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Imperative to Participate: Understanding African American Voter Turnout in High-Profile
Elections with African American Candidates

by

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Imperative to Participate: Understanding African American Voter Turnout in High-Profile
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Dissertation Abstract—Idaho State University (2021)

Since Election 2016, a wealth of research has been conducted about American politics and the subsequent election of Donald J. Trump. While race and racism are not novel to America, questions regarding how racism influences American political processes have reemerged. Traditionally, African American candidacies have been less successful. However, post-election 2016, African Americans candidacies and electability have increased (e.g., Stacey Abrams and Andrew Gillum). African American candidacies and electability are inextricably connected to the African American electorate's political vibrancy. Using voting data from Florida and Georgia's gubernatorial elections occurring between 2006-2018, African American candidacy and political engagement will be explored. Extant research indicates African American candidates increase African American political engagement thus increasing the likelihood of electability. Results suggests African American candidacies situationally and contextually increase African American political engagement bolstering extant research and a need for augmented approaches to understanding African American political behavior.

Keywords: race, politics, voting, candidacy, political engagement, political behavior

Chapter 1: Delayed Promises, Representation & Political Engagement

Political participation has been one of the most celebrated facets of its political culture. The United States of America has not always embraced the lofty principles upon which it was founded. Voting is the most quintessential expression of political participation. During periods of American history, political participation has been limited to the most privileged segments of society (Walton, Smith & Wallace 2017). For example, African Americans¹ have not always been able to exercise their franchise. A culmination of social movements over decades allowed African Americans to participate in United States politics. Even with the fight to end discriminatory practices that limited political participation, problems abound in a plethora of America's political processes today (Huddy 2009; Kim 2013; Banks 2014; Harris 2015; McAdam 2015), specifically regarding African American voting and political candidacy.

As evidenced by history, African Americans have maintained a secondary social status. In other words, while African Americans have gained legal rights, they are relegated to positions beneath Caucasian males, which impacts a path to political fulfillment either through voting or political candidacy. African Americans have the dubious distinction of encountering tremendous barriers that frequently stymie a willingness to vote or the decision to enter the political arena. Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign, for example, demonstrates the difficulties African American candidates experience when running for public office (Fording & Schram 2020; Parker, et al. 2020; Lopez 2015; Doane 2006; Sears, et al. 2000; Peffley, Hurwitz & Sniderman 1997; Hatch 1987) because their candidacies are often viewed on a dichotomy. African American

¹ For expediency and for this research, African American and Black will be used interchangeably. Even though Black sometimes refers to immigrant populations within the African diaspora with origins in other countries, racialized experiences in the United States of America are the same as those of American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS).

candidacies are either seen as a threat to the status quo (white dominance of politics) or are not taken very seriously. Therefore, African American candidates have an onerous time traversing the complexities of political candidacy.

African Americans have been voting for 56 years in America, which is not an extraordinarily lengthy period in the annals of American political history. It is often assumed that African Americans are less likely to engage in political participation through voting or political candidacy, the latter sometimes being more problematic. The who, what, when and why of lack of African American political participation is always at the fore. Therefore, it is important to understand what invigorates African American political participation (candidacy or voting) despite African Americans being viscerally characterized as apathetic to politics (Sigelman, et al. 1995; Davis 1995; Jackson 1973).

Because the African American electorate has been unjustly diagnosed with some form of political dysfunction, questions regarding levels of political participation persist. The kernels of democracy are participation and more aptly representation. A lack of participation forced or intentional reduces the likelihood of achieving political aims and objectives. The African American electorate's political trajectory in the United States has been marred by controversy from the very onset (Danielson 2013; Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich 2011; Matsueda & Drakulich 2009). If any segment of the American electorate is denied the opportunity to be politically active, government is not functioning with peak efficiency. The African American community has often not been sole arbiter of its fate, socially or politically. Thus, the quandary of the day is: what causes the African American electorate to become politically engaged? And why?

In the United States of America, who holds public office is decided by a plurality of votes and may not be representative of the entire general electorate's true desires, but because political

processes in the United States of America are peaceful, the victor normally wins because of political etiquette. There are times when the political status quo does not sufficiently reflect marginalized communities, or their agendas and political engagement becomes necessary not only for social stability but for political survival and viability. Hence, who represents any specific segment of the electorate becomes all too important and the African American electorate is no exception. How important is representation to the African American electorate? In recent years it has become extremely important and voting in pivotal election cycles with viable African American candidacies has been the rallying cry.

Using Election 2016 as the political backdrop and more recent social movements like “Fed Up,” African American political and civic engagement must be explored to better understand the complex innerworkings that either renders increased or decreased political activity. As has been previously mentioned, representation is one of the linchpins of democracy, which African Americans are sometimes denied. Representation is not fulfilled by lackadaisically or haphazardly electing anybody to public office. In other words, African American political activity hinges on inclusion and fulfilling unmet political and or social needs, wants, and desires. Bearing the mantle of African American representation transcends abstract philosophical considerations and becomes much more concrete.

Representation cannot be analyzed based upon “one size fits all” or wholesale philosophies or theories. The African American electorate historically has had to accept any representation or have none (McClain 2018; Sears & Henry 2003). Now that African Americans have been incorporated into America’s political system, theoretically representation should not be a recurring issue; however, considering that African American candidacies are frequently mired by racism and met with tepidity, there is minimal payout for such extraordinary endeavors. Successful African

American political candidacies are inevitably intertwined with the African American electorate (Keele & White 2019; Keele, et al. 2017). The African American electorate may be hesitant to vote because mainstream candidates fail to represent it, culturally or otherwise. Why is this so important?

There is debate among scholars about the precise definition of representation on both abstract and concrete fronts, which leads to inquiries about where the African American electorate, African American candidates, and African American officeholders fit on the spectrum of political representation (Banks & Hicks 2018; Bobo 2017; Seamster & Henricks 2015). Accordingly, representation can be observed in the following two ways: substantive and descriptive, which further parses out why examining African American political behavior (electorate and candidate) is tremendously important. *Substantive representation* refers to an integrated approach to representation (representing all constituencies) while *descriptive representation* refers to a more niched form of representation (sharing similar characteristics with a specific constituency). With recent calls for increased representation of and for marginalized communities, the two approaches above can be contrasted. Substantive representation underplays a need for marginalized communities to be recognized and descriptive representation satisfies a need for marginalized communities to enter spaces and occupy them to promote progress. For African Americans, there perhaps is no distinction between substantive and descriptive representation because they are synonymous. Because the representation for African Americans is frequently tied to a shared identity, it is important to understand how significantly representation, be it descriptive or substantive, influences the African American electorate's political decision-making.

Therefore, the possibility of achieving a modicum of representation is significant to the African American electorate, which is linked to African American candidacies. Most recently, the

2018 gubernatorial elections in Georgia and Florida provide fodder for evaluating the relationship between African American candidacies and African American political activity. In Florida, Andrew Gillum, an African American man attempted to become governor of Florida, while Stacey Abrams, in Georgia, attempted to become the first African American female governor in the United States of America. Both had viable candidacies, but their gubernatorial bids were not successful. Abrams and Gillum's unsuccessful gubernatorial candidacies anecdotally invigorated the African American electorate. The only question left to be answered is: why?

Given that African American candidacies were rare in the past but are becoming increasingly common, political movement in the African American electorate is likely to be buoyed which defies conventional diagnoses of political apathy or political immobility. The narrative of a politically inert African American electorate is a false narrative that has been allowed to flourish because it bolsters racial stereotypes. These stereotypes are problematic because they support deficiency theories that are used to describe African American intellectual capabilities and pursuits which makes it difficult for African American candidates to appeal to the electorate writ large. Thus, Black political candidacies' successes or failures are often correlated to the African American electorate (Keele & White 2019).

African American political activity is tied to identity, which is a residual of American racism. Even though identity politics is frequently utilized to describe and decry the separation of certain groups from the whole, identity is what the African American electorate uses heuristically when becoming politically engaged (Tate 1994). Furthermore, identity politics is regularly tied to extremism; however, identity politics does not necessarily have to exist because of hate and tribalism. For African Americans, a sense of community and a sense of identity equate to cohesion and more precisely solidarity. The determinants that increase the likelihood of political

engagement in the African American electorate must be discerned and employed to comprehensively understand complex political phenomena.

What increases the likelihood of political engagement in the African American electorate?

To answer the question, the following will be addressed: 1) *social movements and political progression relative to race and gender*, 2) *African American voting history*, 3) *common theoretical applications that have been canonized in research attempting to explain African American political behavior, their limitations, and their need for augmentation*, 4) *methodology and results* and 5) *consequences of findings and avenues for further research will be outlined*.

Chapter 2: Social Movements & Political Change

Election 2016 undoubtedly left an indelible mark in American political history because race, racism, xenophobia, and sexism were at the forefront (Stein & Allcorn 2018; Konrad 2018; Bobo 2017; Wilson 2017). Elections which are won by troubling campaign tactics such as the racialization of crime (immigrants described as a criminal element in society), bolstering the fears of white Americans, and the unequivocal acceptance of traditional gender norms lend worry as to how African American and female candidates will successfully traverse political candidacies post-Election 2016. Furthermore, the 2018 gubernatorial elections in Florida and Georgia provide fodder for the simultaneous exploration of African American political participation (voting and candidacy) and female candidacies in the United States of America.

While this research focuses on African American political participation (voting and candidacy), it is important to also establish the milieu which makes political candidacies problematic for women. It is necessary because Stacey Abrams' 2018 Georgia gubernatorial campaign was fraught with controversies and exemplifies an eroding of female political ambitions. The trajectories of The Suffrage Movement and The Civil Rights Movement are potentially analogous; yet differences can be gleaned to determine why African Americans and women, but especially African American women, have distinct experiences when compared to other segments of America's electorate, particularly white males. History cannot be precluded from current scholarly discussions pertaining to African Americans. Moreover, female political participation has been stymied because an ethos of gender-differentiation continues to flourish in contemporary settings (Berkery, Morley & Tiernan 2013; King, Miles & Kniska 1991; Eccles, Jacobs & Harold 1990).

African American women surreptitiously and conspicuously must deal with the intersection of race and gender which sometimes produces social and political environs that are not conducive to success because erroneous stereotypes of Black femininity are so pervasive. The destiny of African American women is intertwined with women in general; however, there is implicit understanding of an outsider status (Davis 2011; Hill-Collins 2000a; 2000b; 1998; 1986) that African American women may never overcome. The identities of race and gender for African American women are intertwined and is a resounding reason that significant attention must be given to the social and political plights of women, but especially African Americans. Therefore, these two identities frequently produce a toxicity and palpable phenomenon which can lead to the erasure of the African American female experience.

After America's seminal founding, women, African Americans, and other minorities had limited legal, political, economic, and social protections. Eventually these circumstances gave rise to two iconic social movements: The Suffrage Movement and the Civil Rights Movement. Given that politics and unsurprisingly political participation, especially candidacy, are frequently public events, one would be remiss not to mention how social norms dictated "feminine" pursuits in the past and are now entrenched in contemporary society's social practices; politics is no exception. Notions of private and public action became discerning factors leading to gender stratification and assignations of "feminine" and "masculine" pursuits (Allen & Smith 2011; King, Miles & Kniska 1991; Cann & Siegfried 1990; Jelen 1988).

The Suffrage Movement was mostly a legal movement seeking to remedy the disenfranchisement of women and is the predecessor of a more robust social movement: The Women's Rights Movement. Women were viewed as private citizens with little or no aspirations outside of the home. The term "cult of domesticity" is utilized to describe the proper domain of

women (the home) and sequentially relegated them to a subordinate social and political status. Political participation, voting and candidacy, in other words, were strictly masculine endeavors for learned white men, which intrinsically removed women from the public realm producing apolitical entities incapable of understanding the complexities of politics and its ambient issues (Dolan, Deckman & Swers 2019; Clatterbaugh 2018; Holman 2014; Cohen, Jones & Tronto 1997).

Attached to the “cult of domesticity” and efforts to mitigate the power of women is negative emotionality. Simply stated, women are more likely to be characterized as emotionally unstable. Negative emotionality, in theory, makes it much more difficult for females or women to function normally under tremendous stress. Politics, which is inherently stressful, is an endeavor not suited to the inherent qualities or characteristics of femininity. According to traditional gender norms, women are genteel and must be protected from the unpleasantness of life and the world, which are inevitably too harsh for them to bear. While there is a chivalric quality in the desire to protect women from the unpleasantness of life, traditional gender norms have a more dubious reputation (Christ 2016; Bryson 1999).

Politics often occurs in environments that are hostile and competitive making it exceedingly difficult for women to succeed in the political arena. Again, the distinction between masculine and feminine becomes a recurring theme. What does the “cult of domesticity” have to do with the current state of female political candidacies in the United States of America? There is a simple answer; however, there is also a complicated answer to this profound question. To understand the potential influence, the “cult of domesticity” has on contemporary female political candidacies, one must comprehend behaviors or characteristics that have been assigned to women by men for millennia. Behaviors assigned to women per the “cult of domesticity” are but are not

limited to piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness (Christ 2016; Sultana 2012; Goldberg 2008; Cohen 2000; Walby 1989; Lerner 1986).

Of these characteristics, ample attention must be given to the readily acceptance of female submissiveness in patriarchy-driven societies. Women were and are supposed to follow the lead of men. Decisions of import were left to men. Notions of private interests versus public interests reduces the likelihood that female candidacies will be successful because of gender norms. Political candidacies require any candidate, male or female, to be assertive in wake of tremendous scrutiny or criticism; yet female political candidates are often admonished for being too assertive, which is a quintessential expression of masculinity. Female candidates are not rewarded for overly masculine behaviors because of gender norms and stereotypes. Assertive women are frequently referred to as “bitches” along with other pejoratives, which offers a telltale sign that gender norms are presently thriving.

Extant research suggests women are less influential when expressing anger or frustration (Salerno & Phalen 2019; Gleason, Jones & McBean 2019; Salerno, Peter-Hagen & Jay 2017). Women may be professionally competent. Yet, women entering male-dominated spaces proves problematic because entrance into these spaces violates dictated gender norms. Because negative emotionality is sometimes vastly overstated in women, it is impossible to escape stereotyping that promotes false narratives about female ineffectualness, incapability, and incompetency. *Prima facie* women have made tremendous progress socially, legally, and politically; nevertheless, history cannot be excluded as a contributing factor to long held false gender narratives that plague contemporary processes, including political participation (voting and candidacy). For example, Election 2016, because of perceived gender biases, raises questions about the ever-changing role

of women in society and politics. Not only that, but it also raises the specter of the “cult of domesticity.”

Gender norms and stereotypes can be even more pronounced in politics. An exemplar that explains the difficulty female political candidates encounter is the responses of Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar at a Democratic presidential debate held on December 19, 2019. Debate participants were given the options of asking for forgiveness or offering a gift to one of their peers on stage because of verbal sparring during the debate. Both Warren and Klobuchar asked for forgiveness while their male counterparts did not, which lends credence to the pervasiveness of gender norms in American society (Salerno & Phalen 2019; Gleason, Jones & McBean 2019; Salerno, Peter-Hagen & Jay 2017). Warren and Klobuchar apologized for their debate performances because they acted outside of socially accepted gender norms by projecting female assertiveness. It is questionable because female political candidates are not able to suitably express themselves in a comparable manner or style to their male counterparts.

It is perceived women change the very nature of politics when they choose to participate in the political arena (Beard 2017; Stainback, Kleiner & Skaggs 2015; Gjorv & Solheim; Lakoff 2003; Jaquette 1997; Yoder & Kahn 1992) because they focus more making meaningful policy decisions. Politics often invokes the worst aspects of humanity because of its bellicose and competitive nature; women move politics from a realist domain (war and power) to a more transcendent realm because they tend to focus on more of a domestic agenda. Focusing on the needs of society is an ultimate expression of female power. It is certainly necessary to understand that women have a different social and political worldview than their male counterparts; however, this distinction is not being made to suggest that female politicians are preferred to male politicians. Gender stereotypes can influence the electorate writ-large in victory and sometimes more aptly in

defeat. Hence, the female experience is and can be described as complex; yet complexity alone must not be used as an excuse not to explore problematic phenomena.

Intersectionality

It is important to also note that intersectionality is an important feature of gender stereotyping. African American females socially and politically, stand at the intersection of race and gender. Gender norms that apply to white women are frequently exacerbated for African American and minority females. For example, Stacey Abrams, a 2018 gubernatorial candidate in Georgia, is an African American female politician who faced more obstacles than her white female counterparts while campaigning for a historic election. Nuances and variations of acceptance exist even among marginalized populations, making concrete assumptions difficult; however, nuances and shades of experiences provide robust fodder for examination and could lead to even more comprehensive conclusions as to why social and political phenomena persist, in this case gender norms, gender stereotypes and racial stereotypes.

As with any narrative, there are multiple identities that warrant elucidation. African American women, because of a notable past, are uniquely positioned in society, which allows them to provide narratives for multiple identities some of which are embraced while others remain elusive. It has been previously mentioned that the “cult of domesticity” established a social gender hierarchy which applied to white femininity or womanhood (Feldstein 2000). Consequently, African American women are not granted consideration of true femininity (Harris-Perry 2011) and therefore frequently have a challenging time navigating life. Moreover, myths persist about “the angry Black woman” which further separates African American women from their white counterparts (Ashley 2014; Sesko & Biernat 2010; Bell 1992; Landrine 1985).

African American women are least likely to be understood among women in America. They are frequently isolated and are the least heralded because they personify the complete antithesis of “true femininity” (Gammage 2015; Goff, Thomas & Jackson 2008; Morris 2007; Young 1999). America’s obsession with the loud, aggressive, angry black woman has caused society to divest any interest in the lives and experiences of African American women. Not only do African American women frequently encounter social insularity, but they are also additionally isolated in professional and leadership settings (Hoyt & Murphy 2016; Carter & Peters 2016; Davis & Maldonado 2015). Therefore, women but especially African American women, are underestimated in professional and leadership roles. An analogous relationship can be established within the political realm as well. For instance, Stacey Abrams in 2018, became the first African American female gubernatorial nominee for a major party in the United States of America. Why are successful African American women political candidacies the exception and not the rule?

Evidence suggests that African American women are subjected to dominant cultural perceptions of femininity even though they have an outsider status. With every task comes tremendous obstacles, however, African American women are thriving in spaces and areas that have not been traditionally welcoming. Stacey Abrams’ Georgia gubernatorial bid could be viewed as successful; nevertheless, if victory is the goal of political candidacy, Abrams’ gubernatorial bid was inevitably a failure. African American women have not held the positions of governor or lieutenant governor in the United States of America. Thus, it is important to understand the narratives of African American women because they provide an opportunity to establish how far America has come in terms of racial and gender equality.

Why Was the Suffrage Movement Important?

Women have customarily held a secondary social status to men in society. Nevertheless, much has changed since The Suffrage Movement's inception and success. The Suffrage Movement triumphantly navigated political tumults to inevitably protect voting rights of women in America via the 19th Amendment. While the franchise of women is legally protected, gender norms still exist in contemporary social and political processes. Women can vote without tremendous barriers; however, political candidacy still proves to be most problematic (Ilie 2018; Sharif & Gull 2018; Conaway 2001; Darcy 1994) which is inextricably tied to now defunct notions of the "cult of domesticity." Women have emerged from the shadows of subservience and have started asserting themselves in spaces that have traditionally been unwelcoming. Women are beginning to exert themselves in the political arena as well.

Women are no longer private individuals that are reflections of the men in their lives; they are individuals who have their own ideas and have their own passions. During the midterm elections of 2018, a record number of women were elected to public office. The status quo is inevitably changing; yet old practices die hard. Women alter the orientation of politics (Baskaran & Hessami 2018; Clots-Figueras 2011; Wolbrecht & Campbell 2007; Mansbridge 1999; Dahlerup 1988). As a result, the visibility of women in politics increases the likelihood of women voting and is a determinant in increased female political candidacy. Women become increasingly engaged in politics when other women are political leaders, which is an enduring legacy of The Suffrage Movement. Political participation (voting and candidacy) among women is correlated to their visibility in the public realm.

The Civil Rights Movement

Unrelenting social and political power structures, in America, have a dubious past which could explain African American behavior when entering social and political settings. African Americans, along with many other minorities, have been subjected to racial stereotypes pre- and post-America's founding. They did not have basic rights of citizenship (e.g., voting) which was done intentionally and more explicitly by constitutional design. African Americans were not granted rights of citizenship because the very existence of the republic was at stake. Providing African Americans with the same rights of citizenship was right at best and controversial at worst because America was founded upon absolute equality, an ideal that could not be readily met (Hutchinson 2104; Wallis 2007; Carter 1995; Freehling 1972). What began as a novel approach to governing gave way to cultural notions of racial acceptability and racial superiority. In absence of rights, African Americans could not and did not control their destinies socially or politically.

Nevertheless, it has been argued the Framers were not intentionally racist but accepted some of the premises of racism to secure America's existence (Feagin 2013; West 1997). The assertion is up for debate and is hotly contested in academe; however, when examining African American history, the potential promises of a new republic produced absolutely no rights. Rights were not readily given. They were forcibly taken initially through The Civil War and through The Civil Rights Movement. Even though both events are respected parts of American history, the events that led up to both are certainly tragic.

To obtain a scintilla of understanding, the treachery of American racism must be examined to illuminate race-related problems in contemporary society. African Americans have undoubtedly assimilated and share many cultural values like their white counterparts. The distinction of being "other" has subsequently never been fully relinquished despite tremendous progress (Harris 2015;

Hutchinson 2014; Kitchen & Burris 2011). What has The Civil Rights Movement truly resolved regarding race and racism in America? A superficial answer would suggest tremendous progress has been made; yet the answer is a bit more enigmatic upon deeper consideration.

African American Fight for Rights

African Americans began to fight for social, legal, political, and economic parity long before The Civil War and The Civil Rights Movement; however, the Modern Civil Rights Movement is often credited with ushering in a new period of freedom for African Americans and many other minorities. Hence, The Civil Rights Movement is thought to be one of the world's most iconic social movements (Perea 2010); yet its positive effects have been reconsidered by many academics and legal scholars (Schmidt 2016; McAdam 2015; Santoro 2015; Tuck 2009). For example, Barack Obama being elected the first Black president of the United States of America evoked feelings of "true post-racial bliss." However, Election 2016 suggests racism continues to thrive, approaching its zenith with the shocking election of Trump. African Americans unfortunately have the troubling distinction of having to fight twice for rights bestowed in the aftermath of The Civil War (13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments). Even since the securing of rights, African Americans continually find themselves having to reassert their existence and stake claim to inalienable rights.

The Civil Rights Movement, thus, exposed the underbelly of American racism and more specifically America's ability to ignore the obvious until wrenched to pay attention. It gave African Americans a platform to demand change, which forced a realization of minority humanity. African Americans have been "othered" since colonial-America which is an enduring legacy that must be accepted (Harris 2015; Hutchinson 2014; Anderson 2013; Kim 2013; Kitchen & Burris 2011). The Civil Rights Movement endeavored to prove that African Americans were just like any other

segment of the population. The African American need to feel like and be treated just like any other citizen was the impetus for seeking change. However, America's penchant to retain entrenched practices such as racism has rendered much of the efforts of The Civil Rights Movement futile. In other words, racism is the norm in America (Horowitz 1998). The inconspicuous nature of racism allows it to persist.

Inevitably, private feelings versus public feelings become factors when discussing the legacy of The Civil Rights Movement and the current state of race-relations in America. Simply put, while The Civil Rights Movement did produce tremendous social, legal, political, and economic gains for African Americans, it also stymied discussions about race and its pertinent dilemmas. Americans are reluctant to talk about race and racism because there is an assumption that The Civil Rights Movement was and is the final arbiter on race and racial equality, the United States of America has attained a post-racial status. Given the difficulties African Americans encounter socially and politically, America has not reached a state of nirvana (Valdez 2015; Harris 2015; Banks 2014; Powell 2010; Winters 2008; Brown, Duster, Oppenheimer & Carnoy 2003).

Racial stereotypes are frequently utilized to strengthen insider and outsider statuses within society. It makes it difficult for African Americans to find their niche in America because they are constantly fighting to mitigate negative racial stereotypes (Bratina 2016; Milligan 2016; Constance-Huggins 2011; Lever 2001; Baker 2005; Cole 1999). African Americans are oft times viewed with distrust by society because of perceived deficiencies. While African Americans have assimilated and share much of America's cultural identity, it is sometimes perceived that African Americans do not represent the true values of America, morally or otherwise. To take a Critical Race Theory approach, the African American experience, and the minority experience writ-large, is inherently different (Delgado & Stefancic 2012; Sommers 2007; 2006; 2000). Although African

Americans have not had the same trajectory as Caucasians, it does not exclude them from being part of America's fabric and or identity.

To further illustrate how race-related issues have truncated much of America's success and by extension openness, Stacey Abrams, and Andrew Gillum's 2018 gubernatorial candidacies, in Georgia and Florida, were marred because the race of each respective candidate was amplified or was utilized as a distinguishing characteristic that limited their potential for success. For example, both were considered unrepresentative of the electorates each would be required to serve in their respective states. Consequently, both were characterized as political outsiders that could not deal with the stressors of politics. It must be stated that politics is as much about private interests as well as public interests. The Civil Rights Movement inevitably changed the trajectory of the African American existence for the better; however, residual bitterness lingers, and white resentment resurfaces at pivotal times socially and trickles into political processes.

According to Dovidio & Gaertner (1986), America's inability to reconcile theory and practice is problematic because much of white America espouses egalitarian values; yet it is loathed to admit it surreptitiously thinks otherwise. If America is not capable of abandoning archaic notions of race, it is nigh impossible to assert that it is a civil society. Yet, power plays an integral role in determining the capable and the incapable. Much of America's history unfortunately illustrates how racial inequality and gender stratification have persisted and are not likely to be eradicated anytime soon.

The Trajectories of African American & Female Candidacies

The 2018 gubernatorial bids of Stacey Abrams and Andrew Gillum, in Georgia and Florida respectively, garnered much attention because racism and sexism unmistakably were present. Two African Americans, a woman, and a man, were campaigning to become governors in historic

elections within the backdrop of Election 2016. Barack Obama being elected the first Black president of the United States of America and Hilary Clinton winning the Democratic presidential nominee also suggested that minority and female candidates were becoming mainstream. Nevertheless, the election of 2016 illustrates a trend reversal of progress made, which was and is completely startling if not intriguing.

The Politics of Gender, Race & Critical Mass Theory

Race and gender have always been at the forefront of American politics because each has similarly evolved; however, studying race and gender in politics provides opportunities to discover minutiae that have been yet to be revealed. Research regarding the politics of race and gender heavily relies on mundane assessments of race and gender that amplify negative stereotypes. In other words, the complexity of the likelihood of a woman or African American being elected to “high” office requires a precise calculus that may never be discerned by strict methodologies or established approaches. Political opportunities ripe for African Americans and women are highly unpredictable because unyielding traditional hierarchies lag with change. With racism and misogyny on the rise in America, the past must be examined to predict the future of race and gender politics in America.

History has provided evidence that African American and women have been most successful in their efforts, social or otherwise, when engaging in collective action to promote any form of change. As with all social movements, individuals must determine if they are part of a respective group and whether common purposes exist. It is possible for one person to effect change: however, the chances of “true” change is undergirded by a multiplicative effect. Social and or political change sometimes occur under ripe conditions when the maximum number of

individuals belonging to a minority group are willing to expend the maximum amount of energy to fight for a particular cause, voting or candidacy.

The focus becomes how saturated underrepresented groups must be to increase the likelihood of political viability and electability. Hence, Critical Mass Theory has been proffered to explain how change (social and political) is attached to a maximal presence of underrepresented groups relative to society. Extant research suggests the percentage of saturation is as low as 25 and as high as 51, which is highly unreliable (Wiley & Monllor-Tormos 2018; Centola, et al. 2018). In relation to African Americans and women, women have reached critical mass in America while African Americans have not. Women comprise 51 percent of the American population while African Americans comprise 14 (United States Census Bureau 2020). When demographic nuances are considered because of race, gender and locale, the effects of critical mass are dynamic. The tipping point for African Americans in Georgia is different from Florida potentially yielding different results even when maximal political participation occurs, and the same rationale is applicable to gender politics.

Hence, Georgia and Florida's 2018 gubernatorial elections provide a unique opportunity to explore African American political candidacies from a unique perspective (race and gender) and to examine African American political behavior. As it pertains to critical mass, Georgia's African American population has reached critical mass at 34 percent while Florida's African American population has not at 16 percent. Whether voting signifies a social or political movement is open to interpretation. However, political history suggests rights are not gained by quiescently waiting but by compelling a recognition that change is necessary, which subsequently establishes a new status quo alterable by successive social or political movements at an exact place, exact time or for a specific purpose. If Trump's victory, in 2016, is the "proverbial" tipping point, according to

Critical Mass Theory, locales where African Americans and women have reached critical mass there is tremendous political and voting power.

However, a mere physical presence does not necessarily equate to action which is always juxtaposed to inaction. Perception is not always reality and reality might defy perception. For African Americans and women, each has objective and subjective realities continuously battling to erect a consistent worldview and a purpose or a call to action. In other words, life experiences exist both inside and outside of the mind. Racism and misogyny have existed for millennia and influence the decisions of African Americans and women. Neither wants to be characterized as sowers of social and political discord because progress is fickle and requires a finesse when contestation is requisite. Social movements have proven powerful agents of change historically, some radical others mundane; however, exercising political power and agency through voting requires minimal confrontation and is a true expression of nondescript power which reduces all-out confrontation.

One thing is certain, however. African American and female candidacies will continue to rise regardless of America's political climate. There are underlying assumptions that America has achieved racial equality and gender equality; nevertheless, anecdotal, and empirical evidence suggest the contrary. Yet, the burgeoning question of this research is: what energizes the African American electorate and compels increased political participation?

Chapter 3: A Delineation of African American Voting History

America has periodically not met some of the lofty ideals upon which it was founded as evidenced by the maltreatment treatment of African Americans socially and politically (Hutchinson 2014; Walton, Smith & Wallace 2017). The Civil War was unavoidably fought to bring about racial parity even if fleeting. In the war's aftermath, Reconstruction allowed African American men untold political freedom, voting and candidacy (Tuck 2009; Carter 1995). African Americans rose to positions of political prominence under the watchful eyes of the federal government, which uttered a multitude of promises that did not materialize. The federal government eventually capitulated to Southern states ending a period of tremendous political activity among African American men which is unparalleled and has not been achieved since.

When Rutherford B. Hayes became president in 1876, the hopes and promises of a people quickly deteriorated and the long, hard journey to gain social and political parity began in earnest after a brief respite from social and political subservience. Jim Crow and many other forms of legally sanctioned racial discrimination ruled the day (Tuck 2009; Horowitz 1998). Voting and political participation became part of a terror-filled legacy that entrenched African American communities post-Reconstruction (Carter 1995; Horowitz 1998; Tuck 2009). Mechanisms such as poll taxes, literacy tests and white primaries supplemented the repression of political participation among African Americans and were unchecked by the federal government who was no longer willingly protecting the civil rights and liberties of African Americans. African American willingness to participate in politics precipitously declined because it became a matter of life and death. Given the choice of living or dying: the choice is clear. History, therefore, cannot be dismissed when discussing African American political ambivalence (Towler & Parker 2018; Parker 2016; Schmidt 2016; Taylor 2011; Brown, Duster, Oppenheimer & Carnoy 2003).

The suppression and repression of African American social and political rights provides a rational explanation for their continued animus towards all things political. While the Civil Rights Movement is often considered the panacea for America's past social and political transgressions (Perea 2010; Powell 2010; Santoro 2015), African Americans still bear scars from past events. Barriers to minority political participation (voting and candidacy) are much subtler than in times past. With subtler forms of racial biases emerging, recent voter laws obliquely attempt to reduce the political participation of certain segments of the electorate, specifically African Americans who already presumably encounter considerable obstacles at the polls and in political candidacy.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965, a major triumph for African American voters, has become part of an intense debate regarding how far America has come with race relations and more importantly minority political participation. The question then becomes: has America truly become post-racial enough that approval from the federal government is no longer necessary to eradicate egregious violations of voting rights? The Supreme Court's ruling in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) suggests racial discrimination in voting laws is unlikely; concordantly, the ruling mitigates racial disparities in voting and politics. There is no precise calculus that can determine how far African American political participation has come in America; yet any progression is preferred considering the past (Kim 2013). The landscape of political participation is rapidly changing because America's demographics are in constant flux. Suppressing political participation has proved to be a successful mechanism in the past and has reemerged as one of America's silent pandemics because increased African American political participation could potentially disrupt the status quo.

African American Political Activity & The Reconstruction Era

The Reconstruction Era was supposed to induce a more enlightened understanding of race and racism in the United States of America; nevertheless, what began as a potential reconciliation of a war-torn country ended in devastation for newly freedmen. Having gained a simulacrum of social and political parity, African American men rose to political prominence. African Americans were cautiously optimistic and were bright-eyed with confidence they would finally be recognized as an integral part of America's existence. Yet, the Reconstruction Era would end abruptly once again relegating African Americans to a secondary social and political status that was more stringent and rules, mores, and norms of old were summarily enforced.

Why was The Reconstruction Era short-lived? There was much trepidation among white Americans (Northern and Southern) about newly freed African American males having social and political power (Richardson 2009). In other words, white Americans had concerns about the extent to which African American men would exercise their political power and for what purposes (Egerton 2014; Davis 2011; Cobb & Jenkins 2001; Franklin 1994). African Americans being elected to public office was a tremendous situation not only because of the novelty, but also because of what the future potentially portended. African American men did and were going to exercise their franchise. The Reconstruction Era is feasibly one of the most politically progressive in American history. African Americans held more than 1500 public offices from local to federal governments (Brown 1998). So, yes, there was much to be feared because African Americans were tremendously active in politics during The Reconstruction Era.

As fate would have it, The Reconstruction Era inevitably ended reestablishing white racial dominance aided mostly by violence. Legally sanctioned methods such as poll taxes, literacy tests and white primaries were also used to suppress African American political activity. There is an

eagerness to oversimplify African American political behavior despite historical evidence suggesting increased political activity after the war produced a systematic elimination of newly conferred Black rights. That is, “right” order had to be restored consequently putting white Americans at the apex of legal, economic, social, and political hierarchies (Kantrowitz 2015; Foner 2013; Keith 2009; Baker 2007; Smith 2002). The end of The Reconstruction Era was as much about reestablishing white power as much as it was about quelling African American progress at the time.

Legally Sanctioned Methods Used to Quell African American Political Progress

It has been previously mentioned that African American men gained political prominence in the American South during Reconstruction. They were elected to local and federal offices, in what were the highest numbers in American history (Brown; Tuck 2009; Keith 2009; Baker 2007; Smith 2002); yet, towards the end of Reconstruction political participation in African American communities dwindled as it became increasingly difficult for them to exercise their newly gained franchise. While much attention has been given to answering whether the Framers were racists, little effort has been exerted to explain how the United States’ federal government failed to protect African American political freedoms or their franchise. The federal government was mostly silent after Reconstruction and hardly meddled when states altered their constitutions to make it difficult for African American men to exercise their franchise.

Black codes, literacy tests, poll taxes and white primaries became part of systemic or institutional designs that were defended as necessary parts of reinforcing racial dominance and quieting a community of political ingenuities. Given that most African Americans were former slaves a vast majority were not properly educated and lacked financial resources to wage a proper defense. Questionable laws, although ignominious, were ingenious ways to suppress African

American political activity and viability. What better ways to suppress unwanted political competition than by creating insurmountable barriers to voting? Because voting and candidacy are inevitably intertwined, stifling voting extinguished any possibility of success for African American candidates, past, present, and future. The right to vote is a quintessential expression of democratic openness. By effectively excluding African Americans from any political processes or activities, African American interests could not and would not be met because they lacked sufficient representation. African Americans no longer had a personal stake in politics because it again became a strictly white male endeavor.

Moreover, while there were racial dynamics (Black versus White) that helped foster the end of Reconstruction, Radical Republicans are culprits as well; they were white Northerners who sought an uncompromising reorienting of American society and politics, which potentially heightened white awareness of how drastically different the world could be once African Americans were completely integrated into the folds of America's fabric. Radical Republicans sought the expedient integration of African Americans into society and politics. Some Southern whites were resentful of "carpetbaggers" who were apparently changing traditional racial norms by aiding former "slaves" in wresting more power than they deserved. Even though Reconstruction America is sometimes romanticized for its highbrowed ideals, the story of how democracy in America was completely dismantled is frequently ignored. Recounting this story requires a reckoning of untold magnitude of which many are incapable of coping. African American political activity and participation were at their highest during Reconstruction and were systematically eradicated because America was not ready for a society where African Americans played a significant role in ensuring that all citizens' rights were protected.

Finally, by electing African Americans to public office, it sowed the earliest seeds of descriptive representation for a soon to be forgotten segment of the electorate. As a result, descriptive representation has become a much-discussed phenomenon in political and social science research. How would an increase in African American political representation affect the political status quo? Were there white fears that African Americans would seize control of the country and abuse white America, as some whites had done African Americans? A potential reversal of fortune for some of white America was difficult to bear and much more of a reality, which warranted a full assault on offenders. In this case, it would be African American political leaders and by extension the segment of the electorate they represented. Political representation unequivocally equated to power and much more significantly purpose. If the African American electorate's purpose for participating in politics were eliminated, no rational basis for political participation or engagement existed.

From Freedom to Repression: The End of Reconstruction

An integral feature post-Civil War that led to the demise of the Reconstruction Era was political violence (terrorism) via racism. Political violence against African Americans who availed themselves of newly acquired political rights increased exponentially during Reconstruction (Teo 2008; Bartley 2002). While racially discriminatory laws were unimaginably successful, extra-judicial political violence was much more successful in deterring African American political activity and growth. The federal government had long abandoned protecting the civil rights and liberties of African Americans. Consequently, racially motivated political violence became the norm (Tuck 2009; Kosary 2007; Horowitz 1998; Carter 1995). There was little the federal government could do to prevent racial violence perpetrated against African Americans because of a code of silence. The code of silence was the acceptance of political violence against African

Americans by some whites. It made racially motivated violence easier simply because violence yielded better results than recorded laws. These acts of violence (e.g., lynchings, beatings and rapes) were completely extra-legal; accordingly, prosecuting racially based violent crimes proved futile.

Moreover, African Americans understood any violence perpetrated against them would not be prosecuted because legal, social, and political institutions were seamlessly used by whites who were active members of the machinery that allowed racial and political violence to go unreported and unprosecuted (Kato 2015; Williams 2012; Rabl 2007; Wright 1996). Political violence, again, was the norm during Reconstruction; consequently, expectations of violence led a nascent and vibrant political community (African Americans) to relinquish newly gained rights to maintain an iota of safety and normalcy. The result of violence, nay terror, during Reconstruction is an enduring legacy of othering and isolation for African Americans politically and socially.

The distinction being made here is America was never truly founded to accommodate the wants, needs or desires of African Americans. The racist roots of America's founding are always present when discussing how African Americans have been received and perceived throughout American history. Therefore, race plays a pivotal role in any interactions among the public. This analysis can be taken a step further because politics in America was never meant to be an African American endeavor.

The thematic content of Kipling's *The White Man's Burden* best describes race-relations in Reconstruction America. Attached to violence during Reconstruction were racial deficiency theories. White Americans had an obligation to ensure that African Americans acted according to social norms and mores. To be more explicit, African Americans were morally deficient individuals who must be coerced or compelled to act according to social norms and dictates (Mills

2014; Brown & Brown 2012; Blum 2002; Tucker 1996; Webster 1993; Appiah 1985). How could outsiders, the morally corrupt or the intellectually deficient become the beneficiaries of tremendous power? To answer the question, one must consider the dichotomy of laws. That is, when laws work to the advantage of a particular set of individuals or a particular group, in this case white Americans, the law functions as intended; yet, when laws change, evolve, or bring once disadvantaged groups to a level of parity, they are inauspiciously corrupt and must not be obeyed. Hence, The Civil War Amendments (13th, 14th & 15th Amendments) influenced political violence during Reconstruction. The United States' Constitution, thus, became a grotesque bastardized version unworthy of reverence because it bolstered African American political power and participation and perceivably diminished white political rights.

The true irony is the Constitution as recounted by The Framers is the supreme law of the land (Hamilton, 1787); nevertheless, it failed to protect newly franchised African Americans males from political violence permitted by state governments via unruly lynch mobs and most notoriously the Ku Klux Klan. Racially motivated political violence used social control to terrorize African Americans and fostered an atmosphere where political participation and activities were stymied regardless of repercussions (there were none). African American communities became all too aware that political participation, voting and candidacy, carried a prohibitive price that many were unwilling to pay. A once politically active community yielded to violence choosing to preserve rather than relinquish life, a well-respected tenet of natural law.

A Reawakening: Fighting for Finality

The Civil Rights Movement has been deservedly credited with transforming America's social and racial landscape. Surprisingly, many legal scholars and academics have begun to question whether The Civil Rights Movement was a successful social movement. The Civil Rights Movement's primary focus was moving racial parity along through the federal court system, which had no control over the private beliefs of individuals. It used litigation to compel social change as opposed to changing the "hearts and minds" of individuals who held steadfast racist views about African Americans. America's federal courts could not police morality although they ruled racial discrimination was illegal. States had to be willing to be the enforcement mechanisms of federal court rulings. Political and social mind frames had to be reoriented for court rulings to be effective.

Thus, it is altogether plausible to suggest The Civil Rights Movement was a litigious movement that produced a legal canon that was ignored to protect established social conventions at the time. The power of the federal government, courts included, diminishes based upon proximity-closer suggests more power, further suggests less power. If the American South is used as a litmus, the federal government had utterly no idea what citizens truly needed. States openly defied federal court rulings and or any legislation that attempted to protect the rights of African Americans. For example, *Brown v. Board* (1954), a historic Supreme Court ruling desegregating public schools, was barely enforced because there were impressions it was illegitimately conceived and promoted an African American racial agenda that sought to establish new social, legal, political, and economic orders. It would be decades later before the desegregation of public schools began in earnest. This example easily demonstrates the intersection at which law and society sit. Law and society are unpreventably juxtaposed creating tensions when the respective values of each collide and often needs resolution.

The Civil Rights Movement established the jurisprudence that made more comprehensive legal protection of African American rights possible. As a result, The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is the culmination of a long-fought battle that garnered results of consequence (Berman 2015; Cox & Miles 2008; Lawson 1999; Davidson 1994). Equal protection under the laws of the United States of America became a reality for African Americans because the federal government introduced enforcement mechanisms that could not be easily circumvented by state and local governments that willingly and flagrantly violated voting rights. The federal government finally signaled its predominance in the federal hierarchy and that it would secure African American rights which it failed to previously protect.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 stabilized African American political participation and voting rights. It allowed African Americans, voters and candidates, the ability to openly express political ideas and become part of democratic processes. Enforcement mechanisms such as preclearance, approval from the United States Department of Justice to change voting laws, mitigated the possibility that wholesale African American disenfranchisement would ever occur again. The federal government was undergirding and protecting the African American franchise with gusto and the most egregious of violators held responsible. The shadows of the past were vanquished, and a new political reality emerged for African Americans; however, African Americans proceeded with caution because just as easily as rights can be conferred, they can be diminished as history has proven. Under the Voting Rights Act of 1965, African Americans became a protected group among the electorate.

As times change, there will always be perceptions that societies evolve or change which reduces the need for laws that protect vulnerable classes of citizens. While racial discrimination in voting and politics is omnipresent, mechanisms that disenfranchise African American voters have

become much subtler. For many, the United States of America has been transmogrified from a racialized society to a post-racial society which sometimes downplays racialized experiences. Do current perceptions of race-relations accurately reflect reality? Is the African American electorate an expendable part of the general electorate?

A New Reckoning: More Subtle Forms of Voter Suppression

The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), eviscerated enforcement mechanisms of The Voting Rights Act. The ruling hinges on a narrow view of racial advancement post-Civil Rights. *Holder* relies heavily on an idealistic view of an enlightened society that embraces absolute equality regardless of race, religion, national origin, sex, or sexual orientation. For example, the Court's decision to undo preclearance-approval from the Justice Department to enact new voter laws in jurisdictions that were the most common violators of voting rights - rendered The Voting Rights Act moot and powerless to protect endangered voters in wake of an increasingly divisive era of politics in America. States, as in the past, once again have tremendous power which allows them to determine "suitable" voters. The right to vote is the kernel of democracy and politics. Yet, when, and how one exercises his or her franchise has become equally important. Undesirable voters (e.g., African Americans, the poor, felons & immigrants) must be kept away from the polls at all costs.

The rise of restrictive voter laws post-*Holder* illustrates how and why voter suppression is such a promising way to alter the effect of constituencies on the electorate. Even though the Supreme Court established the "one person, one vote" rule in cases like *Baker v. Carr* (1962) and *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964), more recently it has been reluctant to tread on states' rights, enabling them to enact restrictive voter laws to preserve democracy and to reduce voter fraud, actual or perceived (Highton 2017; Hassen 2016; Hicks, McKee & Sellers 2014; Bentele & O'Brien 2013;).

Unlike the old days, explicit violations of civil rights and liberties are not accepted; however, under the guise of race-neutral laws, disenfranchisement still occurs and is geared towards diluting votes and especially during turbulent political times. Political parties want to alter the political landscape by putting themselves in the best position to be victorious by increasing the likelihood of voter turnout among their respective constituencies and reducing the likelihood of turnout among their competitors' constituencies.

Current research contends that restrictive voter laws disparately impact African Americans, other minorities and the less privileged (Hajnal, Kuk & Lajevardi 2018; Barreto, Nuno, Sanchez & Walker 2018; Hajnal, Lajevardi & Nielsen 2017). Why are restrictive voter laws so controversial? The short answer is they are not controversial because they have been allowed to remain as recorded laws; the long answer is they harken back to a time where the systematic suppression of voting rights was readily accepted. Some scholars consider restrictive voter laws to be one of America's new pandemics because African Americans are disproportionately impacted and because they produce barriers that limit an already diminished desire to participate. Also, African Americans sometimes feel politicians readily use them as pawns in a zero-sum game that yields extraordinarily little gains for such monumental undertakings.

Gerrymandering of congressional and state districts plays an integral role in deterring African American political participation. Vote dilution is the key goal of restrictive voter laws. The same applies to gerrymandered districts which refers to the drawing of voting district boundaries for political or partisan gain. Like restrictive voter laws, in recent years, the Supreme Court has opted not to intervene. It presumes gerrymandering is a political practice that is as old as America's existence (Waymer & Heath 2016; Burke 1999). Whether true, the Court's decision rests on the justiciability of gerrymandering cases or the ability of cases to be heard and decided.

The Supreme Court has decided gerrymandering is strictly political and is not subject to the machinations of courts. The Court is supposed to shy away from politically charged issues unless federal constitutional rights are entangled.

Political and racial gerrymandering deleteriously impacts the African American electorate (Waymer & Heath 2016; Siegel-Hawley 2013; Soffen 2013; Burke 1999; Overby & Cosgrove 1996; Butler 1995) because under each paradigm African American political power diminishes, votes are unavoidably diluted, and the essence of democracy subverted. Therefore, the Supreme Court's "one person, one vote" doctrine has been unevenly enforced and its demise evident after *Holder*. The suppression of African American voting rights has been delineated previously in this chapter; hence, one would be remiss not to mention how some contemporary political practices seek the diminution of African American political power and prowess by reinventing practices of old.

While African Americans have been integrated into American society, they are still "othered" and sometimes have a status of invisibility (Walton 1996). Restrictive voter laws, political gerrymandering, and racial gerrymandering attempt to reduce African American voter mobilization and political participation and progress. However, with voter suppression on the rise again, the African American electorate has removed the moniker of "politically apathetic" (Clark 2014; Taylor 2010; Vanderleeuw & Liu 2002; Morrison 1987) and has emerged as one of America's most vibrant and sought-after segments of the electorate.

Nevertheless, African American political vibrancy is not always welcomed because it unmistakably disrupts the political status quo. When African American political participation increases, political machinery is activated by threatened political actors. Restrictive voter laws, political gerrymandering and racial gerrymandering render the African American electorate

feckless. Indeed, African American political progress must be blunted so that some of white America feels comfortable. Demographics, in the United States of America, are dynamic; yet the allure of power remains unchanged: those with power make the rules and those without abide by them, begrudgingly or otherwise.

During Reconstruction, African American men fully exercised their newly gained franchise granted by the supreme law of land, the Constitution. Reconstruction symbolized an idealistic view of American society; a society driven by an absolute equality, at the time, which would have been unparalleled in the world. Puerile dreams often fail to be substantiated and give way to harsher realities. America has been and remains a country with a racial hierarchy which predominates much of its social, economic, legal, and political processes. A post-racial America does not exist and realization of that is part of true enlightenment.

Florida & Georgia 2018 Gubernatorial Elections

Since the Reconstruction Era ended in 1877, the African American electorate has experienced brilliance and turmoil in its aftermath. Political violence and extremism became recurring facets of everyday life that eventually quieted African American political participation and activities (Tuck 2009; Horowitz 1998). While African Americans have made tremendous progress since The Reconstruction Era, real economic, social, political, and legal parities have not been achieved (Harris 2015; Hutchinson 2014; Banks 2014; Kim 2013; Kitchen & Burris 2011). There is still much work to be done to deliver the promised land to African Americans.

African American political participation (voting and candidacy) has undoubtedly increased post-Civil Rights; yet deficiency theories and stereotypes abound in contemporary society. African Americans are often perceived as having different worldviews, which is true because of historical events (Tuck 2009; Sommers 2006; Sommers 2007; Horowitz 1998). For example, Stacey Abrams

and Andrew Gillum, in their 2018 Georgia and Florida gubernatorial bids, were easily labeled as other and not representative of the American electorate intellectually, morally, or psychically. For example, because Abrams and Gillum were Democrats and Black, their opponents often sighted they were “soft” on crime and lacked proper knowledge to deal with the intricacies of politics. In other words, African American candidates could not understand the political needs of a majority white electorate which causes friction between Black candidates and white voters. However, the question then becomes: who and what appropriately represents the American electorate? Finding an answer is most certainly difficult.

With events like Charlottesville² and Election 2016 looming large on the American psyche, political representation has become all too important for the African American electorate to remain complaisant while America treads on familiar ground to settle old scores. Candidates like Abrams and Gillum are representative of the Reconstruction Era spirit of African American political participation. The African American electorate is reemerging as a formidable bloc of the American electorate (Keele & White 2019; Tokeshi 2018; Avery & Fine 2018; Keele, et al. 2017; West 2017; Spence & McClerking 2010). The only observation left to be made is whether increased African American candidacies will increase voter turnout among African Americans especially during contentious election cycles. African Americans, politicians, and electorate are not shying away from the responsibility to lead which is energizing the masses.

² A 2017 event that occurred shortly after the election of Trump that led to the death of Heather Heyer because of a white supremacist.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework for Understanding African American Political Participation

Understanding political participation has been at the fore of political and social discourse since the Ancients; therefore, America is no exception. American politics has transformed, and now untold numbers are openly participating because of social change; yet there are individuals who are less willing to participate in political processes or activities because it seems futile in wake of everyday problems (Denny 2016; Avery 2009; 2007; Miller 2008; Alex-Assensoh 1997; Cohen & Dawson 1993). Political participation, voting especially, can be an effective mechanism to be seen and to be heard even if the outcome is not particularly favorable. The prospect of a preferred candidate losing an election can simultaneously be fodder for increased or decreased political participation within or among the general electorate. As a result, much attention has been given to African American political participation because of perceived “political cynicism” or “political apathy” to political processes (Opdycke, Segura & Vasquez 2013; Taylor 2010; Cooks & Epstein 2000; Sampson & Bartusch 1998). However, there are circumstances and or opportunities when African Americans, who are perceived to be politically inert, become politically active and emerge as an integral part of political processes. Thus, the question is why?

To answer the question, it is important to understand concepts of political participation and what fuels an increased awareness of political import. There are three concepts that are useful when exploring increased African American political participation (voting and candidacy) and they are as follows: 1) political efficacy, 2) descriptive representation, and 3) linked fate. *Prima facie* these three concepts appear unrelated; yet they can be combined to effectively explain why African Americans become invested in political processes and contradict traditional or predicted behaviors that suggest less than a full-faith effort to participate. Current research regularly focuses on political efficacy, descriptive representation and linked fate as disparate phenomena which

limits the robustness of findings. By combining political efficacy, descriptive representation, and linked fate there is an increased likelihood that African American political behavior could be better understood as a multifaceted phenomenon worthy of true consideration. Therefore, this research attempts to create a more comprehensive theoretical framework about African American political behavior that bolsters extant research and augments future research because of a novel theoretical framework.

The Law of Parsimony, Political Science Research & African American Political Behavior

The social science research canon asserts the most logical explanation for existing phenomena is derived from the least complicated theory, theories or sets of explanations (Gutnisky 2019; Lynch, Long & Stretesky 2013; Baker 2003; Gerring 1999; Nolan 1997; Sober 1981). Even though the law of parsimony simplifies or gives focus to complex research questions, its editing function frequently causes research to have a too provincial or too narrow scope to thoroughly examine questioned phenomena, often leaving more questions than answers. The allure of finding the least convoluted answer causes researchers to rely on restrictive theories or explanations that eventually become the canon for a particular research discipline and become so entrenched that little thought is given to the need for robust theoretical frameworks that offer novel or more complete ways of understanding any given phenomenon. This scenario is common in social science research (political science, sociology, psychology, etc.); yet, as disciplinary foci become even more nuanced, the problem is exacerbated.

Parsimony, especially in political science research, currently has an amorphous meaning that sometimes cannot be readily explained and is applicable to a multitude of research aspects which includes but is not limited to theoretical parsimony and methodological parsimony (Gunitsky 2019; Aarts 2007). For purposes of this research, theoretical implications will be

explored as it relates to political science research regarding African American political participation. Hopefully, later research will explore methodological parsimony to proffer solutions that bolster more complex research that moves beyond quixotic assessments that often lack depth and breadth to answer the most troubling questions of the day. Therefore, whenever possible, theoretical frameworks must establish foundations that provide answers for complex research questions. Additionally, they must encompass enough substantive elements which allow enhanced generalizations. In other words, theoretical parsimony although well-established in the social sciences does not preclude theoretical research or research designs that attempt to overcome the research status quo.

African American political participation and behavior, for instance, are much studied aspects of political science; however, extant research fails to capture the complexity of African American political behavior and participation because single phenomena such as linked fate, descriptive representation and political efficacy are used separately. Individually they might not yield results that are generalizable or even project reality for complex human phenomena such as African American political participation. There is no precise calculus that can explain the complexities of human nature because it does not operate in a test tube. The African American electorate is influenced by internal stimuli as well as by behavioral elements from other segments of the electorate. Influences can be minimal or maximal; consequently, theoretical assumptions must be maximized to reduce the likelihood that African American political behaviors are not overestimated or understated.

Political Efficacy

Political efficacy or belief in the ability to effectively promote political change has the potential to increase African American political participation. For African Americans, government has frequently been less than trustworthy from inception. As a result, African Americans often presume America's political system never intended to embrace their political needs, wants or desires (Abramson 1977; Gurin, Hatchett & Jackson 1989; Bobo & Kluegel 1993). African Americans are more likely to feel ineffective when expressing political ideas, which subsequently reduces the likelihood of participation (Avery 2006; 2009; Mangum 2016). Thus, if political systems are not responsive, it is a feckless venture to engage in political discourse or political activities.

However, when African American candidates emerge as viable contenders, trust in political processes emerges (Whitby 2007; Tate 2010; Scherer 2010; Curtis & Wilson 2013; Gleason & Stout 2014). African American voters are electrified because they genuinely have a personal stake in politics and its outcomes especially for high-profile elections with African American candidates. Hence, an increased awareness of political power or political empowerment fuels increased political participation in African Americans. Viable candidates become the sole impetus for political activity, which has the potential to change the current political landscape and unavoidably alter the American political landscape in the future. African Americans candidates winning elections, federal or otherwise, is not new; however, the visibility of African American candidacies is on the rise.

Nevertheless, political efficacy is contested in scholarly environments because it is an abstract concept that is often captured and measured inaccurately according to some scholars with regards to African American political participation. Although political efficacy and voting are not

mutually exclusive phenomena, voting for a preferred candidate does not necessarily produce desired political outcomes (Wu 2003; Kahne & Westheimer 2006). It has been suggested that utilizing votes as a single indicator of political activity excludes the goal of voting which is to influence policies and laws. Political processes are truncated and are not comprehensively understood by halting at voting. Voting initiates political processes; however, politics occurs in a completely different context. The focus should not be placed on votes per se but the policy outcomes of votes. Political behavior is as much about perception as it is reality. Do African American votes significantly influence policy outcomes?

Descriptive Representation

Descriptive representation also plays a significant role in determining the extent to which African Americans are politically active. Descriptive representation refers to individuals participating in political processes and activities that share similar characteristics with a demographic (e.g., African Americans & women). Increased political participation is linked to descriptive representation among women and African Americans (Tate 2010; Scherer 2010; Gleason & Stout 2014; Keele, et al. 2017; Keele & White 2019). As it relates to race and political participation, race of a candidate is an indicator of political interest among African Americans. When an African American candidate's chances of success increase, political participation becomes about the electability of an individual who is able and capable of representing individuals who share similar physical characteristics (Bernstein 2005; Whitby 2007; Keele, et al. 2017). For African Americans, electing African American candidates symbolizes political systems and political processes are functioning as intended and that there is a place for African Americans in the political system.

Yet, scholarly debates also suggest descriptive representation does not always produce significant changes in minority participation. The mere presence of elected African American officials does not guarantee fulfillment of the African American electorate's political agenda. Corporeal evaluations frequently reduce African American political participation to physical presence even though representation extends beyond the corporeal. Descriptive representation is not only physical presence; it refers to a consciousness that is relegated to the "physicality" of politics which inevitably disregards socio-psychological elements of political participation that could provide more robust understandings (Leighley & Vedlitz 1999). Furthermore, electing African American candidates is not a foolproof method of promoting political interests because of America's republican form of government. Elected officials often fail to promote the political, social, legal, and economic interests of the constituencies they serve (Wu 2003; Kahne & Westheimer 2006). Broken political promises are more pronounced for African Americans because significant suspicion already exists (Avery 2006; 2009).

Linked Fate

African Americans, more so than any other race or ethnicity, share a sense of linked fate (Sanchez 2016; McLain 2009). African Americans have a communal view of success and failure. Simply stated, if one African American succeeds that success belongs to the entire African American community and is consequently the same for failure. It by no means suggests that being African American is a monolith or that African Americans lack individuality; however, it does suggest there are many socio-psychological forces which are impetus for strong communal connections. Being treated as a social amalgamation rather than individuals striving for disparate goals has cemented a stronger than unusual bond among African Americans (Dawson 1994; Tate 1994).

A Pew Research Center survey finds 44 percent of African Americans believe that what happens to one African American affects them as well (2019). When applied to African American politics, it is possible to surmise political participation increases when African American candidates are on the ballot (West 2017). As previously stated, success or failure of the candidate is communally owned. A certain amount of pride is garnered by aiding a candidate's victory. An acute awareness of community, a sense of belonging, what being an African American symbolizes and what the political outcome means equates to political purpose.

Moreover, African American religiosity and political activity establish a sense of a common political purpose through linked fate. Church and religion have established a microcosm in which African American political thought has thrived, in the presence and absence of political rights (Swain 2008; McClurkin & McDaniel 2005; Tate 1993; Calhoun-Brown 1996; Harris 1999). In other words, church has traditionally been a place where African Americans could congregate and establish political agendas with a utilitarian focus. The church, post-Reconstruction, created a palpable Black consciousness that has endured many social and political generations in American history. The mantra of the Civil Rights Movement was "We shall overcome." African Americans rely on the tenets of Christianity to cope with the tremendous stressors they encounter as normal functions of everyday life.

Religion, and by extension church, serves as a unifying mechanism politically and socially for many African Americans because it is the glue that communally binds and gives the African American experience validation (Dawson 2003), which provides purpose. During and after Reconstruction, churches were simultaneously ground zero for African American political progress but were also places where social and political violence became recurring events (Williams, Williams & Blain 2016; Bailey & Snedker 2011; McDaniel 2009; Mattis, Beckham,

Saunders, Myers, Knight, Rencher & Dixon 2004; Soul & Van Dyke 1999; Lincoln & Mamiya 1990). Therefore, religiosity and church are focal points in understanding historical and contemporary aspects of African American political participation. Churches have and will always provide fodder, negative and positive, for increased discussions about African American political apathy or inactivity.

Why is religion inextricably tied to African American social and political activism? It is plausible to argue that African Americans, throughout American history, have had minimal spaces or places to truly call their own or that has allowed them to discuss their needs. Churches, in a sense, filled a void at times when African American political activism was prohibitively dangerous and prying eyes reported the slightest transgression. For African Americans, church became a marketplace of ideas which established a Black consciousness, a Black social agenda, and a Black political agenda. Church, as a marketplace of ideas, allowed African Americans to hone social and political methodologies that lead to the success of the Civil Rights Movement. Even though white supremacists will not readily admit it, they recognize the integral role that church played in mobilizing the African American community and electorate, transforming disparate individuals into a community engaging in collective activity. As evidenced by history, African American churches were preferred locations for racial intimidation, lynchings and many other forms of political violence, which was part of a larger design to minimize Black political efficacy.

Churches, in African Americans communities, past and present, are vestiges of a communal identity that is longstanding because of a troubled past. Churches have had a soothing presence in African American communities because they have traditionally been run by African Americans leaders which increased a sense of community and more specifically linked fate. Churches despite being sites of prolific racial violence, for much of African American history, have provided

government-like services to its parishioners (Barnes 2005; McKenzie 2004; Paris 1985; Foner 1987), which is why church was, has been and is a critical part of establishing linked fate among African Americans encouraging ramped up social and political activism strategically or when needed. While participating in religious activities or going to church is a private matter, African American churches often consolidate disparate individual interests into a collective, palpable social and political entity, the Black consciousness.

As with any area of research, linked fate is subject to intense scrutiny. Some scholars argue such an abstract concept is easily conceptualized but is rarely ever properly operationalized (Leighley & Vedlitz 1999; Huddy 2009). Linked fate is extremely difficult to measure because defining linked fate is left to the machinations of researchers. In other words, it has been argued that there is a difference in historical experiences among African Americans that might not resonate with Black immigrant populations. Black immigrants may skew analyses attempting to measure linked fate, a major linchpin of research regarding African American political behavior, which reduces the ability to make assumptions about the African American electorate (Kauffman 2008; Tate 1994).

America's Black population is much too diverse and too complex to presume there are no other theories or concepts that aptly explain African American political behavior (Kaufmann 2008). Individuals who share common experiences or share similar physical characteristics might not necessarily have a similar worldview. The Black experience, in America, is not a monolith. Even though Black immigrant populations can be extrapolated and could be defined as other racial or ethnic categories, it removes shades, variations and nuances that could detrimentally undermine research results by splintering the experiences of a marginalized community. For expediency and for this research, Black, Black American and African American are utilized synonymously and

will be used interchangeably. The African diaspora is inherently diverse; however, the American racial experience is the equalizing factor.

Mind, Body & Soul Approach

Political efficacy, descriptive representative and linked fate are tenuously related; however, combined they provide a more robust understanding of African American political behavior. Accordingly, this section will explore controversies in the literature to establish extant theoretical approaches attempting to explain African American political behavior are overly simplified and lack depth or breadth to explain such a complex phenomenon. This section additionally postulates increased African American political participation begins with the individual through notions of political efficacy and descriptive representation. Once political efficacy and descriptive representation are concretized, African American political participation reaches its apex with the recognition of linked fate, a collective effort. The mind, body, and soul (political efficacy, descriptive representation, and linked fate) approach will be used to gauge and potentially better understand African American political participation.

Phenomena like political efficacy, descriptive representation and linked fate alone respectively cannot explain the complexities of African American political participation, voting and candidacy. They are often misunderstood when they are used to explore African American political behavior because they either overstate or underestimate any given political behavior which limits greater theoretical evolution. To understand African American political behavior, political efficacy must be understood in the following ways: 1) political efficacy as an individually oriented phenomenon and 2) political efficacy as a collectively oriented phenomenon. Notions of political efficacy may begin with an individual's conception of his or her ability to influence

political change; however, it is possible for an individual's conception of political astuteness to be tinged by negative or positive emotionality.

Political efficacy additionally must be understood in the following ways: 1) individuals and groups who have positive connotations about their ability to effect political change and 2) individuals and groups who have negative connotations regarding their ability to promote political change. Current research contends that individuals or groups that have positive beliefs about political processes and systems are more likely to think meaningful political change is possible while their counterparts are more suspicious (Beaumont 2011; Taylor 2010; Anderson 2010; Rodgers 1974). In other words, individuals or groups that have not had positive experiences with politics are less likely to be participatory. Is an individual capable of transforming perceptions of individual political success to actual or concrete political change?

Political efficacy is transmuted from an abstract theoretical concept to a concrete reality that solidifies the ideal with the pragmatic which allows theoretical power to be more concretely expressed and wielded. Thus, once an individual recognizes his or her political power, they can recognize internal and external stimuli influence the magnitude of political efficacy. Acknowledging one's positive political power creates a positive ethos with respect to political participation which bolsters a willingness to engage others to achieve political objectives. Second, once that individual creates a positive environment, in which he or she can act, they engage a group of kindred to exact a plan of action to effect political change. On the contrary, individuals or groups that exhibit negative thoughts of political efficacy (the inability to effect positive political change) may retreat or limit political activity.

The fear of political rejection, like the fear of social rejection, produces a mental vacuum that inevitably enables political inertia. Even though the African American electorate becomes

invested in political outcomes, it does not completely relinquish all negative emotionality about America's political system. The capability of traversing the political landscape becomes easier because perceptions of ineffectualness pales in comparison to more substantial prizes, political viability, and electability. The equation below describes the psychological catharsis the African American electorate must undergo to maximize political power irrespective of political outcome.

$$\textit{Individual Power} + \textit{Group Power} + \textit{Positive Ability to Effect Change} = \textit{Political Efficacy}$$

Just as much as political participation involves individual initiative, it also requires a tremendous level of coordination and an even higher level of consciousness of one's position relative to a group and the general electorate. Even though individualism has been enumerated as a steadfast principle of American politics, a "sense of community" or a "sense of belonging" fuels much of American political activity (McMillan & Chavis 1986; Davidson & Cotte 1989; Anderson 2009; Anderson 2010), but more so among the African American electorate and many other marginalized segments of the population. One of the essential components of linked fate is inevitably trust. It is easier to trust individuals that share similar characteristics or who are of the same demographic because trust has been earned through a psychical connection, in which the traumas (e.g., racism & racial discrimination) of life need no explanation. Social and political phenomena such as racism are readily accepted because shared experiences allow frames of references upon which to draw. In academia, this is referred to as the "Black Utility Heuristic" (Houston 2009; Shelby 2005; Dawson 2003; Dawson 1994) which is a form of collective consciousness.

Individuals are obligated to act in ways that secure their own interests; however, politics by nature is a social activity that requires levels of awareness ranging from micro (the individual) to meso (members of a particular group or demographic) to macro (individuals and groups of a

particular demographic interacting within a system). The concept that is unavoidably underscored within this paradigm is power or the ability or capability of encouraging others to act in ways they might otherwise not. There has always been a power differential among the races in the United States of America through structural and institutional forces. It is this power differential that must be explored to discern the true state of African American political participation in America post-Trump. To exert influence, individuals, and groups, especially marginalized, must recognize their capability to effect political change through political participation, voting and candidacy.

It then becomes a deontological issue where inactivity and activity are juxtaposed. Do African Americans have a categorical imperative that requires them to think collectively more so than any other race or ethnicity? Some African Americans feel they are the protectors of the entire race (Smith, Hung & Franklin 2011; Sekaquaptewa, Waldman & Thompson 2007; Schiele 2005; Allen & Bagozzi 2001; Goodstein & Ponterotto 1997) and equate negative experiences, social or otherwise, to the experiences of the whole African American race. There arguably is no categorical imperative that requires African Americans to act communally; however, there is strength in numbers which is synonymous with power-the power of visibility, the power to be heard and culminates with the power to act which is attached to promoting and sustaining the well-being of African Americans.

After the virtues of political efficacy and political empowerment are realized, another socio-psychological and political transformation must transpire for the African American electorate to prioritize who is best suited to represent its respective economic, legal, social, and political objectives. Descriptive representation becomes an all too salient issue when the African American electorate votes and especially for what candidate. As has been previously stated, extant research suggests the African American electorate is extremely interested in African American

candidates (Keele & White 2019; Keele, et al. 2017; West 2017). A most suitable question arises: are psychological, experiential, and physical qualities essential for the African American electorate to receive adequate representation?

The African American electorate, historically and contemporaneously, has not always had the option of voting for candidates that resemble it or who have a personal stake in its well-being. Chapters 1 and 2 unfortunately outline the troubling trajectory of African American politics and political behavior in the United States of America, The Reconstruction Era saw African American politics flourish until systemically and institutionally eradicated. The difficulties of African American voting and candidacy are not of old, they are omnipresent in contemporary political processes and procedures (Jacobsmeier 2015; Block 2011; Petrow 2010; Liu 2001; Reeves 1997). Because the United States of America is a republic and because America's general electorate is white, African American candidates are often viewed as unrepresentative of the voting public because of long held racial stereotypes that reduce the likelihood of viable candidacy and electability (Tokeshi 2018; Avery & Fine 2012; Jefferies 2002; Terkildsen 1993).

The African American electorate may be energized by the presence of African American candidates in contentious elections. Yet, promising African American candidates must overcome socio-psychological factors that are beyond his or her control, but especially a resistant majority white electorate that uses implicit racial cues to register their disdain. On the contrary, the African American electorate, all too aware of an "othered" status in society, bolsters the promising African American candidate's viability and eventually his or her electability. The intra-racial support may have origins in the "Black Utility Heuristic;" nevertheless, the exact calculus that determines how and why the African American electorate engages is extraordinarily complex.

It is, therefore, plausible to contend that politics begins as an individual pursuit that eventually gives way to intra and inter group dynamics which are projected from the social landscape onto the political arena. As with political efficacy, a need for descriptive representation is concretized when a member of a marginalized community recognizes his or her “othered” political or social status and seeks resolution for any quandary. He or she then seeks aid from a group of individuals like himself or herself, hoping to produce an alternative outcome or a reorienting of an unresponsive political system, actual or perceived. Having the ability to receive redress for maltreatment is unavoidably tied to government formality. Individuals or groups with greater visibility are more likely to have their grievances addressed. Revolutionaries aptly stated: “taxation without representation is tyranny!” Thus, descriptive representation becomes one of the most legitimate methods to effect political change absent violence or revolution.

African American votes for African American candidates connote symbioses, some natural others forced, that are requisite for political vibrancy and political growth. The success or failure of African American candidacies is inextricably intertwined to the African American electorate’s inclination to politically participate. There is a presumptive element of shared experience and understanding that must not be ignored or underestimated within the African American electorate. The codependency between candidacy and electorate is multiplied when specifically referring to African American candidates and the African American electorate. Physical presence is a prerequisite for understanding progress because visibility certainly trumps invisibility (Scherer & Curry 2005; Overby & Cosgrove 1996). The African American electorate has long had to think of ingenious ways to be seen and to be heard even when their civil rights and civil liberties were stifled.

Accordingly, research regularly ponders whether there is a noticeable difference between descriptive representation and substantive representation (Hayes & Hibbing 2017; Preuhs & Hero 2009). Descriptive representation is all about physical presence or representing specific segments of the electorate with shared experiences while substantive representation refers to an aseptic version of representation (representing individuals or groups regardless of specific needs, wants or desires). It is difficult to argue with the assertion: “all citizens should have representation;” however, one must consider whether descriptive representation or substantive representation address the political interests or objectives of the African American electorate. Are descriptive representation and substantive representation altogether different or are they interconnected? For the African American electorate, it is possible to surmise that descriptive representation and substantive representation are synonymous.

That is, substantive representation is a derivative of descriptive representation. Descriptive representation, no matter the segment of the electorate, is never guaranteed but is always a possibility (Griffin & Keane 2006; Preuhs 2005; Beltran 2014). For much of African American electoral history, meaningful representation has often been attached to exuding a physical presence, implicitly or explicitly, which transcends merely occupying places and spaces for frivolity, but for substantive gains. While there have been many groups throughout American history that have pleaded cases and causes for African Americans, there is no better representative for a people than someone who has an encyclopedic knowledge, a rhyme and a reason or a heartbeat of the people whom he or she represents. Descriptive representation, for the African American electorate, is subliminal as well as conscious, which fuels how its political decisions are made. The equation below explains how descriptive representation is transmogrified from a

theoretical abstraction to a concrete possibility and from an individual pursuit to a collective pursuit.

Recognition of Individual Identity + Recognition of Group Identity + Physical

Presence = Descriptive Representation

For African Americans, political activities have been tied to community rather than individuals; therefore, linked fate is a prerequisite for any informed theoretical discussion or exploration of African American political behavior. While linked fate potentially explains some political behaviors of the African American electorate, it is too simplistic to be isolated because its theoretical underpinnings leave much to be desired, which weakens research that claims or suggests definitive patterns and behaviors can be parsed or used to comprehensively confirm the existence of social and political phenomena. Linked fate combined with political efficacy and descriptive representation provides an enhanced theoretical framework for proper examination. African American political participation must not be evaluated using theories that isolate one single phenomenon to satisfy entrenched academic norms that advocate parsimony even though political activity is influenced by other stimuli because of the intrinsic nature of politics.

Whether one subscribes to or decries the politics of individualism or prefers collective political action is completely subjective. Collective political action is sometimes misconstrued as a complete loss of identity; however, the African American electorate is a vibrant political community with variegated interests. It is much more difficult to discern the extent to which linked fate binds the African American electorate and community. As a result, the epicenter of discussion becomes an epistemological debate about knowledge and truth. The fact remains, however, that the African American identity has been construed as a collective, initially by force and more

recently by choice. Therefore, linked fate is not fleeting among African Americans; it is a permanent part of their identity and influences all behavior, political or otherwise.

The equation below describes how linked fate becomes imbued into the identity of a people, for this research it pertains to African Americans. An individual must accept his or her identity, then accepts being part of a group and accepts a communal destiny, which becomes a focal point of existence and colloquially becomes the “glue that binds.”

$$\textit{Recognition of Individual Identity} + \textit{Recognition of Group Identity} + \textit{Common} \\ \textit{Destiny} = \textit{Linked Fate}$$

Moving Forward

Previous chapters addressed African Americans and women in United States politics and outlined trajectories and events that have influenced each’s respective political progression. Moreover, a robust theoretical framework for understanding African American political participation addresses whether current theoretical approaches examining African American political participation, voting and candidacy, are sufficient.

Consequently, two high-profile gubernatorial elections from 2018, in Florida and Georgia respectively, with African American contenders will be used to examine a newer approach to understanding African American political behavior which is being referred to as the mind, body and soul approach. Chapter 5 will quantitatively examine these gubernatorial elections to discern if a conglomeration of political efficacy, descriptive representation and linked fate can provide better theoretical leverage in explaining African American political participation. The formulaic expression below is the summation of the mind, body, and soul theoretical approach.

$$\textit{Political Efficacy} + \textit{Descriptive Representation} + \textit{Linked Fate} = \textit{Increased Political} \\ \textit{Participation}$$

Finally, in Chapter 6, results will be discussed, implications will be explored and avenues for future research will be identified.

Chapter 5: Analyses of Georgia & Florida Gubernatorial Elections 2018

Background

The purpose of this research is to explore misconceptions about African American political participation in the United States of America. Much has and will be written about African American political inertia; however, these mundane assessments do not fully capture the true nature of African American political progress. Extant research primarily focuses on political efficacy, descriptive representation, and linked fate as distinct phenomena. In other words, extant research does not provide robust theoretical considerations that accurately assess the state of African American political participation post-Election 2016.

To that end, this chapter transforms theoretical assumptions into practical applications by using the three most widely used research components related to African American political participation in concert: political efficacy, descriptive representation, and linked fate. Consequently, the purpose of this research is to also dispel any misgivings about the vigor of African American political participation and to bolster extant research that shows the African American electorate is vibrant and palpable. This chapter will outline data and methodology, describe dependent and independent variables, identify sources of data, provide descriptive statistics as needed and report the results of statistical analyses.

Data & Methodology

To determine the extent to which Black candidates influence African American political behavior, data from Florida and Georgia's gubernatorial elections between 2006-2018 has been gathered to determine if there is a link between successful African American political candidacies and the political mobilization of the African American electorate. Two separate analyses have been

conducted for Florida and Georgia,. For each analysis, there were 2345 and 2227 observations, respectively. Because the dependent variable was a count variable. A negative binomial regression³ with robust standard errors was employed to complete all statistical analyses (Cameron & Trivedi 2013). A limited number of independent and control variables have been utilized to reduce the probability of multicollinearity and endogeneity and to isolate the phenomena of linked fate, descriptive representation, and political efficacy.

Dependent Variable

One dependent variable was used to determine whether the African American electorate became increasingly engaged when viable African American candidates were on the ballot. The name of the dependent variable was “Black Votes” and was determined by the actual number of African American votes casted for gubernatorial elections cycles from 2006-2018 based upon votes per county per candidate. Data has been obtained from Florida and Georgia’s Secretary of State websites (Department of Elections).

Refer to Figures 1a and 1b below. Both Figures 1a and 1b illustrate a considerable increase in African American electoral activity from 2006 to 2010, arguably because of the Obama presidency. From 2010 to 2014, African American electoral activity stabilized for both Florida and Georgia. However, in 2018, electoral interest was once again piqued among the African American electorate primarily because of competitive gubernatorial races in Florida and Georgia.

³ This method of analysis has been deemed most appropriate because the dependent variable is a count variable. Also, overdispersion occurs and must be corrected to ensure a model of good fit.

Figure 1a

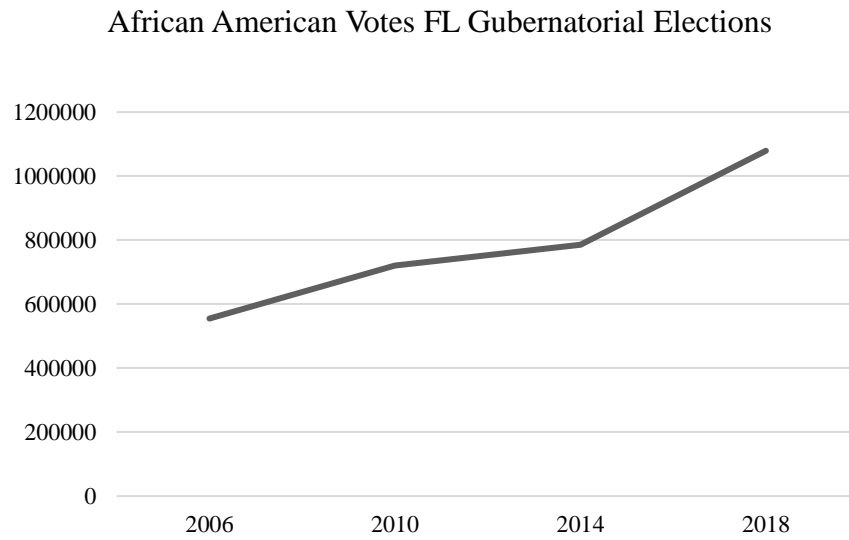
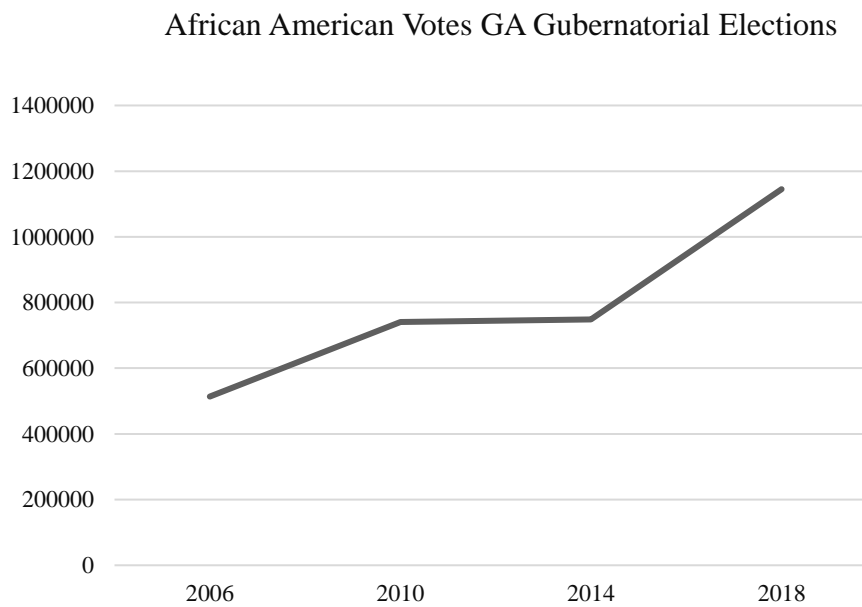


Figure 1b



Independent Variables

Linked fate, political efficacy, and descriptive representation are the independent variables being utilized for analyses.

Political efficacy was a composite score which included the percentage of African Americans who moderately to highly distrust government, ranging from 0 meaning complete trust to 1 meaning complete distrust. Refer to table 1. To complete the composite score for African American political efficacy, perceptions of African American political power and the capability of African American political leaders to effect change have been included. These data have been acquired from American National Election Studies from 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016⁴.

Table 1

Black Distrust in Government

| Year | Level of Distrust |
|------|-------------------|
| 2006 | 0.78 |
| 2010 | 0.62 |
| 2014 | 0.74 |
| 2018 | 0.91 |

Descriptive representation has been coded using a composite score which included the number of Black state representatives and state senators, the number of Black United States representatives and senators plus whether the president is or was Black. The respective numbers were compiled, and a composite score was created for each legislative cycle concurrent to gubernatorial elections held in 2006, 2010, 2014 and 2018. Data were obtained from Florida and

⁴ Even though this research explores gubernatorial elections (state), national data from governmental sources and respected national studies have been used because they are representative of the public.

Georgia State House of Representatives and Senate websites and from the United States government House of Representatives and Senate websites.

Table 2 below shows how many state and federal representatives and senators were Black in the states of Florida and Georgia for each gubernatorial election cycle since 2006. Black elected representatives for Florida remained steady for election cycles 2006 and 2010 while minimal increases were observed for election cycles 2014 and 2018. On the contrary, there was a substantial increase in the number of elected Black officials in Georgia since gubernatorial election 2006.

Table 2
Black Elected Officials at Time of Gubernatorial Elections

| Year | Florida | Georgia |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| 2006 | 29 | 51 |
| 2010 | 29 | 59 |
| 2014 | 31 | 64 |
| 2018 | 34 | 72 |

Linked fate was the percentage of African Americans who believed the following statement: *What happens to a member of my race is likely to happen to me*. Data for this variable was acquired from American National Election Studies 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016. The variable was coded based upon the actual percent of African American respondents who at least moderately felt affected because they were African American.

Presence of an African American major candidate and presence of a major female candidate are coded dichotomously. 0 signified the absence of an African American candidate while 1 signified the presence of an African American candidate. For presence of a female candidate, 0 referred to the absence of a female candidate while 1 referred to the presence of a

female candidate. Data was obtained through available biographical information about candidates on the internet and personal observations. Refer to table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Candidate Name | Stacey Abrams | Andrew Gillum |
| State | Georgia | Florida |
| Percent Black | 32 | 16 |
| Age | 44 | 39 |
| Race | African American | African American |
| Gender | Female | Male |
| Political Affiliation | Democrat | Democrat |
| Political Experience | Yes | Yes |
| Critical Mass (Race) | Yes | No |
| Total Votes | 1, 923, 685 (48.8) | 4, 043, 723 (49.2) |
| Race Outcome | Defeated | Defeated |

Control Variables

The following demographics have been deemed important aspects of race-related research and were used as control variables. They include political affiliation, gender, education, and immigration. Refer to APPENDIX A for variable coding information.

Expectations and Hypotheses

1) *African American candidates are more likely to lose gubernatorial election bids.*

- a) African American men are more likely to out-perform African American women.
- b) Both African American males and females are likely to lose to white male opponents.

2) *African American voters are more likely to turnout when competitive African American candidates are on the ballot especially during contentious election cycles.*

- a) Because of notions of linked fate, African Americans will become politically engaged.
- b) As a sense of political efficacy rises, African Americans will become more politically active.

c) As the possibility of descriptive representation rises, African Americans will become increasingly politically active.

3) *Political efficacy, descriptive representation and linked fate in concert better explain African American political behavior.*

Results

Georgia

The results of statistical analyses suggest the following independent variables have a positive statistical significance linked fate, descriptive representation, political efficacy, presence of female candidate and presence of Black candidate. Refer to table 4 and APPENDIX B.

For Georgia, linked fate among the African American electorate and an African American candidate, produced an increase in African American voter turnout because of a strong belief in a historical and cultural connection, forming a symbiosis.

Moreover, when the possibility of descriptive representation increased for the African American electorate because of an African American candidate appearing on the ballot, African American voter turnout increased.

When a viable African American candidate appeared on the ballot, feelings of political efficacy, according to the results, increased among African American voters. Thus, increasing voter turnout within and among the African American electorate.

The presence of a Black candidate, additionally, had a positive statistical significance which infers Black candidates can influence Black voter turnout, increasing the likelihood of an African American candidate's success.

The presence of a female candidate also had a positive statistical correlation as well indicating a feminine presence influenced African American voter turnout in high-profile elections.

Among the control variables affiliation and gender had statistical significances. According to the results, in terms of gender, Black women out-voted Black men. Female had a positive statistical significance while Male had a negative statistical significance. Also, strength of political affiliation played a significant role in determining whether one votes or not⁵.

For Georgia, all hypotheses were accepted apart from 1a because both candidates were defeated.

Florida

The only independent variable that yielded any result is the presence of a Black candidate, which had a positive statistical significance, which simply means Black voter turnout increased because Gillum was on the ballot.

Of the control variables, gender and immigration yielded statistically significant results. Again, Black women voted more than Black men. Female yielded a positive statistical significance while Male yielded a negative statistical significance. Immigration yielded a negative statistical significance suggesting Black immigrants were not prone to vote for Black candidates solely because they are Black.

For Florida, all hypotheses were rejected apart from 1 and 1b. Refer to table 4 for more information. A more thorough explanation of results is provided in the subsequent chapter.

⁵ Political affiliation is not the focus of this paper and will not be discussed at length in the discussion section but will be suggested as a future avenue of research.

Table 4

Determinants of Increased African American Political Participation

| | Florida | Georgia |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Variables | | |
| Independent | | |
| Linked Fate | | + ** |
| Descriptive Representation | | + *** |
| Political Efficacy | | + ** |
| Presence of a Black Candidate | + ** | + * |
| Presence of a Female Candidate | | + * |
| Control Variables | | |
| Gender | | |
| Female | + *** | + *** |
| Male | - * | - ** |
| Education | | |
| Affiliation | | + ** |
| Immigrants | - *** | |

--Positive sign denotes a positive statistical correlation while the negative sign denotes a negative statistical correlation.

--Level of significance is notated as follows: $p \leq .10$ is *, $p \leq .05$ is **, and $p \leq .01$ is ***.

Chapter 6: Unraveling African American Political Behavior

The African American electorate has been ignored for much of American political history, sometimes by choice and others by machinations of unyielding political traditions. Whether deliberately isolated, the effects are quite palpable today. How do African American political candidacies and the African American electorate navigate the complexities of politics while maintaining or sustaining a meaningful identity that promotes not only survival but success? The ethos of American politics must change to incorporate every segment of the general electorate which embodies true political openness during a period in American history where racial biases have resurfaced.

Given that racial rancor is increasing in America, it is unsurprising that African American candidacies are on the rise. The United States of America is undoubtedly a racialized country and will continue that trajectory for the near future. Hence, African American political candidacies and their relationships with the African American electorate provides a unique opportunity to explore race and politics in their unadulterated states. While African Americans are not the only race or ethnicity that has a tragic history, as a racial group, it has been subjected to oppression throughout American history. Therefore, two African American political candidacies (Abrams and Gillum) were used to determine the extent to which African American political candidacies invoke feelings of linked fate, political efficacy, and a need for descriptive representation among the African American electorate. Thus, each candidacy provides fodder for robust conversations regarding the need for augmented theories that comprehensively explain African American political behavior.

Florida and Georgia, as well as most states, have never had popularly elected African American governors post-Reconstruction ⁶. Florida and Georgia, states that have historically been hostile to the franchise of African Americans, are either exemplars of progress or regression. Hence, understanding African American candidacies in high-profile elections could provide a clearer trajectory of African American political viability and electability in the future as American demographics shift.

What do the results suggest about Florida and Georgia's 2018 gubernatorial elections? The results most certainly address a need for more nuanced theoretical frameworks for examining African American political behavior, voting and candidacy. *Utilizing descriptive representation, political efficacy and linked fate in concert could shift foci from established approaches to more expansive approaches eviscerating calls for parsimony.* Yet, limitations must also be addressed because meaning and interpretation of key concepts and theories could become convoluted reducing the likelihood of comprehending African American political progression. Florida and Georgia's gubernatorial elections are exceptions that may become the norm; thus, each must be treated as such. The results of each gubernatorial election are contextually and situationally driven.

Georgia

African Americans have always been one of the most disadvantaged races or ethnicities in America; therefore, the premise of this research focuses on the presumed racialized affinity African Americans have for one another when context and situation matter. As has been previously asserted, Georgia has never popularly elected an African American governor pre-Reconstruction or post-Reconstruction. While African Americans have made tremendous strides in this country,

⁶ Douglas Wilder in Virginia (1990-1994) and Lawrence Deval Patrick in Massachusetts (2007-2015).

Georgia's 2018 gubernatorial election is a stark reminder that African Americans must funnel efforts into African American candidacies, or the likelihood of success diminishes. Georgia's gubernatorial election results infer African American candidacies are hinged on the mobilization of the African American electorate, bolstering the assumption of extant research. In other words, African American, men and women alike, viewed Abrams with a simulacrum of kinship because she was fighting to transmogrify the status quo of white male dominated politics in a part of the country where "good ole boy" politics still thrive.

The phenomenon of linked fate is palpable in Georgia state politics because African Americans are keenly aware of how the racialization of politics operates. The fate of African American candidacies in high-profile elections is controlled by the African American electorate, aided by its coalitions and cohorts, which does not diminish notions of linked fate or racialized affinity⁷ among African Americans. Linked fate among African Americans is therefore not controversial because persons with similar backgrounds are likely to build stronger connections than with individuals who are dissimilar. An associative connection exists among African American candidates and the African American electorate and race sometimes plays an integral role in its political decision-making. It is easier to identify with a person or persons who share similar physical characteristics and cultural understanding which is a form of heuristics.

Identity politics, often viewed negatively, does not necessarily have to have negative connotations or denotations. Likewise, African Americans are viewed as an amalgamation rather than disparate individuals with disparate interests and concerns. Political candidates often have a targeted set of individuals from whom votes are preferred. Simply stated, African American

⁷ Racialized affinity does not promote hatred of other races or ethnicities.

candidates seek African American votes which is intertwined with notions of descriptive representation. Election 2016 is impetus enough for an increased awareness for the need of descriptive representation in politics. Racism was one of many troubling campaign tactics Trump employed to secure his presidential victory. So then, the question becomes: does who represents whom truly matter during times of social and political upheavals?

Georgia's 2018 gubernatorial election results point to the affirmative. The African American electorate, in Georgia, overwhelmingly voted for Abrams because she was more representative of its population. For much of African American political history, there has been a dearth of African American candidacies for executive offices among states and Georgia is no exception to the rule. When given the opportunity to choose who represents it, the African American electorate adjusts its political behavior in response to socio-political and psychological stimuli. Internally the African American electorate must overcome psychological barriers that either limit a willingness to engage or produce political apathy. Each of which is problematic for African American candidacies because African American votes are critical to success at best and defeat at worst. There is no differentiation between substantive and descriptive representation within the African American electorate so who represents whom does matter.

Descriptive representation is more than merely occupying spaces. It creates a political ethos of openness and adds a forthright element to political processes including campaigning with the prospect of being elected which reduces the effects of external stimuli such as racism in politics. While linked fate, descriptive representation and political efficacy are linked, each has a definitive role in the outcomes of African American political behavior but must not be ignored as a collective to uphold conventional wisdom. When given purpose, the African American electorate engages in

strategic ways increasing the likelihood of future African American candidacies being successful albeit historical evidence points to the contrary.

African American candidacies are on the rise and as a result proportionally affects notions of political efficacy- a positive cognitive process that recognizes strength in numbers is necessary for collective action. Critical Mass Theory, although some argue is now defunct, is still a useful tool to measure the ability of underrepresented groups, race and gender included, to invoke needs for conversations about race and gender in politics. Past and present research provides a vast array of percentages that represent the proverbial “tipping point.” There is no precise methodological approach that can pinpoint maximal output of effort or effectively measure the success of signals sent to external stimuli. For this research, tipping point will be considered successful if the presence in each category is at least 25 percent⁸.

Because Abrams is an African American woman, intersectionality and the role African American women played in solidifying a strong gubernatorial candidacy for Abrams must not be overlooked. While Abrams was defeated, cultural understanding and sensitivity among African American women buoyed her candidacy to near victory. African American women voted more than African American men in Georgia’s 2018 gubernatorial election⁹. As with any other form of descriptive representation, gender representation, especially among African American women, is minimal in politics. Like any other theory, Critical Mass Theory has been critiqued for its inability to account for the efforts of a few over the many. The magnitude of effort of a small, underrepresented group is often overshadowed when the intended goal is not met. Victory is the

⁸ Centola, et al. 2018 low-end estimate for tipping point or underrepresented group saturation, race and gender included.

⁹ Georgia’s African American female population has not reached critical mass.

goal of electoral politics; subsequently, marginal defeats cast doubt about the suitability or political viability regarding African American candidacies. African American women expressed their political support for Abrams by quietly casting ballots for her even though she lost. The magnitude of impact, however, is more important although African American women have not gained critical mass in the state of Georgia.

On the contrary, Georgia's African American population has met critical mass and therefore there is a likelihood Georgia's African American electorate can effect political change. The prospect for African American candidates is moving in an overwhelmingly positive direction post-Election 2016 and gubernatorial election 2018. Prognosis of success, however, is no guarantee that African American political candidacies will be successful, in Georgia, because of the nuances of politics. The precise nature of future socio-political change cannot be determined because too many variables must be considered. The likelihood of Georgia politics progressing and becoming more diverse is highly likely, but a measure of caution is necessary because African American candidacies in high-profile gubernatorial elections are developing; time will tell if African American candidacies aided by high African American voter turnout will yield more high-profile victories.

Florida

The election results of Florida's 2018 gubernatorial election provide opportunities for an alternative analysis regarding how linked fate, political efficacy and descriptive representation fuel African American political candidacies and the African American electorate's willingness to vote in high-profile elections. Consequently, there are stark differences between electoral politics in Florida and Georgia, driving a cautionary tell that supports a contextual or situational paradigm regarding the connection between African American candidacies and the African American

electorate. That is not to say, African American candidacies are not strongly correlated to African American voter turnout. Nevertheless, it does suggest, while Abrams and Gillum did face similar obstacles during their candidacies, the impetus for the results may have entirely different origins, which must be explored separately.

Linked fate is just as important in Florida as in Georgia; yet Florida's African American electorate's willingness to engage was not tied to feelings of shared historical or cultural backgrounds due in part to immigration patterns in the area. Large populations of Black immigrants who do not have the same cultural or historical ties to Black Americans are less likely to use "Black Utility Heuristics" when deciding to vote or not vote for an African American candidate solely because of shared experiences. The Black immigrant population is tremendously diverse and is more likely to participate differently than American Descendants of Slaves¹⁰. A more nuanced exploration of linked fate among Florida's Black electorate is necessary to determine if points of origin can eschew feelings of linked fate.

No feeling of linked fate is found among Florida's African American electorate; on the contrary, raw numbers infer that Black voter turnout increased during Florida's 2018 gubernatorial election. What fueled increased Black voter turnout in Florida? There is no easy answer. Yet, several assumptions can be proffered alongside contextual and situational analyses: 1) the composition of an underrepresented group in an area potentially affects political behavior, 2) immediate events influence political decision-making more than historical events and 3) an individual's willingness to vote is influenced by ambient figures.

¹⁰ Often Black immigrant populations view themselves differently than Black Americans because there is a disconnect from historical or cultural events of importance to Black Americans.

Attached to notions of collective action is a sense of belonging, increasing an individual's connection to a whole. In this regard, descriptive representation is no different, the African American electorate, like any other segment of the electorate, has a preferred candidate which is implicitly understood. Voting trends illustrate that African Americans are more likely to vote for African American candidates; however, it is difficult to determine a place or time success is likely. Florida's African American electorate once again did not establish a clear connection with voting and a need for descriptive representation within political processes. It does not necessarily mean the African American electorate, in Florida, has abandoned or does not appreciate descriptive representation. Unlike Georgia, Florida's political evolution is progressing much slower and is yet to receive a catalytic spark. Once a catalytic spark has been set, calls for descriptive representation among Florida's African American electorate will increase and voter turnout will increase many folds.

Moreover, no relationship has been established among Florida's African American electorate's ability to politically engage and increased notions of political efficacy. While the African American electorate overwhelmingly voted for Gillum, increased feelings of political efficacy did not influence voter turnout. It is possible to suggest African Americans feel comfortable with current electoral processes in Florida politics. The previous assertion may incite controversy; however, it is more of an assumption to explain African American political behavior and not to provide a sound basis for generalization about observed phenomena. If voting equates to purpose, several plausible explanations exist to explain absences of feelings of linked fate, needs for descriptive representation and feelings of political efficacy within Florida's African American electorate.

Critical Mass Theory appears to provide one of the most logical explanations of African American political behavior for Florida's gubernatorial election 2018. Compared to Georgia's African American population (32 percent), Florida's African American population is merely 16 percent which has not met critical mass. Following that rationale, Florida's African American population has not saturated the general population enough to impose its presence during gubernatorial elections. Thus, the maximum number of African Americans voting in Florida's 2018 gubernatorial election could not tip the scale in Gillum's favor which by no means diminishes Florida's African American electorate's political prowess. The African American electorate, in Florida, has not reached critical mass which in turn could produce a catalytic spark for political evolution.

Finally, a secondary explanation for increased African American voter turnout in Florida without the presence of linked fate, descriptive representation and political efficacy lies with immediacy of need. The immediacy of need refers to the African American electorate voting in large numbers, not to invoke feelings of connectedness or unity, but to the immediate external stimulus of Trump's 2016 presidential victory. Hence, the agent for change is Trump, not changing the political status quo. The African American electorate transmitted a warning signal, in Florida, with a potential for increased political action in the future, which means it has reserved the right to act or not act until further notice.

Final Observations

While both Abrams and Gillum lost their gubernatorial election bids in 2018, in Georgia and Florida respectively, signs point to increased political engagement in both locales strictly

based upon raw numbers. Was there a noticeable difference between the two candidacies¹¹? If the goal of political candidacy is to be elected, then both candidacies were unsuccessful; yet ambient issues regarding African American electoral politics were on full display. It is difficult not to point out a hyper-awareness in the African American electorate during these two respective election cycles. Each candidacy must be viewed contextually and situationally and with cautious optimism. The composition of the electorate for any underrepresented group is an integral part of understanding what drives political action or political inertia.

The mere physical presence of Abrams on the ballot produced increased African American voter turnout in Georgia; however, so did Gillum's presence on Florida's ballot but for distinct reasons. Therefore, over-generalizations cannot be made based upon gathered evidence and the results of this research. African American gubernatorial candidacies are not the norm; therefore, much more data is needed to definitively address how the African American electorate navigates state gubernatorial politics and utilizes its political power via the ballot box. There is benefit in using linked fate, descriptive representation, and political efficacy as a combination of phenomena rather than single, disparate phenomena that each have their own function when discussing African American candidacies and their relationships to the African American electorate.

Dissertation Contribution

Florida and Georgia's 2018 gubernatorial elections garnered significant attention during Trump's tenure in office, especially regarding African American candidacies and their relationship to the African American electorate. Current research contends successes or failures of African

¹¹ Both Gillum's and Abrams' defeats render gender-based comparisons moot because race was an overriding factor for general electorate. This does not reduce the potentiality that Abrams encountered gender discrimination.

American candidacies are connected to the African American electorate's willingness to politically engage. Linked fate, descriptive representation and political efficacy, major theoretical underpinnings are treated as disparate phenomena that occur independently of one another. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to provide new theoretical insight as it pertains to studying African American political behavior by utilizing linked fate, descriptive representation, and political efficacy as a conglomerate to elucidate African American political behavior.

Underlying assumptions, therefore, address the need for augmented theoretical foundations among current research and literature. It is understood that voting begins with the individual; however, voting, as an individual action, has transformative qualities when individuals of politically underrepresented groups recognize the power of collective action, whether done conspicuously or inconspicuously. African American history illustrates African Americans are much stronger when they function as a collective rather than disparate individuals with variegated needs. Yet even that assumption proves problematic when exploring the African American electorate because there is a presumption that group needs override individual needs.

Whether the previous assumption is true, without a doubt studying Abrams and Gillum's 2018 gubernatorial election bids and the connection African American candidates share with the African American electorate strengthens existing research and contributes to a vast catalogue of research. African American political history is evolving; hence, approaches to studying phenomena within the African American electorate must evolve as extraordinary events transpire. It by no means suggests this study is perfect; it does, however, highlight the complexities of African American political behavior and assails traditional characteristics of African American political viability and electability. The African American electorate is not inert; it is highly active and moves strategically as needed.

Florida and Georgia's 2018 gubernatorial elections provided exemplars; nevertheless, each produced different results relative to the African American electorate because of contradictory results. The results of each do not overshadow any contributions made because as African American gubernatorial candidacies increase linked fate, descriptive representation, and political efficacy as a set of phenomena will be used to explore not only African American political behavior but political behavior of other groups within the general electorate. A novel theoretical approach has been contributed to scholarly tomes; nonetheless, as with any scholarly contribution, it is a start.

Future Research

The focus of this research was to discern whether using linked fate, descriptive representation, and political efficacy in concert rather than using them disparately better explains African American political behavior. African Americans frequently have a racialized affinity for African American candidacies. This research explored a cause-and-effect relationship between African American candidacies and African American voter turnout at the gubernatorial level but did not explore how African American political affinity affects African American candidacies based upon the candidate's party identification. African Americans tend to be quite liberal and tend to vote for Democrats. Further avenues of research should explore political affinity, party identification and political ideology more closely. In other words, does the African American electorate share an overriding sense of kinship with Republican African American candidates?

A wealth of research has been conducted regarding the mayoral successes of African American candidacies; however, future research should address federal and state offices using linked fate, descriptive representation, and political efficacy in concert because a significant amount could be learned about African American candidacies and their relationships to the African

American electorate through larger elections. Finally, Critical Mass Theory, which is being assailed for reliability, should be explored to determine the precise threshold or saturation the African American electorate must reach to influence electoral politics.

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APPENDIX A

List of Variables

| Variables | Source | Coding |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Dependent | | |
| African American Votes | Florida and Georgia Department of State | Actual Number |
| Independent | | |
| Linked Fate | American National Election Studies | Percent of African Americans who feel they share similar fate with other African Americans |
| Political Efficacy | American National Election Studies | Composite Score |
| Descriptive Representation | American National Election Series | Composite Score |
| Controls | | |
| Education | Florida and Georgia Department Elections | Actual Number by Level of Education |
| Gender | Florida and Georgia Department of Elections | Actual Number of Votes by Gender |
| Affinity | American National Election Studies | Party Affinity (Strength) |
| Presence of a Female Candidate | Biographical Information | Actual Information obtained by Observation |
| Presence of a Black Candidate | Biographical Information | Actual Information obtained by Observation |

APPENDIX B

Likelihood of Increased African American Political Participation

| | Florida | Georgia |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Variables | | |
| Independent | | |
| Linked Fate | -1.45(.77) | 2.22(1.15) ** |
| Descriptive Representation | -1.34(.33) | 3.45(.03) *** |
| Political Efficacy | -1.59(1.23) | 1.98(1.46) ** |
| Presence of a Black Candidate | 2.12(.96) ** | 1.88(.85) * |
| Presence of a Female Candidate | N/A | 1.77(1.35) * |
| Control Variables | | |
| Gender | | |
| Female | 4.57(1.28) *** | 5.38(1.18) *** |
| Male | -1.69(.45) * | -1.96(.66) ** |
| Education | -1.24(.87) | 1.63(.72) |
| Affiliation | 1.04(.57) | 2.35(1.02) ** |
| Immigrants | -4.66(.22) *** | 1.55(.06) |
| | | |
| Number of Observations | 2345 | 2227 |

Level of significance is notated as follows: $p \leq .10$ is *, $p \leq .05$ is **, $p \leq .01$ is ***, Robust standard errors in parentheses.