

# **EXAMPLE**

**1**

**Symbolic Candidacies and the Significance of Third Parties:  
A Historic Analysis of African Americans Seeking Executive Office, 1872-2008**

**Abstract**

If awarded, a First Year at Fordham Faculty Research Grant would provide me with able research assistants and the necessary materials to successfully launch my second manuscript project. Unlike most academic treatises and mainstream media on the subject, this post-Obama election project is not focused on the absence of a black *president* over the past one and half centuries since the abolition of slavery, but the plethora of black *presidential candidates* that have appeared over that period's duration. By examining in detail how over thirty African American presidential candidates have been incorporated into the electoral process at the executive level, this project introduces the importance of the presidential campaigns of African Americans to US electoral politics generally. Although the participation of African American candidates on the national level may have seemed like far-flung and self-serving endeavors for many of these third party and independent candidates, important institutional mechanisms arose from their inclusion into the electoral system at this elite level. These candidates implemented grass roots organizing on local levels in diverse locales, altered party rules, and groomed local campaign workers for local-level and state-wide offices. Their quest for the executive office not only contributed to an increase in African American elected officials on local levels, but also directly and indirectly enabled the success of the Obama campaign some 136 years after Frederick Douglass's name first appeared on a presidential ballot.

This project is in the genesis stage of research. With the assistance of this grant, background research will be gathered pertaining to the role of African Americans in third parties, symbolic candidacies, and the political party participation of African American elected officials. This pilot data will enable me to prepare and implement a qualitative survey throughout the spring, summer, and fall of 2010. Once the survey data is collected, I plan to

publish an article based on my findings,<sup>1</sup> which will also provide a platform to apply for external support. With the data collected, the following summer I will submit applications for a grant proposal to such prestigious organizations as the Russell Sage Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and the National Science Foundation (NSF).

## **Background**

African American candidates for President of the United States have represented various political parties and affiliations, but more than two thirds represented independent parties, a trend that provides potential insight into the historical limitations of the dominant two-party system for African Americans. However, despite this trend, African American politicians have also historically depended on an established party as a way to achieve their own political party status.<sup>2</sup> This process may have ironically undermined the perceived independence and authority of these new political parties, helping to explain why several independent and third party candidates received little to no traction during their national campaigns.

This explanation may find support in scholars who argue that African American voters are inherently practical, and therefore seek to maximize their policy preferences within the dominant party system. This argument suggests that even if African American third party candidates articulated shared preferences with an African American polity, they would still fail to garner substantial support from these voters,<sup>3</sup> as African Americans have traditionally believed that although achieving their electoral ends outright may be beyond their reach, they

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<sup>1</sup> There are several possible journals of interest. The *Journal of Black Studies*, *Du Bois Review*, and the *Journal of Politics* are the three journals of primary interest.

<sup>2</sup> Walters, 1984.

<sup>3</sup> Extending as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, blacks supported one of the two major parties, and not the Liberty Party, the party of abolitionists.

can act as a balance of power by throwing their support behind the “lesser of two evils” within the dominant two-party system.<sup>4</sup>

However, such compromises do not reflect the interests of the African American electorate through “sincere” and “straightforward” voting. This is the dilemma of the African American electorate, that it must either: 1) work within a dominant two-party system that is designed to disappoint, and thus potentially lead to African American’s alienation and withdrawal; or 2) not work within that system and guarantee their alienation as a consequence of that withdrawal.<sup>5</sup> Thus by participating in the two-party system, in which roughly ninety-percent of African American voters have historically supported the Democratic Party, African Americans are seeking to *protect* their interests, but at the price of a decreased ability to *advance* their interests. As a consequence, the dominant two-party system has been crippling for African Americans.

Thus my project takes an historical approach to ask whether and how African American political power can be asserted and interests advanced without a party machine that operates within the confines of America’s dominant two-party system. I have already presented a preliminary draft of this project at the most recent meeting of the American Political Science Association in Toronto, Canada this past September 2009. The paper was entitled, “A Historical Analysis of African Americans and the Executive Office, 1872-2008” and generated interest from scholars of voting and elections, as well as scholars of American political development.

### **Contribution**

African American allegiance to the two party system is rational in that it has provided them with a certain level of ideological stability, structural stability in terms of choices (even if

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<sup>4</sup> James Weldon Johnson (1924) “...How can the Negro expect any worthwhile consideration for his vote as long as politicians are always reasonably sure as to how it will be cast?”

<sup>5</sup> Hamilton, 1973.

that choice is between the lesser of two evils), as well as a percentage of black political leaders and leadership.<sup>6</sup> However, that same allegiance is irrational to the extent that the gained ideological stability fails to accurately reflect and advance African American interests; the structural stability it provides constitutes picking the lesser of two evils rather than a truly preferred platform; and the percentage of African American political leaders and leadership has not risen to the level of being truly representative, particularly at the national level. This tension highlights both the inherent limitations of America's dominant two-party system for African American candidates, as well as both the importance and limitations of the effects African American third-party candidates have had — and can have — on that system.

By employing mixed methods of archival, quantitative, and qualitative research, my project will thus present scholars of electoral politics, American political development, and African American Studies with an incisive examination of that tension, along with implications for its resolution that will resonate with the next generation of African American candidates and voters. To ascertain the effect of third party candidates, I will conduct a detailed analysis of African American candidates as well as the voting patterns of African Americans over the past fifty years. A national qualitative survey of past and present African American elected officials and candidates, as well as interviews with those who reside in the NYC metro region, will also be conducted to create detailed political narratives of the effects of African American third party candidates on local and state level politics. This combination of qualitative and quantitative data will help support claims pertaining to increased participation of African Americans in the US electoral process due to the long lasting effects African American candidates have had as a result of running for this nation's highest office.

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<sup>6</sup> Walters, 1984.

  
**Cost**

With the generous support of the First Year at Fordham Faculty Research Grant, I will be able to employ two undergraduate research assistants to conduct substantive archival research at the Schomburg Center for Research in Harlem, NY. I will also use these research assistants to edit and disseminate a national survey, the necessary supplies and equipment for which constitutes the balance of my costs. Some of this equipment, particularly the laptop, will also be necessary for me to conduct research on site at the Schomburg Center as well as interviews with subjects throughout the New York metro region.

**Conclusion**

To fully understand the historical significance of President Obama's election, it is necessary to shift our focus away from the absence of an African American president over the past one and half centuries in order to examine the more important issue, from which this absence distracts us: the origin, legacy and lessons of the thirty African American presidential candidates since Frederick Douglass's name first appeared on a presidential ballot. Having already generated interest from a variety of scholars at the American Political Science Association, *Symbolic Candidacies and the Significance of Third Parties* thus promises to be a valuable contribution to my career, my discipline, and the continued development of American Democracy at this historic moment.

# **EXAMPLE**

**2**

*Youth Movements in Post-Communist Societies:  
A Model of Nonviolent Resistance*



**Abstract**

If awarded, a Faculty Research Grant would cover critical costs for international field work in support of my current book project, titled *Youth Movements in Post-Communist Societies*, for which Fordham's Department of Political Science has already provided generous support by granting me an unpaid leave of absence for spring 2010.

Over the past decade, a wave of youth mobilization against repressive political regimes has swept the post-communist region. Thousands of young people took to the street to demand political change during the election period, a critical juncture in domestic politics. These protests have exposed a litany of problems that beset non-democratic political regimes and inspired civic activists worldwide. In 2000, Serbia's social movement Otpor played a vital role in bringing down Slobodan Milosevic. Emulating the example of Otpor, Georgia's Kmara in 2003 and Ukraine's Pora in 2004 mobilized youth to press for the turnover of power. Similarly, the Belarussian youth movement Zubr in 2001/2006 and Azerbaijani youth groups Magam, Yeni Fikir and Yokh in 2005 have attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to mobilize large numbers of young people and propel a democratic breakthrough. The purpose of this project is to provide a comparative analysis of nonviolent resistance in five post-communist states – Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine – and offer an explanation for divergent movement outcomes.

In this study, I argue that the analysis of tactical interaction between youth movements and incumbent governments is vital to understanding divergent movement outcomes. By tactical interaction, I mean a chess-like game in which movement participants display tactical innovation and incumbent governments, in turn, adjust their tactics to subvert unorthodox forms of mass mobilization.<sup>1</sup> The primary empirical basis for this research is interviews with former movement participants. I have already made a field trip to the region in the winter of 2008 and began to interview former movement participants. With the support of Fordham's Department of Political Science and the Faculty Research Grant, I intend to make a second trip to the region in the winter of 2010 to collect additional data. Upon the completion of data collection, I intend to prepare and submit a book proposal to academic presses by May 2010.

## **Background**

The debate over the relative importance of structure and agency in accounting for movement outcomes occupies a prominent place in social movement literature. Proponents of the structural approach argue that certain features of the political environment determine the likelihood of movement success (for a review, see Meyer 2004), while another strand of research stresses the importance of agency in explaining movement outcomes. In agency-centered accounts of social movements, some scholars examine the impact of diffusion on movement strategies (for a review, see Strang and Soule 1998).

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<sup>1</sup> On the conceptualization of tactical interaction, see McAdam (1983).

In recent scholarship on electoral revolutions in the post-communist region, this debate has received considerable attention. Some scholars argue that the strength of the repressive political regime is the best predictor of political change in the aftermath of fraudulent elections (Way 2008, 2009). Another strand of research underscores the importance of ideational factors. Specifically, social scientists draw upon diffusion literature to explain a wave of electoral revolutions (Beissinger 2007; Bunce and Wolchik 2006, 2009). Unlike most previous work, however, *Youth Movements in Post-Communist Societies* aims to trace the dynamics of cross-border political learning by both social movements and incumbent governments.

A distinguishing feature of this project is the dynamic approach to the study of youth movements. While scholars have scrutinized processes of tactical interaction between challenger organizations and the ruling elite in advanced industrial democracies (Beckwith 2000; McCammon 2003; Minkoff 1999), much less research on this topic was done in non-democracies. Yet, the dynamics of nonviolent resistance in non-democracies are likely to play out in a different manner. The repressive nature of the non-democratic political regime imposes additional constraints on the range of protest strategies that social movements can adopt and expands the magnitude of discretionary power that the ruling elite can exercise to maintain the status quo and stifle the opposition.

The proposed study will build upon my previous research about youth and politics in the post-communist region. Earlier findings from my research have appeared in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *Comparative Politics*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, *PS: Political Science and Politics*, and *Youth and Society*. The financial support from Fordham University will facilitate the completion of my first book-length manuscript in a timely manner.

## **Contribution**

*Youth Movements in Post-Communist Societies* seeks to contribute to existing literature in two ways. First, this study seeks to strengthen our understanding of political learning in non-democracies. Based upon semi-structured interviews with former movement participants, media reports, and original documents, this analysis aims to elucidate how the cross-national diffusion of ideas affects the tactics of youth movements and incumbent governments. In particular, this inquiry investigates how autocratic incumbents turn around the use of modern technology to contain the movement's growth. Second, this book-length study expands the growing literature on electoral revolutions by focusing on the tactics of youth movements and examining cases of both success and failure. Most empirical work has focused on cases of successful mass mobilization (Aslund and McFaul 2006; Kuzio 2009; McFaul 2005; Wheatley 2005), while much less attention has been accorded to abortive attempts of civic activists to bring about political change (Marples 2006; Silitski 2006; Valiyev 2006). Social scientists and civic activists, however, can draw valuable insights from the analysis of movement defeats.

A strong indicator of this project's research potential is the support it has received from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Stanford University's Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law. These fellowships enabled me to make a field trip to the region and then present preliminary findings at the following academic venues:

- Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C, January 15, 2009
- The Eleventh Annual Graduate Workshop, Kokkalis Program on Southeastern and East-Central Europe, Harvard University, February 12-13, 2009
- Institute of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies, University of California-Berkeley, March 4, 2009

- Comparative Politics Workshop, Department of Political Science, Stanford University, April 14, 2009
- The Annual Conference of the Canadian Political Science Association, Ottawa, May 27-29, 2009

Building upon these experiences, the completion and publication of *Youth Movements in Post-Communist Societies* will stimulate further academic interest in the study of youth activism and invigorate a policymaking debate about strategies for promoting social justice and human rights in non-democracies. The results from this research will inform the donor community of some pitfalls associated with adopting the same approach to democracy promotion in different repressive regimes. Furthermore, the arguments presented in *Youth Movements in Post-Communist Societies* can be translated into practical tools for civic activists in the post-communist region and beyond.

### **Cost**

I request funding to cover some costs associated with international travel. To interview former movement participants, I will fly to Ukraine and travel across the country. In addition, I intend to establish affiliation with the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and use their library resources.

### **Conclusion**

*Youth Movements in Post-Communist Societies* will build upon my previously published and generously supported research by enabling not only my first book-length manuscript, but also a critical contribution to social movement literature. Its innovative analysis of tactical interaction in five post-communist states will benefit scholars, policy makers, international donors, and civic activists.