

RACE, REPRESENTATION, AND COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Legislative scholars have long recognized that standing committees are central to the legislative process.¹ Standing committees are significant for both the policy-making process and the career paths of legislators. There are two important policy-making functions that committees perform. One is the division of labor. Given the large volume and often technical complexity of legislation, committees provide a system of specialization that allows legislatures to make educated and informed choices (Shepsle 1975, 1988; Stewart 1992). Second, standing committees play an agenda-setting and gatekeeping role for legislatures. Committees not only control the substantive content of bills, they also determine if and when a piece of legislation will reach the full legislature. They have the capacity to prevent legislation—even that which might enjoy the support of the majority of the legislature—from ever being considered. In so doing, committees can substantially control the sets of issues and policy initiatives that are debated and decided in legislatures (Hall 1987; Rosenthal 1974; Smith and Deering 1984).

As for legislative careers, the committee assignments that a legislator receives can significantly influence that member's reelection chances. Legislators tend to seek membership on committees that are relevant to the interests found in their districts. Such assignments allow representatives to act or appear to act in a manner that is responsive to his or her constituents (Eulau and

Karps 1977; Fenno 1973; Rhode and Shepsle 1973; Stewart 1992). Committee assignments also enable legislators to pursue their personal interests, and they can help enhance a representative's position or status within the institution (Hibbing 1991; Munger 1988; Shepsle 1988).

Along with the central roles they play in the legislative process and in enhancing members' careers, committee assignments also have instrumental importance. It is through their participation in committees that legislators have their greatest direct effect on public policy. From the representative's perspective, however, all committee assignments are not the same. Committees have varying jurisdictions and unique responsibilities, and legislators are better able to have their own policy agendas advanced if they receive certain committee assignments rather than others (Bratton and Haynie 1999b; Francis 1989; Rhode and Shepsle 1973; Stewart 1992). As a result, legislators view some committee assignments as more desirable.

In chapter 2, I focused on the impact that African American state legislators have on the legislative process by examining their agenda-setting behavior. In this chapter the focus remains the same, but here I examine the African American representatives' standing committee assignment patterns rather than their bill introductions. Given the central role that committees play in legislatures, an examination of committee assignments provides us another appropriate opportunity to evaluate how African American legislators influence the policy-making process.

Kenneth Shepsle (1988) has suggested that because standing committees are jurisdictionally based, their members acquire an important stake in their respective jurisdictions. He argues that, as a consequence, committees

are not legislatures writ small; they are not representative of the larger legislature. To the contrary, they are highly unrepresentative, consisting mainly of "interesteds" or "preference outliers." . . . It suits legislators fine, because this arrangement permits them to specialize and accumulate power in just those areas that are of special interest to those who must renew their contracts every other year. (Shepsle 1988:471-72)

Because of this characteristic (i.e., consisting mainly of "interesteds" and "preference outliers"), standing committees also provide another excellent venue from which to explore whether or not, and to what degree, African American state legislators behave like race representatives. We know from chapter 2 that black interests and matters of race are of special concern to race representa-

tives. Therefore, if African American legislators do indeed behave as race representatives, we can expect them to allocate a significant share of their committee assignments to committees whose jurisdictions include black interest issues.

THE COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

Accommodating members' requests appears to be the norm in the committee assignment process in state legislatures. This norm of accommodation is in part a consequence of attempts of party leaders to achieve and maintain party unity by creating a satisfying work environment for their members (Hedlund 1989). The lack of a strong and entrenched seniority system in state legislatures contributes to this norm by providing party leaders and legislative officers with more flexibility in meeting members' request (Francis 1989; Rosenthal 1981).

As evidence of this tendency toward accommodation, Wayne Francis (1989) cites a 1981 Council of State Governments national survey in which 83.4 percent of responding state legislators indicated that they were "pleased" with their standing committee assignments. Similarly, James Button and David Hedge (1993), in a 1991–92 national survey of state lawmakers, found that 92 percent of all responding legislators reported that they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their committee assignments. Other legislative committees studies, conducted at both the congressional and state legislative levels, provide additional persuasive evidence that comports with the results of these surveys, which illustrate that legislators' committee assignment requests tend to be accommodated by legislative and party leaders (Bullock 1985; Gertzog 1976; Hedlund 1989, 1992; Shepsle 1978).²

INTEREST REPRESENTATION AND COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

One of the consequences of this norm of accommodation has been for legislators to sort themselves out on committees based on their personal or district interests. Francis (1989) argues that because of this we can expect, in general, that

there will be an abundance of requests for a small number of powerful standing committees, almost always including those dealing with appropria-

tions, taxation, or budgeting; but beyond the prime committees, interests will be scattered, suited to personal background and constituency make-up.

(27)

We know from the previous literature on legislative committees that the desire to represent one's district is one of the most important reasons for legislators' seeking membership on particular committees (e.g., Bullock 1973; Eulau and Karps 1977; Fenno 1973; Rhode and Shepsle 1973; Stewart 1992). We also know that committees provide members with an important strategic position from which to promote and advance their policy agendas. And, given that the overwhelming majority of African American legislators are elected from majority black districts with distinctive needs, the expectation is that African American legislators will seek and hold assignments on those committees whose jurisdictions include black interest policy areas. That is, we should expect to find African Americans significantly represented on committees whose jurisdiction includes health, social welfare, education, civil rights, and employment opportunity issues.³ This pattern should be more pronounced in the earlier session (i.e., 1969), when African American representation in state legislatures was still fairly new and when there was heightened awareness of the social and economic conditions of the African American community following the 1960s civil rights movement.⁴

The difficulty of satisfactorily characterizing what, in fact, district or constituency interests are is a major problem found in much of the scholarly literature that attempts to link legislators' committee assignment preferences to district interests. Eulau (1985), for example, has asserted that researchers often inappropriately substitute measures of regional or state interest for district or constituency interests.⁵ Because of this seeming inability to find appropriate measures of constituency interest, Eulau argues that "'representation' in any other than its descriptive-statistical sense seems to have little purchasing power in the committee assignment studies" (Eulau 1985:212). Notwithstanding this sound and persuasive critique, with regards to the representation of black interests, I believe that identifying the interests of African American constituents and connecting them to committees in legislatures is not as harrowing an undertaking nor even the nearly impossible task that Eulau suggests it might be.

Given a shared cultural background and common historical heritage, and given the fact that African Americans have been one of the most stable and consistent groups on questions of public policy and political ideology (Dawson 1994; Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989), it is indeed possible both to speak in

terms of and identify a black constituency with particular interests. For instance, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) in the U.S. Congress, since its inception in 1971, has seen itself as representing “the national Black Community” (Barnett 1975). This conception of a national African American community rests on the notion of a “commonality of black political interests” and on the belief that African American members of Congress can and should “jointly represent” this “black collectivity” (Barnett 1975:38). Making a similar point, Canon (1999) writes, “The formative political experiences for the founding members of the CBC were in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. . . . Many members saw themselves as the spokespersons for all African Americans, not only those in their congressional districts” (40). At the state level, in a study of the North Carolina Legislative Black Caucus, Cheryl Miller (1990) concluded that “the Caucus was emerging in its own mind, as well as in the minds of the General Assembly, media, and other political actors, as being an effective voice for minority concerns” (343).

Thus, while in theory the political actions of persons serving in state legislatures should be governed first by a desire to represent not a state or a region but a particular district within a state, African American legislators are often faced with or undertake the additional obligation of pursuing racial group representation. That is, the political behavior of black legislators is often governed by a desire and effort to represent both their individual district *and* African American citizens, regardless of where the citizens reside.⁶ Therefore, connecting the standing committee assignments of African American legislators to their attempts to substantively represent black interests and African American constituencies is more defensible theoretically and more easily done empirically than the attempts criticized by Eulau.

DATA AND METHODS

The data analyzed here consist of the standing committee assignments from the lower legislative chamber of the Arkansas, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, and North Carolina legislatures for 1969, 1979, and 1989. These data were collected from the various state legislative manuals and legislative journals. With the exception of black interest committees, only those committees on which an African American legislator served in at least one of the three legislative sessions are included in the analyses. Using this criteria, the number of committees analyzed ranges from seven in Maryland to twenty-six in Illinois. State legislative committees often undergo name changes. However, here, if a com-

mittee's name changed but its jurisdiction remained the same, only the original name appears in the tables that follow.

The primary task in this chapter is to examine the standing committee assignment patterns of African American legislators. This examination is intended to shed some additional light on black representatives' impact on the legislative process. It will also allow us to further investigate the extent to which African American legislators behave as race representatives. I use two measures—saliency and influence potential—to assess African American representation on legislative committees.

Committee jurisdictions rarely are stagnant or have concretely defined boundaries. In fact, various committees often have jurisdictions that overlap. Thus it is possible for legislators to use more than one committee to accomplish their representational goals. Because of this, it is difficult to infer conclusively exactly what legislators' presence on or absence from a particular committee means (Canon 1999). Nevertheless, the two representational measures used here can provide some relevant information that allows us to reasonably estimate the significance and instrumental value of particular standing committee assignments to African American legislators and their policy agendas, especially as they pertain to black interests.

The first measure, *saliency*, operationalized as the percentage of the total number of all African American committee assignments devoted to a particular committee, provides an assessment of the relative importance of that committee and the policy areas within its jurisdiction to black legislators.⁷ For example, in a legislative session in which African American legislators held a total of ten committee assignments, and four of those assignments were on the Education Committee, the Education Committee would have a saliency score of 40 percent; and if two of those assignments were on the Transportation Committee, then the Transportation Committee's saliency score would be 20 percent. We could then say that, based on their committee service, education issues resonated more with African American legislators than did transportation issues.

The second measure that I use, referred to here as *influence potential*, is a commonly used measure: the percentage of a committee's members who are African American. Because committees enable their members to specialize and acquire power in the policy areas within their jurisdiction, the degree to which a cohesive well-organized group is represented on a committee reflects that group's potential influence over certain policy areas.

As I use them here, an implicit assumption of both of these measures is that

there was some strategic consultation among the African American legislators in each state regarding the allocation of their standing committee assignments. While substantiating that such consultations actually took place is beyond the scope of this study, there is evidence in the existing literature that suggests that this type of decision-making is not uncommon among black legislative caucuses. For example, in her study of agenda-setting activities of the North Carolina Legislative Black Caucus, Cheryl Miller (1990:12) found that African American legislators strategically used their dispersion and leadership on various committees in order to improve the probability of passage of their priority legislation. Similarly, David Canon (1995, 1999) reports that the Congressional Black Caucus has long had an explicit goal of having at least one of its members on each of the most important standing committees. All five of the states in this study had formal legislative black caucuses in at least one of the relevant legislative sessions.

SALIENCY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Table 3.1 provides information on how salient black legislators found the various types of committees in each of the five states and for all three of the legislative sessions included in this study. From these data we see that black interest committees—those committees whose jurisdictions include black interest policy areas like health, education, civil rights, and social welfare—were extremely prominent assignments among African American representatives. (Black interest committees are presented in tables 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6.) Because state legislatures vary in the number of standing committees they have, and because committee jurisdictions often differ from legislative session to legislative session and from state to state, the number and particular committees that are classified as black interest committees will be different from state to state and/or from session to session. Appendix 1 contains a list of all the committees classified by committee type for each of the five states.

The saliency of black interest committees to black legislators ranged from 23 percent in Illinois (1979) to 60 percent in New Jersey (1989). In eleven of the fourteen cases, assignments on black interest committees were ranked at the top in terms of their saliency to African American representatives. This suggests that in deciding on which standing committees to serve, the black legislators acted in a manner that is consistent with what we would expect of race

TABLE 3.1
SALIENCY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN REPRESENTATION ON HOUSE
STANDING COMMITTEES IN THE FIVE STATES, BY COMMITTEE TYPE
(1969, 1979, AND 1989)

State/Committee Type**	Saliency*		
	1969	1979	1989
<i>Arkansas</i>			
Black interests	—	42.9	25.0
Constituency	—	14.3	31.3
Policy	—	0	6.3
Prestige	—	0	6.3
Miscellaneous	—	42.9	31.3
<i>Illinois</i>			
Black interests	45.7	22.9	23.9
Constituency	17.1	14.3	11.9
Policy	22.8	25.7	35.8
Prestige	8.6	28.6	17.9
Miscellaneous	5.7	8.6	14.9
<i>Maryland</i>			
Black interests	53.3	40.0	56.5
Constituency	20.0	6.7	4.0
Policy	0	26.7	21.7
Prestige	2.9	26.7	17.4
Miscellaneous	23.8	0	0
<i>New Jersey</i>			
Black interests	33.3	60.0	33.3
Constituency	0	0	0
Policy	16.7	20.0	16.7
Prestige	16.7	20.0	33.3
Miscellaneous	33.3	0	16.7
<i>North Carolina</i>			
Black interests	42.9	41.7	35.7
Constituency	0	0	0
Policy	28.6	25.0	7.1
Prestige	28.6	25.0	23.8
Miscellaneous	0	8.3	33.3

**Saliency* is the percentage of the total number of black committee assignments designated for that particular committee type.

**With the exception of the black interest committee, the committee types are from Smith and Deering (1990:87). Black interest committees are those committees whose jurisdiction includes such black interest policy areas as health, education, civil rights, and general social welfare. For example, Judiciary, Education and Health committees are classified as black interest rather than policy committees. See the appendix to chapter 3 for committee classifications for each state.

representatives. That is, their committee assignment decisions appear to have been guided, at least in part, by a concern for addressing the particular needs and interests of African American constituents.

As expected, assignments on black interest committees were generally more salient in the earlier legislative session than in the latter one. Only in Maryland did the saliency of black interest committees increase between 1969 and 1989. In New Jersey, saliency on these committees was the same in 1989 as it was in 1969. There are several possible explanations for this pattern of African American legislators' allocating fewer of their committee slots to black interest committees over time. One possibility for this trend is that it reflects the overall improvements in the political and socioeconomic status of African Americans as a group over the last two and a half to three decades.

Notwithstanding the fact that serious social and economic problems continue to plague the African American community and that African Americans continue to be less well-off economically relative to white Americans (Dewart 1990; Hacker 1992; Massey and Denton 1993; Tidwell 1992; Wilson 1987), it is also the case that, in many respects, there has been tremendous progress. In areas such as educational achievement, white-collar employment, and home ownership, the number and percentage of African Americans in the middle class have all generally followed a steep upward trend since 1960 (Canon 1999; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). Also, most of the political goals of the civil rights movement, such as the protection of voting rights and ending *de jure* discrimination and segregation, have been accomplished. And in many respects, there is less national or widespread attention given to these issues. It is possible that these improvements have resulted in a shift in focus or priorities, or even a broadening of the conceptualization of black interests on the part of African American representatives. That is, perhaps in the minds and behavior of black legislators, how black interests are now conceived entails placing more emphasis and direct attention on issues such as commerce and economic policy, business entrepreneurship, community development, and environmental quality, and less on government-provided social programs and traditional civil rights issues (Whitby 1987).

Efforts to advance their legislative careers and efforts to become more incorporated into the "mainstream" of the legislative institution are two additional potential explanations for the apparent decline in the saliency of black interest committee assignments to African American legislators. Obtaining seats on those committees deemed to be the most prestigious in the legislature is an important vehicle for accomplishing both of these outcomes.⁸ Typically,

the Appropriations, Budget, Finance, Taxation, and Rules committees are considered to be the most prestigious in a legislature (Francis 1989). Not only are a representative's chances of moving into leadership positions significantly enhanced by serving on one of these committees (Francis 1989; Rhode and Shepsle 1973; Shepsle 1975), his or her perceived or actual power, influence, and effectiveness within the institution may also depend on having such committee assignments (Frantzich 1979; Friedman 1996; Meyer 1980; Weissert 1989). In choosing their committees, African American legislators may find it difficult to attend to the interests of their African American constituents while at the same time they are attempting to improve their relative standing in the legislature and advance their legislative careers (Friedman 1993). Consequently, there might be some trade-off effect at work. That the saliency of prestige committee assignments grew from 1969 to 1989 in three of the five states, while the saliency of black interest committees either stayed the same or declined during the same period (table 3.1) is some evidence in support of this proposition.

Finally, this decline in the saliency of black interest committee assignments might be evidence of the emergence of a different generation or a new type of African American representative. This new generation of African American representatives may be less inclined (or perhaps perceive less of a need) to be the type of race representatives that their predecessors were. Canon (1995, 1999) finds evidence of such a generation of black representatives emerging in the U.S. Congress. He refers to them as products of the "politics of commonality." Commonality representatives tend to be professional politicians whose formative political experiences were honed in elected office rather than the civil rights movement.⁹ They de-emphasize race and the racial aspects of political issues in their legislative behavior. In other words, their general approach to politics is based on multiracial or nonracial terms. They tend to seek to balance their advocacy for black interests with concern for broader issues (Canon 1995:162–63; 1999:38–42). Given these characteristics, commonality-type legislators can be expected to have fewer black interest committee assignments than "difference members."¹⁰ They will tend to seek assignments on a variety of committees whose jurisdictions extend beyond black interests. Canon's examination of this hypothesis using data from the 103rd and 104th U.S. congresses yielded inconclusive results. As expected, the commonality members held fewer black interest committee assignments than difference members, but the differences were not statistically significant (1999:184).

An individual-level analysis like the one employed by Canon is not possible with the data used for this study. Therefore I cannot determine whether Afri-

can Americans in the state legislatures can be reasonably divided into categories like “commonality” and “difference” members. Nevertheless, the findings in table 3.1 do demonstrate that, although black interest committees remained very popular throughout the period studied, the African American legislators became more varied in rationing their committee assignments over time. As was the case with their bill introductions, they seem to adopt what Canon (1999) refers to as a “balancing perspective” in choosing their committee assignments.

AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS AND POLICY INFLUENCE POTENTIAL

Because they are jurisdictionally based and composed of members who are especially interested in the policy areas within their jurisdiction, standing committees generate agenda-setting and gatekeeping powers. Committee members are empowered with substantial authority over policy-making in their committee’s jurisdictions (Shepsle 1988). One consequence of this is that well-organized and cohesive subgroups within a legislature, if they can amass significant representation on a given committee or set of committees, can strategically place themselves to potentially exert noticeable and disproportionate influence over specific issues or entire policy domains.

African American legislators form one such legislative subgroup. While it is interesting and important to know which committees—and therefore which issues—resonate the most (i.e., are more salient) with black state legislators, it is perhaps more important to determine over which issues or jurisdictions they have the most influence. Of particular concern here is their potential influence over black interest matters. To make these determinations, I compare standing committees in terms of their African American representation. The comparisons are made separately for each of the five states. Influence potential is measured as the percentage of a committee’s members who are African American.¹¹ I also include an *equity ratio* measure for each committee, which assesses the proportionality of African American representation on the committee. The equity ratio is operationalized as the percentage of African Americans on the committee *minus* the percentage of African Americans in the House. If, for example, African Americans constituted 15 percent of the Appropriations Committee and they made up 10 percent of the entire House, then the equity ratio for this committee would be

% Appropriation Committee seats held by African Americans – % African Americans in the House

or $.15 - .10 = .05$

An equity ratio of 0 equals perfect proportional committee representation. A positive score indicates that African Americans are overrepresented on the committee, and a negative ratio means that they are underrepresented. Again, with the exception of black interest committees, only those committees on which an African American legislator served in at least one of the three legislative sessions are included in the analyses.

ARKANSAS

During the 1979 legislative session, African American legislators in Arkansas served on a total of six different standing committees; in 1989 they served on ten (table 3.2).¹² In both sessions they were represented on all the existing black interest committees except the Public Health, Welfare, and Labor Committee. Also in both sessions, at least one black interest committee was among the committees on which African Americans had the most potential influence—the Education Committee in both 1979 and 1989, and the Joint Committee on Children and Youth in 1989.

From the equity ratios in table 3.2, we see that on six committees in 1979 and four in 1989, the black legislator's representation exceeded their representation in the House. In both sessions, African Americans were, in general, the most overrepresented on black interest committees. For the period studied, the Judiciary Committee in 1989 is the only black interest committee on which African Americans in the Arkansas House were underrepresented. Besides black interest committees, African Americans' greatest potential for influence on public policy came on the Legislative Affairs and House Management committees.

ILLINOIS

In each of the three legislative sessions in Illinois, a black interest committee was the committee on which blacks exerted the greatest influence—the Public Welfare and Human Resources Committee in 1969, the Cities and Villages Committee in 1979, and the Urban Affairs Committee in 1989 (table 3.3).¹³ African Americans were particularly well-placed to have an effect on social welfare policy in 1969, urban affairs in 1979, and on both categories in 1989. Moreover, in 1969, black representation on the Public Welfare and Human Resources

TABLE 3.2
AFRICAN AMERICAN REPRESENTATION ON ARKANSAS HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEES (1979 AND 1989)

Committee Name	1979 (N = 3)			1989 (N = 5)			Rank	
	% Black	Equity Ratio		% Black	Equity Ratio		1979	1989
City, County and Local Affairs	0	-3.0		5.0	0		—	T5
Joint Committee on Children and Youth	NE	NE		20.0	15.0		NE	1
Economic and Industrial Resources, and Development	9.6	6.0		NE	NE		3	NE
Education	10.0	7.0		10.0	5.0		T1	T2
House Management	5.0	.20		10.0	5.0		T4	T2
Insurance and Commerce	5.0	.20		5.0	0		T4	T5
Judiciary	5.0	2.0		5.0	0		T4	T5
Legislative Affairs	10.0	7.0		10.0	5.0		T1	T2
Public Health, Welfare, and Labor	0	-3.0		0	-5.0		—	—
Public Transportation	0	-3.0		5.0	0		—	T5
<i>Revenue and Taxation</i>	0	-3.0		5.0	0		—	T5
State Agencies and Government Affairs	0	-3.0		5.0	0		—	T5

Notes: N = number of African Americans in the House.

NE = the committee was not in existence during that session.

Black interest committees appear in bold, prestige committees in italics. With the exception of black interest committees, only those committees in which an African American legislator served in one of the two sessions are included. No African Americans served in the House in 1969. The equity ratio is the percent of African Americans on the committee minus the percent of African Americans in the House.

TABLE 3.3
AFRICAN AMERICAN REPRESENTATION ON ILLINOIS HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEES (1969, 1979, AND 1989)

Committee Name	1969 (N = 14)			1979 (N = 14)			1989 (N = 14)			Rank		
	% Black	Equity Ratio		% Black	Equity Ratio		% Black	Equity Ratio		1969	1979	1989
		Black	Ratio		Black	Ratio		Black	Ratio			
<i>Appropriations</i>	3.6		-4.3	7.7		-0.7	16.7		5.0	15	10	T6
Banks and Savings & Loans	11.1		3.2	4.2		-4.2	14.3		2.6	7	16	T9
Cities and Villages	NE		NE	21.4		13.0	0		-8.4	NE	1	—
Conservation and Water	5.9		-2.0	NE		NE	NE		NE	14	NE	NE
Consumer Protection	NE		NE	NE		NE	21.5		9.8	NE	NE	4
Contingent Expenses	20.0		12.1	NE		NE	NE		NE	2	NE	NE
County and Township Affairs	11.8		3.9	6.7		-1.7	7.7		-4.0	T4	T11	T17
Education	14.3		6.4	0		-7.9	13.3		1.6	3	0	11
Elections	10.7		2.8	15.0		6.6	7.7		-4.0	T8	T3	T17
Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources	NE		NE	6.7		-1.7	23.1		11.4	NE	T11	3
Executive	7.4		-0.5	10.5		2.1	14.3		2.6	11	T6	T9
Higher Education	0		-7.9	13.3		4.9	11.6		-0.6	—	5	14
Highways and Traffic Safety	0		-7.9	4.8		-3.6	8.0		-3.7	—	T14	16
Insurance	14.8		3.9	10.5		2.1	28.5		16.8	T4	T6	2

Judiciary	10.7	2.8	0	-8.4	10.0	-1.7	T8	—	15
Labor and Commerce	0	-7.9	6.7	-1.7	12.5	0.8	—	T11	T12
Municipalities	10.7	2.8	NE	NE	NE	NE	T8	NE	NE
Personnel and Pensions	NE	NE	20.0	11.6	0	-8.4	NE	2	—
Public Utilities	11.8	3.9	0	-8.4	15.5	3.8	T4	—	8
Public Welfare and Human Resources	27.8	19.9	15.6	6.6	21.1	9.4	1	T3	5
Registration and Regulation	6.3	-1.6	NE	NE	12.0	0.3	13	NE	14
Revenue	0	-7.9	8.3	-0.1	12.5	0.8	13	NE	14
Rules	7.1	0.8	8.3	-0.1	6.3	-5.4	12	NE	19
State Government	NE	NE	0	-8.4	16.7	5.0	NE	—	T6
Urban Affairs	NE	NE	NE	NE	40.0	28.0	NE	NE	1
Veterans Affairs	0	-7.9	4.8	-3.6	NE	NE	—	T14	NE

Notes: *N* = number of African Americans in the legislature.

NE = the committee was not in existence during that session.

Black interest committees appear in bold, prestige committees in italics. With the exception of black interest committees, only those committees in which an African American legislator served in one of the three sessions are included. The equity ratio is the percent of African Americans on the committee minus the percent of African Americans in the House.

Committee was almost twice the proportion of blacks in the House; and black representation on the Urban Affairs Committee in 1989 was nearly three times the percentage of African Americans in the legislature.

The most noticeable trend in Illinois, however, is the declining African American presence on black interest committees over time. Every black interest committee that existed and had at least one black member in both 1969 and 1989 experienced a drop in African American representation. No blacks served on the Higher Education Committee in 1969, but between 1979 and 1989 black influence declined on this committee as well. In terms of the percentage of African American members, two of the top three committees in 1969, and three of the top four in 1979 were black interest committees. By 1989, however, only one of the top four committees with the highest proportion of black members was a black interest committee. This pattern is consistent with the committee saliency findings for Illinois (table 3.1). Over time, African American legislators clearly expanded their presence to committees that were not directly linked to black interests, like the Executive and Insurance committees.

MARYLAND

In the Maryland House of Delegates, as in Illinois, a black interest committee was the committee on which blacks exerted the greatest influence for each of the legislative sessions. The Constitutional and Administrative Law Committee was the highest-ranked committee in terms of the percentage of African Americans members in both 1969 and 1989 (table 3.4).¹⁴ The Constitutional and Administrative Law Committee's jurisdiction includes election laws, workers' compensation, and amendments to the state constitution. In 1979 the Economic Matters Committee ranked first in African American representation. Unemployment insurance and consumer protection are among the areas covered by the Economic Matters Committee. It is somewhat surprising that African American legislators were consistently and significantly underrepresented on the Judiciary Committee throughout the period studied.

The representation of African Americans on all the black interest committees increased over time. In fact, on three of the four black interest committees, the African American presence more than doubled between 1969 and 1989. For example, in 1969 black legislators made up 12.5 percent of the Constitutional and Administrative Law Committee and 2.9 percent of the Economic Matters Committee. By 1989, African Americans constituted more than 27 percent of the total membership of the Constitutional and Administrative Law Commit-

TABLE 3.4
AFRICAN AMERICAN REPRESENTATION ON MARYLAND HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEES
(1969, 1979, AND 1989)

Committee Name	1969 (<i>N</i> = 8)			1979 (<i>N</i> = 14)			1989 (<i>N</i> = 22)			Rank		
	%	Equity		%	Equity		%	Equity		1969	1979	1989
		Black	Ratio		Black	Ratio		Black	Ratio			
<i>Appropriations</i>	<i>NE</i>	<i>NE</i>		12.5	2.6		12.5	-3.1		<i>NE</i>	3	4
Constitutional and Administrative Law	12.5	6.9		13.6	3.7		27.3	11.7		1	2	1
Economic Matters	2.9	-2.7		17.4	7.5		18.2	2.6		T4	1	2
Environmental Matters	7.4	1.8		4.2	-5.7		4.2	-11.4		3	7	7
Judiciary	2.9	-2.7		4.3	-5.6		8.7	-6.9		T4	6	5
<i>Rules and Executive Nominations</i>	0	-5.6		6.7	-3.2		7.5	-8.1		—	5	6
Ways and Means	11.1	5.5		8.3	-1.6		16.7	1.1		2	4	3

Notes: *N* = number of African Americans in the legislature.

NE = the committee was not in existence during that session.

Black interest committees appear in bold, prestige committees in italics. With the exception of black interest committees, only those committees in which an African American legislator served in one of the three sessions are included. The equity ratio is the percent of African Americans on the committee minus the percent of African Americans in the House.

tee, and slightly more than 18 percent of the Economic Matters Committee. This growth was contrary to what was predicted. Their presence on these committees as well as the Ways and Means Committee placed African American representatives in a position to have significant influence on the issues of particular importance to their African American constituents, such as election laws, unemployment insurance, education, and social welfare programs.

Black legislators in Maryland had a presence on at least one prestige committees in all the sessions. However, in four of the five instances, their representation on these committees was lower than their proportion in the legislature as a whole. The equity ratios also reveal that when the black legislators were overrepresented on a committee, it was almost always on a black interest committee. The only exceptions are the 1969 Environmental Matters Committee and the 1979 Appropriations Committee.

NEW JERSEY

The data in table 3.5 indicate that African American legislators in New Jersey tended to spread themselves out almost evenly across a relatively small number of committees. In 1969, for example, African American legislators served on only six of twenty-one committees that existed. In 1979 it was five out of seventeen, and in 1989 they served on only four of a possible twenty-two committees. Thus it appears that the representatives sought to narrowly target their areas of influence.

The black legislators maintained a presence on important black interest committees in each of the legislative sessions. They were overrepresented on the Education as well as Institutions and Welfare committees in 1969 and 1979, on the Judiciary Committee in 1979, and on the Housing Committee in 1989. It is interesting that no African American served on the Higher Education Committee in either of the three sessions.

NORTH CAROLINA

Black legislators in North Carolina tended to divide their standing committee assignments mostly between black interest and prestige committees (table 3.6). In 1969, of the seven committees that had African American representation, five of them fit this description, as did six of the nine in 1979 and seven of the fourteen in 1989. African Americans were overrepresented on at least one prestige committee in each of the legislative sessions. And, when one considers all the sessions together, on black interest committees they were overrepresented

TABLE 3.5
AFRICAN AMERICAN REPRESENTATION ON NEW JERSEY HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEES (1969, 1979, AND 1989)

Committee Name	1969 (N = 5)			1979 (N = 3)			1989 (N = 5)			Rank		
	% Black	Equity Ratio		% Black	Equity Ratio		% Black	Equity Ratio		1969	1979	1989
Appropriations	0	-6.3		0	-3.7		13.3	6.2		—	—	4
Community Development and Urban Affairs	NE	NE		NE	NE		20.0	12.9		NE	NE	T1
County and Municipal Government	0	-6.3		14.3	10.6		0	-7.1		—	T4	—
Education	11.1	4.8		14.3	10.6		0	-7.1		T2	T4	—
Higher Education	0	-6.3		0	-3.7		0	-7.1		—	—	—
Housing	NE	NE		NE	NE		20.0	12.9		NE	NE	T1
Institutions and Welfare	11.1	4.8		20.0	16.3		NE	NE		T2	T1	NE
Introduction of Bills	14.3	8.0		NE	NE		NE	NE		1	NE	NE
Judiciary	0	-6.3		20.0	16.3		0	-7.1		—	T1	—
State Government	0	-6.3		0	-3.7		20.0	12.9		—	—	T1
Taxation	11.1	4.8		0	-3.7		NE	NE		T2	—	NE
Transportation and Public Utilities	11.1	4.8		0	-3.7		0	-7.1		T2	—	—
Ways and Means	0	-6.3		20.0	16.3		NE	NE		—	T1	NE

Notes: N = number of African Americans in the legislature.

NE = the committee was not in existence during that session.

Black interest committees appear in bold, prestige committees in italics. With the exception of black interest committees, only those committees in which an African American legislator served in one of the three sessions are included. The equity ratio is the percent of African Americans on the committee minus the percent of African Americans in the House.

TABLE 3.6
AFRICAN AMERICAN REPRESENTATION ON NORTH CAROLINA HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEES
(1969, 1979, AND 1989)

Committee Name	1969 (N = 1)			1979 (N = 2)			1989 (N = 13)			Rank		
	% Black	Equity Ratio	Equity Ratio	% Black	Equity Ratio	Equity Ratio	% Black	Equity Ratio	Equity Ratio	1969	1979	1989
Alcoholic Beverage Control	0	-0.8	-1.7	0	-1.7	17.8	28.6	17.8	—	—	—	T1
Appropriations	1.6	0.8	-0.1	1.6	-0.1	-1.0	9.8	-1.0	7	9	11	11
Banking and Banks	4.3	3.5	-1.7	0	-1.7	-10.8	0	-10.8	4	—	—	—
Budget	NE	NE	3.6	5.3	3.6	NE	NE	NE	NE	7	NE	NE
Constitutional Amendments	0	-0.8	8.8	10.5	8.8	NE	NE	NE	—	2	NE	NE
Correctional Institutions	8.3	7.5	-1.7	0	-1.7	-10.8	0	-10.8	1	—	—	—
Courts and Judicial Districts	0	-0.8	10.8	12.5	10.8	NE	NE	NE	—	1	NE	NE
Economy	0	-0.8	5.0	6.7	5.0	0	0	0	—	3	—	—
Education	3.7	2.9	-1.7	0	-1.7	3.5	14.3	3.5	5	—	T5	T5
Election Laws	0	-0.8	4.2	5.9	4.2	3.5	14.3	3.5	—	4	T5	T5
Finance	0	-0.8	0	1.7	0	-3.0	7.8	-3.0	—	8	13	13
Higher Education	0	-0.8	3.9	5.6	3.9	-3.7	7.1	-3.7	—	T5	14	14
Judiciary (I, II, III)	4.5	3.7	3.9	5.6	3.9	3.0	13.8	3.0	3	T5	10	10
Military, Veteran, and Indian Affairs	0	-0.8	-1.7	0	-1.7	3.5	14.3	3.5	—	—	T5	T5

Pensions and Retirement	0	-0.8	0	-1.7	18.2	7.6	—	3
Public Employees	0	-0.8	0	-1.7	28.6	17.8	—	T1
Public Welfare	3.1	2.3	0	-1.7	16.7	5.9	6	4
Roads and Transportation	0	-0.8	0	-1.7	14.3	3.5	—	T5
<i>Rules and Operation of the House</i>	<i>5.3</i>	<i>4.5</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>-1.7</i>	<i>9.1</i>	<i>1.7</i>	2	12
State Government	0	-0.8	0	-1.7	14.3	3.5	—	T5
UNC Board of Governors	0	-0.8	0	-1.7	14.3	3.5	—	T5

Notes: N = number of African Americans in the legislature.

NE = the committee was not in existence during that session.

Black interest committees appear in bold, prestige committees in italics. With the exception of black interest committees, only those committees in which an African American legislator served in one of the three sessions are included. The equity ratio is the percent of African Americans on the committee minus the percent of African Americans in the House.

*The 1989 standing committee system was significantly different than in 1969 and 1979. By 1989, several committees that were previously stand-alone committees were now incorporated as subcommittees. For example, the Higher Education Committee became a subcommittee of the larger Education Committee, and Roads and Transportation became a subcommittee of the Infrastructure Committee. For the purposes of this analysis, where appropriate, such subcommittees were treated as full standing committees in order to maintain consistency and comparability.

in nine of thirteen cases. In no case, however, was a black interest committee ranked first in terms of the percentage of African Americans on it.

The 1989 committee representation pattern in North Carolina is similar to the one in Illinois in 1989. By 1989, while maintaining a significant presence on black interest committees, African American legislators in the North Carolina House had both expanded the number of committees on which they served and diversified the areas over which they had influence. The top three committees based on African American representation were committees whose jurisdictions were not directly linked to a black interest area, i.e. Alcoholic Beverage Control, Pensions and Retirement, and Public Employees. In the cases of the Alcoholic Beverage Control and the Public Employees committees, African American representation was at least more than one and a half times what it was on any black interest committee. The relatively high percentage of African Americans on these two committees may be explained, in part, by the fact that an African American legislator was part of the committees' leadership structure.

DISCUSSION

For all three of the legislative sessions in four of the five states, a black interest committee was among the top two committees in terms of the percentage of their members who were African American. Moreover, while they did not have representation on every possible black interest committee, if we consider all of the fourteen legislative sessions together, African Americans were overrepresented on thirty-nine of the forty-eight black interest committees on which they actually served. Thus, based on their standing committee assignments, African American legislators were in a position to specialize and accumulate power in those areas of particular importance to their African American constituents. That is, through their presence and participation on standing committees, African American legislators had the greatest potential to directly influence legislation in black interest categories.

Between 1969 and 1989, there was an increase in the number of committees on which black legislators served in three of the states—Arkansas, Illinois, and North Carolina. The number of committees on which African American legislators served in Maryland and New Jersey during this time stayed the same. Diversification in the substantive areas over which they had some influence accompanied this increase. For example, there were some indications that over time, the legislators increased their influence on prestige and internal house management committees. However, it does not appear that the African Ameri-

can legislators expanded their committee coverage at the expense of significantly lowering their influence on black interest committees. Only in Illinois was there a systematic decline in African American representation on black interest committees between 1969 and 1989. An increase in the number of African Americans elected to the legislatures was the most important factor driving the expanded committee coverage.

CONCLUSION

Standing committees play a central role in the legislative process. Because they can control the substantive content of legislation and determine if and when bills reach the floor, standing committees have tremendous control over the types of issues that are debated and decided in legislatures.

The desire to represent one's constituents and district is one of the most important considerations for legislators as they choose committee assignments (Bullock 1973; Eulau and Karps 1977; Francis 1989; Hedlund 1992; Rhode and Shepsle 1973; Stewart 1992). Because standing committees are jurisdictionally based, their members accumulate power and influence and acquire an important stake in the policy areas that are handled by the committee. The analyses in this chapter tells us that through their committee assignments, black state legislators tended to accumulate power and acquire influence in black interest policy areas more than in any other area. Consistent with the conclusion from chapter 2 regarding African American state representatives and legislative agenda-setting, the findings here indicate that the black legislators behaved like race representatives by attempting to insure that a black voice and perspective were heard at a very important stage of the legislative process.

In a recent study of committee assignment patterns in state legislatures, Kathlene Bratton and Kerry L. Haynie (n.d.) found that African American legislators were more likely than nonblack legislators to serve on education, health, and welfare committees, and that the bills they introduced were also more likely to be referred to one of those committees.¹⁵ Serving on committees to which one's own proposals are referred provides substantial advantages in terms of advancing one's policy priorities through the legislative labyrinth. As Bratton and Haynie put it, "Racial and gender differences in committee service . . . facilitated black and female state legislators' ability to more effectively translate their policy agenda into policy outcomes" (n.d.:24). Based on two separate measures—saliency, measured as the percentage of all African Ameri-

can committee assignments devoted to a particular type of committee, and potential influence, calculated as the percentage of a committee's membership that is African American—we can conclude from the analyses above that African American legislators examined in this book were well positioned on standing committees to advance or protect a black interest agenda.

Interestingly, much like what has been chronicled among African American members of Congress (e.g., Canon 1995, 1999; Swain 1993), some of the data and analyses in this chapter indicate that, over time, there has been a broadening of the agendas and interests of African American legislators. Thus, once again, we have found evidence of African American representatives seeming to balance their concern for black interests with other interests that may be important to their districts, their legislative careers, or to both. So, in terms of their committee service, the African American legislators seemed to be both race representatives and “responsible legislators.” That is, while they were well positioned on standing committees to advance a black interest agenda, they were also well positioned to exert influence on other important legislative matters as well.