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Katherine Tate: Black Faces in the Mirror

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The Puzzle of Representation

But, in spite of many centuries of theoretical effort, we cannot say what representation is.

—Heinz Eulau, in *The Politics of Representation*

TO THE ANCIENT GREEKS, democracy meant rule by the common people. For very practical reasons, the American political system is not a pure democracy, but an indirect one. Americans participate in government by selecting others to make decisions for them. How the government actually represents and does the people's bidding is an important question. Designing a government with limited powers, the framers of the Constitution sought to ensure government-by-the-people or popular sovereignty through elections. By granting only two-year terms to legislators in the House of Representatives, the nation's founders arranged for the quick replacement of lawmakers who failed to live up to constituent expectations. In addition to regularly scheduled elections or popular control, there was the presumption that elected officials could be trusted to represent the will of the people because government officials would be drawn from the ranks of the people. A perfectly representative body would be similar to the general population in race, sex, ethnicity, occupation, religion, and other fundamental social characteristics. Through the possession of social characteristics similar to their constituents, representatives could be counted upon to share their political beliefs and interests.

As methods of preserving popular sovereignty, these propositions have their shortcomings. Winning an election to the U.S. House of Representatives now usually requires at least half a million dollars, and generally those who spend the most win most often. There are now scholars who worry that political equality and popular sovereignty have been undermined by the high cost of winning an election. Thus, an entire field has emerged devoted to the question of how campaigns and money have impacted on the American political system. That the U.S. government is socially unrepresentative of the public — with its members being wealthier, older, whiter, and overwhelmingly male — has generated far less concern and little corresponding scholarship. Indeed, most congressional scholars have long assumed and argued that the social back-

ground of legislators has little bearing on their politics. In the opinion of one set of leading congressional scholars, “Must Congress demographically mirror the populace to be a representative institution? Probably not. Legislators from farming districts can voice farmers’ concerns even though they themselves have never plowed a field or milked a cow; whites can champion equal opportunities for minorities. Legislators can speak for voters of divergent social rank or life style” (Davidson and Oleszek 1981, 104).

Nevertheless, as the numbers of women and racial minorities winning seats to the U.S. Congress have increased, the question of whether such groups are equally or unequally represented in government has generated some research. For women, scholarship has seemingly reached a consensus that women’s political interests have been underrepresented in the past since women legislators are more likely than their male counterparts to address “women’s issues” (Swers 1998; Thomas 1994; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994). In contrast, the more limited scholarship on Blacks has yet to reach such a consensus.

In this book, I address the question of whether or not the racial composition of government is relevant to the political representation of Blacks. Like women, African Americans have made tremendous gains in holding elective office but still fall short of proportional representation. Constituting 12 percent of the population, Blacks hold about two percent of all elected offices in the country. Blacks make up about 7 percent of Congress—the chief lawmaking institution in the U.S. governmental system—with thirty-eight members in the House of Representatives but none currently serving in the Senate. Today about one-third of Blacks are represented in Washington by Black officeholders. Are these Blacks better represented in Washington by Blacks than the two-thirds not represented by Blacks?

My goal in this book is to present a broad and balanced assessment of the value of descriptive representation for African Americans. A new breed of empirically oriented scholars have pursued this question largely by examining whether Black representatives cast different roll-call votes than other representatives or file different sorts of bills (see Swain 1993; Lublin 1997; Whitby 1998; Canon 1999). However, my book brings substantially more data to this debate. Political representation, as I briefly explain in the next section, consists of three forms: substantive, descriptive, and symbolic. In contrast to previous empirical studies, I consider all three forms in my assessment of the importance of race in political representation.

A second unique and contrasting feature of my book is that utilizing a 1996 national telephone survey of Blacks, I address the question of how important is descriptive representation from both sides of the rep-

representative-constituent relationship, uniquely from the vantage point of Blacks themselves. Do Blacks feel that they are better represented in the U.S. system of indirect democracy when their representative is Black? In addition, how does the race of the House representative impact their political behavior and attitudes? In other words, does Black representation in Washington lead Blacks to become more informed about and more active in national politics? And does Black representation affect attitudes that Blacks have about Congress as an institution more broadly? The analysis of survey data allows me to address these critical questions that have been much subject of much debate, especially within the field of minority voting rights. These are questions that have been subjected to fierce debate but without, to my knowledge, much hard, empirical evidence. While touching on the normative components of the debate over race and representation, my book provides hard, empirical evidence as well.

The argument that I will make at the end of this book is that it is the majoritarian or district plurality system that the nation's founders imported from Great Britain that systematically encourages lawmakers to provide descriptive and symbolic representation as much as substantive representation to their constituents. The reasons why all three components of political representation are stressed by American legislators are several. First, lawmaking is a difficult and lengthy enterprise in the U.S. system. At the end of a term, the typical House member can claim credit for passage of only one bill that they sponsored or, more likely, cosponsored. Rationally, therefore, American legislators work hard to convey to constituents that even in the absence of tangible or substantive policy outputs, their views and interests are still well represented in Washington through activities weighted toward the symbolic and descriptive. Second, U.S. legislators are also much less confined by party memberships than elected representatives under different electoral arrangements. Legislators are credited less for what their political party achieves than for what they individually provide for constituents in the American political system as a consequence. As members of geographically defined spaces as well as of political parties, American legislators pursue their own particularized goals, including pork barrel legislation, in addition to their party's ideological agendas (Arnold 1990). Related to this second point is that modern political campaigns are candidate-centered with parties in the background (Aldrich 1995; Wattenberg 1991). House members seeking reelection try to build a record based on personal accomplishments as much as they share the credit with their political party. Candidate-centered campaigning pushes the balance even further in favor of Richard Fenno's "home style," or the concentrated efforts by members of Congress to establish "personal ties" with

their constituents (Fenno 1978). Members spend considerable time and resources talking to constituents, providing personal services to constituents in addition to the time that they spend on Capitol Hill doing legislative and committee work. And the campaign materials of House members reflect the strong emphasis of the “personal” over the “political” in fact.

Ultimately I will argue that Blacks are not alone in their strong appreciation of being descriptively represented; all Americans place a strong value on it as it is a component of political representation continuously stressed by members of those elected to the U.S. Congress. Thus, in describing and analyzing the manner in which Blacks are political represented in the U.S. Congress, I provide new insights, broader and more balanced coverage of the nature of representation in the American political system than congressional scholars have to date. Thus, by providing this empirical analysis of how Blacks are represented in the U.S. Congress, I make a significant theoretical contribution to the field of congressional studies in establishing the very broad nature of political representation in the U.S. Congress.

RACE AND THE REPRESENTATION DEBATE

Does the social background and race of the representative matter in a representative democracy? While congressional scholars generally think not, the founding fathers explicitly expressed the hope that their government would be a descriptively representative body. John Adams, a leading architect of the Constitution, explicitly conceived of elected representatives as “a portrait of the people at large in miniature” (Wood 1998 [1969], 165). Still there is a debate over the degree to which the founding fathers truly desired popular representation. Some argue that James Madison intended a government composed of the social elite when Madison wrote in *The Federalist* No. 10 about the role of Congress to “refine and enlarge” public opinion (Wood 1998; Fishkin 1995). Other scholars, notably Robert C. Grady, contend that Madison was a true democrat and his tendency toward elitism was tempered by a strong preference for a government that reflected “the great body of the society, not . . . an inconsiderable proportion of a favored class” as he wrote in *Federalist* No. 39 (1993, 17–18). A review of the Revolutionary debates over representation is not especially clarifying. Even at the time of the nation’s founding, according to historian Gordon S. Wood (1998), there was “great confusion” concerning the concept of political representation.

The problem of how best to represent the American people in an elected government was so controversial at the time the Constitution

was drafted that it nearly defied political solution. Small states objected to legislative seats based solely on population, which is what large states preferred. The “Great Compromise” resulted in a bicameral Congress where each state legislature would send two senators and the lower-house seats would be allocated on the basis of the state’s population. While the conflict is treated as a small state/large state feud, at its core was the fear of democrats who believed that the Senate and presidency were constitutional devices to curb the political influences of the lower classes in this new democracy. As “Montazuma” sarcastically declared in the Anti-Federalist Paper No. 9, “we have designated by the popular name of the House of Representatives. But to guard against every possible danger from this lower house, we have subjected every bill they bring forward to the double negative of our upper house and president.” Because senators and the president were to be chosen by the state legislatures or their electors, Anti-Federalists believed they would remain positions largely controlled by the members of the economic and social elite. Federalists wanted a government somewhat removed from the masses, and designed a government that “filtered” citizens’ views through the indirect elections of senators and the president (Wood 1998; Fishkin 1995). Anti-Federalists, in contrast, wanted a government closer to the people; they therefore sought frequent, direct elections and rotation in office. Additionally, the Bill of Rights became the procedural mechanism that safeguarded the rights of the lower classes by a government whose Senate would most likely be limited to the social and economic elite.

The division of the national legislature into two houses, while it solved the immediate problem of the balance of power among the thirteen original colonies, did not fundamentally resolve the problem of how elected representatives were to represent the people. The framers left the question of how voters would elect representatives to the states. And in the beginning, only five states chose to use districts, while the majority elected members of Congress through at-large elections. In 1842, Congress passed legislation requiring single-member districts. This move resulted from partisan competition as the majority parties in at-large elections states were electing delegations composed entirely of members from the majority party (Barber 2000).

Thus, the methods of electing representatives would be a source of continuous debate throughout U.S. history. Americans had revolted against British rule because they felt that they were not represented in the government. The British responded that Americans, as subjects of Great Britain were “virtually represented,” as are those living in England, since no one was “actually” represented (Wood 1998). Virtual representation claims are elitist. Historian Gordon S. Wood writes that

while John Adams had urged that representatives should mirror the people, “in the same breath he had suggested that they must also be ‘a few of the most wise and good’ who, as the English defenders of virtual representation had implied, would presumably know better than the bulk of the people what was the proper interest of society” (1998, 180). Such claims were naturally challenged; one American leader expressed the view at the time New York was ratifying its constitution that elected representatives need not be the “best sort,” but preferably average men with “common sense and an unshaken integrity” (Wood 1998, 180).

Ultimately Republican claims that Americans are a “singular and united people” that lay beneath claims of virtual representation would be contested as fair and equal representation increasingly implied actual representation. Still from 1776 to 1778, American revolutionaries unconsciously—it seemed—embraced the notion of virtual representation because they assumed that people were “a homogeneous entity in society set against the rulers” (Wood 1998, 607). In a few short years following the Revolution, Wood writes, American political thinkers would recognize that their country was one comprised of many political factions. And as such, the political good was no longer a single “entity distinct from its parts” but formed in the aggregation of these combative separate interests. Increasingly, representatives need not possess great abilities, as their role in government was to represent faithfully the will of the people as instructed. Writes Wood, “The representation of the people, as American politics in the Revolutionary era had made glaringly evident, could never be virtual, never inclusive; it was acutely actual and always tentative and partial” (600). For Wood, clearly all of the various factions should be actually represented in government, for at least some of the time. Yet the very principle behind the claim that Americans were virtually represented in English Parliament was used by Americans to dismiss arguments in favor of granting suffrage to Africans, mulattos, and Indians in Massachusetts (183). Insofar as legislators were ultimately pursuing policies that served the interests of their communities and of the nation as a whole, such groups were virtually represented.

Race, when raised as a political problem at the constitutional convention, was only raised with reference to the enslavement of Africans. Even then the matter of race and representation ironically was debated only over whether the Black slave population should be used in the allocation of seats to the slave-owning states to the House of Representatives. Blacks at the time the Constitution was ratified were explicitly and unanimously excluded from the new government as noncitizens, even while the original Constitution did not make direct reference to race. The Constitution, the shining document that sprung from the Dec-

laration of Independence, sided with the slave-owners and enshrined the practice of slavery in three provisions, though, all without mentioning slavery or slaves. Slaves would be partially counted in the state's population, augmenting the political representation of slave-owners in the House and in the Electoral College. Congress was forbidden as well to ban the importation of slaves until 1808. The Constitution also instructed states to return escaped slaves to their slave-owners.

It was on the basis of these three passages contained in the Constitution that Chief Justice Roger B. Taney would argue with the consent of the Supreme Court's majority in the 1857 Dred Scott decision that Black people, even free Blacks, were not U.S. citizens and had no rights under the Constitution. Although many American government textbooks generally stress that slavery "embarrassed" the founding fathers, Alexis de Toqueville's own observations were that few Americans saw the blatant contradiction between slavery—as well as the country's treatment of free Blacks—and democracy. It is truly difficult to imagine the founding fathers favoring a government that included Blacks as elected officials given not only their acceptance of slavery but also the extent of their racial prejudices. At the time he wrote the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson owned over 200 slaves. Still, Jefferson publicly opposed slavery. James Madison became a staunch abolitionist who saw the enslavement of Blacks as a vile contradiction to a democratic system. Radical Republicans in their effort to create a truly color-blind democracy also advocated Black officeholding, and twenty Blacks, half of whom had experienced slavery, would serve in the U.S. House of Representatives during Reconstruction.

Nevertheless, rather than only the outcome of a terrible compromise, or better still, a capitulation to slave-owners in order to create and preserve the Union, the denial of individual rights and equality to Blacks reflected the illiberal traditions that justified it. These same illiberal traditions that are enshrined in the Constitution have also consigned a majority (women, Indians, Blacks, and Asian immigrants) to an inferior and unequal status for a majority of America's history (R. M. Smith 1997). The claim that the Constitution was and is "color-blind" has blinded liberals to the social and economic inequalities that were either sanctioned by aspects of the Constitution or encouraged. This liberal creed that enshrines color-blindness (or gender- or class-blindness) obscures then how much racial group membership has affected and continues to affect U.S. politics and the distribution of public goods (Phillips 1995; R. M. Smith 1997). And, in fact, outside of New England, many states such as Ohio, as they dropped the basic property qualifications during the era of Jacksonian democracy, added the restriction of race to the right to vote. Even northern states such as New York, Penn-

sylvania, and New Jersey, which had previously permitted free Blacks to vote, adopted new state constitutions confining the right to adult White males (Barber 2000). Whigs would push for literacy requirements instead of race, but in states where Democrats controlled matters, the party line against Black male suffrage held firm. As historian J. Morgan Kousser (1999) argues, Black voting rights were denied in part as a consequence of intense party competition.

It was the history of state-sanctioned discrimination against Blacks that alerted the courts to the importance of Blacks having the right to elect a “candidate of choice,” and implicitly, therefore, the importance of Blacks’ descriptive representation in elected legislatures. Without this history, their numerical underrepresentation in government never would have won judicial protection and remedy. The initial case validating the importance of creating opportunities that gave minorities meaningful opportunities to elect one of their own to government involved multi-member as opposed to single-member legislative districts. In *White v. Regester*, Blacks and Latinos argued that multimember districts in Texas were used to dilute their voting strength, therefore denying them their Fourteenth Amendment rights. In 1973, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled in favor of the Black and Latino plaintiffs. The basis for declaring the multimember districts unconstitutional was vague, but notably included the state’s history of discrimination against minorities. Seven years later, however, in *City of Mobile v. Bolden*, the Court would rule that election systems that are shown to discriminate against minorities are only unconstitutional when minorities can show that they were purposefully created with a racial animus against them. After testimony was offered about the history of discrimination in Alabama, however, the case was remanded. Racial intent was proven, and the Black plaintiffs prevailed in Mobile. (Yet proving racial intent was costly, and the legal standards for proving it were vague, making such intent very difficult to effectively establish in courts [Kousser 1999].) Thus, voting rights activists in response to *Bolden* successfully pressed for modification of the 1965 Voting Rights Act in 1982 (Pinderhughes 1995). The modification expressly prohibited voting procedures that afforded minorities “less opportunities than other members of the electorate to participate in the political process and to elect representatives of their choice” (Davidson and Grofman 1994, 35). Minorities could never be fairly represented in government, in other words, as long as the electoral system was biased against them.

The 1982 amendment of the Voting Rights Act unleashed a furious controversy. On the one side, political conservatives such as Abigail Thernstrom (1987) argued that using the act effectively to force states to create minority-majority districts violates the principle of colorblind-

ness and fairness. This was also the argument used by Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor in the 1993 *Shaw* ruling against a North Carolina plan that had sent that state's first two Blacks to Congress since Reconstruction. Liberal supporters countered conservative critics of the Act by applying the same logic of racial fairness, arguing that without it Blacks and Hispanics would never have won election to Congress in the South in the first place. Voting rights activists like Frank M. Parker (1990) have pointed out the inherent racial bias of a system that perpetuates White political domination and the necessity of drawing minority-majority districts to overcome that racial bias. Still others, such as Lani Guinier (1994), have rejected majority-minority districts as a short-term fix, supporting instead the more radical solution of moving from a single-member plurality election system to a proportional representation one.

Complicating the debate have been the arguments developed and advanced by Carol M. Swain in her award-winning *Black Faces, Black Interests* (1993). Drawing a distinction between descriptive and substantive political representation, she asked if Black elected officials were necessary to advance Black political interests? The question was both legitimate and timely. In the 1992 House elections, Blacks gained a record number of thirteen new seats in Congress, largely through the U.S. Justice Department's enforcement of the 1982-amended Voting Rights Act. Including the District of Columbia's nonvoting delegate, this brought their number in the House to thirty-nine in the 103rd Congress. No longer could the question of whether Black elected officials were necessary for Black political representation be dismissed or evaded by voting rights liberals who had stressed the "paucity" of Black elected officials, and especially in the South, as the primary justification for the racially gerrymandered districts. Blacks were now serving in Congress from five southern states that during the twentieth century none had previously served: Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.¹ Were these Blacks representing their Black constituents differently than did whites? Based largely on case studies of thirteen black and White House-members, the study concludes that blacks did not need to be descriptively present in Congress for black citizens to be fully represented in government. Further still, Swain argues that Blacks' push for descriptive representation undermines their substantive representation in Washington.

THE PUZZLE OF REPRESENTATION

Does race matter in the political representation of Blacks in Congress? Obviously the answer depends on how interests are represented in Con-

gress. Although the issue of political representation remains of enormous interest to political theorists, interest in this topic among congressional scholars has lagged. In the 1970s interest shifted from a focus on political representation to congressional elections (see Mezey 1993; Fiorina 1974; Mayhew 1974). The study of elections still remains one of the hot areas of research in congressional studies.

Since the theories of Edmund Burke in the eighteenth century, congressional scholars have pointed out two different styles of political representation: delegate versus trustee. Delegate representatives try to reflect in their representative role the views of their constituents, while those acting as trustees serve by relying on their best judgment of the issues. Rooted in his republicanism, Burke strongly believed that representatives should represent the country, not constituents nor districts. Not surprisingly, early surveys of legislators found that they did a little bit of both. The issue is not a dead one. It was raised quite seriously during President Clinton's impeachment hearings as some of his critics felt that members of Congress should disregard the president's strong showing in opinion polls and vote according to their "conscience." A survey showed that members of Congress thought that while they should behave as trustees, they nevertheless acted as delegates since that is what they thought the public wanted (Davidson and Oleszek 1981).

Since Burke, political scientists have made a distinction between the focus (nation vs. constituent) and style (delegate vs. trustee), as both are implied in Burke's view on the role of the elected representative. Often times, a two-by-two typology is presented to establish the four types of legislative roles elected officials can assume (Miller and Stokes 1963; Thomassen 1994), but the roles are each best depicted as single dimensions as shown in figure 1.1. On issue after issue, legislators move between a trustee role and delegate role, in pursuit of national or particularistic goals. After all, as legislators strive to bring back "pork" to their districts, they also participate in making national policy. Elected representatives fall somewhere on this two-dimensional space. In the United States, however, the idealized form of political representation is the instructed-delegate version, where representatives are not independent, but constrained by elections, and strictly obey the will of their constituencies. Moreover, as much as Congress along with the president makes national laws, its members pursue their own particularized goals as representatives of geographically defined districts. Legislators' efforts to represent districts as well as individual constituents make the U.S. system of government somewhat unique. The accumulated evidence, nevertheless, suggests that even this typology fails to show adequately the full role that members play in the U.S. Congress. U.S. legislators are also opinion leaders even if the normative view casts them as electorally

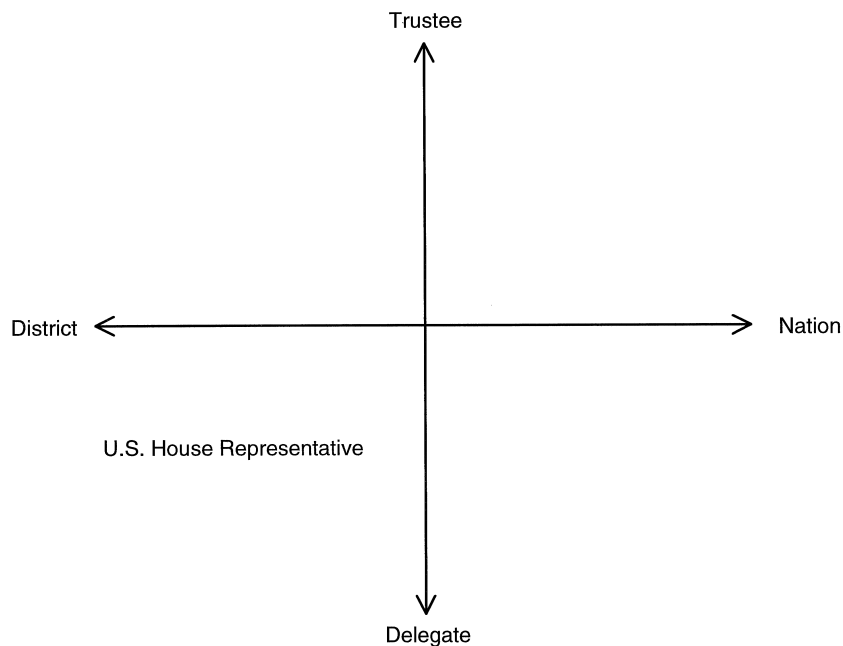


Figure 1.1. Style and focus of elected representative.

constrained agents. Groups within districts are also represented in the activities of members in addition to the district and the nation as a whole.

The role of the elected representative is but one conceptual component; another is the way in which constituents are actually represented. In 1967, political theorist Hanna Pitkin's seminal work held that citizens are represented in elected government in three ways: descriptively, symbolically, and substantively. One is descriptively represented when the representative belongs to your social or demographic group. Representatives substantively represent their constituents through the realization of their political needs. Descriptive representation devoid of any substance impact is "symbolic." She concludes by discounting the value of descriptive or "pictorial" representation. In the end political representation is best achieved when legislators act "in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (209).

The initial empirical work that emerged generally ignored symbolic and descriptive representation in favor of a model of representation that was purely instrumental. Warren Miller and Donald Stokes's seminal article published in 1963 searched for "congruence" between constituents' beliefs and the legislator's voting behavior, and subsequent studies

would interpret political representation as policy responsiveness or congruence. Policy congruency, for good and bad, would become the elusive “Holy Grail,” the chalice used by Christ, in empirical studies of political representation. The Miller and Stokes study was roundly criticized for its methodological shortcomings, which are discussed further in chapter 6. Other scholars have concluded that a one-to-one correspondence between legislators’ policy positions and constituent opinions need not exist on all the issues, as the constituencies to which members are accountable are varied, and as the decision-making process in Congress is quite complex (Kingdon 1981; Arnold 1990; Weissberg 1976; Froman 1963). Still others have found that policy congruence is achieved in the aggregate, as the voting records of members of Congress do faithfully correspond to the majority sentiment in the district (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1992). Still others have sought to establish a link between constituency service, committee position, and legislative activity and the House incumbent’s electoral success, but to no avail (Fiorina 1989; Fiorina and Rivers 1989).

Political representation is much more than policy representation, or even service to districts through pork barrel legislation or to individual constituents. Representation is powerfully symbolic, according to Heinz Eulau and Paul Karpis (1978). As they note,

By emphasizing only one component of responsiveness as a substantive concept, they reduced a complex phenomenon like representation to one of its components and substituted the component for the whole. But if responsiveness is limited to one component, it cannot capture the complexities of the real world of politics. . . . How else could one explain that representatives manage to stay in office in spite of the fact that they are *not* necessarily or always responsive to the represented?” (60–61).

For Eulau and Karpis, constituents were symbolically represented through “public gestures of a sort that create a sense of trust and support in the relationship between the representative and the represented” (1978, 63). Congress is loaded with acts of symbolic representation. Politicians routinely push for policies that they know won’t ever become law (Edelman 1964). Legislators vote for legislation that won’t ever be implemented (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984). The average citizen, however, does not understand that certain resolutions (simple and concurrent), for example, don’t make law and are unenforceable by law. However, because 200 or more such symbolic resolutions are generally passed in each Congress, there must be political rewards and tactical advantages associated with them. Symbolic legislation is also a byproduct of the American legislative structure, where members are elected to represent

geographic communities in addition to their parties and constituents. Empirical examination of how members of Congress symbolically represent their constituents, and the electoral and political significance of symbolic representation is still a fledging field that has only recently taken off (Chapman 2002). This said, symbolic representation is one important reason why blacks need to be descriptively represented in the U.S. Congress.

Since Pitkin's seminal work, a new group of political theorists, stimulated by the voting rights controversy, have begun to assert that descriptive representation, something Pitkin herself discounted, is an important form of political representation. A number have pointed out the importance of representatives "standing" for social groups (Young 1990; Phillips 1995; M. S. Williams 1998). Taking this a step farther, Melissa S. Williams (1998) argues that fair representation must include descriptive representation for marginalized social groups in legislative bodies. As the American system of government functions as a deliberative democracy, marginalized groups must take part in it (Phillips 1995; Mansbridge 1999). Such groups, these theorists contend, must be free to define their interests and defend them publicly. Any other form of political representation short of descriptive representation might result in the neglect or dilution of their interests. Many women believe that the issue of sexual harassment was not initially taken seriously because there were no female members on the Senate Judiciary Committee at the time of Clarence Thomas's confirmation to the Supreme Court. Not only will such groups now be heard in legislative chambers, but the process in which policy is worked out might become more discursive and consensus-oriented (M. S. Williams 1998, 146–47).

These electoral mechanisms, psychological and structural, however, failed to work as theorized for Blacks in the one-party South and were generally weak in the nation's two-party system (Frymer 1999). When the interests of minorities are defined as outside or contrary to those of the community, then legislators can safely ignore them. Blacks' political history, Williams contends, justifies the perception among Blacks that Black representatives are more trustworthy representatives than are White legislators. Whites can win trust from Black constituents, of course, but because of history, they are necessarily going to have to work harder at establishing that trust. Congressional scholar Kenny Whitby writes that "[h]aving members of Congress who share the sociological attributes of the electorate is a powerful symbol of representation" (1998, 6). Descriptive representation remains potently symbolic to Blacks today. It represents their inclusion in the polity, the progress achieved in America's race relations, and their political power in the U.S. system.

The battle between Black and White legislators in South Carolina over the state's Confederate battle flag illustrates the continuing significance of symbols. This flag flying over the South Carolina Statehouse symbolized White supremacy and Southern resistance to the Union, although its supporters maintained that it represented "heritage," not hate. The flag was hoisted over the state capitol only in 1962, however, during the peak period of Southern resistance to the Black civil rights movement. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in its efforts to force the White-dominated state government to remove the flag sponsored a boycott aimed at the state's tourism industry, a measure, according to media accounts, that was draining millions of tourist dollars from that state. Seeking a compromise, in May 2000, Governor Jim Hodges backed a bill removing the flag from the dome of the statehouse, but allowing a smaller one to be flown on a thirty-foot pole in front near a monument to soldiers of the Confederacy. This compromise legislation failed to satisfy the NAACP, which has vowed to continue its boycott. The NAACP president, Kweisi Mfume, a former member of Congress, in fact, singled out and criticized the ten black state lawmakers (out of thirty-three) who had voted for the compromise legislation.

The war over racial symbols in South Carolina plainly demonstrates that symbols matter not only to Blacks but to many Whites as well. A few months earlier, South Carolina finally agreed to recognize Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday as a state holiday, but only as part of a compromise bill that created a state holiday called the "Confederate Memorial Day." To ignore the role that elected representatives play in symbolically representing their constituents and to examine only the substantive legislative products is to miss a very critical component of how constituents are actually represented in the American political system.

Finally, Congress is an institution with historical and momentous weight in American politics, and not simply because of the collective output of its members as agents of the public. Rather, members of Congress carry great influence for the actions that they take as individual actors within the "public sphere." This public sphere, as conceptualized by David Mayhew (2000), represents the public consciousness. As means of pressing upon the collective consciousness, members have a wide array of activities to consider that cannot be adequately captured by the Constitution's description of the legislature's functions. "With the member's job," Mayhew writes, "goes a license to persuade, connive, hatch ideas, propagandize, assail enemies, vote, build coalitions, shepherd legislation, and in general cut a figure in public affairs." The member's capacity to influence collective outcomes and possibly transform society

through issue preference formation is far greater than his or hers ability to make laws. The presence or absence of Blacks within the Congress, within the U.S. Senate, therefore, has far greater consequences than textbook treatments of Congress generally suggest. It is not simply a problem of whether electing Blacks can cost parties' their majorities, but significantly more than this. Members of Congress possess a "power of one" in addition to their contribution as one of 535. This broad understanding of Congress elevates the problem of Black political representation as citizens are not only represented through the enactment of public laws. Constituents are represented through many more activities than bill initiation and roll-call votes.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION: THE VIEW FROM THE BLACK ELECTORATE

As the quote at the beginning of this chapter suggests, the concept of representation is elusive. Like power, it may elude all efforts toward a precise theoretical definition. Constituents are represented in everything that legislators do in their formal capacity as elected representatives. Members of Congress engage in three principal, interrelated activities: (1) constituency service, (2) policy-making, and (3) reelection. Out of all of their activities, members substantively, symbolically, and descriptively represent their constituencies. Constituents are substantively represented by legislators in the form of policy initiatives, votes on policy, and in the form of constituency service. They are represented in activities below the floor level of Congress, not as visible to the public (Hall 1996). At the same time, constituents can also be represented symbolically. They are represented by the "position taking" that members of Congress engage in, as described by David Mayhew (1974). Symbolic representation gives voice and recognition to the goals and values of a key interest and social group. Substantive and symbolic representation are not mutually exclusive categories but can overlap. And of course, Black legislators providing substantive representation provide Black constituents with both. Of the three forms that political representation can take, which activities are recognized and valued most by constituents?

Public knowledge about Congress is abysmally low. Ordinary citizens do not and cannot be expected to follow the legislative voting history of their representatives in Washington, watch their floor speeches on C-Span, and learn about the interests from whom they receive donations or the lobbyists with whom they lunch. Empirical work in congressional studies has generally focused on elections, not representation. Important determinants of the congressional vote are political party and ideology. For sure, political party is an important element in evaluating one's elected representative and in congressional elections (Miller and

Stokes 1963; Erikson and Wright 2001). In low-information congressional elections, party presents a clear choice. Some revisionist work established the importance of ideology and issues in congressional elections. Alan Abramowitz's analysis (1984) shows that ideology was a force in the 1980 and 1982 House races. The more liberal the voter was, the more likely the voter was to vote Democratic. Erikson and Wright (2001) show that the member's ideology independent of political party is consistently linked to the vote decision in the House elections. Candidates whose ideologies are too extreme for their district generally are punished at the polls.

While the evidence suggests that party and ideological records of members do matter to their poorly informed constituents in elections, Richard Fenno's detailed case studies establish that members of Congress emphasize their personal qualities as much as, and perhaps more than, their policy stands. Reading Fenno's *Home Style*, one is struck by how much members of Congress stress their "descriptive" representation of constituents when in their districts. Fenno quotes one congressman telling his audience, "I am not exactly one of you, but we have a lot in common, and I feel a lot like you." It may be that with most members of Congress socially so unlike the population, members work very hard at identifying with their constituents and connecting with them at a personal level. Samuel L. Popkin (1991) writes about how presidential candidates will eat tacos in Mexican American communities to symbolize their support. Similarly politicians during the campaign will eschew suit jackets to bond symbolically with the ordinary, working person. This effort to identify and bond can be politically costly, as when a *Washington Post* news story quoted then-Georgia U.S. Senator Wyche Fowler telling a Black audience in his reelection campaign that "I'm black—white on the outside but black on the inside." His Republican opponent Paul Coverdell made copies of the story and had it distributed to his supporters at political rallies (MacNeil/Lehrer News-Hour transcript, 11/23/92). Coverdell went on to defeat Fowler narrowly in the 1992 Senate race.

Voters use demographic facts about candidates such as their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and social origins, as a "low-information shortcut" according to Samuel Popkin (1991) to estimate their policy stands. Voters also use more information, when available, such as party affiliation and the candidate's qualifications, but descriptive characteristics are not simply ignored. The public's inability to follow and interpret Washington politics may in the end give special weight to the symbolic form of representation, and specifically, then, to descriptive representation.

Work by Lawrence Bobo and Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr. (1990) has found that the descriptive representation of Blacks is politically empowering,

that is, Blacks descriptively represented are more interested and active in politics than Blacks who are not descriptively represented in government. They contend that believing the system perhaps to be more responsive to their needs and interests when Blacks hold positions of power in government, Black citizens become more politically active. Black elected officials represent a potent symbol of Blacks' inclusion in the polity, inspiring more Blacks to take part in it. Similarly, Nancy L. Schwartz (1988), following a long line of theorists, argues that political representation can be empowering, a vehicle through which citizens become educated and become linked to their communities. If descriptive representation in Washington is found to empower Blacks politically, the case for structuring elections to achieve their descriptive representation is strengthened. This definition of representation is a general one, not at all exclusive to Blacks. I believe that legislators strive in their everyday activities to represent their constituents descriptively as well as substantively and symbolically. Whether constituents value that descriptive representation as well as substantive representation, however, or whether only marginalized social groups value descriptive and symbolic representation more, is an open question that I address in the book's conclusion.

The problem of race and political representation generates a number of complicated issues. People dogmatically fall on one side of the fence, either opposed to the value and all means of achieving descriptive representation in government for Blacks and other political minorities, or in favor. For those readers who already have made up their minds in this debate, I would like to illustrate both the appeal and costs of descriptive representation through the application of a sports metaphor.

With respect to Black descriptive representation, is it enough that Blacks identify with a team and cheer it on to victory on the sidelines, or, to truly take part in the activity, must some of the players on the field also be Black? What happens to Black supporters if none of the players are ever members of their own race? Are they as enthused about the game as supporters whose social groups are well represented on the field? Will they continue to show up at the games even if they receive shares in the team's victories? Will they continue to care if their team wins or loses in events? What if, however, having Black members on the field as players reduces the team's likelihood of winning? After all, as many contend, like Swain (1993), the practice of constructing majority-Black congressional districts reduces the likelihood of other Democrats winning their seats. Some contend that the dozen or so majority-Black districts constructed in the 1990 round of redistricting helped the Republican party become the majority party in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1994. But still, might Black players bring different strate-

gies (and agendas) to the field, and might they seek to achieve different goals that were not apparent before?

In short, is the race of the players salient and important to the many Black spectators in the stands? This is the central question that my study takes up.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

In the first half of the book I consider the question of whether Black members of Congress are different from their White counterparts. Chapter 2 begins by focusing on an elemental but neglected aspect of the question, namely the sociological characteristics of Blacks in office compared to those of Whites. The nature of our system requires that individuals have wealth and education, and that they belong to certain occupations as informal prerequisites for public office. The higher the office, the higher the status demands. Are Black legislators more like the average Black American in terms of their occupation, wealth, education, and gender or more like their White counterparts in the House? If Blacks legislators are unlike their Black constituents on almost every social dimension but race, what is the real value of descriptive representation? Chapter 3 examines their elections to Congress. Certainly, most Blacks in Congress represent districts very much unlike their White counterparts as they are majority-Black or majority-minority in population. Whether the fact that Black members are elected in majority-Black districts gives them a degree of “electoral immunity” is addressed in this chapter. While ample new research has examined this, chapter 4 once again compares the political styles and voting records of Black legislators and White legislators through an analysis of their voting records. A departure from past work, however, is a comparison of Black members’ key votes in the 104th Congress to actual public opinion data on African Americans. Chapter 5 addresses the issue of symbolic representation. Representation is much more than pork barrel policies; the representation of Blacks through symbolic legislation is presented as a valued component of how legislators elected to represent communities and groups. Whether Black legislators offer only “symbols” and not substantive public policies that benefit Blacks and the general public is a charge that I also consider in this chapter.

The second half of the book addresses the relevance that race has for Blacks in terms of their political representation. Chapter 6 examines the impact that race has on how satisfied blacks are with their representation in Congress. In chapter 7, I determine whether Nancy Schwartz’s claims about the constitutive value of political representation is valid or

not. Does representation empower Blacks? Does having Black representation in the House affect the attitudes that Blacks have about the institution? In chapter 8, I examine the link between attitudes toward Congress, political trust, and descriptive representation. Chapter 9 presents my conclusions about the degree to which race affects the political representation of Blacks and the degree to which Congress must socially mirror Blacks to be a representative governing body.

THE 1996 NATIONAL BLACK ELECTION STUDY AND THE 104TH CONGRESS

Much of the data analyzed in this book are from the 1996 National Black Election Study (Tate 1998). The 1996 NBES is a survey of 1,126 African Americans modeled after the 1984 National Black Election Study, the first-ever national telephone survey of a racial minority group (Jackson 1993). The 1996 NBES was designed with an explicit congressional focus. Respondents were matched to their congressional districts through their telephone exchanges and asked to evaluate their House representatives. A total of 252 House districts fell into the 1996 sample, including the districts of 34 of 39 Black members of Congress. A description of the sample design and survey is presented in Appendix A.

These 252 House legislators were part of the 104th Congress. This Congress has a special place in history because it was the first Congress with a Republican majority in the House of Representatives in forty years. In fact, Republicans controlled both houses in the 104th Congress. Two Black Republicans were also part of this new Republican majority, J. C. Watts of Oklahoma, a star of the Republican freshman class, in fact, and Gary Franks of Connecticut. Their districts, less than 2 percent Black, did not fall into the 1996 NBES sample, however.

The first 100 days of Republican leadership in Congress were staged for drama. Many House Republicans had campaigned on the basis of a "Contract with America," a policy agenda consisting of ten legislative proposals, such as a balanced budget amendment and welfare reform. Republican candidates pledged to bring these contract items to the floor of the House for a vote in the first 100 days of the new session. President Clinton would veto the Republican budget plan. With House Republicans unwilling to reach agreement, the government would shut down on December 16, 1995 through January 2, 1996. The twenty-one-day shutdown is so far the government's longest one, during which federal workers did not receive full pay and most federal offices and museums were closed over the Christmas holiday (Sinclair 1997, 206–12). This shutdown, writes one journalist, "would in fact survive as the

most enduring accomplishment [of the 104th Congress] . . . No other Congress in the country's history had closed down the government for three weeks" (Killian 1998).

This was the political context the 1996 NBES was conducted in. The 1996 NBES was a two-wave panel study in which 1,126 Blacks were interviewed shortly after the 1996 national conventions and the day preceding the November election. Eight hundred sixty-nine Blacks were reinterviewed shortly after the November election. Not only were these Black respondents asked to choose a president, they were voting in a new Congress: the 105th. Republicans would retain their majorities in Congress in the 1996 elections, but by an even smaller margin.