

AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL INCORPORATION

A VIEW FROM THE STATES

After the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, black politics was transformed from pressure or protest politics to the politics of electoral participation. This new politics served as an impetus for African Americans to compete for public office and led to significant gains in African American representation in government. A black presence in governmental institutions has important symbolic and psychological consequences for African Americans in particular, and all of American society in general. For example, Lani Guinier (1994) reports that an African American member of the 1989 Arkansas House of Representatives indicated that one reason that he worked to get other African Americans elected was to help undermine “the myth that some white kids might have that blacks can’t serve or shouldn’t be serving at the courthouse” (54). Like Virginia Sapiro’s (1981) argument that increased descriptive representation of women in legislatures would dispel the perceptions and beliefs that politics is a “male domain,” the increased presence of African Americans in public policy-making institutions challenges the notion that African Americans cannot or should not be trusted in positions of authority and power. The “new black politics,” however, was not to be simply a struggle for inclusion. Inclusion was intended to be a means to substantive ends rather than merely a symbolic end unto itself. For example, one expectation has been that black inclusion would in some way challenge and change existing power structures and

racial hierarchies as well as being a vehicle for transforming American political institutions.¹

In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that descriptive representation or even simply articulating a race-based agenda may not be sufficient if African Americans are to have significant influence in public policy-making. Several scholars, most notably Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984), have persuasively argued that African American officeholders must achieve *political incorporation* as a precondition to having a meaningful effect on government policies and programs (see also Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Sonenshein 1993).

Political incorporation refers to the extent to which a group is represented in important and sometimes dominant coalitions in policy-making institutions. It is the degree "to which a group has been able to achieve a position from which strong and sustained influence can be exercised" (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984:241). Browning and colleagues's measure of incorporation is a composite scale of the number or percentage of African American officeholders present in the policy-making arena, their presence in important leadership positions, and their active participation in dominant ruling coalitions.

High levels of incorporation are seen as necessary for a group to realize its political goals and objectives. Several studies have found political incorporation to be positively associated with increased governmental responsiveness to African American concerns and interests (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Sonenshein 1993).

A group that has achieved substantial political incorporation has taken a major step toward political equality. It is in a position to articulate its interests, its demands will be heard, and through the dominant coalition it can ensure that certain interests will be protected, even though it may not win on every issue. The group will have successfully opened the system and gained the kind of ability to make its interests prevail that other groups have already achieved.

(Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984:27)

Specifically, Browning and colleagues discovered that high levels of minority incorporation were accompanied by changes in urban policies such as the increased use of minority contractors, the appointment of more minorities to city commissions, the creation of police review boards, and improved city services in minority neighborhoods. Lawrence Bobo and Franklin D. Gilliam (1990) demonstrated that a link exists between African American incorporation and blacks' engagement and participation in the political process. They found that

African Americans living in high “black empowerment” areas were more knowledgeable of politics and more likely to vote and otherwise participate than those African Americans living in cities with low or no black empowerment.²

Are these apparent positive effects for African Americans from political incorporation limited to cities, or do black officeholders and black interests at other levels of government benefit from incorporation as well? To date, nearly all the research on minority-group political incorporation has been conducted at the municipal level. Therefore, our knowledge about the impact of this process outside of a city or urban context is somewhat limited.

LEGISLATURES AND POLITICAL INCORPORATION

Albert J. Nelson’s 1991 book, *Emerging Influentials in State Legislatures: Women, Blacks, and Hispanics*, is one of the few studies to explore minority-group incorporation in a setting other than the city. He examined minority incorporation in forty-five lower state legislative chambers by constructing “influence indices” for women, African Americans, and Hispanics which were based on the party leadership positions and committee chairs that they held. In many respects, Nelson’s findings for African Americans raised more questions about the process and significance of political incorporation in legislatures than he answered. Most of his results are statistically insignificant, counterintuitive, or contradictory to his hypotheses (Nelson 1991:114–16). A few examples of these findings follow.

Black partial correlations also represent some unexpected results. Surprisingly, there is a significant but negative partial correlation . . . with education, a small but insignificant relationship with mental health and hospitals. These findings indicate educational expenditures are likely to be lower if black influence is greater. (114)

Black influence in states with a unified Democratic government produces different results than reported above. . . . The results reported above indicate a positive, but insignificant, relationship between black influence and social service expenditures. That relationship is reversed here. I have found that there is marginally significant, but negative, correlations between black influence and social service expenditures. . . . If black influence increases from state to state, per capita expenditures for social services tend to decline. (116)

A somewhat restricted, overly narrow definition or construction of political incorporation might be part of the explanation for these findings. For example, Nelson constructed what he calls an index of "potential influence," which is based solely on leadership and committee chair positions and which takes into account whether legislators are in the majority or minority party (Nelson 1991:94). In this chapter, I seek to add to the knowledge about the nature and consequences of the concept of African American political incorporation by applying it in the five states used in this study. Building primarily on Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984), and to a lesser extent Nelson (1991), I have constructed an African American "political incorporation index" suited especially for legislatures. The incorporation index and the methods that I use here differ significantly from those employed by Nelson. The scale not only takes into account leadership positions and whether or not African Americans are in the majority party, it also accounts for the number of African Americans present in the legislature, the prestige or power committee assignments that they hold, and the tenure (i.e., seniority) of blacks in the legislature. Consequently, my conceptualization provides a somewhat more comprehensive representation of the potential that African Americans have to influence public policy. It recognizes that in order to achieve the capacity to exert strong and substantial influence in legislatures, African Americans not only need a continuous presence, but they also must obtain leadership positions and strategic committee assignments.

Specifically, my political incorporation scale for legislatures is a composite measure of six factors: (1) the number of African Americans in the legislature; (2) the percentage of the Democratic Party that African Americans constitute; (3) the number of prestige or power committee assignments they hold; (4) African American seniority levels; (5) leadership positions; and (6) the presence of an African American speaker, majority leader, or minority leader (table 4.1).³ Descriptive representation is accounted for in this conceptualization of incorporation, but the scale relies most heavily on variables that are directly associated with power and influence in legislatures.⁴ In other words, the African American political incorporation scale puts a premium on leadership positions, seniority, and strategic institutional positioning. Because of this, the expectation is that African American incorporation will be lower in the earlier legislative sessions when African American lawmakers were relatively new to state legislatures and less likely to have acquired key positions (i.e., 1969) than in the later sessions (i.e., 1989).⁵

African American political incorporation scores were computed for each of

TABLE 4.1
POLITICAL INCORPORATION INDEX FOR STATE LEGISLATURES

Variable	Value
Number of African Americans in legislature	Actual number
African American % of Democratic Party	Actual % (only if Democrats are majority)
Prestige committee assignments	1 point each assignment
Mean African American seniority in years	Actual average
Leadership positions*	2 points each position
Speaker, Majority/Minority Leader	3 points

*Prestige committees are the Appropriations, Budget, Finance/Taxation, Rules, and Ways and Means committees (see Smith and Deering 1980:87). Leadership positions include assistant majority/minority leader, party whips, assistant party whips, and committee chairs. The speaker, majority leader, and minority leader positions are counted separately.

the five state legislatures and the three legislative sessions examined in this book. First, one point was assigned for each African American in the legislature. Because it is clear that participation in a dominant coalition yields more substantive policy changes for minority groups than does descriptive representation alone (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Nelson 1991; Sonenshein 1993), if the Democrats were the majority party I added points that equaled the percentage of the party that blacks constituted. This variable gives considerably more weight to those legislative sessions in which African Americans were part of a dominant or controlling coalition. For example, in New Jersey in 1979 the three African Americans in the Assembly made up 6 percent of the Democratic Party, and the Democrats were the majority party—thus six points more were added to the African American political incorporation score for New Jersey 1979. In 1989 six African Americans made up 15 percent of the Democratic Party; however, the Democrats were in the minority. Therefore, six points were added for the number of African Americans in the legislature, but no points for the percentage of the Democratic Party that they comprised were added to the political incorporation score for this session.

One point was added to the incorporation score for each assignment that a black legislator had on a prestige committee. Standing committee assignments are important in a legislature because most of a legislator's effect on public policy comes via his or her committee work. Prestige committees are a small group

of powerful and highly coveted committees that deal with appropriations, taxation and budgeting issues, and the rules and procedures of the legislature. The conventional wisdom is that assignments on these committees tend to confer some extraordinary degree of power and influence to legislators (Francis 1989; Haynie n.d.; Smith and Deering 1990).

Seniority and holding formal leadership positions are important contributors to power and influence in legislatures. Senior representatives generally are more knowledgeable about legislative procedures, and this contributes to their being more effective in negotiating the legislative labyrinth (Meyer 1980; Weisert 1989). By virtue of the powers inherent in their positions, formal legislative leaders are decidedly more influential than rank-and-file legislators. The average seniority in years for black representatives was added to the African American political incorporation scores. Two points were assigned for each African American leader in a legislative session. Because of the extraordinary powers of the speaker and the majority and minority leaders (e.g., control over the legislative calendar and the committee assignment process), three points were added when an African American held one of these positions.

Because the analysis that follows is based on a limited sample of states, it is subject to all the caveats about generalizations. However, this analysis nevertheless provides some important insights into a virtually unexamined facet of African American legislative experience and behavior. The findings here can perhaps serve as the foundation for theory-building and more in-depth studies of this subject.

AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL INCORPORATION IN THE FIVE STATES

In order to assess African American political incorporation in state legislatures, I assigned incorporation scores to the 1969, 1979, and 1989 legislative sessions of the lower house of the five state legislatures studied in this book (i.e., Arkansas, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, and North Carolina). African American political incorporation ranged from a low of 5 in North Carolina in 1969 to a high of 72 in Maryland's 1989 legislative session (see figure 4.1). Most importantly, the bar graphs in figure 4.1 show that, as expected, there was a dramatic growth in African American incorporation between 1969 and 1989. In all five states, African American incorporation was higher from one decade to the next. Considering all the states together, the average gain in incorporation between 1969 and

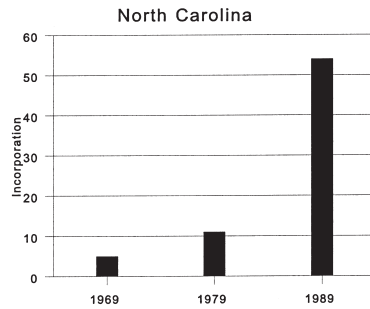
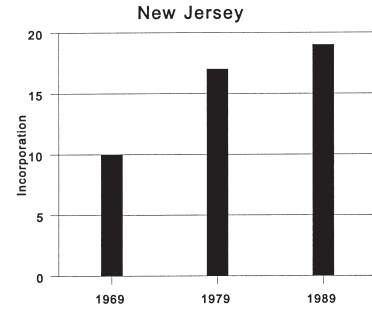
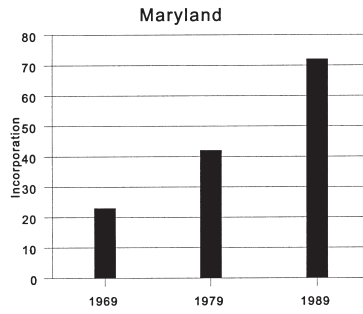
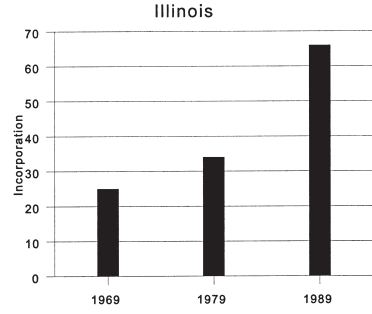
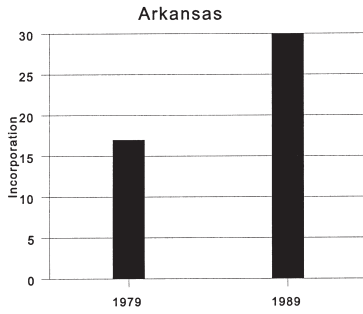


FIGURE 4.1 African American Political Incorporation in the Five States

TABLE 4.2
LEGISLATIVE SESSIONS GROUPED BY QUARTILES OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN POLITICAL INCORPORATION

Lowest		Highest	
Arkansas 1969	Arkansas 1979	Illinois 1969	North Carolina 1989
North Carolina 1969	New Jersey 1979	Arkansas 1989	Illinois 1989
New Jersey 1969	New Jersey 1989	Illinois 1979	Maryland 1989
North Carolina 1979	Maryland 1969	Maryland 1979	

1989 was 283 percent. These data suggest that, again as expected, the status and clout of black state legislators has grown substantially over time.

Table 4.2 presents a ranking of the fifteen legislative sessions by quartiles of African American political incorporation.⁶ Although African American incorporation and African American descriptive representation are highly correlated, $r = .92$ ($p \leq .01$), the rankings in table 4.2 demonstrate the importance of other variables besides descriptive representation to the conceptualization and measurement of political incorporation. For example, although African Americans who served in Arkansas's 1989 legislative session made up a smaller percentage of their legislature than did African Americans in Maryland and Illinois in 1979 (see table 1.1), as a group the Arkansans achieved a higher level of political incorporation than did the blacks in both of these other legislative sessions. Similarly, in 1969, Illinois had a significantly higher percentage of African Americans in its legislature than Arkansas in 1989 (7.9 percent to 5.2 percent), but Arkansas 1989 placed higher in terms of African American incorporation. The number of prestige committee assignments held by African American legislators and their slightly higher level of seniority are responsible for these outcomes.

POLITICAL INCORPORATION AND GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSIVENESS

The theory of political incorporation developed in studies like Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984) and Sonenshein (1993) maintains that increased African American incorporation in government results in significant and noticeable changes in public policy. Indeed, both of these studies found that changes in municipal politics and policies that were favorable to African Americans often

followed periods of increased African American political incorporation on city councils. The question here is, has the growth in the power and status of African American state legislators translated into significant substantive results at the state level? That is, has there been any increased responsiveness to African American state legislators and to black policy interests that is related to the increases in African American incorporation in state legislatures?

Unlike previous studies, I treat responsiveness as having two closely related yet distinct dimensions—internal and external. *Internal responsiveness* refers to reactions to African American legislators inside the legislature, or to how black legislators themselves directly benefit from higher levels of political incorporation. The passage rates of bills introduced by African American legislators are used to measure and assess internal responsiveness in state legislatures. *External responsiveness*, on the other hand, refers to changes in public policy that are correlated to and explained, at least in part, by changes in African American representatives' level of incorporation. I address the question of whether political incorporation leads to external responsiveness by examining state expenditures in three policy areas: health, education, and social welfare. These policy categories include many of those issues that make up the core of black interests (see chapter 2; also see Bratton and Haynie 1999a; Canon 1999; Karnig and Welch 1980; Swain 1993).

The state expenditure data that I use for the analyses in this chapter are from three different time points: 1971–72, 1981–82, and 1991–1992. These years were selected to allow for some lag period between the beginning of a legislative term and the time when legislators who served in that session could reasonably be expected to have an impact on state spending. For example, the expenditure data that I use for the 1969 legislative sessions are the mean state expenditures for 1971–72, for 1979 they are the mean expenditures for 1981–82, and so on.

The argument regarding African American political incorporation is that it is a better predictor of institutional responsiveness than simple descriptive representation, and that the higher the level of incorporation, the more responsiveness there will be. Embedded in these expectations is the alternative explanation that African American descriptive representation by itself is sufficient to elicit favorable responses to black interests. That is to say, it is possible that institutions simply respond when there is an African American presence. Like the case for political incorporation, the more African Americans present in the legislatures, the more responsiveness we should expect. Thus while we are primarily interested in the effects of political incorporation on responsiveness, I also

explore whether or not there is a relationship between descriptive representation (i.e., the percentage of legislators who are African American) and responsiveness, both internal and external.

INTERNAL RESPONSIVENESS

Because the incorporation scale developed and used here relies most heavily on variables that are associated with power and influence in legislatures, it is logical to expect political incorporation to be linked to internal institutional responsiveness. Individual legislators or groups of legislators like African Americans whose level of incorporation increases over time should benefit from this elevation in status and clout. Moreover, higher levels of incorporation should result in higher levels of responsiveness. The success that legislators have in getting the bills that they introduce passed is a useful and appropriate indicator of internal responsiveness. Bill passage in legislatures is often a *response* to the power, skill, and/or influence of the proposal's primary sponsors.

Power is not identifiable until it is manifested in situations where one [legislator] gets his [or her] colleagues to do something they would otherwise not do. . . . The act of introducing a piece of legislation and requesting the [legislature] to act on it forces the members of the legislature to make decisions that would not otherwise be made. . . . In operational terms one congressman is more powerful than another when he [or she] is more effective in the passage of legislation.”⁷

In other words, in making the decision to approve one bill as opposed to another, it is reasonable to argue that legislatures, in part, are being responsive to the status and stature of individual or small groups of representatives.⁸

Contrary to expectations, as measured by the percentage of their bill introductions that passed in the lower houses of the various state legislatures, African American lawmakers in general did not experience higher levels of internal responsiveness as their level of political incorporation increased (figure 4.2a). In fact, on average, a higher percentage of bills introduced by African American legislators passed in the legislative sessions with the lowest levels of African American incorporation. The passage rate in the quartile of legislative sessions with the lowest level of African American incorporation was 44.7 percent, compared to a passage rate of just 23.2 percent for the sessions with the highest amount of black incorporation. The pattern is the same when the legislative

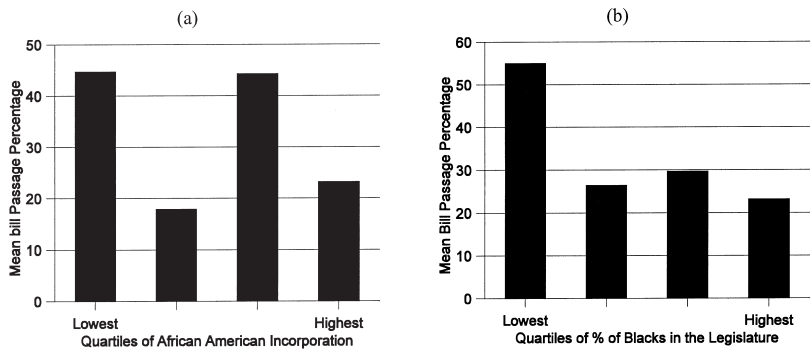


FIGURE 4.2 Political Incorporation, Descriptive Representation, and Mean Passage Rate of Bills Introduced by African American Legislators

sessions are grouped into quartiles of the percentage of African Americans in them (figure 4.2b). In this instance, not only did the quartile with the lowest levels of black descriptive representation have the highest level of responsiveness (55 percent passage rate), it is also the case that the sessions with the highest percentage of African American representatives were the least responsive (23.2 percent passage rate) to the rising power and status of black legislators.

The results in figure 4.2 suggest that neither African American political incorporation nor African American descriptive representation has a significant effect on the likelihood of passage of bills introduced by black legislators. The correlation data in table 4.3 support this finding. These findings are not expected.⁹ According to these results, there is a negative and statistically insignificant

TABLE 4.3
CORRELATION OF *PASSAGE RATE OF BILLS INTRODUCED BY AFRICAN AMERICAN LEGISLATORS* WITH *AFRICAN AMERICAN INCORPORATION AND AFRICAN AMERICAN DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION* (*N* = 15)³⁰

	Average Percent of Bills Passed
Incorporation	-.08
Descriptive representation	-.16

correlation between the average passage rate of bills introduced by African American representatives and African American political incorporation. The results for the relationship between descriptive representation and bill passage rate was virtually the same—negative and not statistically significant. In other words, neither their increased presence nor their seemingly increased influence resulted in more internal institutional responsiveness for African American state legislators.

EXTERNAL RESPONSIVENESS

External responsiveness refers to changes in state public policy that are correlated to, and in part explained by, changes in African American representatives' level of political incorporation. State expenditures for health, education, and social welfare programs and services are what I use to measure this type of institutional responsiveness. My expectation, based on extant theories of political incorporation, is that African American political incorporation will be positively related to increased state spending in these policy areas.

HEALTH EXPENDITURES The discrepancies in the quality of their health is perhaps the widest and most persistent gap between African Americans and whites. For example, there has been a long-standing racial divide in black-white life expectancy, infant mortality, and incidences of heart disease and cancer (Kochack, Maurer, and Rosenberg 1994; National Center for Health Statistics 1994). These gaps are large and are growing.

In 1995 the life expectancy for blacks was about 10 percent shorter than that for whites (seventy years for blacks, compared to seventy-seven for whites), the infant mortality rate was double for blacks (15.1 deaths per 100,000 births for blacks, compared to 7.6). . . . The death rate for women with breast cancer fell by 10 percent for all women between 1990 and 1996, but did not change for blacks (and now stands at 27.5 deaths per 100,00 for blacks, compared to 21 for all women). . . . The cancer rate among black men has risen by 67 percent since the early 1960s, but only about 11 percent among white men. Death caused by stroke and heart disease are also substantially more frequent among blacks, though the gap between blacks and whites did not increase between 1990 and 1995. (Canon 1999:24–25)

Addressing these conditions is a perennial concern of the black community.

Figure 4.3 provides information on the relationship between African American political incorporation, African American descriptive representation, and

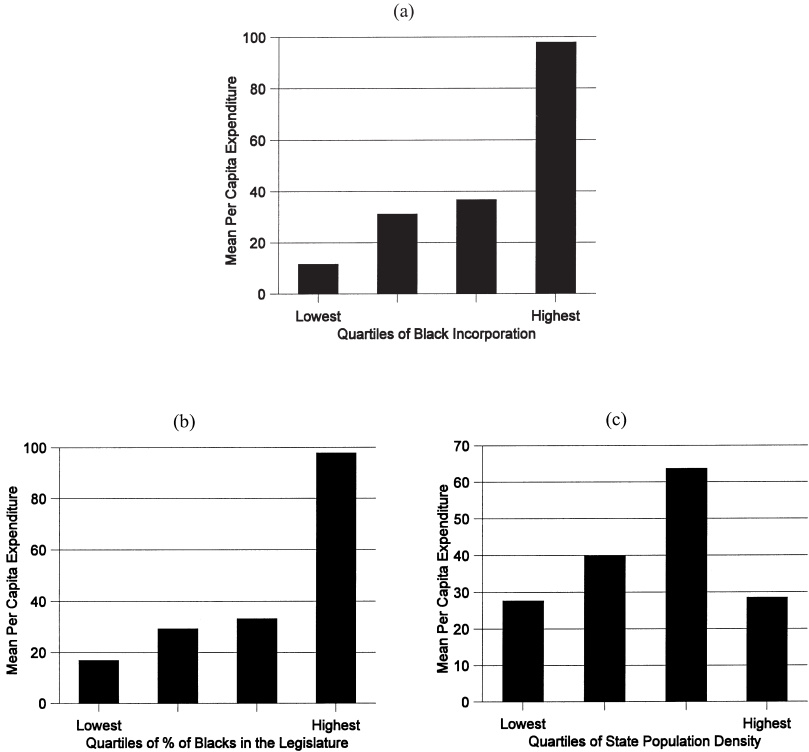


FIGURE 4.3 Political Incorporation, Descriptive Representation, Population Density, and State *Health Expenditures*

state health expenditures. The findings comport perfectly with the arguments of both the political incorporation and descriptive representation perspectives. The three legislative sessions with the highest levels of African American incorporation (figure 4.3a) spent significantly more per person on health programs than the four legislative sessions with the lowest levels of incorporation (\$98 to \$12).¹⁰ Likewise, the three legislative sessions with the greatest proportion of African Americans in them (figure 4.3b) spent significantly more than the four sessions with the least (\$98 to \$17).

The correlation results in table 4.4 confirm the findings in figure 4.3. Both political incorporation and descriptive representation are significantly corre-

TABLE 4.4
CORRELATION OF PER CAPITA STATE SPENDING FOR *HEALTH* WITH
AFRICAN AMERICAN INCORPORATION AND AFRICAN AMERICAN
DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION
(*N* = 15)

	Health Expenditures
Incorporation	.84*
Descriptive representation	.74*

Note: Descriptive representation is measured as the percentage of African Americans in the legislature.

**p* < .001

lated to state health spending. Of these two, African American political incorporation is more closely related to responsiveness.

EDUCATION EXPENDITURES Better educational achievement is widely considered the most effective means for improving the health, social, and economic conditions of the African American community. In fact, previous research and analyses (as presented in chapter 2) demonstrate that African American legislators at the state level are more likely than other state representatives to introduce legislation supportive of education (Bratton and Haynie 1999a). Thus spending by states to improve or provide more educational opportunities is an outcome that is desired by African American legislators and African American citizens alike.¹¹

The arguments that institutions respond only when African Americans are present in the legislature, and the greater the black presence, the more responsiveness there is likely to be, seems to be strongly supported by the results in figure 4.4b. Indeed, when the state legislative sessions are grouped into quartiles according to the percentage of African Americans in them, those with higher proportions of black legislators spend more on education than those with lower proportions.

As for political incorporation, a cursory look at the relationship between African American incorporation and per capita education expenditures that is represented in figure 4.4a provides little empirical support for the hypothesis that higher levels of incorporation will lead to more spending for education initiatives. However, results from the correlation analyses reported in table 4.5 suggest a different conclusion. These data show that, in fact, African American

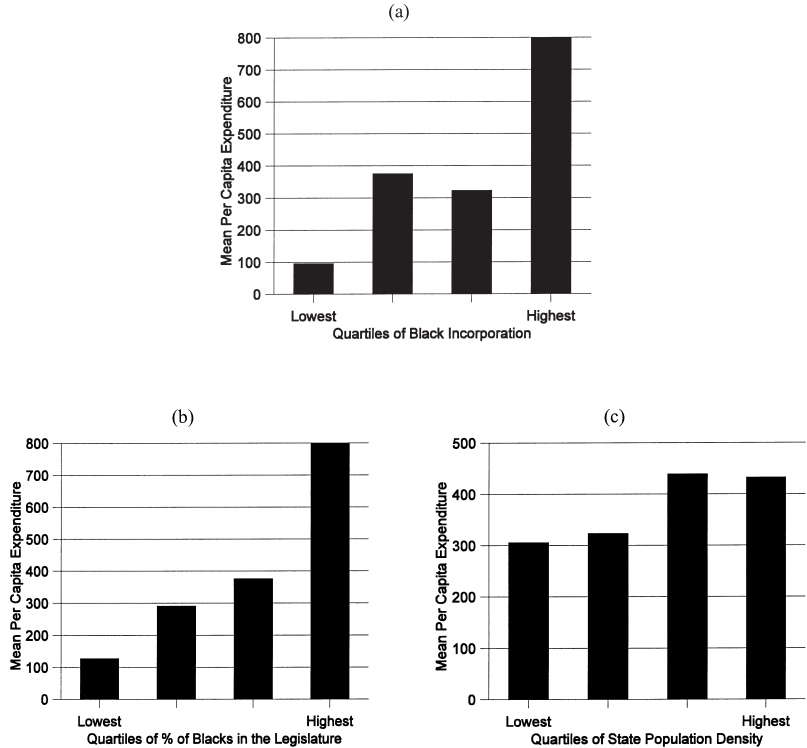


FIGURE 4.4 Political Incorporation, Descriptive Representation, Population Density, and State *Education Expenditures*

political incorporation is more closely connected to spending for education than is the percentage of African Americans in the legislature. These data also confirm the figure 4.4b findings of a relationship between African American descriptive representation and state responsiveness in this policy area.

SOCIAL WELFARE EXPENDITURES High unemployment and large numbers of people living below the poverty level have long been a part of the African American experience. In every year between 1970 and 1990, nearly one-third of African Americans lived in poverty. Moreover, the African American unemployment rate was consistently at least twice that of whites during this same twenty-year span (U.S. Department of Commerce 1992). Consequently, African Ameri-

TABLE 4.5
CORRELATION OF PER CAPITA STATE SPENDING FOR *EDUCATION*
WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN INCORPORATION AND AFRICAN
AMERICAN DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION ($N = 15$)

	Education Expenditures
Incorporation	.59*
Descriptive representation	.51*

Note: Descriptive representation is measured as the percentage of African Americans in the legislature.

* $p < .05$

cans tend to strongly favor increased support and spending for social welfare and economic redistribution programs. Redistribution programs are those government policies and/or services that reallocate societal resources. They transfer economic resources from those who have the most and who have gained the most from economic development to those who have been left behind or who are less well-off, like the elderly, the disabled, the poor, the unemployed, the sick, and children. All the policy areas discussed and analyzed in this chapter fall within the redistribution category (see, for example, Peterson 1995:16). The 1984–1988 National Black Election Panel Study contains survey results that attest to African Americans' support for these types of policies. For instance, the study found that 82 and 79 percent of African Americans favored increased government spending for job creation and Medicare, respectively. Thus, greater state spending for social welfare programs is another reasonable indicator of responsiveness toward black interests.

The graphs in figure 4.5 offer support for both the political incorporation and the descriptive representation hypotheses. As the level of incorporation increases, so does per capita state expenditures for social welfare (figure 4.5a). The three legislative sessions with the highest level of African American political incorporation spent on average \$467 per person for social welfare programs, compared to only \$59 per person spent by the sessions with the lowest level. Similarly, larger amounts of money are spent on social welfare when the proportion of African Americans in the legislature is higher (figure 4.5b). Those sessions with the greatest proportion of African Americans average \$467 in per capita expenditures, and those with the lowest proportion average \$89 per person.

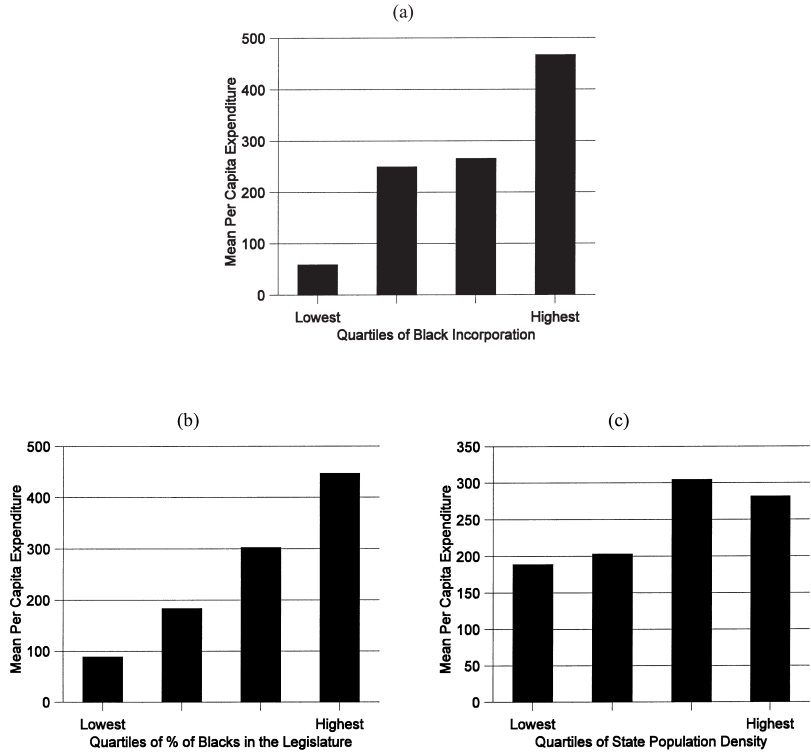


FIGURE 4.5 Political Incorporation, Descriptive Representation, Population Density, and State *Welfare Expenditures*

The correlations in table 4.6 indicate that black incorporation is slightly more closely related to responsiveness in welfare spending than simple descriptive representation. However, it is clear that both African American incorporation and black descriptive representation are potentially key factors in influencing expenditures in this area. More sophisticated testing of both possibilities is presented later in this chapter.

AN AGGREGATE MEASURE OF POLICY RESPONSIVENESS

In an attempt to clarify further the relationship of African American political incorporation to responsiveness, I combined state expenditures for health, ed-

TABLE 4.6
CORRELATION OF PER CAPITA STATE SPENDING FOR *WELFARE* WITH
AFRICAN AMERICAN INCORPORATION AND AFRICAN AMERICAN
DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION (*N* = 15)

	Welfare Expenditures
Incorporation	.63*
Descriptive representation	.60*

Note: Descriptive representation is measured as the percentage of African Americans in the legislature.

**p* < .01

TABLE 4.7
CORRELATION OF TOTAL PER CAPITA STATE SPENDING FOR
REDISTRIBUTION PROGRAMS WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN
INCORPORATION AND AFRICAN AMERICAN DESCRIPTIVE
REPRESENTATION (*N* = 15)

	Redistributive Expenditures
Incorporation	.61**
Descriptive representation	.55*

Note: Total per capita redistributive expenditures is the sum of per capita state spending for health, education, and welfare programs. Descriptive representation is measured as the percentage of African Americans in the legislature.

***p* < .01

**p* < .05

ucation, and welfare into an aggregate measure of total state per capita redistribution spending. This combined measure allows for the assessment of a state's overall responsiveness to black incorporation. The correlation data presented in table 4.7 indicates that African American incorporation is more closely related to overall policy responsiveness relative to black interests than descriptive representation.

The findings reported in figure 4.6 mirror the patterns that resulted when the spending categories were analyzed separately, and they are generally consistent with both the political incorporation and descriptive representation hypotheses. As measured by total state redistribution expenditures, the legislative

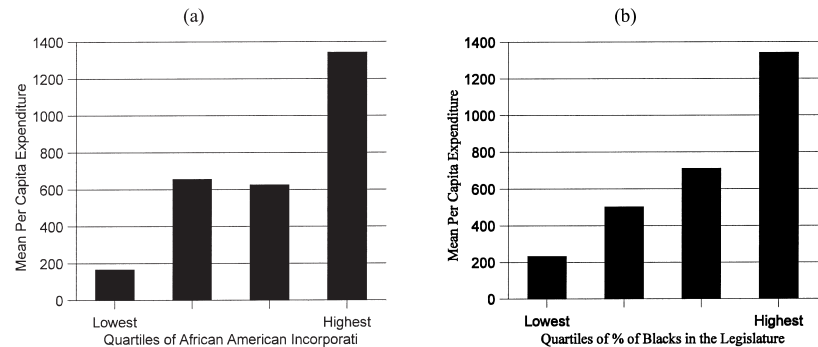


FIGURE 4.6 Political Incorporation, Descriptive Representation, and Total State *Redistributive Expenditures*

sessions in which African American representatives attained the greatest levels of incorporation generated more responsiveness to black interests than did the other sessions. There was a \$1,176.00 difference in expenditures between the quartile with the highest levels of black incorporation and the quartile with the lowest (figure 4.6a). Likewise, legislative sessions with more descriptive representation of African Americans generated more expenditures for black interest programs than did sessions with smaller proportions of African Americans in them (figure 4.6b). The difference in redistributive spending between the highest and lowest quartiles in this instance was \$1,109.00.

DISCUSSION

Whether there is a noticeable and significant relationship between African American political incorporation and institutional or governmental responsiveness to black interests, and whether or not incorporation provides a better explanation of such responsiveness than does descriptive representation, were the questions that began this section. The findings above indicate that greater black incorporation does not necessarily translate into more internal responsiveness for black legislators. I find a negative and statistically insignificant correlation between African American political incorporation and the passage rate of bills introduced by black lawmakers. The results for the relationship between descriptive representation and bill passage rate was virtually the same—negative and not statistically significant.

With regard to external responsiveness, however, the analyses thus far show that African American incorporation is indeed associated with important changes in state policy. African American incorporation has been found to be positively linked with state expenditures for health, education, and social welfare programs. The higher the level of incorporation, the more responsiveness there is. That is, legislative sessions with higher African American incorporation spend more on these redistribution programs than sessions with lower black incorporation. Descriptive representation, measured as the percentage of legislators who are African American, is also shown to be linked to external responsiveness to black interests. However, incorporation appears to be the more closely related variable of the two. Incorporation is more highly correlated to state spending in each of the separate policy areas, as well as to total state redistributive spending.

All of these analyses and results are quite suggestive, yet they are neither conclusive evidence that African American political incorporation has a significant effect on state redistributive spending, nor are they proof that incorporation provides a more empirically satisfying explanation of state responsiveness than descriptive representation. Only after controlling for other factors that potentially influence state expenditure decisions will it be possible to identify the precise effects of political incorporation and descriptive representation. I now turn to multivariate regression analyses with which such controls are possible.

POLITICAL INCORPORATION, DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION, AND BLACK INTERESTS: A MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

To determine the distinctive influence that both African American political incorporation and African American descriptive representation have on governmental responsiveness to black interests, I estimated multivariate regression models using the ordinary least squares (OLS) procedure.¹² As with the correlation analyses above, state per capita expenditures for health, education, and social welfare, and the total per capita expenditures for redistribution programs are the dependent variables. Along with incorporation and descriptive representation, the states' poverty rate, percentage of people living in urban areas, and tax capacity are included as possible explanatory variables.¹³ A state's poverty rate could significantly influence its redistributive expenditures. States

with relatively high percentages of poor people might view the alleviation of poverty as a priority, or they may face political pressure to address the needs of the poor from various interest groups and thus be inclined to spend more for redistribution programs. Because their populations are often poorer, less educated, and more likely to be unemployed, the social welfare needs of cities might be greater than those of rural and suburban communities. The higher the percentage of a state's population living in urban areas, the more that state is likely to spend for social welfare programs. Tax capacity is a measure of the amount of revenue a state can raise at a given tax rate (Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations 1982). State spending is expected to be higher in those states with more fiscal resources. Therefore, it is important to include tax capacity as a control.

Because African American political incorporation, as conceptualized here, includes a measure for the number of blacks in the legislature, there is high multicollinearity between the variables African American incorporation and African American descriptive representation. Therefore, models that include both variables simultaneously are problematic. When high multicollinearity exists, the parameter estimates of a model become unreliable and one runs the risk of accepting the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between a dependent and independent variable when the two are in actuality linked. Consequently, in the analyses that follow, I estimate two separate regression models for each expenditure category. One model includes political incorporation, the state's poverty rate, the percentage of the state's population living in urban areas, and the state's tax capacity as the control variables. The second model includes all of these same variables except political incorporation is replaced by descriptive representation, which is measured as the percentage of legislators who are African American.

RESULTS

Recall that the argument regarding African American political incorporation is that, because the measure of the concept encompasses the variables that are directly associated with power and influence in legislatures, it is a better predictor of responsiveness than simple descriptive representation. OLS regression results for a state's health expenditures are reported in table 4.8. Estimates of bivariate models with political incorporation and descriptive representation as explanatory variables are presented in columns one and two, respectively (Models I and II). The coefficients are positive and statistically significant for

TABLE 4.8
THE EFFECTS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL INCORPORATION AND
AFRICAN AMERICAN DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION ON STATE PER
CAPITA HEALTH EXPENDITURES ($N = 15$)

Independent Variables	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
Incorporation	1.42*** (.249)	—	1.86*** (0.28)	—
Descriptive representation	—	6.21*** (1.56)	—	10.04*** (1.95)
Poverty rate	—	—	4.12** (1.85)	6.04** (2.39)
Population density	—	—	.06* (0.03)	.04 (0.03)
Tax capacity	—	—	-.29 (0.69)	-.25 (0.83)
Intercept	.575 (8.79)	.193 (12.6)	-58.34 (76.4)	-96.47 (91.3)
R ²	.71	.55	.83	.76

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. See Appendix 2 for a description of the variables and a list of data sources.

*** $p \leq .01$

** $p \leq .05$

* $p \leq .10$

both political incorporation and descriptive representation, which tells us that both variables have an effect on state spending for health programs. However, as indicated by the R-square values, the incorporation model (Model I) explains more of the variance in health expenditures than does incorporation.

In Models III and IV of table 4.8, state poverty rates, population densities, and tax capacities are included with political incorporation and descriptive representation as possible explanatory variables. The results are similar to those from the bivariate models in that both incorporation and descriptive representation are in the expected direction, and both are statistically significant at the $p \leq .01$ level. For each unit increase in African American incorporation, the states spent an additional \$1.86 per person for health services. For every percentage increase in African American descriptive representation, state health expenditures rose slightly more than ten dollars per state resident. Both models also indicate that the level of poverty in states contributes to how much states spend for health programs.

Although a comparison of the R-square values shows that the incorporation model provides a slightly better explanation of state spending for health, both of the R-squares are relatively high and therefore each of the models is satisfactory and acceptable on its own terms. In other words, as measured by state expenditures for health programs and services, these data offer support for the hypothesis that responsiveness to black interests increases as African American representatives become more incorporated into the power structures of legislative institutions; and these data also support the proposition that African American descriptive representation by itself is sufficient to elicit favorable responses to black interests. Thus, similar to the findings in the previous two chapters, here it appears that simple descriptive representation alone provides some important tangible or substantive results vis-à-vis black interests.

The regression results for the effects of incorporation and descriptive representation on state expenditures for education are presented in table 4.9. Here,

TABLE 4.9
THE EFFECTS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL INCORPORATION AND
AFRICAN AMERICAN DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION ON STATE PER
CAPITA EDUCATION EXPENDITURES ($N = 15$)

Independent Variables	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
Incorporation	10.14* (3.82)	—	15.51** (4.58)	—
Descriptive representation	—	44.1* (20.2)	—	85.99** (26.8)
Poverty rate	—	—	65.06* (29.5)	82.51* (33.1)
Population density	—	—	.06 (0.41)	.65 (0.03)
Tax capacity	—	—	2.78 (11.0)	2.76 (11.4)
Intercept	76.49 (134.8)	75.82 (157.6)	-1462.2 (1219)	-1789.7 (1260)
R ²	.35	.27	.58	.55

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. See Appendix 2 for a description of the variables and a list of data sources.

** $p \leq .01$

* $p \leq .05$

as with the models for health expenditures, both African American incorporation and African American descriptive representation have a significant and positive effect on governmental responsiveness. The parameter estimate for political incorporation in Model III indicates that states spend, on average, \$15.50 per person more on education with every unit increase of African American political incorporation. For every percentage increase in the proportion of the legislature that African Americans comprise, average per capita expenditures for education increases by \$86 (Model IV). It is interesting to note that here, just as with health expenditures (table 4.8), a state's poverty rate, as expected, has a significant effect on how much a state spends for education. The magnitude of the parameter estimates for poverty show that it has a powerful influence on this category of state spending.

In both the bivariate and multivariate regressions, the incorporation models (I and III), fit the data better than the descriptive representation models (II and IV), but only slightly so in the case of the multivariate analyses. It appears, then, that neither model is especially superior to the other. This suggests that the substantive explanations embedded in the theory of political incorporation do not take us much further in understanding responsiveness to black interests than arguments that suggest that simply having African Americans present in policy-making institutions leads to attention and action on blacks' policy concerns.

The regression results for social welfare expenditures presented in table 4.10 follow the pattern found in the previous two sets of analyses. In the bivariate models, for example, the coefficients are positive and statistically significant for both political incorporation and descriptive representation, which tells us that each of the variables has an effect on state expenditures for social welfare programs. The incorporation model (Model I) explains slightly more of the variance in state welfare spending ($R^2 = .40$) than Model II, the descriptive representation model ($R^2 = .37$).

Regarding the multivariate models (Models III and IV), the pattern is again similar to what we found with the bivariate models, in that both the incorporation and descriptive representation variables are in the expected direction and are statistically significant at the $p \leq .01$ level. Each one-unit increase in African American incorporation results in an average increase of \$7.87 per person in state spending for welfare programs (Model III). For every 1 percent increase in the proportion of the legislature that African Americans comprise, average expenditures for education increases by \$44.44 per person (Model IV). Each of the models also indicates that the level of poverty in states contributes to how

TABLE 4.10
THE EFFECTS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL INCORPORATION AND
AFRICAN AMERICAN DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION ON STATE PER
CAPITA SOCIAL WELFARE EXPENDITURES ($N = 15$)

Independent Variables	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
Incorporation	5.95*** (2.03)	—	7.87*** (2.34)	—
Descriptive representation	—	28.5*** (10.4)	—	44.44*** (13.4)
Poverty rate	—	—	33.94** (15.1)	43.34** (16.5)
Population density	—	—	.33 (0.21)	.30 (0.21)
Tax capacity	—	—	5.77 (5.63)	5.63 (5.69)
Intercept	69.03 (71.4)	51.32 (80.4)	-1107.1* (621.9)	-1276.7 (629.3)
R ²	.40	.37	.64	.63

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. See Appendix 2 for a description of the variables and a list of data sources.

*** $p \leq .01$

** $p \leq .05$

* $p \leq .10$

much states spend for social welfare programs. For example, with the incorporation model, for every 1 percent increase in a state's poverty rate, about \$34 more per person are spent in the social welfare policy area. With the descriptive representation model, the figure is a little more than \$43 more per person. That the R-squares of the multivariate regression models in table 4.10 are almost identical (.64 *versus* .63) is evidence that supports both the hypothesis that responsiveness to black interests increases as African American representatives' level of political incorporation increases, and the proposition that the mere presence of African Americans in state legislatures has positive consequences for black interests.

The dependent variable in the final set of regressions is the total state per capita expenditures for redistribution programs. Total redistributive expenditures are the combined state expenditures for health, education, and social wel-

TABLE 4.11
THE EFFECTS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL INCORPORATION AND
AFRICAN AMERICAN DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION ON TOTAL STATE
REDISTRIBUTIVE EXPENDITURES ($N = 15$)

Independent Variables	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
Incorporation	17.37** (6.29)	—	25.42** (7.45)	—
Descriptive representation	—	78.66** (32.9)	—	142.25** (43.2)
Poverty rate	—	—	108.58* (47.9)	138.08* (16.5)
Population density	—	—	1.17 (0.62)	1.07 (0.67)
Tax capacity	—	—	9.20 (17.9)	8.97 (18.35)
Intercept	162.4 (221.83)	140.7	-2804.7 (1981.7)	-3346.9 (2027.2)
R ²	.37	.30	.60	.59

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. See Appendix 2 for a description of the variables and a list of data sources.

** $p \leq .01$

* $p \leq .05$

fare. This aggregate measure allows for the assessment of a state's overall responsiveness to black interests. Table 4.11 shows the results of regressions run for the total per capita state redistributive spending category. The findings generally confirm the interpretations derived from the analyses in tables 4.7 to 4.9. The political incorporation and the descriptive representation variables are positive and statistically significant in all the models. Moreover, there is virtually no difference in the explanatory power of the two multivariate models. The incorporation model (Model III) explains 60 percent of the variance in per capita state redistributive spending, and the descriptive representation models explains 59 percent. Thus, as was the case with the individual regression analyses conducted for health, education, and social welfare expenditures, these data for total per capita redistributive spending offer evidence to support the hypothesis that responsiveness to black interests increases as African American representatives become more incorporated into the power structures of legisla-

tive institutions; and these data also support the proposition that African American descriptive representation by itself is sufficient to elicit favorable responses to black interests.

CONCLUSION

Political incorporation refers to the extent to which a group is strategically positioned to exercise significant influence over the policy-making process within political institutions. Increasing their level or degree of political incorporation is widely viewed as an important and perhaps necessary goal for cohesive political subgroups who are numerical minorities in political institutions. This is considered to be especially true for groups that have previously been excluded, legally and otherwise, from the governmental process. African American state legislators are one such group. The argument is that higher levels of political incorporation puts such groups in a more advantageous position to insure that their personal interests as well as the interests of their constituents are heard and seriously considered during debates over policy choices.

A group that is intensely concerned about governmental policies, but has not gained access to the policy-making process has not achieved significant political equality. A group that achieves substantial incorporation—beyond the right to vote and simple representation—is in a strong position to change government policy in areas of special concern to them. Substantial incorporation, including partnership in a dominant coalition, provides an especially strong form of access to policy making, bringing with it opportunities to affect every stage of the policy process.

(Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984:243)

Conceptualized here as a composite measure of the number of African Americans in the legislature, the percentage of the Democratic Party that African Americans constitute, the number of prestige standing committee assignments and leadership positions that blacks hold, African American seniority, and the presence of an African American speaker, majority leader, or minority leader, the analyses above show that African American state legislators' degrees of political incorporation and, consequently, their status and clout, have grown significantly since 1970. In the five state legislatures studied in this book, the average increase in African American incorporation between 1969 and 1989 was 283 percent. Like the previous research on minority group incorporation in ur-

ban or municipal politics (e.g., Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Sonenshein 1993), I found this growth in African American incorporation in state legislatures to be positively linked to what I call external institutional responsiveness to black interests. In general, the higher the level of black incorporation, the more states spent on health, education, and social welfare programs.

Notwithstanding the significant correlations between African American incorporation and state spending in the black interest policy areas, the regression analyses in this chapter also yielded the somewhat surprising finding that the effects of higher African American incorporation are not decidedly superior to the effects of increased black descriptive representation. Not only is this finding counterintuitive, to some extent, it is also contrary to the arguments and conclusions of the most comprehensive study of minority-group political incorporation to date—Browning, Marshall, and Tabb's *Protest Is Not Enough* (1984). While acknowledging the importance of descriptive representation to the governmental process, Browning and colleagues conclude that "in our ten cities political incorporation of blacks and Hispanics led to increased policy responsiveness to minorities. This political variable best predicts the policy responsiveness, and is a better predictor of policy responsiveness than minority population" (250–51). Here, while it is indeed the case that black political incorporation had positive and significant effects on spending in each of the black interest policy areas, and that the multivariate incorporation regression models explained slightly more of the variance in these expenditures, it appears that it is also true that the mere presence of African Americans in state legislatures, regardless of their political incorporation status, was sufficient to yield significant institutional and governmental responsiveness relative to black interests. Thus African American representatives, and consequently African American citizens, seem to benefit almost as much from the simple presence of blacks in state legislatures as they do from high levels of African American incorporation in these same institutions.

The differences in the findings here and in those of Browning and colleagues may be due to the small and somewhat limited sample of states and years used in this study. However, Nelson's (1991) study of minority-group influence in state legislatures, which utilizes a forty-five state sample, reaches conclusions about African American incorporation not unlike the ones here.¹⁴ Alternatively, the differences might mean that political incorporation has different degrees of importance and varying consequences or benefits for African Americans, depending on the particular political context in question. That is to say, in comparison to descriptive representation, political incorporation may

be more meaningful and may yield more tangible benefits in local political settings, such as city councils and county commissions, than in state legislatures where there are multiple centers of power and power itself is generally more diffuse. It could also be the case that the effects of African American incorporation are less detectable in larger institutional settings.

Finally, we should note that although the incorporation and descriptive representation models were similar in their predictive and explanatory powers, from a practical point of view it is probable that future increases in African American influence in legislatures will come more from increased political incorporation than from increases in the number of African Americans elected to these bodies. For example, given both the current political and legal climate regarding the creation of majority-minority legislative districts, and the fact that, even under the best of circumstances, there is a finite number of such districts that can be drawn (e.g., Swain 1993), it is likely that, in any given state legislature, the number of African American legislators acquiring more seniority, leadership positions, and prestige committee assignments will increase at a faster rate than the number of new African Americans elected to them. Consequently, greater incorporation may be the most efficient and effective short-term strategy for assuring the substantive representation of black interests in state legislatures. However, an increased reliance on political incorporation may present African American representatives with a profound dilemma. One cost of achieving higher levels of incorporation might be that African American legislators will be required to behave less like race men and women and display a more overt commitment to the values of the larger legislative institution. For example, in order to increase their power and influence, black legislators might be pressured to seek more assignments on prestige committees and fewer on the committees whose jurisdictions include traditional black interest areas. If such trade-offs become necessary, greater incorporation of African American legislators may be inconsistent with efforts to articulate and promote the interests of African American constituents, who, as a group, remain economically and politically deprived, and African American legislators will be required to engage in a delicate, precarious, and perhaps impossible balancing act.

