

Chapter 1

The State Link in the *Chain*

Throughout his tenure in office, Reagan explicitly and implicitly affirmed this broad commitment to stand tall against redistributive liberalism: in his successful repopulation of the federal judiciary with ideological conservatives . . . [to] his pointed efforts to force a retrenchment of welfare and the regulatory state; and in the major alteration of the federal tax code during his years in office.

—Mary D. Edsall and Thomas Byrne Edsall,
*Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights,
and Taxes on American Politics* (1991)

Power in American politics is not *where* it once was. Since the election of President Ronald Reagan, the increasingly centripetal nature of American politics—ideologically and programmatically—places the state and its discretionary power at the center of public policy development, implementation, and administration. “New federalism” and devolution initiatives have shifted power from Washington to the respective state governments.

Insofar as national programs are eliminated, scaled back, or diversified, the relocation of power to the states potentially imperils African American constituencies.¹ The 1996 enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) is the most notable evidence that power has been relocated from Washington and may not return. Passed by conservative congressional Republicans as an outgrowth of their “Contract with America” and signed into law by Democratic President William J. Clinton, PRWORA signals a new era in the politics of federalism and the politics of race. That Clinton, who won with strong support among African Americans, campaigned for reelection by promising to “end welfare as we know it”

confirms that the ideological landscape of American political power has shifted, perhaps irrevocably.

But the shift is more than ideological; it is also intergovernmental. Given that there are nearly 600 black state legislators nationwide and formal caucuses in 28 states, a preoccupation with the effectiveness of the relatively small (approximately 40 members) Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) therefore seems inadequate at best, and misfocused at worst. For example, the termination of national oversight over poverty reduction programs (i.e., TANF), the wider latitude given to states over environmental policies, and the policy trade-offs necessitated by federal “unfunded” mandates, may have adverse impacts on African American communities.² Once enacted into federal law, any prized piece of “black interest legislation” is often placed within a hostile environment of state governors, legislative leaders, and bureaucrats.³

Also, although extremely insightful, studies of the Congressional Black Caucus offer only one dimension to understanding how black legislators and black politics operate. State legislative environments are far more diverse and, given the interplay between societal and institutional actors, arguably more unpredictable and resistant to change than the congressional environment. Besides, the material conditions of African Americans are not only a function of how effectively CBC members navigate the federal environment, but also how effectively their legislative counterparts navigate the “troubled waters” of state politics in this new era of power.⁴ As such, black state legislative politics centers on a two-pronged concern: first, a struggle for inclusion in American governance institutions; and, second, a struggle for that inclusion to effect “several substantive ends rather than merely a symbolic end unto itself.”⁵ That two-pronged concern guides our study of black state legislators and their caucuses.

To achieve inclusion and its corresponding material benefits, during the past half-century black activists and politicians have slowly but steadily graduated from “protest to politics” (Tate 1994). But their transformation occurred alongside the shift from federal-centered to state-centered politics. As Michigan’s John Conyers, a future Congressional Black Caucus member, asserted in 1969, through political participation “black people [could] exert strong influence on state governments, [could] pressure Capitol Hill and force quite a bit of listening at the White House.”⁶ Three decades after Conyers spoke these words, we must assess whether black state elites “exert strong influence on state governments,” or national officials, to improve the material conditions of African Americans. We believe that assessment should focus specifically on black state legislators, for the political devolution of power to states has empowered state elites as much if not more than national ones.

In this book, we raise a variety of questions. First, how have black state legislators responded to the post-Reagan political environment of budgetary constraints, increasing conservatism, and increased responsibility in the public

policymaking process? What is the role of the formalized legislative black caucus (LBC) in state legislative politics? In what specific ways do black state representatives, and formalized caucuses, affect legislative institutions? What types of districts do black state legislators represent, and are there particular issues pertinent to those constituencies? What is the role of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL), the “national network and clearinghouse for the discussion, dissemination, and exchange of ideas and information,” in helping organizational members improve legislative effectiveness and the articulation, protection, and advancement of black interests?⁷ Finally, how do some black state legislators perceive the growing institutionalization of legislative power, and what impact does this perception have on the internal and external workings of state caucuses?

RACE AND CHANGING STATE–FEDERAL DYNAMICS

The ever-changing dynamics of state politics have significant impacts on race politics, and for three reasons: (1) the astounding growth in the number of black state elites, especially state legislators; (2) the state-level control of the increasingly important redistricting process; and (3) the diversity of opinion over whether there is an optimum level of black political incorporation or influence, and how such influence affects substantive representation. Taken together, these factors underscore the lack of appreciation for the shift in conflict from Capitol Hill to state legislatures, and for the full legacy of Reagan’s new federalism.

Growth in Black Numerical Presence

African American presence in electoral politics was significantly enhanced by the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This presence increased the total number of black elected officials (BEOs) across all levels of government: federal, state, county, education, municipal, and judicial. State legislators are no exception to this trend. Between 1970 and 2001 the number of black state legislators grew from less than 200 to nearly 600 (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies 1998; National Black Caucus of State Legislators 2001). These gains undoubtedly enable today’s black elected officials, particularly state legislators, to develop policy expertise and exercise policy influence in unprecedented ways.

Of course, any group’s institutional influence is mediated by partisan preferences, ideology, chamber cohesion, group allocation of resources, and membership characteristics. Power is further conditioned by specialization and the

stratification in the legislative process. Federal legislators have successfully altered the legislative process to represent a variety of constituent and member interests, while adjudicating among competing claims for resources and attention (Arnold 1990; Fenno 1978; Polsby 1987). However, given the tensions implicit in building majority coalitions, the race policy-specific orientation of some black caucus members (Barker, Jones, and Tate 1999; Button and Hedge 1996; Haynie 2001; Mansbridge 1999; Miller 1990; Tate 2003a; Whitby 1997) can exacerbate partisan and chamber politics.

Policies designed to protect civil rights, social welfare, and voting rights are especially susceptible to partisan tension, and a corollary rise in Republican control of government. For example, of the nine states covered entirely by Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, as of January 2005 six had Republican governors. Of the seven states partially covered, four had Republican governors. Of the nine fully covered states, the Republicans controlled both legislative chambers in six of these states and Democrats controlled the chambers in the other three. Of the seven states partially covered, Republican majorities controlled four state assemblies.⁸ All told, of the 16 states affected by Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, six were operating under a unified government with Republican leadership: Alaska, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Texas. Silence by, or dissension within, the overwhelmingly Democratic black state legislative caucuses in the coming decades will do little to prevent post-devolution damage to African American constituencies.

Moreover, black state caucuses work within legislative environments and organizational structures designed to foster floor leadership, activism, partisan loyalty, and policy entrepreneurship. Simultaneously, these legislators are confronted by a palpable need to develop a sense of political, if not explicitly racial-cultural, interdependence (Clay 1992; Hammond 1997; Holmes 2000; Whitby 1997). How black representatives respond to the pressures of constituents, colleagues, caucus members, and the governor is critical to racial representation. Collective action by legislative black caucuses (LBCs) no doubt can protect and promote black state interests. But collective ineptness may exacerbate the situation. Presence without influence, or the ability to maximize influence, falsely conflates state legislative growth with increased black political power.

Redistricting Control

The process of drawing state legislative lines typifies these challenges—no less because state elites make the decisions. Recent challenges to the legality of majority–minority districts, coupled with the political and scholarly debates over the connection between descriptive and substantive representation, make

TABLE 1.1
Black State Legislators by State and Selected Year, 1984–2001

<i>State</i>	<i>1984</i>	<i>1986</i>	<i>1988</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>
Alabama	24	24	23	24	22	35	35	35	35	35
Alaska	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
Arizona	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	2	2	1
Arkansas	5	5	6	12	13	13	13	15	15	15
California	8	8	7	9	9	7	6	6	6	6
Colorado	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3
Connecticut	10	10	8	9	12	14	14	14	14	13
Delaware	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4
Florida	12	12	11	14	19	20	20	20	20	22
Georgia	27	28	30	35	40	45	44	43	43	47
Hawaii	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Idaho	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Illinois	20	21	21	21	20	22	22	23	23	24
Indiana	8	8	8	8	11	12	13	13	13	12
Iowa	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Kansas	4	4	4	4	6	7	7	7	7	7
Kentucky	2	2	2	3	4	5	5	4	4	5
Louisiana	18	19	20	19	31	33	31	31	31	31
Maine	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Maryland	24	27	27	31	30	36	36	38	38	38
Massachusetts	5	7	6	6	8	7	7	6	6	6
Michigan	17	16	16	15	14	17	17	20	20	23
Minnesota	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Mississippi	20	20	22	22	42	45	45	45	45	45
Missouri	15	15	16	16	16	15	16	16	17	18
Montana	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nebraska	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Nevada	3	3	3	3	3	5	5	5	5	5
New Hampshire	0	1	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	5
New Jersey	7	8	8	8	12	13	15	15	15	15
New Mexico	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	1
New York	20	20	21	22	26	27	27	27	27	29
North Carolina	16	16	15	19	25	24	24	24	24	25
North Dakota	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ohio	12	13	13	13	15	18	18	16	17	18
Oklahoma	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Oregon	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Pennsylvania	18	18	18	18	17	18	18	18	18	18
Rhode Island	4	6	6	8	9	9	9	9	9	7
South Carolina	20	20	21	21	25	34	33	33	33	31
South Dakota	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Tennessee	13	13	13	13	15	16	16	16	16	17
Texas	14	15	15	15	16	16	16	16	16	16
Utah	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Vermont	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
Virginia	7	9	10	10	12	14	15	15	15	15
Washington	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
West Virginia	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	4	4	2
Wisconsin	4	4	5	6	6	8	8	8	8	8
Wyoming	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
U.S. Total	384	400	407	436	509	567	567	569	571	584

Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, *Black Elected Officials*, relevant years.

redistricting battles especially contentious. Those who draw the maps alter the dynamics of state and even national power.⁹

For example, 38 states allow the legislature to determine state legislative district plans, while 45 states permit state legislatures to determine the congressional districts (NCSL 2000). Eleven states' legislative districts are drawn either by a commission or a redistricting board (NCSL 2000). In New Jersey, a state heavily populated by minority groups, the party chairs choose the 10-member commission charged with drawing state districts, with each party selecting five members. If the commission fails to develop a plan one month after the census data becomes available, the chief justice of the state Supreme Court appoints an eleventh member. The legislative leadership in New Jersey is also charged with sitting on the commission charged with drawing congressional districts.¹⁰ Without the sustained presence of black legislators in legislative politics, black constituents and black interests might be systematically relegated to the level of invisibility, or at a minimum a level of obscurity, from national black politics like that experienced between 1901 and 1929. Or, more likely, constituents could be packed so perversely into the minimum number of districts possible that their voting power is diluted.¹¹

Disagreement over Representation

Scholarly journals and newspaper articles are replete with analyses of how the number of black elected officials relates to the substantive representation of African American interests. Focus on the quantity of officials tends to eclipse discussion of the overall quality of black interest aggregation and representation. Of particular interest is how racial redistricting affects black representation.

Proponents of majority–minority districts argue that such districts provide a quasi-guarantee of black electability and institutional presence and, by extension, the substantive representation of black interests (i.e., recognizable shifts in public policy). Scholars and pundits alike bolster this assertion through one or more of the following claims. First, that without the presence of minority interests, delegates representing majority groups are numerically and institutionally advantaged. Second, that without a fuller discussion of policy alternatives the policy outcomes will be incongruent with the true distribution of electoral preferences. Or third, that given the reality of racially or ethnically polarized voting, substantive representation thus requires the creation and protection of opportunities for demographic representation.¹²

While a string of Supreme Court decisions have challenged these assertions and the constitutionality of conflating descriptive representation with substantive representation (e.g., *Shaw v. Reno* [1993]; *Miller v. Johnson* [1995]; *Shaw v. Hunt* [1996]; *Bush v. Vera* [1996]; *Abrams v. Johnson* [1997]; *Hunt v.*

Cromartie [1999]; *Sinkfield v. Kelley* [2000]), any analysis of black empowerment within state legislatures must examine the degree of black incorporation.

Context Matters

Collectively, these new twists in racial politics at the state level again underscore the problems confronting contemporary black state legislators. How minority representatives adjudicate between competing interests continues to engulf both political science and the civil rights community. The latter is clearly concerned with protecting the continuity, growth, and diversification of black political presence, while the former continues to probe the philosophical tensions within democratic theory between descriptive presence and substantive representation.¹³ From either perspective, how the interests of black communities are seen and heard is of paramount importance, regardless of what exactly happens when all roll-call votes are tallied, when all committee work has ceased, and no matter how much seniority black legislators have within their chambers.

This book assesses interest representation and institutionalized power as they pertain to black state legislative politics. Specifically, we are interested in the *qualitative gains* in black representation afforded by the increased *quantitative* presence of black state legislators at the end of the 1990s. This interaction between quantitative presence and qualitative gain underscores our twofold argument. First, we suggest that inadequate attention has been paid to state politics despite the continued trend toward devolving power to the states. Second, we suggest that the collective action of black state caucuses is as important as the actions of individual black state legislators.

Interestingly enough, it was insufficient scholarly and popular attention given to the newly emerging states' rights movement of the 1970s that made the candidacy and election of Republican Ronald Reagan so surprising. It is this same lack of attention to the power (and manipulability) of the legislative context that makes the *state of black state politics* in this age of devolution so interesting. We now discuss Reagan's presidency as a transformative moment in federal-state relations that frames the discussion of contemporary black state political power.

REAGAN'S LEGACY: POSTMODERN BUDGETARY AND RACIAL POLITICS

The politics of race and the American presidency have had a long, sordid, and historically rich relationship.¹⁴ During the 1950s and 1960s, the relationship

took on new, virulent forms as both parties attempted to stake out their positions on civil rights and to maintain key constituent groups. During this turbulent time, many conservative white Democrats, particularly in the South and the West, defected to the Republican Party because of ideological and programmatic disagreements over civil rights and expanded federal government power.

It is no surprise, therefore, that former Democrat Ronald Reagan—who opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964—campaigns aggressively as a Republican presidential candidate in the South by invoking the rhetoric of states' rights, economic and social conservatism, and the retrenchment of policies recently enacted by liberal Democrats. Reagan revived former President Richard Nixon's Southern Strategy.¹⁵ As Wayne Greenshaw writes in *Elephants in the Cottonfields*: "Ronald Reagan had already made one unpublicized tour through the Southland, touching places in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. He told small gatherings about the qualities of this man [Barry] Goldwater, and he showed off his own great qualities as far as they were concerned. Then he went back to California where he sat down with a group of Republican businessmen and started planning his debut as a [presidential] candidate."¹⁶

Political scientist Hanes Walton says Reagan purposely "reintroduced racial cleavages for partisan political advantage" as a way to remove any doubts about the racial and programmatic undertones of his campaign. "Reagan launched this effort by starting his presidential campaign in Philadelphia, Mississippi, where the three civil rights workers James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman were brutally murdered during the Freedom Summer of 1964," writes Walton (1997b: 20). "At the Neshoba County (Mississippi) Fair in 1980, Reagan spoke in explicit terms about states' rights and other issues dear to the old south."¹⁷ By choosing this backdrop and interweaving the notion of states' rights into the dialogue of his formal opening salvo against Democratic President Jimmy Carter, Reagan sent a less than subtle message to white voters about the supposed excesses of liberal agendas, the problems of national-centered federalism, and the programmatic orientations of a future Reagan presidency. Carter's attempt to highlight the racist undertones of the message—both in context and sentiment—went unheard or were dismissed as a feeble attempt to deflect attention away from Reagan's indictment of the president's (failed) party and policies. Reagan's sentiments resonated with many voters.

Reagan and his vice president, George H. W. Bush, parlayed constituent discontent with Carter and Democratic policies into 12 straight years of Republican control of the White House. Winning a staggering 489 of the 538 electoral votes and garnering 52.6 percent of the voting-age population in 1980, Reagan signaled America's interest in a new governing philosophy.¹⁸

Deemed the “Reagan experiment” by the nonpartisan Urban Institute, this new governing philosophy synthesized different social and budgetary themes into a coherent strategy aimed at shifting public policy direction and altering the perceptions of constituents and policymakers concerning the responsibilities of government.¹⁹ Its overall structure is found in Reagan’s 1981 inaugural address, in which he laid out the connections between America’s economic crisis, ideology, budgetary politics, and the institutional structures:

In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem. . . . It is no coincidence that our present troubles parallel and are proportionate to the intervention and intrusion in our lives that result from unnecessary and excessive growth of government. It is time for us to realize that we are too great a nation to limit ourselves to small dreams. We’re not, as some would have us believe, doomed to an inevitable decline. I do not believe in a fate that will fall on us no matter what we do. I do believe in a fate that will fall on us if we do nothing. So, with all the creative energy at our command let us begin an era of national renewal.

Of course, as historian Manning Marable (2002:74) notes, these sentiments were not new, “but under Reagan, carried to its logical extreme, well to the right of traditional Republican social and economic policies under Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. This extreme agenda of downsizing, if not abolishing, the public sector also had the effect of increasing inequality throughout American society.” Reagan’s policy rhetoric was a form of coded language about race, and contrasted sharply with the political rhetoric of his recent predecessors. He railed against the failures of the “Great Society” and the social coalitions underpinning the Carter presidency, capitalizing on citizen discontent and dismay over the state of American politics. In doing so, Reagan fueled a growing conservatism in America that could be readily energized to dismantle the liberal traditions of the Democratic Party (Marable 1991).

Reagan’s revolution would be led by the “majority” of Americans who, conservative critic Kevin Phillips (1970) forecasted, were believed to be ideologically and fiscally conservative, and predominantly white, southern, strong on defense, and/or disenchanted with the liberal approach to race or race relations. To Reagan, former presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson had mistakenly shifted attention to what the *federal* government shifted could do for the social ills facing America instead of focusing on policy innovation at the *state* level. As “laboratories of democracy,” states were better positioned to determine what programs and expenditure levels fit their particular needs.²⁰ Thus, the histories of failed liberal interventions required a new and different

approach to governance: one that would invest the limited budgetary resources of taxpayers into foreign policy efforts, cut taxes on the affluent, reduce expenditures on certain programs of Johnson's Great Society, and, finally, create an environment friendlier for business expansion. What Nixon started, Reagan would finish.²¹

In all, the new governance strategy targeted all levels of government (i.e., federal, state, local) and centered on three broad themes: moving administrative, financial, and policy-setting responsibility to the states; reducing the number of individuals eligible for benefit programs and subsequently reducing the level of benefits to those eligible; and, finally, challenging the rationale behind federal intervention in social policy, favoring "greater reliance on the private sector and market-oriented approaches for accomplishing public purposes."²² From the vantage point of some analysts, the Reagan experiment wreaked havoc on social and economic support mechanisms (i.e., safety nets) usually accessed by lower income persons and a majority of minority groups.²³ In noting these particular effects on African Americans, Marable remarks, "the Reagan administration's mandate for governmental devolution destroyed hundreds of thousands of jobs that would have represented employment opportunities for African Americans."²⁴ Without adequate personal resources to help stabilize their circumstances during economic downturns (e.g., unemployment or high inflation), coupled with the underfunding or elimination of certain stabilizing institutions, many within black and lower-income America felt "miserable" under the Reagan regime.²⁵

Political economist William Keech examined "misery indexes" to underscore the social and economic circumstances faced by constituents during Reagan's "experiment" with intergovernmental relations. Keech writes (1995:85):

Because unemployment got worse before it got better, the change may not have been worth it to people who in 1981 had short time horizons and who cared more about unemployment than inflation. . . . For some people, the human costs of unemployment and lost output are so great relative to inflation that performance such as that of the Reagan Administration [was] not acceptable.

Those "human costs" were disproportionately paid by minorities, wage earners, and low-income communities, as well as economically and structurally displaced individuals—many of whom were already racially and spatially segregated from social networks and capital that could have helped absorb the brunt of the misery (Marable 1991; Wilson 1978, 1999). Hence, Reagan's quest to "put the nation on a fundamentally different course—a course leading to less inflation, more growth, and a brighter future for all of our citizens" also exacerbated state fiscal crises, preventing many localities with diminished resources

from providing pre-Reagan levels of social services (Barker, Jones, and Tate 1999; Marable 1991; Walton and Orr 1997).²⁶ By tapping into racial prejudices *while* reactivating citizen predispositions toward limited government, Reagan could alter the trajectory of social policies and social spending—particularly those related to welfare and civil rights—under the guise of fiscal and social conservatism *somewhat* shielded from charges of racism (Shull 1993; Walton 1997; Zucchino 1997).

But the extent of Reagan's impact would not merely be limited to federal, budgetary, or racial politics. As his enormous electoral victories in 1980 and 1984 indicate, Reagan had mobilized (or awakened) a different voter, one unafraid to interrogate the ideological and fiscal positions of politicians and one committed to changing the geopolitical landscape of America. Indeed, as Hanes Walton and William O. Generett, Jr., note, the Reagan presidency (and the Bush presidency to follow) transformed the sociopolitical environment black elites and black masses had to navigate, a process that altered "the nature of both their competitors and partisan competition in the political process generally. The transformation of the political context not only had impact on the Republican Party, the federal government, and the Congress, it likewise forced a shift in the Democratic Party."²⁷

In other words, the Reagan experiment caused the Democrats to look further inward at the "programmatic and coalitional implications" of their campaign messages and activities (Baer 2000; Phillips 1990). A policy statement ratified at the Democratic Leadership Council's (DLC) 1991 annual convention, entitled "The New American Choice: Opportunity, Responsibility, and Community," outlined the new direction the Democrats wanted to go in order to recapture their lost constituencies. The document signaled the Democrats' acknowledgment that Reagan had set the discursive stage for partisan, programmatic, and budgetary debate on public policy. Summarizing it, Byron E. Shafer (2000:12) said: "Its 'New American Choice Resolutions' ranged widely . . . but they could be gathered into four main initiatives, two in the realm of economics and social welfare, and two in the realm of culture and foreign affairs." Collectively, the DLC document reflected a worry that the party's longevity required that it "escape the spatial locus of its reliable strength, urban America, for the growing suburbs. And it needed to escape the social locus of its reliable strength, the working class and the poor, for the growing middle class." For these new Democrats, if protecting black interests meant losing presidential elections, something had to change.

For some race-relations scholars, the DLC had positioned itself squarely within the contours of a postmodern racial political agenda, "to link race with more comprehensive political and cultural agendas, to interpret social structural phenomena (such as inequality or social policy) with regard to race."²⁸ In essence, the DLC hoped its "New Democrats" would project a different image

to outmaneuver the postmodern racial politics of the mostly Republican-favored “New Right” project, which also had “a unique conception of racial difference, a theoretical approach—whether explicit or implicit—to the chief structural problem of racial inequality, a potential or actual political constituency, and a concrete political agenda.”²⁹ This new postmodern racial project would attempt to stymie the effects of the Reagan legacy and the “New Right” project. However, in a sense the very formation of the DLC confirmed the impact of Reagan’s legacy on the belief systems of elites and constituents (Smith 1996a, 1996b).

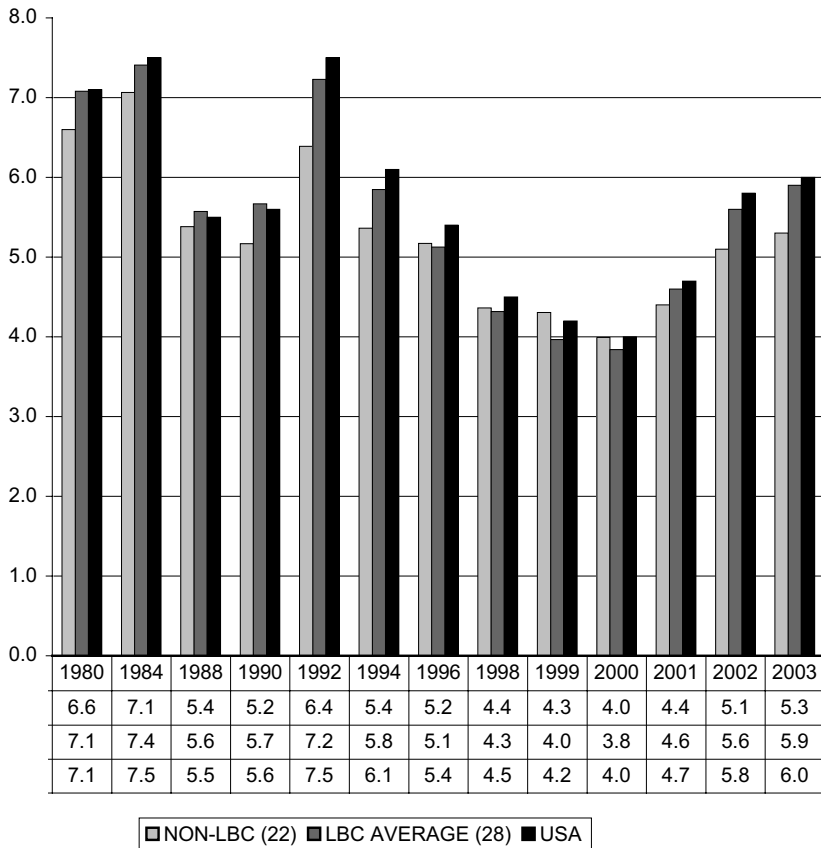
Similarly, the passage of welfare reform legislation, and the criticism levied at President Clinton by the social and electoral coalitions most allied with the old Democrats, further illustrated the extent to which Democrats continued to fight the ghosts of Reagan. Given this, and the comprehensiveness of Reagan’s attack on policies most favored by liberals, it is unquestionable that state politics, black state elites, and state citizens were, and are still, affected by his intention to create “an era of national renewal.” Put differently, welfare reform in the late 1990s illustrated the prophetic nature of the words uttered by Reagan’s Attorney General Edwin Meese III about the president’s intentions to impact the judiciary in the decade of the 1980s: to “institutionalize the Reagan revolution so it can’t be set aside no matter what happens in future presidential elections.”³⁰

Indeed, as Reagan and his advisors had designed, the shock waves of political, cultural, social, and economic reform would be felt deeply within and widely across the American electorate and party system.³¹ Those who were low income, less educated, dependent upon the federal system, or members of minority groups would also disproportionately feel the force of the waves of reform. Collectively, citizens in any of these groups lack appropriate mechanisms to combat the effects of increased financial pressures (Alesina and Drazen 1991). And the effects of these shocks could neither be set aside by Clinton’s presidency, nor ignored by congressional Democrats.

SHOCKS TO STATE GOVERNMENTS AND AFRICAN AMERICAN CONSTITUENCIES

Communities lacking financial adaptation or stabilization mechanisms are disproportionately affected by downturns in the economy (e.g., savings, investments, alternative employment networks). Cyclical and structural unemployment effects tend to exact greater burdens on minority communities, as do shifts in industry relocations, reductions in federal spending, and rapid increases in the average price of commodities (Wilson 1987, 1999).

Table 1.2 depicts the rates of civilian labor force unemployment across the American states. The 1980 unemployment rate in many southern states and LBC states was higher than the national rate of 7.1 percent, including Michigan (12.4 percent), Indiana (9.6 percent), Alabama (8.8 percent) and Tennessee (7.3 percent). By the 1990s, some southern states, including Alabama, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Florida, endured fluctuating unemployment rates while struggling with the effects of market globalization, cyclical-industrial migration, and competitive federalism’s tendency to siphon away large-scale manufacturing businesses. Figure 1.1 depicts a comparison of unemployment rates for LBC and non-LBC states across the same time period.



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics; calculations prepared by authors.

FIGURE 1.1 LBC States’ versus Non-LBC States’ Unemployment Rates, 1980–2003

TABLE 1.2
State Unemployment Rates, 1980–2003

<i>State</i>	1980	1984	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Alabama	8.8	11.1	7.2	6.9	7.4	6.0	5.1	4.2	4.8	4.6	5.3	5.9	5.8
Alaska	9.7	10.0	9.3	7.0	9.2	7.8	7.8	5.8	6.4	6.6	6.4	7.7	8.0
Arizona	6.7	5.0	6.3	5.5	7.6	6.4	5.5	4.1	4.4	3.9	4.7	6.2	5.6
Arkansas	9.1	8.9	7.7	7.0	7.3	5.3	5.4	5.5	4.5	4.4	5.0	5.4	6.2
California	6.8	7.8	5.3	5.8	9.3	8.6	7.2	5.9	5.2	4.9	5.4	6.7	6.7
Colorado	5.9	5.6	6.4	5.0	6.0	4.2	4.2	3.8	2.9	2.7	3.7	5.7	6.0
Connecticut	5.9	4.6	3.0	5.2	7.6	5.6	5.7	3.4	3.2	2.3	3.3	4.3	5.5
Delaware	7.7	6.2	3.2	5.2	5.3	4.9	5.2	3.8	3.5	4.0	3.4	4.2	4.4
Florida	5.9	6.3	5.0	6.0	8.3	6.6	5.1	4.3	3.9	3.6	4.8	5.5	5.1
Georgia	6.4	6.0	5.8	5.5	7.0	5.2	4.6	4.2	4.0	3.7	4.0	5.1	4.7
Hawaii	4.9	5.6	3.2	2.9	4.6	6.1	6.4	6.2	5.6	4.3	4.6	4.2	4.3
Idaho	7.9	7.2	5.8	5.9	6.5	5.6	5.2	5.0	5.2	4.9	5.0	5.8	5.4
Illinois	8.3	9.1	6.8	6.2	7.6	5.7	5.3	4.5	4.3	4.4	5.4	6.5	6.7
Indiana	9.6	8.6	5.3	5.3	6.6	4.9	4.1	3.1	3.0	3.2	4.4	5.1	5.1
Iowa	5.8	7.0	4.5	4.3	4.7	3.7	3.8	2.8	2.5	2.6	3.3	4.0	4.5
Kansas	4.5	5.2	4.8	4.5	4.3	5.3	4.5	3.8	3.0	3.7	4.3	5.1	5.4
Kentucky	8.0	9.3	7.9	5.9	6.9	5.4	5.6	4.6	4.5	4.1	5.4	5.6	6.2
Louisiana	6.7	10.0	10.9	6.3	8.2	8.0	6.7	5.7	5.1	5.5	5.9	6.1	6.6
Maine	7.8	6.1	3.8	5.2	7.2	7.4	5.1	4.4	4.1	3.5	3.9	4.4	5.1
Maryland	6.5	5.4	4.5	4.7	6.7	5.1	4.9	4.6	3.5	3.9	4.0	4.4	4.5
Massachusetts	5.6	4.8	3.3	6.0	8.6	6.0	4.3	3.3	3.2	2.7	3.7	5.3	5.8
Michigan	12.4	11.2	7.6	7.6	8.9	5.9	4.9	3.9	3.8	3.6	5.3	6.2	7.3
Minnesota	5.9	6.3	4.0	4.9	5.2	4.0	4.0	2.5	2.8	3.3	3.7	4.4	5.0
Mississippi	7.5	10.8	8.4	7.6	8.2	6.6	6.1	5.4	5.1	5.7	5.5	6.8	6.3
Missouri	7.2	7.2	5.7	5.8	5.7	4.9	4.6	4.2	3.4	3.5	4.7	5.5	5.6
Montana	6.1	7.4	6.8	6.0	6.9	5.1	5.3	5.6	5.2	4.9	4.6	4.6	4.7
Nebraska	4.1	4.4	3.6	2.2	3.0	2.9	2.9	2.7	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.6	4.0
Nevada	6.2	7.8	5.2	4.9	6.7	6.2	5.4	4.3	4.4	4.1	5.3	5.5	5.2
New Hampshire	4.7	4.3	2.4	5.7	7.5	4.6	4.2	2.9	2.7	2.8	3.5	4.7	4.3
New Jersey	7.2	6.2	3.8	5.1	8.5	6.8	6.2	4.6	4.6	3.8	4.2	5.8	5.9
New Mexico	7.5	7.5	7.8	6.5	7.0	6.3	8.1	6.2	5.6	4.9	4.8	5.4	6.4
New York	7.5	7.2	4.2	5.3	8.6	6.9	6.2	5.6	5.2	4.6	4.9	6.1	6.3
North Carolina	6.6	6.7	3.6	4.2	6.0	4.4	4.3	3.5	3.2	3.6	5.5	6.7	6.5
North Dakota	5.0	5.1	4.8	4.0	5.1	3.9	3.1	3.2	3.4	3.0	2.9	4.0	4.0
Ohio	8.4	9.4	6.0	5.7	7.3	5.5	4.9	4.3	4.3	4.1	4.2	5.7	6.1
Oklahoma	4.8	7.0	6.7	5.7	5.7	5.8	4.1	4.5	3.4	3.0	3.8	4.5	5.7
Oregon	8.3	9.4	5.8	5.6	7.6	5.4	5.9	5.6	5.7	4.9	6.3	7.5	8.2
Pennsylvania	7.8	9.1	5.1	5.4	7.6	6.2	5.3	4.6	4.4	4.2	4.7	5.7	5.6
Rhode Island	7.2	5.3	3.1	6.8	9.0	7.1	5.1	4.9	4.1	4.1	4.7	5.1	5.3
S. Carolina	6.9	7.1	4.5	4.8	6.3	6.3	6.0	3.8	4.5	3.9	5.3	6.0	6.8
South Dakota	4.9	4.3	3.9	3.9	3.2	3.3	3.2	2.9	2.9	2.3	3.4	3.1	3.6
Tennessee	7.3	8.6	5.8	5.3	6.4	4.8	5.2	4.2	4.0	3.9	4.4	5.1	5.8
Texas	5.2	5.9	7.3	6.3	7.7	6.4	5.6	4.8	4.6	4.2	4.8	6.3	6.8
Utah	6.3	6.5	4.9	4.3	5.0	3.7	3.5	3.8	3.7	3.2	4.4	6.1	5.6
Vermont	6.4	5.2	2.8	5.0	6.7	4.7	4.6	3.4	3.0	2.9	3.6	3.7	4.6
Virginia	5.0	5.0	3.9	4.3	6.4	4.9	4.4	2.9	2.8	2.2	3.4	4.1	4.1
Washington	7.9	9.5	6.2	4.9	7.6	6.4	6.5	4.8	4.7	5.2	6.4	7.3	7.5
West Virginia	9.4	15.0	9.9	8.4	11.4	8.9	7.5	6.6	6.6	5.5	4.8	6.1	6.1
Wisconsin	7.2	7.3	4.3	4.4	5.2	4.7	3.5	3.4	3.0	3.5	4.5	5.5	5.6
Wyoming	4.0	6.3	6.3	5.5	5.7	5.3	5.0	4.8	4.9	3.9	3.9	4.2	4.4
U.S. Average	7.1	7.5	5.5	5.6	7.5	6.1	5.4	4.5	4.2	4.0	4.7	5.8	6.0

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, relevant years.

A snapshot of unemployment rates by race for the year 2000 illustrates the true toll of unemployment in particular LBC states. Table 1.3 shows the differences in employment for whites, blacks, and Hispanics in states with formal legislative black caucuses. The differences between white and black unemployment rates in these states were often 3-4 percentage points, with blacks experiencing much lower rates of employment. In Mississippi, for example, whites enjoyed a 7.9 percentage point advantage in employment, compared to a nationwide white-black difference of only 4 percentage points. In states like Florida, South Carolina, and North Carolina, however, blacks were employed at higher rates than their counterparts elsewhere in the country.

The data in Table 1.2 and Table 1.3 also reflect the oft-reported differences in poverty rates and median household income experienced by African

TABLE 1.3
Unemployment in LBC States by Race, 2000

<i>State</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Hispanic^a</i>	<i>W-B Diff</i>	<i>H-B Diff</i>
Alabama	4.6	3.3	8.3	—	-5.0	—
Arkansas	4.4	3.3	10.0	4.7	-6.7	-5.3
California	4.9	4.9	7.5	6.5	-2.6	-1.0
Connecticut	2.3	2.0	4.2	3.2	-2.2	-1.0
Florida	3.6	3.1	6.3	4.8	-3.2	-1.5
Georgia	3.7	2.5	6.4	3.8	-3.9	-2.6
Illinois	4.4	3.2	11.0	4.7	-7.8	-6.3
Indiana	3.2	2.8	8.5	—	-5.7	—
Kansas	3.7	3.1	9.9	4.0	-6.8	-5.9
Louisiana	5.5	3.7	10.0	3.7	-6.3	-6.3
Maryland	3.9	2.7	6.4	3.0	-3.7	-3.4
Massachusetts	2.7	2.4	6.3	6.0	-3.9	-0.3
Michigan	3.6	3.1	6.9	6.6	-3.8	-0.3
Mississippi	5.7	3.1	11.0	—	-7.9	—
Missouri	3.5	2.9	8.9	—	-6.0	—
New Jersey	3.8	3.0	8.6	4.6	-5.6	-4.0
New York	4.6	3.9	7.9	6.9	-4.0	-1.0
North Carolina	3.6	2.8	6.4	5.4	-3.6	-1.0
Ohio	4.1	3.7	7.6	6.3	-3.9	-1.3
Oklahoma	3.0	2.5	7.2	3.3	-4.7	-3.9
Pennsylvania	4.2	3.6	10.0	5.4	-6.4	-4.6
Rhode Island	4.1	3.8	8.3	12.0	-4.5	3.7
South Carolina	3.9	3.1	6.3	—	-3.2	—
Tennessee	3.9	3.2	8.2	—	-5.0	—
Texas	4.2	3.8	7.8	5.0	-4.0	-2.8
Virginia	2.2	1.7	4.2	3.6	-2.5	-0.6
Wisconsin	3.5	3.0	9.9	7.5	-6.9	-2.4
U.S. Averages	4.0	3.5	7.6	5.7	-4.1	-1.9

^aThere were no figures reported for some states.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics; calculations prepared by authors.

Americans and non-African Americans during recent decades. In 1979, the median household income of blacks was \$18,242. The median household income for whites was \$31,071. Things would improve as the economic prosperity of the late 1980s and early 1990s helped to move people into employment, raise median incomes levels, and decrease poverty rates for all families. For example, black median family income rose to 58.6 percent of white income in 1999, with figures of \$35,999 and \$61,284, respectively, while the median income for Hispanics stood at \$31,062. Although poverty rates for black America consistently hovered around 30 percent in the 1970s (compared to 10 percent for whites), by 1999 poverty rates had decreased. For whites, poverty rates fell, to about 7 percent, as did overall rates for blacks (21 percent) and Hispanics (20 percent).

Despite gains in income and decreases in poverty during the 1980s and the 1990s, the relative socioeconomic position remained far worse for blacks. Many blacks still faced “asset poverty,” an inability to improve their capacities to generate, sustain, and mobilize income into wealth. Ignoring these facts when measuring economic parity obscures the myriad economic shocks endured by black citizens. As sociologist Dalton Conley put it: “At the lower end of the income spectrum (less than \$15,000 per year), the median African American family has no assets, while the equivalent white family holds \$10,000 worth of equity. At upper income levels (greater than \$75,000 per year) white families have a median net worth of \$308,000, almost three times the figure for upper-income African American families (\$114,000).”³² These differences in black–white wealth are not explained by traditional variables used in social science research—for example, income, age, sex, children, education, occupation, region, work history, or the number of people working in a household (Oliver and Shapiro 1995).³³

Income, wealth, and labor force participation data confirm the dim economic prospects faced by citizens residing in LBC states, and other significant segments of the African American population, in the aftermath of Reagan-Bush era federalism (Wilson 1996, 1999). Furthermore, these figures suggest the complexity of decisions facing state legislators, especially black state legislators, who were challenged by growing budgetary constraints, black citizen demand for ameliorative programs, and growing ideological conservatism among whites. These constraints made it extremely difficult to combat racial differences in entrenched poverty and stagnant unemployment or their counterpart: lower median household incomes. These same constraints also made it difficult for federal decision makers to maintain coalitions supportive of liberal expenditures for social welfare programs. Moreover, as the separate debates on federal budgetary politics and the desirability of certain social welfare programs continued to converge (Edsall and Edsall 1991), states were forced to make tougher decisions on program funding. With limited resources, states

were forced to find alternative revenue sources, and consequently their citizens were forced to find alternative financial stabilization mechanisms.

A close look at Table 1.4 underscores the revenue-raising problems faced by states and localities, which were already plagued with administrative problems in fulfilling their tax capacities and implementing programs to provide services for their unemployed, impoverished, and increasingly resource-diminished citizenry (Wilson 1987, 1996).³⁴ Table 1.4 shows the context of budgetary politics. The fluctuation in state expenditures as a percentage of federal grant-in-aid often resulted in different levels of support for developmental and redistributive programs (Peterson 1995). For example, in 1980 federal grant-in-aid dollars accounted for close to 30 percent of state expenditures while in 1990 such aid only accounted for 19 percent of state expenditures. Federal outlays in 1990 approached \$135 billion but grants only approached 11 percent of total outlays, a departure from 1980 when federal grants accounted for almost 16 percent of the \$91.4 billion outlay. By 1995, outlays had zoomed to \$225 billion, with grants accounting for 23 percent of state expenditures and 26 percent of state and local investments. Perhaps indicative of state efforts to offset the effects of declines in federal grants-in-aid as a share of total investments, by 1995 per capita state and local debt had increased to \$4,243 from \$3,459 in 1990.

TABLE 1.4
Trends in Federal Grants to State and Local Governments, Selected Years, 1960–2005

Fiscal Year	GRANTS-IN-AID TO STATES AS A PERCENTAGE OF					
	Grants in Billions	Total Federal Outlays	Federal Domestic Programs	State & Local Expenditures ^a	Gross Domestic Product	State Gross Investment
1960	7.0	7.6	18.0	18.2	1.4	24.6
1965	10.9	9.2	18.3	19.1	1.6	25.5
1970	24.1	12.3	23.2	23.0	2.4	25.4
1975	49.8	15.0	21.7	25.7	3.2	26.0
1980	91.4	15.5	22.2	28.5	3.4	35.4
1985	105.9	11.2	18.2	21.7	2.6	30.2
1990	135.3	10.8	17.1	19.0	2.4	21.9
1995	225.0	14.8	21.6	23.2	3.1	26.0
2000	284.7	15.9	22.0	22.8	2.9	21.9
2003	387.3	17.9	23.7	26.1	3.6	23.0
2004 ^b	418.1	18.0	24.1	N/A	3.6	N/A
2005 ^b	416.5	17.4	23.2	N/A	3.5	N/A

^aExcludes outlays for national defense, international affairs, net interest, and undistributed off-setting receipts

^bEstimates

Source: Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2005, Analytical Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004), Table 8-3, p. 120.

By 1998, many states with formal black caucuses also had the highest receipts from total general sales taxes: Michigan (\$9.5 million), California (\$21.3 million), Florida (\$12.9 million), Ohio (\$5.5 million), Pennsylvania (\$6.3 million), Texas (\$12.4 million), Tennessee (\$4.0 million), and Illinois (\$5.6 million). In 1997, a family of four earning up to \$25,000 in Philadelphia—a heavily populated African American city—paid \$3,241 in total state and local taxes, a whopping 13 percent of their total income.³⁵ In the same year, a similar family in Detroit paid 10.2 percent of \$25,000 (\$2,551) in total sales taxes, a nominal residential property tax rate of \$5.88 per \$100, and an effective tax rate of \$2.58. In 1997, residents of another heavily populated minority city, Newark, New Jersey, on the other hand, were assessed the highest effective tax rate—\$3.91 per \$100.³⁶

Regardless of particular state economies and industries, individuals with lower levels of disposable income are often doubly disadvantaged through imposition of taxes on property, alcohol and tobacco, insurance premiums, and gasoline. This reality often makes it difficult for cities to consistently raise additional revenue through sales taxes, bonds, user fees and charges, or individual income taxes. Lacking consistent and growing streams of revenue, localities look to other sources to finance expenditures. As a result, jurisdictions with large minority populations often appeal to the federal government or the state government for help in providing quality social services and administrative solvency. A shift in the political context therefore alters two things: first, the likelihood that decision makers can remain receptive to such appeals for assistance; and, second, the types of programmatic responses decision makers entertain for dispensing additional support.³⁷

Turning to the revenues side of the equation, Hanes Walton and Marion Orr (1997) compared mean federal dollars to cities with African American mayors to show how aid to urban areas dwindled during part of the Reagan era. Walton and Orr noted substantial regional differences in the loss of federal dollars from 1979 to 1988: Southern cities with African American mayors lost \$41 million dollars in aid, midwestern cities lost \$107 million, western cities lost \$122 million, and eastern cities lost \$53 million in federal dollars.³⁸ Walton and Orr illustrated sharp decreases in the mean percentage of city budgets provided by the federal government across the 10 cities examined. The authors challenged scholar Paul Peterson (1981) on his claim that federal dollars were inconsequential to the overall operations of city budgets, and hinted at a truer methodological and empirically observable relationship between federal aid, state limited resources, and administrative-programmatic responsibilities.³⁹

Collectively, these shocks and strains on state economies put state politics—and black state legislators and the formal legislative black caucuses—back at the forefront of the domestic policy process. In other words, the politicization

of social and economic conditions of African Americans as unsolvable by federal interventions, coupled with the consistent levels of poverty in black America, provided the rhetorical and fiscal groundwork for congressional Republicans in 1995 to place state politics back on the agenda.⁴⁰ Republican and conservative challenges to the effectiveness of social welfare programs (e.g., Aid to Families with Dependent Children) and other federally assisted poverty-reduction programs were thus challenges to the perception that an expansionist government governed best (Lieberman 1998; Skocpol 1996; Zucchini 1997).

For Republicans, if citizens wanted to improve their socioeconomic condition, it would not be at the expense of programmatic expenditures deemed more important (e.g., national defense) or the expense of more affluent taxpayers who repudiated such expenditures on ideological grounds. If states wanted to continue such programs, they would have to find the monies and political will to do so. If state elites wanted to scale back such programs, they now had the political power to do so. If welfare reform meant cutting holes in the proverbial safety net of social welfare policies, whichever groups fell the hardest deserved the greatest pain.

It is this dynamic—working within an environment where there was both new political power and a renewed contestation of political wills—that most black legislators faced before and after passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. Given the liberal orientation and resource-poor material conditions of African American citizens, for these legislators representing black interests meant patching the holes in the safety net to ensure that African American citizens or the impoverished didn't fall, or at least did not fall hard. This task was easier said than done, particularly within the post-1980 context of state racial politics characterized by sporadic Democratic control of state institutions, and the tug between demands for allegiance to party, race, and personal interests.

THE CHALLENGE OF PROTECTING AFRICAN AMERICAN INTERESTS

Once the political context shifted back toward state government oversight and implementation, most black state legislators were also faced with the challenge of protecting the interests of the Democratic Party while representing and protecting the interests of black constituents.⁴¹ Often these interests would converge, but sometimes they did not. This divergence presented black legislators with “institutional–constituency tension,” a dilemma over whose interest to support first and foremost. And, as the data in Table 1.5, Figure 1.2, and Figure 1.3

TABLE 1.5
Democratic Share of Total Legislative Seats, 1970–2002

<i>Year</i>	<i>Nation</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>Non-South</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>Midwest</i>	<i>West</i>
1970	61%	84%	49%	51%	46%	51%
1972	60%	81%	50%	50%	48%	51%
1974	68%	86%	59%	60%	57%	61%
1976	68%	87%	58%	59%	58%	58%
1978	64%	84%	54%	57%	52%	52%
1980	60%	82%	50%	54%	49%	46%
1982	63%	83%	53%	56%	53%	50%
1984	58%	78%	49%	50%	50%	46%
1986	60%	77%	52%	54%	53%	48%
1988	60%	75%	53%	54%	54%	51%
1990	61%	74%	54%	55%	54%	53%
1992	59%	71%	53%	54%	52%	52%
1994	52%	64%	46%	51%	44%	42%
1996	52%	62%	48%	55%	44%	43%
1998	52%	61%	48%	55%	43%	44%
2000	51%	59%	48%	55%	42%	44%
2002	51%	59%	48%	55%	42%	44%

Source: National Conference of State Legislatures.

further illustrate, this dilemma posed an ever more complex challenge given divided government, increased Republican control of governors' mansions, and the competitive political environment faced by many legislative black caucuses.

An experienced black representative from South Carolina (SCLBC) who succinctly captured this tension with the following words, also articulated the complexity of this challenge:

Part of the problem is that race is a complication for us [legislators] across the board. What I mean by that is that there is a certain expectation that Black legislators will adhere to the Democratic agenda, but there is no expectation that the Democratic Caucus will adhere to the Black Caucus agenda. That is an issue for me of accountability whether white Democrats feel accountable to their Black constituencies. I have to surmise that their sense of accountability is very limited.⁴²

The “institutional–constituency tension” summarizes the conflicting loyalties required by partisan politics, institutional norms, and the reality of majority rule in deliberative environments (Arnold 1990; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Krehbiel 1992). Those loyalties are, of course, expected by racially identified and politically attentive constituents who support the enactment of liberal policies and who, accordingly, vote for black elites and white liberals (Barker, Jones, and Tate 1999; Dawson 1994; Pitkin 1976; Tate 1994).⁴³