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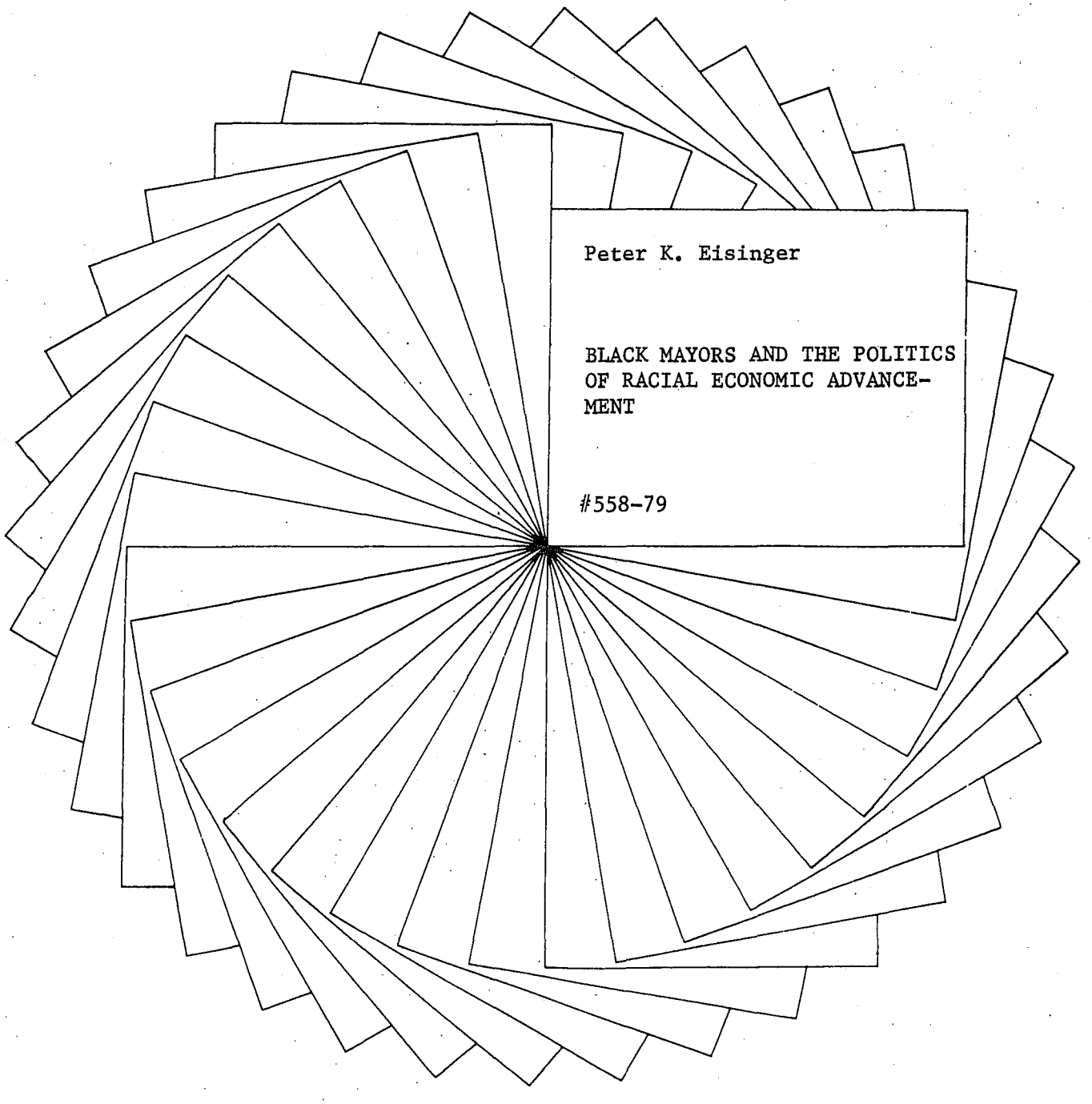

BLACK MAYORS and the POLITICS of RACIAL ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT

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ABSTRACT

An analysis of personnel policies and city purchasing and contracting patterns in cities governed by black mayors suggests that the black mayors have adapted modern techniques of public administration to serve traditional ethnic income goals once pursued by urban machines. By guaranteeing the increased participation of blacks in municipal civil service jobs and in city purchasing, the black mayors are making city government a significant focus for the redistribution of income. The implications of this analysis, which examines data on the increase in black participation in these areas in six large cities, are (a) that the capture of city hall by blacks can have important economic consequences for the black community; (b) that the politics of ethnic (or racial) advancement once practiced by traditional machines is possible even under the rationalized techniques of modern public administration.

BLACK MAYORS and the POLITICS of RACIAL ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT

Except for a few isolated survivors, the traditional urban machine, that marvel of disciplined organization in pursuit of bread and butter goals, may safely be pronounced a thing of the past, a colorful exhibit in the gallery of political Americana.[1] Even if the current tone of city politics has lost little of the intensity it had during the heyday of the machine, its practice nevertheless now represents the triumph of an occasionally over-rationalized public administration. The widely accepted reasons for the demise of the machine are legion: For example, the supplanting of the machine reward system of selective patronage and side-payments by bureaucratized social welfare programs, the economic assimilation of the ethnic groups that once ran the machines, the spread of municipal civil service coverage and the concomitant decline of patronage opportunities, and the rationalization of municipal contracting and purchasing.[2] What these changes mean, quite simply, is that most people now find that they can produce economic benefits for themselves similar to those the machines once offered without making the sorts of commitments of political energy and loyalty that urban machine organizations required and without regard to whether "their" side has won or lost in a local political contest. For members of the victorious group <u>income</u> gained through the preferential acquisition of jobs and contracts is no longer a very important goal to be sought through local political action. Certainly this is the case in places where issues of equity and efficiency in service delivery, local economic development, and the quality of the urban environment and infrastructure dominate political debate rather than the possibili-

ties for particularistic income redistribution (Stone et al., 1979, p. 100). Individuals and groups seeking to affect income levels through the manipulation of political institutions now focus on the government in Washington, the source since the Depression of public welfare benefits and the presumptive master of macroeconomic tools to regulate wages and prices.

However, an emergent development in black-mayor cities that partakes of both the old machine pattern and the practices of the contemporary rationalized urban government is the adaptation of the techniques of the new public administration to serve the same particularistic income goals which once galvanized the machines. To be sure, the quest for jobs and contracts no longer seems motivated so much by the need to reward and control electoral supporters, nor are these efforts the concern only of black mayors; but like much of the machine politics of old, current efforts to use the local polity to augment income reflect, in the hands of black mayors particularly, a politics of ethnic (or racial) advancement. The income goals sought by black politicians specifically for their black consituents occupy a high place in the mayors' agendas and influence their basic strategies of governance.

The major techniques black mayors use in quest of income opportunities for their black constituents involve a variety of affirmative action rules that bear on public and private sector employment and on the distribution of city contracts. Since increased black participation in the local labor market and the contracting system require a healthy local economy, black mayors have tended to develop styles of governance dominated by the need to establish close relations with the white business community in their city. The consequences of these efforts, as we shall see in the data which follow, have

been to expand black participation in a variety of public sector income producing activities in a very short period of time.

Data pertaining to several aspects of black participation in public sector employment and in municipal contracting were gathered for the six largest cities which still had black mayors in office in 1978 (Atlanta, Detroit, Gary, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and Newark).[3] Since no public central depository of such material exists and since cities are neither compelled to reveal nor even to save data on these matters, there tend to be gaps and a lack of comparability in the presentation. Nevertheless, a combination of site visits and telephone interviews produced sufficient information to suggest an important preoccupation in these cities with using control over the institutions of local government to enlarge black access to public money.

1. ADAPTING THE SYSTEM TO BLACK INCOME GOALS

In contrast to practices in existence in the machine era, nearly all municipal hiring and purchasing today are governed by bureaucratized, competitive rules. Civil service regulations require hiring largely on the basis of merit qualifications, and city contracts on everything from multimillion dollar airport expansion to paper clip supplies are let on the basis of secret, competitive bidding. How, then, have the black mayors adapted this rationalized system to serve the goals of racial economic advancement through participation in the receipt of public expenditures? There appear to be three principal techniques that bear on public sector operations: the aggressive

pursuit of affirmative action strategies, the use of racial criteria in exercising appointment powers in city government, and the imposition of city residency requirements for municipal civil servants.

Affirmative Action Strategies

Nearly all cities now have local affirmative action laws bearing on municipal employment, and all cities are bound by the 1972 Equal Employment Opportunity Act to hire in a nondiscriminatory way and to report periodically to the federal government on their affirmative action performance. Nevertheless, the existence of such pressures does not necessarily mean that city administrations will pursue affirmative action policies vigorously or even place the hiring of minorities high on the agenda of priorities. For example, although a post of affirmative action officer was created in Atlanta by the white mayor who preceded Maynard Jackson, it was not filled until the black mayor came into office nearly a year and a half later. A study of 16 Southern cities averaging more than one-third black in population found not only that blacks were severely underrepresented in local government service, particularly at the managerial level, but that only 2 of the 16 cities had even developed affirmative action plans in 1975 (New York Times, May 25, 1978).

In black-mayor cities affirmative action has been used to take the offensive. City personnel departments in these places have not waited passively for black applicants to appear but have initiated active recruitment searches. Detroit's Personnel Office, for example, began a program whereby it identified promising black students in college and offered them internships during their senior year in the hopes of attracting them to city government service after graduation. Atlanta's search for minority city employees took recruiters into surrounding black colleges and even high schools. In

both cities the black mayors ordered the reevaluation of selection procedures, which led to a deemphasis on written examinations. At least in five of the six black-mayor cities the head of the personnel office was black.

In the five black-mayor cities for which some data are available it is clear that black public sector employment has been a focus of affirmative action efforts (see Table 1). Note that in the three cases for which data over time are provided, black employment increased even though municipal public sector employment in Detroit and Atlanta was decreasing (Judd, 1979, p. 201; Jones, 1978, p. 116). Black public employment in all three cities also increased faster than estimated local black population increases. Indeed, black representation in the Los Angeles city workforce slightly exceeded the proportion black in the city as a whole, and first quarter figures for 1978 on black city employment in Atlanta (59%) and Gary (77%) indicate a similar conclusion for those cities. Perhaps most important of all are the sizable advances made by blacks at the top of the civil service employment hierarchy, namely at the administrator and professional levels. The rate of increase in these categories was substantially more rapid in Los Angeles, Detroit, and Atlanta than the rate of increase in total black municipal employment.

As figures in Table 2 show, black increases in police employment in particular are even more dramatic. In the space of 10 years black representation on the Detroit police force increased sixfold and in Newark and Atlanta threefold. Starting with a higher base the number of blacks on the forces in Gary and Washington still doubled. The only exception to this growth occurs in Los Angeles, significantly the only city on the list without a black majority and one of the two cities (the other is Washington; Preston, 1976, p. 125)

Table 1. Affirmative Action Hiring of Blacks in City Employment

City	% Black Population[a]	% Blacks Hired	
		1973	1977
Los Angeles (1973)[b]	20	22	24
Totals			
administrators		1.3	3.9
professionals		5	7
Newark (1970)	58	--	40.8
Totals			
administrators		--	24.4
professionals		--	43.2
Atlanta (1973)	60	41.5	51
Totals			
administrators		--	--
professionals		19	28
Detroit (1973)	58	45.1	53.1
Totals			
administrators		12.1	23.5
professionals		22.8	41.1
Gary (1967)	60	--	77
Totals			
administrators		--	63
professionals		--	71

Source: Personnel departments of each city.

[a]Estimated percentage black of total population of cities in 1978.

[b]Date in parentheses is the date of the first election of a black mayor.

Table 2. Blacks on Police Forces[a]

City	Percentage Black in Selected Years	
Los Angeles	5 (1971)	6 (1978)
Newark	9 (1970)	25 (1977)
Atlanta	9 (1967)	33 (1978)
Detroit	5 (1967)	30 (1978)
Washington[b]	22 (1968)	44 (1978)
Gary	22 (1968)	47 (1977)

Source: Police departments of each city.

[a]Recordkeeping varies markedly from city to city. Some places have data which predate the election of the black mayors; others do not. Dates in parentheses in the left hand column are the closest to the date of the first election of a black mayor; dates in the right hand column are the latest available.

[b]Washington's black mayor was appointed in 1967; the first popular election of a mayor took place in 1974.

which did not have a black police chief during the mid-1970s.

Besides seeking to expand black employment opportunities in the public sector, black mayors have also attempted to expand the participation of minority-owned firms in city contracting and purchasing. The figures offered in Table 3a are not strictly comparable from city to city since the basis on which such statistics are kept varies widely. Nevertheless, the data for Washington, Detroit, and Atlanta show plainly that black participation in public purchasing contracts has swelled from virtually nothing at the beginning of the 1970s to a substantial share by 1978 (see also Table 3b).[4] Such increases cannot be explained by the imposition of federal minority "set-aside" requirements, some of which -- regarding public works, for example-- date as far back as the Lyndon Johnson administration. Rather, initiatives taken by the black-mayor administrations appear to be the decisive factors.

The participation of minority firms in city business has been augmented in part by advertising efforts of city purchasing departments that are designed to let black entrepreneurs know the range of products and services the city buys. In Detroit, Los Angeles, and Newark minority businesspeople are even invited to visit the city purchasing department to discuss city needs. In addition, some black-mayor cities have developed more elaborate devices to make possible greater minority business involvement.

In Atlanta, joint venturing enables many small minority firms that could not have submitted bids on their own to participate in city business. All firms in that city that submit a bid on a municipal purchase or project must meet minority hiring goals established by the city's contract compliance officer; a firm not in compliance may have its bid turned back, even if it is the lowest. However, a white-owned firm not in compliance may be allowed to

Table 3. City Contracting and Purchasing Going to Minority-Owned Enterprises

A. In percentages, 1973-1978

City	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
1. Data on total spending						
Atlanta	2	13	n.a.	n.a.	16	33[a]
Washington	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2	3	10[a]
2. Data only on spending handled through a central purchasing dept.						
Detroit[b]	3	n.a.	n.a.	9	20	33[a]
Los Angeles	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	21[c]
3. Data only on public works projects						
Gary	n.a.	59	50	71	63.6	n.a.
Newark	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	18

B. In Millions of Dollars, 1977-1978

Atlanta	36.3 (1977)
Washington	2.5 (1977)
Detroit	21.6 (1977)
Los Angeles	15.0 (1978)
Gary	1.4 (1977)
Newark	6.9 (1978)

Sources: Individual purchasing, engineering, and redevelopment departments.

[a]Figures for first 6 months only.

[b]Includes nearly all major expenditures and contracts except for repairs and maintenance handled by individual departments.

[c]This figure is an estimate provided by the purchasing department of business going to minority-owned and "small" firms.

undertake a city contract if it develops a good-faith hiring plan and if it agrees to a joint venture--an arrangement in which the white-owned firm is joined by a black-owned firm in order to merge resources, perform the contractual obligation jointly, and share in the profits on the basis of a negotiated formula. Joint ventures in Atlanta's massive airport expansion project account for the relatively high minority share of city expenditures shown in Table 3b.

Detroit has established a preference system for local firms when its city purchasing department reviews bids. Although not all local firms are minority-owned, of course, the preamble to the city ordinance establishing preferential treatment expressly states the intent of the law "to aid those small business concerns which...are owned by socially or economically disadvantaged persons" (Ordinance 52-H, 1975). In comparing bids the ordinance provides that the bid of a local firm is treated as the better bid even if it is as much as 2% higher than that of a firm based outside of Detroit.

It should be noted that in all cities 10% of federal public works funds are set aside by federal law for minority contractors. Newark, however, attempts to set aside a minimum of 25% of these expenditures for minority entrepreneurs. In addition, local ordinances in all six cities require that private firms interested in bidding on city contracts or which take advantage of publicly financed tax abatement or economic development plans must meet affirmative action hiring criteria. Although there are few reliable data bearing on the impact of such rules on the racial makeup of the private sector labor force, city officials nevertheless believe that they possess a modest tool to enlarge minority job opportunities in private firms.

City Government Appointments

A second technique black mayors have used to expand black income opportunities through public sector employment is the appointment of a high proportion of black supervisors in the municipal civil service corps. Appointment powers vary from city to city but the black mayors of Detroit, Atlanta, and Gary--all strong mayor cities--have appointed blacks to more than half the department head positions (see Table 4). Since department heads ultimately evaluate and promote employees under them, getting blacks into these key "gate-keeper" positions is seen as critical to black employment and advancement opportunities (personal interviews, May 18, 1978; May 23, 1978). Even in Newark, where the mayor's appointive powers are relatively limited, the mayor has been able to appoint blacks in majority numbers to the Affirmative Action Review Council, the Newark Human Rights Commission, and the Committee on the Status of Women, all of which exert influence on agency personnel practices.

City Residency Requirements

A third device that black mayors have used to increase black employment opportunities is the imposition of city residence requirements on municipal workers (see Table 5). Requiring city employees to live within the city limits has recently become an issue laden with racial overtones. Playing particularly on the image of white police forces whose members commute to their jobs from the suburbs as occupying armies in the ghettos, black politicians have been prominent in the call for residency laws. With the city no longer obligated under such laws to draw from the predominantly white metropolitan labor force, black job aspirants in the increasingly black central city face a more favorable structure of competition. Residency requirements are not, of course, designed solely to aid central city minority groups--in regard to police employ-

Table 4. Mayoral Appointments of Blacks To City Government, 1977-1978

City	Department and Agency Heads	Boards and Commissions
Atlanta	55.5%	46%
Gary	66.7	n.a.
Detroit	51.3	44
Los Angeles	n.a.	35
Newark	n.a.	51.4
Washington	n.a.	n.a.

Table 5. City Residency Requirements For Municipal Employees

City	Action Taken Under Black Mayor
Atlanta	Executive order requiring city residence for all appointees (1974). City residency requirement for new police and fire department employees (1976).
Washington	City residency requirement for all city employees (1980).
Newark	City residency requirement for all city employees except police, fire and school personnel, who are exempted by state law (1975).
Gary	City residency requirement for all city employees (1978).
Los Angeles	City residency requirement for all city employees (1972). Subsequently repealed by state constitutional initiative. A city ordinance requiring firefighters to live in the city predates the black mayor.
Detroit	None. A general residency requirement dates from the turn of the century.

ment, for example, three quarters of all cities over 250,000 have such rules (ICMA, 1974, p.222)--but it is striking that residency laws were passed in five of the six cities under discussion during black-mayor regimes. In the sixth city, Detroit, Mayor Coleman Young has been a vigorous defender of the residency law when it has come under periodic attack by the Detroit Police Officers Association.

2. BLACK POLITICAL ALLIANCE WITH WHITE ECONOMIC POWER

Expanding black income opportunities is viewed by urban black mayors as a central issue facing their cities (Hatcher, 1971, pp. 123, 128). The quest for jobs and the rhetoric about "saving" their cities through economic development have at their core a concern with black poverty and unemployment. To produce income opportunities most black mayors have pursued a strategy designed to establish a partnership with the dominant white business and industrial interests in their city. The black mayors operate on the basis of a simple equation: Private economic development in the city produces jobs in the private sector and tax money that may be used for jobs and purchases in the public sector. Through the various affirmative action devices discussed above, a certain proportion of these jobs and purchases may be channeled to the black community.

Mayor Carl Stokes established the basic pattern when he set out to mobilize a fragmented business community that had shown little interest in the rebuilding of Cleveland (Rogers, 1971, p. 120). The revival of downtown Detroit and the erection of new insurance industry skyscrapers in Newark are the fruit of the coalition strategies of Mayors Coleman Young and Kenneth Gibson (on Newark, see New York Times, July 2, 1977; May 3, 1978). Airport expansion and the

construction of a mass transit system serving the downtown are the product of Maynard Jackson's alliance (although occasionally tentative) with Atlanta business interests. In Los Angeles Mayor Bradley was so assiduous in his pursuit of downtown redevelopment in league with the city's business interests that he jeopardized his support in the 1977 election campaign in some segments of the black community, which claimed that he had forgotten them (New York Times, Dec. 5, 1975, Dec. 27, 1976).

The decision to follow a strategy of coalition with white business means that a number of other possible governing strategies must be foregone. Black auto-development or separatism is not only seen as too radical in a biracial city but as economically doomed to failure. Coalition with poor whites, that is, the pursuit of a politics of class, is seen as a threat that could drive white business from the city. Coalition with the white middle class, a possible third strategy, is viewed as the least productive alternative of all, for it is among the dwindling central city middle class that opposition to school integration and the sharing of public sector jobs with blacks (on the police force, for example) is lodged. Thus it is that the black mayors have come to the ironic conclusion that to use the local political system to create income opportunities for blacks, one must forge a coalition with local private money. In a period in which federal grants are insufficient to offset the inflation which local governments face, in which even federal revenue-sharing funds may no longer be counted on, it is assumed that private investment finally determines whether local tax revenues will reach sufficiently high levels to permit the hiring of new policemen or enable the city to meet the matching requirements of job- and contract-producing federal public works grants.

Thus in most black-mayor cities the governing coalition represents an alliance of white economic power and black political power. Although it is not yet entirely clear whether such an alliance can affect black income levels on an aggregate basis, there are in the meantime certain negative costs to bear. Since the black mayors are under constant challenge by black groups claiming that the mayors have "sold out" to the white corporate rulers, they must spend a good deal of time performing rituals of reassurance before ghetto audiences. There is also a problem in such coalitions of finding a meaningful role for the white middle class to play in the affairs of the city. Certain of their political resources--their votes and their money--are virtually superfluous. Yet they constitute the clientele for many of the institutions and activities that give a city its character--its cultural amenities, shops, restaurants, libraries, universities, and so on--as well as a major proportion of the city's taxpayers. The consequences of their loss of interest in a city in which they play no great role in the governing process are grave.

3. THE POLITICS OF ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT

Machine politics in American cities began to disappear, according to accepted doctrine, in large part because the federal government began to take over, universalize, and bureaucratize the machine's income functions. The character of urban government, whatever it became, was no longer defined by its income-producing activities. To win control of city hall these days is no longer considered an achievement of great substantive value. Power is said to reside elsewhere: in metropolitan bodies, in Washington, in the state capital, in public employee union halls. Cities are too dependent economically on sources of revenue that they do not control, and their powers

are constrained by restrictive charters. It has taken the emergence of black urban mayors, voted into office by ghetto majorities, to rediscover the possibilities for expanding income opportunities for ordinary people through local political action.

Exactly how significant are these possibilities? It is too early to tell whether blacks in black-mayor cities have made genuine income advances in relation to whites. But we can show the implications of the income-producing strategies pursued by black urban administrators. It may reasonably be argued that municipal jobs presently may support between 7 and 15% of the black populations of the cities under discussion. When we use the following simple formula,

$$\frac{P\ (N)\ x\ 4}{B}$$

where P = percentage of municipal jobs held by blacks

N = total number of municipal jobs

4 = hypothetical number of persons potentially supported by one job

B = total black population,

we find that in 1977, municipal employment could have supported as much as 15% of Newark's black population, 10% in Gary, 8% of all blacks in Atlanta and Los Angeles, and 7% of Detroit's blacks. It is notable that the percentage of blacks potentially supported by municipal employment grew in Atlanta from 5% in 1973, while in Los Angeles the figure remained stable at 8% despite the influx of more than 40,000 additional blacks between 1970 and 1975. In Detroit severe fiscal difficulties in the mid-1970s led to the loss of more than 10% of the local government work force between 1969 and 1977, but the percentage of the black population potentially supported by municipal employment declined only from 8 to 7%.

Establishing historical comparisons with other ethnic groups to put these figures into perspective is a difficult task. However, the Irish experience provides the most obvious analogy. Irish political power in American cities developed in the decades around the turn of the century. A major consequence of their local political success was the capture of a disproportionate share of public sector jobs at all levels and of government contracts. Although the general pattern is well known and innumerable case studies exist of Irish patronage and municipal employment strategies, there are few hard data to make direct, aggregate comparisons with the current black experience.

Stephen Erie's (1978) work on San Francisco, however, permits a limited comparison by allowing us to estimate the extent to which local municipal employment supported the Irish population in that city in 1900 (a year in which the Irish dominated the city's politics and municipal work force). Irish city employees in San Francisco, comprising slightly more than one-third of the entire public service workforce, probably supported no more than 10% of the Irish population.[5]

Set against the extraordinary level of Irish socioeconomic achievement by the 1970s, such a figure does not seem insignificant. Public service jobs seem to have established for the Irish an economically secure lower middle and middle class, which, if initially small, nevertheless provided the resources to support and encourage the advancement of succeeding generations. By 1970 the Irish ranked as the most successful gentile group in the United States on most measures of socioeconomic achievement (Greeley, 1976, pp. 45-56).

Since the days of Irish dominance in city jobs, the public sector has grown substantially, opening up more substantial employment opportunities for

blacks than the Irish had. Although the steady growth of city government may be at an end as the nation begins the decade of the 1980s, there is no doubt that city service has already provided the base for the emergence of a black urban professional and managerial corps as well as an economically secure work force in the uniformed services, mass transit, and clerical professions. With the growth in local government spending compared to the Irish heyday and the additional opening of the municipal purchasing and contracting process to black entrepreneurs, black business and black labor may be expected to grow. All of these gains, upon which a certain segment of the urban black population may be expected to build a substantial level of economic security for succeeding generations, have come in large part as a consequence of manipulating the local political system. Winning influence in or control of city hall, then, is no mere symbolic achievement for blacks: Mastering local government can have significant economic consequences for blacks.

NOTES

[1]A few machines still apparently exist. Michael Johnston (1979), for example, reminds us of the continuing vitality of machine politics in New Haven. But on the whole, the machine is an anachronism.

[2]Greenstein's article (1964) is the classic summary of these reasons.

[3]New Orleans is not included, since the black mayor, Ernest Morial, was elected only in 1978.

[4]Early lack of black participation was not necessarily a function of lack of black enterprises. The number of black-owned businesses with employees in 1972 in Atlanta was 442; in Detroit, 1104; in Gary, 199; and in Washington, 773 (Howard, 1978, p. 7).

[5]My calculations were made as follows. The first and second generation Irish population in San Francisco in 1900 amounted to approximately 80,500. Irish workers held a combined total of 2551 public service jobs in federal, state, and local government. Generously assuming that 2000 of those jobs might have been municipal in character and multiplying by a factor of 4, we arrive at a figure of slightly less than 10% of the Irish population supported by the city payroll. (For the figures on which my calculations were based, see Erie, 1978, p. 281.)

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