and lesbians.

H_4: Legislators will be less likely to introduce bills with HIV-AIDS content, when compared to other bills.

Data and Method

The data employed in this analysis are derived from a variety of sources. The first part of the study examines black attitudes towards gays, using the National Election Studies (NES). The NES is a full probability sample administered in the United States during every national election-year dating back to 1948. Arguably, the most widely used index of data quality is the response rate. It is defined as the proportion of individuals who were contacted that actually gave an interview. The average response rate of the years for this analysis, 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000, is 69.3 percent. These four years are pooled together 1) because of the limited number of black respondents included during a given year; and 2) because each of these years contain the necessary items used in this analysis (e.g., structural and individualistic attribution items). Because the sample is a national, random-sample, blacks represent roughly 12.5 percent of the entire sample. Given that the average sample size for the four years employed here is 1,487, we would only be expected to observe roughly 186 blacks in a given year. The total number of blacks examined in this analysis is 989. To account for missing data, I make use of a multiple imputation method (King, Honaker, Joseph and Scheve 2001).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this analysis is **support for gay adoptions**. This variable serves as a proxy for black attitudes toward gays and lesbians. The question employed here is: "Do you think gay or lesbian couples, in other words, homosexual couples, should be legally permitted to adopt children?" This is a binary variable that takes on a value of one if the respondent supports gay adoptions and zero otherwise.

Independent Variables

The primary independent variables in this analysis are religiosity, individualistic attributions and structural attributions. **Religiosity** is measured by how frequently the respondent attends church (e.g., never, once a week…). **Structural Attributions** is constructed using responses to two items: "Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve" (reverse coded); and "generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class" (reverse coded). **Individualistic Attributions** is operationalized using the following two items: "Irish, Italians, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without special favors"; and "It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites." The alpha scores are .43 and .65, respectively. Both items are coded so that the negative response is high. Hence, structural attribution really is measured as low structural attribution in this analysis. That is, blacks who do not believe that the inequalities between blacks and whites is a function of structural barriers.

Other variables are included to fully specify the model. Education and income are included and both are measured from lowest to highest. Party identification and ideology are based on the traditional 7-point scale, taken on high values for Republican and conservatism, respectively. Age is the actual age of the respondent. Gender is a dichotomous variable taking on a value of one if the respondent is male and zero for female. The model also controls for the various years of data included in the analysis. Here, we control for 1990, 1994, and 2000, leaving 1992 as our baseline. For ease of interpretation, all of the variables, with the exception of age, are mapped onto a [0, 1] interval.

Data are also culled from the 1999-2007 legislative sessions in two southern states, Georgia and Mississippi, to test whether state legislators are less likely to introduce bills related to HIV/AIDS. Using data from each of these states, I conducted content analysis for every bill introduced by the legislature to determine if the bill contained content related to AIDS or HIV. This analysis differs from that of Cohen, in that I examine state legislators, who are believed to be closer to their constituents.

Findings

Based on the individual-level dependent variable examined in this paper, approximately 30 percent of blacks oppose gay adoptions, compared to roughly 70 percent who support it. Table 1

depicts the results for two models: 1) a restricted model which only examines gay and lesbian adoption as a function of the attribution variables, controlling for the year of each survey; and 2) an unrestricted model that includes all of the aforementioned independent variables and control variables. The results of the restricted model are included in model A. Here, blacks who ascribe to individualistic attributions are found to be less likely to support gay or lesbian adoptions, when compared to those who score low on the individualistic scale. There is no support, however, for the structural attribution variable, even though the sign is in the posited direction.

Table 1, model B, presents the unrestricted model. Once all of the variables are included in the analysis, the individualistic-attribution coefficient attenuates in significance i.e., washes out. It should be noted, however, that despite the decline in significance, the coefficient remains in the posited direction. Nevertheless, both Hypotheses 1 and 2 are rejected.

In testing Hypothesis 3, table 1, model B, reveals that those blacks who attend church frequently are less likely to support gay or lesbian adoptions, when compared to less religious blacks. This coefficient is highly significant and in the posited direction, thereby lending support for Hypothesis 3. The only other variable to achieve statistical significance is the age of the respondent. The results reveal that older respondents are less likely to support gay adoption, when compared to younger respondents.

Table 1
Black Support for Gay and Lesbian Adoptions

Variable	Model A		Model B	
	Coefficient	Robust (SE)	Coefficient	Robust (SE)
Individualistic Attributions	-.09	.04**	-0.34	(0.38)
Structural Attributions	-.06	.06	-0.50	(0.50)
Ideology (Conservative High)			-0.05	(0.62)
Party Identification (Republican High)			-0.38	(0.47)
Black Interviewer			0.12	(0.39)
Education			0.46	(0.50)
Income			0.20	(0.51)
Age			-0.04	(0.01)***
Religiosity			-1.01	(0.35)***
Gender (Male)			-0.23	(0.25)
1990	.17	.26	0.20	(0.30)
1994	.30	.26	0.26	(0.28)
2000	.24	.21	0.28	(0.24)
(Constant)	-.18	.36	1.15	(0.65)*
Pseudo R^2	0.02		0.13	
% Predicted Correctly	68.0		69.0	
N	989		989	

The States Response to the AIDS Crisis

In addition to the individual-level analysis, the current research differs from Cohen's (1999) work examining black Congresspersons failure to respond to the AIDS epidemic, by examining state legislators from two southern states. In testing Hypothesis 4, the expectation that legislators will be less likely to introduce bills related to AIDS, when compared to other bills, was confirmed. The findings here provide very strong support for our hypothesis. In Mississippi,

there were only 15 bills out of 43,648 that were introduced between 1999 and 2007. Similarly, in Georgia, only three bills out of 8,494 were introduced during the same period.

Conclusion and Avenues for Future Research

The AIDS epidemic has served as one of the deadliest diseases to plague the black community. However, because of the negative connotations associated with the disease, African Americans have failed to take ownership of this issue. This has led to a failure to pressure/lobby elected officials to assist in ameliorating this epidemic. In this paper, I have proposed a model which posits a relationship between the black church, black attitudes toward gays and lesbians, and legislative behavior. A priori, it was expected that blacks who attend church regularly would possess socially conservative views on issues pertaining to gays and lesbians. This in turn, would lead to a dearth of bills with AIDS/HIV related content. To make this connection more transparent, this paper contends that the otherwordly orientation of some churches leads to socially conservative attitudes among the parishioners. This in turn, leads to less support for progressive policies for gays and lesbians. As a result, there would be little or no support aimed at progressive policies supporting homosexuals. In short, because of the perception of HIV/AIDS being strongly related to homosexual activity, blacks would be less inclined to pressure legislators to support AIDS related policies.

The findings reveal that blacks possess socially conservative attitudes on issues pertaining to gays and lesbians. When examining a restricted model which included only variables tapping attributions of inequality, individualistic attribution was found to impact attitudes toward gays and lesbians, while structural attributions had no effect. Once the model was fully specified, however, this impact washes out. These results, however, could have been driven by the crude measure tapping attitudes toward gays and lesbians due to data limitations. Here, I employed a variable investigating support enabling gay men and lesbians to adopt children. This variable does not really get at "irresponsible behavior" (actually the opposite) as defined by social conservatives. Hence, future research should employ items that examine a connection between gays and AIDS contraction.

Lastly, two southern states with high incidences of AIDS cases among blacks were examined to investigate whether political officials were responding to the crisis. As predicted,

the results reveal that elected officials have turned a blind eye to the AIDS epidemic. After examining over 40,000 bills, amazingly, only 15 bills contained content related to HIV/AIDS.

The current research has offered a parsimonious model to examine the publics' response to the AIDS epidemic in the black community. This research offers a different perspective related to the separation of church and state. For blacks, the church has served as a long-time advocate, so to speak, between the black community and political institutions. However, because AIDS is a cross-cutting issue and does not affect the black community at large, the church and its parishioners have failed to take ownership of this issue. The failure on the part of the black community to place HIV/AIDS on its agenda has worked at the expense of the black community.

In closing, there are some positive signs emerging as it relates to the issue at hand. The Balm of Gilead organization has been at the forefront of mobilizing black churches to respond to the AIDS issue. Indeed, data provided on their web site suggests that the number of black churches that provide, either AIDS ministries or AIDS educational programs, tend to be in areas where there are high incidences of AIDS. Efforts by such organizations as the Balm of Gilead signify an attempt to modify black attitudes on the AIDS issue.

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