Racial politics in Brazil have changed dramatically: the nation-state that once denied racism now enacts racial policies for Afro-Brazilians. The discourse of race has also changed: it is now common for the media to discuss Afro-Brazilians as a voting bloc. Using qualitative methods, this article tests the hypothesis that Afro-Brazilian politicians seek a racial vote from the Afro-Brazilian electorate. Analyzing campaign advertisements from select candidates in Salvador and São Paulo, this study finds that most Afro-Brazilian politicians use racial cues, and interviews show that most Afro-Brazilian politicians address racial issues during their campaigns. Not all of them seek racial votes, however: at the federal level, Afro-Brazilian politicians believe that this strategy would not get them elected. Many use campaigns nevertheless to raise racial consciousness among the electorate.

My campaign made the black racial question visible so the slogan was in reference to the black woman. It was “Olivia Santana, the big black woman (Negona) of the City.” It was a slogan that was more about the history of elections, of black participation in elections. This slogan tackled the racial question in a more objective manner.

—Olivia Santana, 2006

This article is an exploratory effort to examine campaign strategies of Afro-Brazilian locally elected politicians in Salvador and São Paulo and federally elected Afro-Brazilian politicians in Brasília. This research is important because it examines Afro-Brazilians in electoral politics. Studying Afro-Brazilian politicians’ strategies is especially important to scholarly work on Brazilian electoral politics, as they represent nontraditional alternatives to campaign strategies.

Black and brown Brazilians now outnumber white Brazilians (Wernick 2008) yet remain underrepresented in electoral politics. Afro-Brazilian politicians have often been ignored in academic studies on electoral politics because of the presumption that race does not matter in Brazil. Undoubtedly, racial politics in Brazil have changed from denying racism to affirming its existence. Racial policies such as affirmative action have been implemented to address racial discrimination. The
political landscape has shifted, and racial issues are now part of Brazil’s political agenda.

Are racial issues important to Afro-Brazilian politicians, or do they believe that addressing these issues would threaten their campaigns? Do Afro-Brazilian politicians seek votes by making racial appeals to Afro-Brazilian voters? The hypothesis of this study is that given the saliency of race in contemporary politics, Afro-Brazilian politicians discuss racial issues to appeal to self-identified black (negro and preto) Afro-Brazilian voters, rather than those who claim other color categories. The research for this article finds that among the samples in Salvador and São Paulo, visual and verbal racial cues are used. Interviews reveal that racial issues are important to Afro-Brazilian politicians, but most of them do not depend on a black racial vote to be elected. Afro-Brazilian politicians, especially women, are dedicated to raising racial consciousness among Afro-Brazilians, and some appeal to self-identified black Brazilians.

**Methodology**

This study used two qualitative methods. First, a discourse analysis was conducted on campaign advertisements and newsletters of Afro-Brazilian politicians in Salvador and São Paulo to examine whether they used racial cues. Second, interviews with locally elected Afro-Brazilian politicians and Afro-Brazilian federal deputies conducted from 2004 to 2007 were analyzed. Collection of material began in 2004, during the city council elections, and on a return trip to Brazil in 2005, collecting information from elected politicians. The discourse analysis consists of examining whether racial cues mention Afro-Brazilian issues or if Afro-Brazilian cultural markers are used in campaign material. Subsequently, the article defines blackness in Brazil and explains why this is important to the discourse analysis and the interviews with Afro-Brazilian politicians.

The study is restricted to campaign material collected from politicians willing to give this information. A limitation of this research is that it was not able to collect campaign material of all locally elected Afro-Brazilian politicians in Salvador and all Afro-Brazilian federal deputies and senators in Brasília. Consequently, the results cannot generalize how all Afro-Brazilian politicians in these cities make appeals to Afro-Brazilian voters. This project is nonetheless helpful in beginning to examine the campaign strategies of Afro-Brazilian politicians.

Nor does the study examine television and radio advertisements. Television ads for city council were extremely brief, giving most candidates a ten-second “spot” provided by the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), which grants a Free Electoral Hour (Horário Gratuito Eleitoral). Because of the large number of candidates for city council, television
ads were extremely short. More time was given to politicians running for mayor. Because of the highly personalized nature of voting and the weak ideology of political parties, this study focuses on individual politicians’ strategies, rather than the strategies of political parties. Party switching among voters and elected officials is not uncommon in Brazil (Mainwaring and Scully 1995), and sometimes coalitions are formed between political parties to support candidates (Fleischer 2006). However, many times these coalitions have no similarities in political ideology, thus demonstrating the relative weakness of political parties.

**Interview Sample**

In Salvador I interviewed 5 locally elected Afro-Brazilian politicians and in São Paulo, 2 locally elected Afro-Brazilian politicians. I also interviewed 5 Afro-Brazilian federal deputies in Brasília. Currently there are 11 Afro-Brazilian federal deputies and 1 Afro-Brazilian senator (Brooks 2008). Afro-Brazilian informants in Salvador and São Paulo identified these politicians as Afro-Brazilian, and they were selected for an interview on this basis. In Salvador and São Paulo my informants included research assistants and Afro-Brazilians with whom I built personal relationships. In both cities, the total number of informants was 16. In Salvador, more Afro-Brazilian politicians were identified by informants than were interviewed. In São Paulo, only 2 Afro-Brazilians were identified by Afro-Brazilian informants and white council members, and only 2 self-identified as such.

Data were not available on race or color self-identification of politicians from the Tribunal Regional Eleitoral (TRE, Regional Electoral Court), but instead were stored by each political party with which politicians registered. Therefore I was not able to collect these data. For this reason, it is not clear how representative my Salvador sample is. In São Paulo, the sample represents all Afro-Brazilian council members, and in Brasília the sample represents 42 percent of Afro-Brazilian politicians in Congress. In São Paulo there are only two Afro-Brazilian council members, and I interviewed both of them. In Salvador, self-identification of politicians did not always match how others identified them. Self-identification will be discussed further in the section on blackness.

**Brazilian Campaigns and Afro-Brazilian Politicians’ Campaigns**

Electoral campaigns in Brazil tend to be very expensive (Ames 1995; Samuels 2001). They are highly competitive because of the open-list proportional representation system, which means that candidates compete against candidates from their own political party as well as candi-
dates from other political parties. Carey and Shugart (1995) argue that the PR open-list system encourages politicians to receive personal votes and to run candidate-oriented campaigns.

These personal votes are expensive because money is spent on advertisements and clientelisitc relationships to guarantee them. In addition, relying on general election data, David Samuels (2001) finds that it is difficult for leftist politicians to rely on financial support from businesses and that most electoral campaigns receive money from businesses. Because businesses are the main source of support, interest representation is limited in Brazilian democracy. On the other hand, Frances Hagopian (1996) argues that although Brazil has made the transition to democracy, vestiges of authoritarianism remain. As she points out, some of the leaders who held positions before democracy continued to hold power after Brazil transferred to a democracy. This point is relevant to campaigns because some politicians enjoy name recognition from familial ties that may have existed in predemocratic Brazil. Additionally, some of these politicians have longstanding patron-client relationships they can depend on to get elected. Because of family wealth and name recognition they can run competitive campaigns.

The impact of campaign costs greatly affects Afro-Brazilian political candidates. In his 1997 study of city council elections in Salvador, Cloves Oliveira found that most of the Afro-Brazilian candidates elected came from working-class backgrounds. Many of them did not have the same kind of financial support as their white colleagues. In the interviews for the present study, many Afro-Brazilian candidates said they ran their campaigns with significant financial constraints. A lack of financial resources and family ties where name recognition is an asset makes it difficult for these candidates to win elections.

If Afro-Brazilian politicians rely on candidate-oriented campaigns to win, they must appeal to voters who know them from their communities or through their involvement in social movements. Afro-Brazilian politicians who are elected face great odds, yet those addressing racial issues have followed a successful strategy that appeals to a sector of the Afro-Brazilian electorate concerned with these issues.

RACIAL POLITICS IN BRAZIL

As early as 1971, Amaury de Souza explored why the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB) sought support from Afro-Brazilian voters. Abdias do Nascimento, one of the most recognized Afro-Brazilian movement leaders, helped to build the Democratic Labor Party (PDT), along with Leonel Brizola (Johnson 2006, 176). Today the Workers’ Party (PT) explicitly seeks the support of Afro-Brazilians. It has a division in the party devoted to combating racism. Several other political parties have divi-
sions devoted to addressing Afro-Brazilian issues and attracting Afro-
Brazilians as members. These parties include the Brazilian Social
Democracy Party (PSDB), the United Socialist Workers’ Party (PSTU),
and the Workers’ Cause Party (PCO).\(^1\) Further, using data from the Latin
American Barometer, Michael Mitchell finds that nonwhites are more
likely to claim that there is “a lot of discrimination” in the workplace,
schools, police, the courts, and political parties (Mitchell 2007, 28).\(^2\) This
finding gives evidence that Afro-Brazilians are concerned with how
political parties deal with Afro-Brazilian issues.\(^3\)

Key works that do examine race in Brazilian politics focus on Afro-
Brazilian mobilization, Afro-Brazilian politicians, or Afro-Brazilian racial
attitudes. Michael Hanchard (1994) highlights the efforts of black move-
mment activists from the 1930s to the late 1980s. He also examines the role
racial hegemony played in preventing large-scale black mobilization. Ollie
Johnson’s research (1998, 2006) examines Afro-Brazilian representation in
the Brazilian Congress and the role Afro-Brazilian politicians played in
presenting racial policies at the national level. Michael Mitchell’s scholarly
work (1977) examines the racial attitudes of black movement activists and
Afro-Brazilians affiliated with black movement organizations.

Amaury de Souza (1971) uses data from the 1960 presidential elec-
tion to examine ethnic voting. Souza finds that Afro-Brazilians, regard-
less of their class level, overwhelmingly supported the Brazilian Labor
Party (PTB), compared to white Brazilians. He explains this by pointing
out that during President Getúlio Vargas’s years in power (1930–45,
1951–54), some Afro-Brazilians ascended socially and economically;
therefore middle-class Afro-Brazilians continued to support the opposi-
tion party, to which Vargas belonged. Poor Afro-Brazilians supported
the PTB because it presented itself as the party of the poor. Neverthe-
less, Souza finds no significant differences between white and Afro-
Brazilian voters in terms of electoral participation and political interest.

Focusing only on Afro-Brazilian candidates and voters, Ana Valente
(1986) examines the 1982 elections in São Paulo. Political parties such
as the Democratic Labor Party (PDT), the Party of the Brazilian Demo-
cratic Movement (PMDB), and the Workers’ Party (PT), all leftist parties,
supported Afro-Brazilian candidates and were dedicated to minority
issues. Black movement activists encouraged Afro-Brazilians to vote for
black candidates. Despite their desire for an ethnic vote, of the 54 Afro-
Brazilian candidates running for office, only 2 were elected, and they
were not tied to the black movement and did not discuss racial issues.
Valente’s survey data reveal that most Afro-Brazilian voters did not
know the black candidates who ran or were not concerned with candi-
dates’ racial background; therefore they did not vote for them.

Ideological differences in the black movement also contributed to
the failure to attract Afro-Brazilian voters. Valente recognizes that black
movement activists prematurely expected an ethnic vote. Similarly, Sales Augusto dos Santos (2000) examines Afro-Brazilian federal deputies' campaign platforms. Most of them did not focus on racial issues because they thought this would isolate voters. This indicates that they did not think an ethnic vote could elect them to office. The politicians Santos focuses on were legislators in 1998; therefore the interviews for the present study provide a timely follow-up to his study.

In the 1990s, Benedita da Silva attempted to organize Afro-Brazilian senators and federal deputies. Silva was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1987. She served as vice governor of Rio de Janeiro, council member, and senator, and was governor when former governor Anthony Garotinha ran for president (Johnson 2006, 29). Silva has always addressed the needs of the poor, Afro-Brazilians, and women. In 2003, Luiz Alberto was successful at organizing parliamentarians around racial issues when he founded the Congressional Caucus in Defense of Racial Equality (Frente Parlamentar em Defesa da Igualdade Racial), which was open to all members of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate regardless of color. This group has more than one hundred members. The Nucleus of Black PT Representatives (Núcleo de Parlamentares Negros do PT, NUPAN) was formed not long after the FPDIR and has ten members for the 2007–11 legislative session.

In contrast to the 1982 São Paulo elections, when only two Afro-Brazilians were elected, Cloves Oliveira (1997) finds that a substantial number of Afro-Brazilian candidates were elected in Salvador, Bahia. He finds an increase in the number of Afro-Brazilians elected city councilors from 1988 to 1992. Afro-Brazilians elected to the city council tended to come from working-class backgrounds, in comparison to white Brazilians, who tended to be from high- and middle-income backgrounds. Moreover, comparing the 1992 election to the 1988 election, the proportion of Afro-Brazilians elected to the city council increased from 11 percent to 34 percent, due to an increase in the number of council members from working-class backgrounds. Oliveira believes that a change in recruitment by political parties aided in this increase. Afro-Brazilians were nonetheless underrepresented in local politics, considering that nearly 70 percent of the population is of African descent.

Glaucio Ary Dillon Soares and Nelson do Valle Silva (1987) examine Rio de Janeiro’s 1982 election of Leonel Brizola as governor. Although their focus is on the effects of urbanization, social class, and party organization on the Brizola vote in various municípios, they are also interested in the role of race. They find that the higher the proportion of nonwhites, the more votes Brizola received. Morenos, or those claiming a brown (moreno) identity, tended to vote for Brizola more than whites and blacks.
Morenos can be light- or dark-skinned. Explaining moreno identity, Edward Telles (2004) claims that dark-skinned Afro-Brazilians who claim a moreno identity may be expressing a form of whitening. He believes it is an ambiguous term that allows people who may not be able to call themselves white to avoid stigmatized nonwhite categories (2004, 98). This implies that Afro-Brazilians who claim a moreno identity are politically different from Afro-Brazilians who claim a black identity. Soares and Silva, however, propose three possible reasons that blacks did not support Brizola as much as browns. One reason is that Brizola made an explicit appeal for socialismo moreno to attract Afro-Brazilian voters; but it is possible that he isolated black voters, as the appeal was for moreno socialism and not for black socialism. A second reason is that most blacks live outside the Rio metropolitan area, where the party’s organization was not very strong. Third, illiteracy could have played a role in voter access, and blacks have the highest illiteracy rate of all color groups.

Cloves Oliveira (2007) has conducted the most comprehensive and outstanding scholarly work that examines the media’s role on the election campaigns of Benedita da Silva of Rio de Janeiro and Celso Pitta from São Paulo. Silva ran for mayor in 1992 and lost. Pitta ran for mayor in 1996 and won. They are both Afro-Brazilian, but da Silva is known for addressing race, gender, and class issues and is affiliated with the PT, a progressive political party. Pitta avoided addressing racial issues and represented a conservative political party, the Brazilian Progressive Party (PPB). It is clear that race played an important role in how the media depicted the two. This study also examines how implicit and explicit racial cues were used by a variety of candidates to galvanize support from Afro-Brazilians. Oliveira’s work is important in establishing the role of race in Brazilian electoral politics.

It appears that Afro-Brazilian politicians who want to win office avoid explicitly addressing racial issues for fear they will isolate voters who do not believe that racial issues are important to them. Given that affirmative action policies were enacted in 2001 and that racial discrimination is more openly discussed in Brazilian politics today, it is plausible that racial issues are important to Afro-Brazilian voters. If Afro-Brazilians view their socioeconomic status as the result of class and race, candidates who discuss racial issues may appeal to them more than they did in the past.

Racial Cues

The 2002 scholarly work of Nicholas Valentino et al. on racial priming in the United States finds that implicit racial cues prime racial attitudes; when counterstereotypical images are presented, however, the effect of
racial priming is less. Much of their work on political advertisements focuses on the negative effects of priming white racial attitudes. They find that whites tend to be less supportive of government spending on programs to benefit African Americans.

Most work on racial cues and priming in U.S. politics focuses on white attitudes. African American voters are not the central focus of these studies (Mendelberg 2001; Hutchings 2008). In Brazil, by comparison, some Brazilian politicians use visual and verbal racial appeals and are elected. This suggests that appeals that mobilize Afro-Brazilian voters and racial cues in Brazilian politics can be used to garner support for candidates, not to repress voter turnout.

The success of some Brazilian politicians who use racial appeals challenges the idea that most Afro-Brazilians have endorsed the myth of racial democracy. If Afro-Brazilian voters were not concerned about issues relevant to Afro-Brazilians, verbal racial cues would not mobilize them. Politicians’ success cannot be explained entirely by ads that appeal to black movement activists and educated Afro-Brazilians, who constitute a small section of the electorate. This study postulates that Brazilian black movement activists have been extremely successful at influencing the Afro-Brazilian electorate to embrace blackness and to support policies specifically for Afro-Brazilians. Furthermore, Afro-Brazilian voters who identify as black (preto and negro) now make up a sizable voting bloc.

**Blackness in Brazil**

It is important to note the complexity involved in identifying black politicians. All the politicians interviewed for this study self-identified as such. Although self-identification and how politicians were identified was not a problem in São Paulo and Brasília, it was a problem in Salvador. Gilmar Santiago, then secretary of the Municipal Department of Reparations in Salvador, was asked to identify black (negro) City Council members, and he identified well over half of the council’s members. However, some of these people did not self-identify as Afro-Brazilian, nor did the Afro-Brazilian informants identify some of them as such. Santiago identified some as black (negro) because of their support of racial policies. Because access to color data was unavailable, it could not be determined how many Afro-Brazilian politicians identify as black or brown. Self-identification is one way to acknowledge blackness; other ways include cultural markers.

The discourse analysis for this study focuses on cultural signifiers as well as explicit racialized language because both of these tap into Brazilian notions of blackness. Blackness is operationalized by examining ideas of blackness, which include traditional cultural symbols, such as capoeira or candomblé, and modern notions of blackness, such as
hip hop music. Blackness also includes negative stereotypes of Afro-Brazilians. This is the reason black movement activists challenge stereotypes of blackness and black people with positive representations of Afro-Brazilians and blackness.

In Brazil, blackness is not simply defined as those who identify as black (*negro* or *preto*) or Afro-Brazilian. Instead, notions of blackness are imbued with negative stereotypes, which, in Brazil, have often been naturalized. Both black movement activists and, in some cases, Afro-Brazilian politicians employ notions of blackness that challenge stereotypes and are used to empower Afro-Brazilians. The interviews reveal how Afro-Brazilian politicians embrace and promote blackness in a positive way. In Brazil, as in many Latin American countries, because of the low number of African-descended people in professional positions, these positions are naturalized as “white positions.” Thus a black doctor or a black dentist is an oxymoron. Instead, security guards or domestic workers are racialized as black occupations. Even someone who is not a racist, including an Afro-Brazilian, may negatively racialize people because of visual representations they are exposed to on a daily basis. In the article “Racialized Bodies, Naturalized Classes: Moving Through the City of Salvador da Bahia,” Cecilia McCallum (2005) expounds on this point. She claims that spaces are “blackened” or racialized by the presence of people of African descent, that blacks often occupy inferior spaces, and that these spaces are racialized as black spaces.

Blackness as defined by Afro-Brazilians varies across generations. Livio Sansone (2004) discusses modern notions of blackness among young Afro-Brazilians in Salvador. These notions are influenced by global notions of blackness and are evident in young people’s dress, hairstyles, and music preferences. Older Afro-Brazilians, by contrast, equate Bahian traditions such as *Baianas*, women who wear traditional candomblé white clothing and sell *acarajé* (a deep fried dough made of beans and stuffed with shrimp) in the streets, with their ideas of blackness. In other words, traditions rooted in Bahian culture are marked as black for older people but may not be celebrated as black culture. Sansone believes that Afro-Brazilian youth differ from their parents in that they celebrate blackness and modernity, and the two go together; the youth can be both black and modern. Their parents may celebrate traditional Afro-Bahian culture without necessarily recognizing it as black culture.

In sum, blackness is multifaceted. There are negative stereotypes of blackness, which are challenged by activists and those who self-identify as such. There are also modern and traditional notions of blackness, which are attached to transnational notions of blackness or more folkloric ideas of Afro-Brazilian culture. These varied notions of blackness are used in campaign material by Afro-Brazilian politicians.
RACIAL DISCOURSE AND CULTURAL SIGNIFIERS IN POLITICAL PROPAGANDA IN SALVADOR

Nationally, most Afro-Brazilians classify as brown (*pardo*). In the 2000 census, 45 percent of the population identified as white, 39 percent as brown, 6 percent as black, and less than 1 percent as yellow or indigenous. In 2007, however, Afro-Brazilians outnumbered whites, due to an increase in the number of Afro-Brazilians claiming a black (*preto*) identity (Werneck 2008).

In Salvador in the 2000 census, 66 percent of the population considered themselves black or brown. In São Paulo, only 30 percent of the population considered themselves black (*preto*) and brown (*pardo*). In absolute numbers, however, São Paulo has more people who claim a *preto* identity than Salvador has. According to the 2000 census, in São Paulo, 872,609 Afro-Brazilians identified as *preto* while only 605,199 Afro-Brazilians in Salvador identified as *preto*. Salvador is located in Brazil’s Northeast, one of the country’s poorest regions. Salvador is often referred to as the “blackest city” in the country. São Paulo is located in the South, Brazil’s wealthiest region. While Salvador is known for Afro-Brazilian culture, many of Brazil’s black movements started in São Paulo, which makes the two cities an interesting comparison.

Campaign advertisements and newsletters were used to test the hypothesis. Brazil’s system of proportional representation means that Afro-Brazilian candidates must seriously consider the political party with which they will affiliate, since winning depends on the number of votes they receive as individual candidates and the number of votes their political party receives. In addition, Afro-Brazilian voters are extremely skeptical of politicians. Politicians have to be attentive to the issues they highlight in their campaigns and during their time in office if they wish to be re-elected; this makes local elections very competitive.

A more comprehensive analysis of the advertisements I collected is given by grouping the issues addressed into four categories. These are whether politicians mention projects for Afro-Brazilians or discrimination, whether they mention Afro-Brazilian cultural activities, whether they support women’s organizations or are concerned about women’s issues, and whether they are concerned with low-income people (see table 1). These four categories are examined because the interest is whether cultural symbols are used in reference to Afro-Brazilians or if there is an explicit mention of Afro-Brazilian issues. Given that many Brazilians attribute discrimination to class rather than race, we would expect more politicians to mention class-related issues than race-related issues. Let it be noted again that these are only select materials collected. These materials are not comprehensive enough to conclude that these candidates have not mentioned these issues in other material.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City Councilor</th>
<th>Mentions project for Afro-Brazilians, discrimination</th>
<th>Mentions Afro-Brazilian cultural activities</th>
<th>Mentions women’s issues, organization for women</th>
<th>Mentions issues relevant to low-income persons or communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laudelino</td>
<td>—[^a]</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Worked on projects for low-income neighborhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceição (PSB)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reginaldo Oliveira (PC do B)</td>
<td>Coordinated program to increase work opportunities for black (negro) youth</td>
<td>Participated in a seminar that examined the use of Afro music in Carnaval.</td>
<td>Supported women’s cooperative of Plataforma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia Santana (PC do B)</td>
<td>“Our struggle is against racism, intolerance, machismo and social inequalities. This cause deserves your vote.” Also supports affirmative action in universities</td>
<td>Pamphlet shows photos and quotations from people who support Santana, including a candomblé priestess</td>
<td>“It is not easy for women, especially black women, to participate in political life.” Participated in National Conference on Public Policies for Women</td>
<td>Called attention to Director of Development and Urban Planning stating that the city did not invest “in the most needy areas of the city . . . which are mainly made up of the black population”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilmar Santiago (PT)^b</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Sponsored a hip hop event for Afro-Brazilian youth</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eronildes Carvalhalho (PFL)</td>
<td>Created municipal program to combat racism and affirmative action for Afro descendants</td>
<td>Supports NGOs that promote sports such as capoeira</td>
<td>President of special commission to combat discrimination against women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[^a]: No information found in newsletter or campaign ad.  
[^b]: Was not re-elected in 2004.  

Note: For full versions of the abbreviations, see the list on page 107.
Salvador Results: Racial Appeals to Afro-Brazilians in Campaign Advertisements

When Afro-Brazilians learned about this research, they identified Afro-Brazilian candidates and politicians. Attending campaign events or meetings, I also identified politicians who identified as such. The focus is only on the campaign material of Afro-Brazilians who held political office in 2004. A more comprehensive analysis would include advertisements from a larger number of Afro-Brazilian politicians, but this was impossible given time and financial constraints.

Race, Discrimination, and Racial Equality

Three of five campaign ads or newsletters mention projects for Afro-Brazilians, discrimination, or racial equality. The other two make no mention of projects specifically designed for Afro-Brazilians. Olívia Santana, a council member elected in 2004 but then appointed secretary of education, deplores racism in her campaign ad. Despite being from a conservative political party, Eronildes Carvalho, from the Party of the Liberal Front (PFL, now called the Democrats, DEMS), was also elected in 2004 and was very explicit in her racial appeals.

Does racial identification trump political party affiliation? The PFL is not a political party known for racially progressive policies, but traditionally it has enjoyed support from Afro-Brazilians. The late Antônio Carlos Magalhães (ACM), best known for representing the PFL in Bahia, was known for clientelism. Carvalho also identifies as an Evangelical, a growing religious segment in Salvador. Because she mentions that she is Evangelical and strongly identifies as such, it appears that she explicitly targets other Evangelicals as well. It is likely that this conservative base made her election successful. At the same time, she is progressive in her stances on race and gender. Though still conservative, perhaps the PFL changed its name to the Democrats (Democratas) as a gesture to change its image as a traditionally conservative political party. Considering her conservative background and her progressive attitudes, Carvalho can serve as an example of what they hope to be.

Two of the ads that mention Afro-Brazilian issues discuss racial discrimination by denouncing it. This implies that politicians believe that their constituencies are concerned with firm stances against racism. In addition, it is possible that Afro-Brazilian politicians who identify as black (negro) are racially conscious of their blackness and promote group identity and group interests.
Culture

Four of five advertisements or newsletters mention Afro-Brazilian cultural activities. Two mention capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial art, or candomblé. One mentions Afro-Brazilian music in Carnavi and the other mentions hip hop music. In Olívia Santana’s ad, a candomblé priestess supports her re-election. Eronildes Carvalhos’s newsletter shows her support of capoeira. She is pictured receiving an award titled “Friend of Capoeira.” People of non-African descent practice capoeira and candomblé. In Salvador, however, they are culturally marked as Afro-Brazilian.

Olívia Santana goes a step further in her campaign advertisements to draw on cultural markers. She explicitly uses black cultural symbols and racial cues. Santana is associated with the Communist Party of Brazil (Pc do B). She discusses race in her ad and portrays herself as *A Negona da Cidade*, the big black woman of the city. She wears earrings in the shape of the African continent, made partly of cowrie shells, or *búzios*. Cowrie shells are also shown beside her name, and her advertisement displays the colors yellow, green, and red. Many people may associate cowrie shells with the African continent; however, they are also used in candomblé.

Santana thus draws on three notions of blackness. One is a blackness associated with African identity, indicated by the pan-African colors. The second is an Afro-Brazilian blackness derived from African culture; these colors may be identified by less-educated Afro-Brazilians as colors used by Olodum or Ilê Aiyê, whose costumes exhibit “African and pan-African” colors. The third type of blackness is a traditional notion of Bahian blackness, associated with candomblé.

Santana challenges the notion that Afro-Brazilians, specifically Afro-Brazilian women, cannot hold positions of power by calling herself the big black woman of the city. Moreover, Santana wears her hair in braids, showing that she embraces blackness, rather than chemically altering her hair. Some Brazilians refer to African-descended people’s hair, especially if it is not apparent that they are racially mixed, as *cabelo duro* or hard hair, and believe such hair is bad hair. Santana wears her hair neatly, showing that black (*negro*) hair is manageable. She defies the stereotype that chemically unaltered hair is bad hair and valorizes blackness.

Gender

It is interesting that three of the five advertisements also mention concern with women’s issues, and these ads belong to the same politicians who discuss racial issues. Mentioning both implies that they want to show their constituency that racial and gender issues are important.
Some of these ads recognize the intersection of race and gender. An example is Olívia Santana’s ad, which affirms that it is difficult for black women to participate in political life. Eronildes Carvalho complains about the lack of representation of blacks in politics. Reginaldo Oliveira mentions both racial and gender issues but does not recognize the intersection of the two. He does not recognize what Patricia Hill Collins (1990) calls interlocking systems of domination or oppression, which may affect men and women in different ways. Not recognizing how gender, race, and class intersect leads to fundamental misunderstandings about addressing the needs of these groups.

**Class**

It is surprising that only two ads mention projects that are explicitly concerned with low-income communities. I was especially attentive to ads that mentioned needy, *carente* people or communities. I was interested in whether these projects would be discussed as projects for Afro-Brazilian communities. Olívia Santana, who recognizes the intersection of race and gender, also acknowledges the intersection of race and class. Santana’s ad contends that poverty mainly affects the black population of the city. Reginaldo Oliveira’s ad focuses on race and class as separate issues.

In sum, in this select sample of advertisements in Salvador, most politicians mention racial issues, implying that their constituencies are concerned with these issues. This does not prove that they are courting a racial vote. The interviews are helpful in answering whether they are seeking votes based on race. This analysis shows nevertheless that explicit mention of racial issues or Afro-Brazilians and visual cultural cues are used in these Afro-Brazilian politicians’ political advertisements and newsletters. Some use racial symbols of “Afro-Brazilianess” or “Africanness,” as exemplified by Olívia Santana, and others use cultural markers such as capoeira or candomblé.

These cultural markers are intended for an Afro-Brazilian constituency. Many advertisements that mention race denounce racism and discuss it as racial discrimination, not class discrimination. Only Santana and Carvalho in this select sample mention the intersection of race and gender. Only Santana mentions the intersection of race and class, which indicates that even though there has been a shift in racial discourse, not all politicians in the sample recognize the intersection of multiple identities. Instead, they see social issues as separate issues. Although it is not true that all Afro-Brazilian politicians use racial appeals, most Afro-Brazilian candidates in the Salvador sample mention racial issues or activities rooted in Afro-Brazilian culture.
Politicians as Teachers of Afro-Brazilian Racial Consciousness in Salvador

Interviews with City Council members were conducted in 2005 and 2006. At the time of this research, Salvador had 41 City Council members. Afro-Brazilian council members who self-identified as such were interviewed. These members were Olivia Santana, Reginaldo Oliveira, Eronildes Carvalho, Pedrinho Pepê, and Gilmar Santiago. Santiago is a former council member and in 2004 was the director of the Municipal Department of Reparations. Olivia Santana was appointed director of the Secretariat of Education. While data on gender, occupation, political party, age, and so on were available, racial or color data of city council members were not available from the TRE or the Regional Electoral Court. For this reason, it was impossible to obtain an accurate number of Afro-Brazilian City Council members in Salvador.

The analysis examined, first, why Afro-Brazilian council members in Salvador ran for office, and second, if they sought a racial vote. Three Afro-Brazilian City Council members and one past council member, Gilmar Santiago, addressed racial issues during their campaigns or thought it was important to address issues relevant to Afro-Brazilians while in office. The four politicians who addressed these issues in their campaigns or during their terms in office were Olivia Santana (PCdoB), Eronildes Carvalho (PFL), and Reginaldo Oliveira (PCdoB). Santiago, Santana, Carvalho, and Oliveira all self-identify as black (negro). Both Santiago and Santana have experience in the black movement and are concerned with racial issues. Santiago has roots in the black and labor movements and feels that it is important that issues in the black movement be represented in government. Santana decided to run because black movement participants encouraged her. Similarly, Carvalho ran because of her involvement in the Evangelical movement. In addition, she believes it is important that Afro-Brazilians, especially Afro-Brazilian women, have representation in government.

With the exception of Eronildes Carvalho, most politicians in the sample concerned with racial discrimination and the Afro-Brazilian community are from liberal political parties. Not surprisingly, those most vocal about issues relevant to Afro-Brazilian women are Afro-Brazilian women. Santana and Carvalho are the most outspoken about these issues. They recognize the intersection of race and gender and how certain issues affect Afro-Brazilian women in specific ways. Below are their individual responses to why they ran for political office and to issues they focus on.

Olivia Santana, of the Communist Party of Brazil, responded that she ran for office because she is an activist. “I am an activist of struggle against racism and we have few blacks in spaces of power. It was a col-
lective decision of the group that I participate in . . . to try to have a chair on the council” (Santana 2005). Further, she stated that important issues were women’s issues and equality for blacks.

Gilmar Santiago, of the Workers’ Party, ran for office because he believed his constituents needed representation.

I was a city councilor for the first time in 2000. This was on account of thinking that we can use our political militancy in any place. The parliament is another space of militancy. I always privileged being involved in social movements, such as the black movement and at the forefront of the labor movement. It was only in 2000 and now in 2004 that I understood the importance of increasing spaces of participation of the black community in parliament. (Santiago 2005)

He also claimed that the central theme of his campaign was the struggle against racism.

It is necessary to combat racism because it is one of the greatest elements that has structured inequality in our country since the beginning of our social formation. It is racism that determines the place of people. (Santiago 2005)

Reginaldo Oliveira, of the Communist Party of Brazil, has been involved in politics for a considerable amount of time.

Actually I had already participated in politics for approximately 30 years. We fought for our project and it was approved. It is concerned with sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. I also had a great impact on issues of inclusion of Afro-descendants that entered into debates in the house. (Oliveira 2006)

Eronildes Carvalho ran for office because of her social work for children and her strong Evangelical background.

In reality, it was not my choice, I had an indication. I belong to the Evangelical segment. The segment understands the social work we do for children and this is what we projected . . . to do this in politics at the local and municipal levels. (Carvalho 2005)

Further, she said that fighting for women was an important theme.

Today the majority of society is made up of women. They are almost 72 percent of the city of Salvador. A majority black city where women still suffer from the issue of discrimination is a consequence of a large cancer called prejudice. The problem of gender is enormous. It is a strange fact that we have in the city of Salvador diverse segments, but no representation of black women in politics. (Carvalho 2005)
Not all politicians mentioned racial issues. Pedrinho Pepê, who ironically is a member of the Commission of Reparations, is an example. The commission addresses the needs of Afro-Brazilians. Pepê believes that politicians try to gain racial votes only as a marketing strategy. Pepê was the most energetic politician interviewed and was excited to talk about his experiences in office, but found it difficult to answer questions dealing with race. He responded,

I think each city councilor has a way of reasoning in their campaign. Other City Council members have money and contract agencies . . . publicity agencies to take care of their campaign. Whoever has money has a publicity agency and this agency can suggest, “I think you should go this way for blacks. I think you should go this way for whites. . . . You are a doctor, look for the medical field.” (Pepê 2005)

Pepê believes that discussing racial issues is a political strategy that can be employed by political candidates according to their campaign strategists. He does not directly say that discussing race is a plausible strategy. Yet by implying that appealing to racial groups is comparable to appealing to other segments, he acknowledges that it is a plausible political strategy.

Seeking Racial Votes

Politicians who discuss race are concerned with Afro-Brazilian issues; yet it is not clear they sought a racial vote. The interviews probed candidates about their voting constituencies. Olivia Santana admitted that she sought a racial vote. However, this was not the sole purpose of her campaign. The goals of both Santana’s and Santiago’s campaigns included teaching racial consciousness to the Afro-Brazilian electorate. Politicians who sought racial votes and discussed race often said that although Salvador is a majority black city, there is little representation of black issues in government. Olivia Santana says that her campaign “gave visibility to the black (negro) question.” She stated, “the truth is, it was an act of consciousness. The vote I looked for was a conscious vote, a vote of blacks that accept that they are black, that know they are black, and that want to change things in this society.” Santana sought votes from Afro-Brazilians who claim a black (negro) identity, which for her signals racial consciousness. Because racial issues were central to her campaign, it was unavoidable that race is something her voters would consider.

Similarly, Santiago has an interest in racially conscious Afro-Brazilians and enforces the idea that Afro-Brazilians should want black political representation. Moreover, he believes that Afro-Brazilian politicians should claim a black identity and work for the good of the black community.
It is not enough to be black, it is necessary to think about and do what is right for blacks, independent of political party. This should be the fundamental issue. What I see is that a lot of black men and black women who sometimes occupy important spaces in the legislature talk about the racial question and inequalities as a social problem, therefore they do not defend affirmative policies. (Santiago 2005)

Santiago asserts that the City Council is essentially black. However, he says, “very few [council members] accept that they are black or defend black issues. The city has unemployment but when you see research, data between blacks and whites, you will see that the majority [of the unemployed] are black.” Santiago recognizes the intersection of race and class by noting the gap in employment between whites and blacks. He is critical of Afro-Brazilian politicians who do not identify as black (negro), whether that be through color identification or by supporting pro-black policies. For Santiago, blackness is not simply a color but a political choice.

In sum, in Salvador, most Afro-Brazilian candidates address racial issues. Four of the five candidates made these issues part of their platforms or agendas they would address while in office. Although it is not common to do so, some politicians do rely on a racial vote to get elected. Olivia Santana and Gilmar Santiago believe that it is important to address racial issues to draw the support of Afro-Brazilians and to teach black racial consciousness. They reach out to Afro-Brazilian voters who accept (assumir) or take on a black (negro) identity. They are also trying to make the Afro-Brazilian electorate more aware or conscious of issues that Afro-Brazilians face because of their race. In this sense, they are trying to shape group identity. While most politicians do not seek a racial vote, some do, and they have succeeded at getting elected. However, not all were as successful. Santiago was not re-elected. Nevertheless, it is likely that Santiago’s commitment to racial issues is why he was appointed to lead the Department of Reparations.

**Racial Appeals in Campaign Advertisements in São Paulo**

Unlike the colorful pan-African cultural displays seen in some campaign ads in Salvador, none were present in the São Paulo ads of elected councilors. This could be because ads were collected only from politicians who were elected in 2004, rather than from all candidates, and there were only two Afro-Brazilians on the City Council: Claudete Alves and Agnaldo Timóteo. Another likely reason is that although São Paulo’s black movement is known to be concerned with Afro-Brazilian culture,
the use of these symbols in politics is more likely in Salvador, which is known for its rich tradition of African-influenced culture.

In addition, São Paulo is seen as a modern city; therefore Afro-Brazilian culture is less tied to traditional notions of culture. This popular perception is similar to Sansone’s (2004) notion of modern blackness. Moreover, while some aspects of Afro-Brazilian culture are part of Brazilian culture in general, such as capoeira and candomblé, they may be marked as Afro-Brazilian or African in Bahia. Peter Fry (1997) makes an important point in comparing feijoada and soul food. In Brazil, feijoada, a dish created by slaves, became a national dish. In the United States, soul food is limited to the African American community. In Brazil, some Afro-Brazilian cultural practices are unmarked as black and accepted as Brazilian culture. Some of these cultural forms are nonetheless racially marked as black in different regions of the country, such as Bahia.

### Racial Appeals

Only one of the two Afro-Brazilian politicians interviewed uses racial appeals. The most explicit use of race was in Claudete Alves’s campaign. She produced a booklet for her campaign that essentially reads like an instructional booklet on racial issues. Many of the issues she dis-
discusses may be redundant to São Paulo’s middle- and upper-class Afro-
Brazilians. However, for those less in tune with the discourse of dis-
crimination, which proclaims that it is due to class rather than race, 
Alves gives thorough explanations. She cites statistics such as “3 out of 
4 deaths in the periphery in São Paulo are black people,” and “on aver-
age, black male workers make less than 40 percent of white male work-
ers,” and “on average, black women workers earn less than 60 percent 
of white male workers” (Alves 2004a). She also discusses programs she 
introduced in her previous council term. One example is that she 
approved a law that guaranteed an increase in salaries, and she claims 
that the majority of the thousands of workers who will benefit are black. 

Unlike Olívia Santana’s ads, which address racism and black mobi-
lization in terms of Afro-Brazilian mobilization, Claudete Alves relies on 
mobilization efforts in other countries. She refers to social movements 
in the United States and South Africa. She cites the Million Man March 
(A Marcha de um Milhão de Negros). Her pamphlet also cites political 
participation in the African National Congress in South Africa. She uses 
these examples to affirm her belief that black participation is funda-
mental to resolving Afro-Brazilian problems. Further, she acknowledges 
that a black vote can have an impact on São Paulo elections, and she 
encourages Afro-Brazilians to vote ethnically.

It is problematic that Alves’s ads rely so heavily on examples from 
other countries. São Paulo has had a tradition of black movement activ-
ity since the 1930s, and it is puzzling that Alves does not acknowledge 
this. In her discussion of affirmative action, she mentions its success in 
the United States and claims that black North Americans are integrated 
into society. She contends that in Brazil, blacks (negros) make up only 
1.8 percent of university students, and states that she defends quotas in 
public and private universities. The rosy picture of equal opportunity in 
employment for African Americans is quite troubling; yet what is more 
troubling is the absence of a discussion of Afro-Brazilian mobilization in 
support of quotas or a mention of activists, such as Abdias do Nasci-
mento, who founded the Black Experimental Theatre and later became 
a federal deputy and senator in the National Congress.

I believe that because São Paulo is a highly developed and modern 
city, Alves uses these examples. It is common for Paulistas to compare 
São Paulo to New York because of its size and modern industrialization. 
Moreover, race relations in São Paulo are different from race relations in 
other parts of the country, such as the Northeast. Because of European 
immigration, more white Brazilians are located in southern regions of 
the country. Telles (2004) notes that 73 percent of whites live in the 
South and Southeast, which are relatively well developed. In contrast, 
only 54 percent of blacks and 37 percent of browns live in these 
regions. In São Paulo, Afro-Brazilians make up 30 percent of the popu-
lation. It is likely that explicit acts of racial discrimination are more common in a city like São Paulo. Subsequently, because São Paulo is a developed city and has a discernible Afro-Brazilian middle class, Afro-Brazilian Paulistas are likely to be exposed to, and to interpret acts of discrimination as, racial discrimination.

**Afro-Brazilian Cultural Cues**

Alves is also the only Afro-Brazilian politician whose ad mentions Afro-Brazilian cultural activities. Alves proposes a “House of Hip Hop,” which she would name “Malcolm X,” drawing on an African American leader rather than an Afro-Brazilian leader for the name.

Alves’s ad and newsletters mention attendance at events centered on women; and only one councilor mentioned issues dealing with low-income individuals and communities. I was interested in whether or not councilors recognized an intersection of race and gender or race and class. Alves discusses salary differences in earnings of Afro-Brazilian women compared to white Brazilian men in her pamphlet directed to Afro-Brazilians. However, she does not mention this in another pamphlet directed at women (Alves 2004b). In this pamphlet, for prospective women voters, she discusses gender discrimination but not gender and racial discrimination.

Alves is concerned with Afro-Brazilian women’s issues, so it is surprising that she does not discuss race and gender in her pamphlet for women voters. Perhaps she believes that discussing the two would isolate white Brazilian women voters. This is demonstrated in her choice to produce two separate pamphlets, one for Afro-Brazilian voters and one for women voters. Nevertheless, Alves’s proclamation in her pamphlet for Afro-Brazilians that “We are the majority in the favelas” is directed to Afro-Brazilians. She recognizes the intersection of race and class. Her discussion of racism shows that Afro-Brazilians are economically marginalized because of racial discrimination and a lack of policy programs directed at them. The São Paulo ads revealed no focus on poor people or people living in the peripheries or suburbs. Instead, they focused on urban development in general. Their focus was less local and more on developments that would benefit the city as a whole.

**The Modern City and Racial Democracy: São Paulo Interview Results**

There were only two Afro-Brazilians on São Paulo’s 2004–8 City Council, which had a total of 55 members. The interviews in São Paulo reveal that even though Brazil’s racial democracy is considered a myth, that myth is alive and well with Agnaldo Timóteo, an Afro-Brazilian with
more conservative and traditional ideals of race. Claudete Alves of the PT was more vocal about the concerns of Afro-Brazilians.

Alves was most concerned with issues relevant to Afro-Brazilians and Afro-Brazilian women in particular. She is also concerned with children’s rights, labor issues, and violence against women, the victims of which are disproportionately Afro-Brazilian women. Alves was temporarily removed from office during her second term because of a financial scandal, and she believes that she was closely scrutinized because of her strong stance against racism. She was first elected to the City Council in 2000. Her campaign adviser informed me that large banners for Alves were strategically placed in locations where the campaign thought they could gain votes. The campaign sought black votes, and Alves self-identifies as black (negra) in her campaign material. Her campaign material addresses Brazilian racism and teaches Afro-Brazilians about its various forms. It is clear that her material seeks to conscientizar, or to make potential Afro-Brazilian voters conscious of, racial issues.

In response to what strategy she used to promote her campaign, Alves stated,

We put up 22 megabanners that people thought was a millionaire campaign because the entire city knew me. We put them at strategic points at the morning time. . . . I worked with two pieces of material: a booklet for women and a racial booklet, exploring the racial vote. Why? They say that blacks don’t vote for blacks. In São Paulo, we have 3,200,000 blacks and a lot of candidates without strategies. In my first campaign, just like in my second campaign, we made a booklet, “Blacks and Politics,” and we worked. We are as much the electorate [as anyone else], and we don’t have any representatives. . . . We talked about the racial question and the issue of gender. (Alves 2006)

Agnaldo Timóteo, from the Republic Party (PR), a conservative political party, passionately declares that he did not discuss racial issues during his campaign.

No! No! No! I detest that we imagine we are inferior. I deplore every law that protects black people’s lives. This is prejudice. When they present a law that assists us, that protects us; the law differentiates and should protect all Brazilians. I deplore this because I think that blacks have to conquer their spaces with their intelligence and ambition, not with government favors and with pretentiousness saying it is racism. No! It is social prejudice, where there is a dirty black or a dirty white they can’t enter! Therefore the problem is social not racial. (Timóteo 2006)

Timóteo believes that specific laws for blacks reproduce racism by differentiating people on the basis of race. He also agrees with the tra-
ditional Brazilian rhetoric that Afro-Brazilian marginalization is due to class rather than race. Such logic ignores persistent racial discrimination that middle- and upper-class Afro-Brazilians face because of their race, not their class. Timóteo believes that a politician such as Alves is radical in her concepts, and he disagrees with her. Contradicting his belief that Brazilians should not differentiate each other on the basis of race, after the interview he said he did not understand why Afro-Brazilian men with money, such as soccer players, all marry white women.

My São Paulo informants told me that Timóteo was elected only because he is a singer and not a serious politician. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that council members referred to Alves and Timóteo as the two blacks (negros) on the council. The irony is that Timóteo desires a raceless society but is still seen as black (negro) by his colleagues. His later comment concerning interracial marriage contradicted his statements about a society where Brazilians should be seen as Brazilian rather than as racialized people.

In sum, in São Paulo, the two Afro-Brazilian council members were fundamentally different. Alves explicitly discussed racial issues and used cultural cues in her ads, though many of these cues depended on countries such as the United States or South Africa. Alves admitted that she sought racial votes. Timóteo denied that racism against Afro-Brazilians exists and disagreed with racial policies directed at Afro-Brazilians.

**AFRO-BRAZILIAN FEDERAL DEPUTIES**

I interviewed five Afro-Brazilian federal deputies: Domingos Dutra, Edson Santos, Janete Pietá, Evandro Milhomen, and Carlos Santana. Three of the five are members of NUPAN. All addressed issues relevant to the Afro-Brazilian population. However, they were not all affiliated with black movements and did not all address racial issues in the same way. Domingos Dutra of the PT recognized that quilombos, communities of former runaway slaves that can now gain federal recognition, have been politicized as a racial issue, but claims that the word quilombo did not exist as it now does. In these interviews, moreover, only one federal deputy admitted to seeking black votes.

Dutra is skeptical that Afro-Brazilian politicians can successfully win a campaign if they only address the racial question. Janete Pietá, also of the PT, recognizes that most voters who support her are Afro-Brazilian. She valorizes Afro-Brazilian identity in her appearance and believes that to do so is important. Carlos Santana of the PT is concerned with racial issues, though this is not his sole focus, and he contends that Brazilian society is racist. Evandro Milhomen of the PC do B is dedicated to addressing racial issues and believes it is particularly difficult to do so because those issues are masked in Brazilian social relations. Edson
Santos, also of the PT, addresses racial issues and believes that all Brazilians should be concerned with these issues.

Pietá, a federal deputy from the state of São Paulo, says she received 87 percent of her votes from the city of Guarulhos, which is predominantly Afro-Brazilian. She is concerned with health, education, transportation, social issues, and women’s issues. Pietá believes that she is known in that city because she accepts her Afro-descendant identity, which she expresses with a braided hairstyle and a distinctive way of dressing.

I want to tell you that 51 percent of the population of Guarulhos is women, and I can affirm that a large part of the Brazilian population [and the population] in Guarulhos have origins of Afro-descent. Nevertheless, some of them are not conscious of this. Even though it looks like a joke, this is the way I dress. A lot of times I dress with African-inspired clothing and hair. (Pietá 2007)

Pietá visibly valorizes blackness and believes that this is important. As a public leader and a politician at the federal level, this is a unique way for her to teach Afro-Brazilians racial consciousness. Pietá recognizes the importance of embracing visible symbols of African tradition, whether it is through dress or hair. She elaborates on this, responding to a question about whether racial issues were important for middle-class blacks (*negros*) or all blacks.

I think the racial issue is important for all blacks, but in a society where black people are not valorized, that are always treated . . . in Brazil, racism exists but it’s done in a form . . . like here in Brazil we had a lot more miscegenation. Brazil is a country that aims to be white. This is the background, in the subconscious. However, we blacks know that we are black and principally when you have access to certain places or university, differences become a lot clearer. . . . I’ve always done the work of consciousness. (Pietá 2007)

Pietá notes the role of education and racial consciousness. I argue that educated Afro-Brazilians are more racially conscious of their blackness and acknowledge it more than poor Afro-Brazilians who have less contact with white Brazilians or whose contact is in extremely unequal conditions. Bailey and Telles (2006) find that more educated and younger Afro-Brazilians claim a black (*negro*) identification. There is a positive relationship between claiming blackness and education. As someone with an extremely prestigious occupation, Pietá willingly claims blackness. Her commitment is not simply symbolic. She has fought for the rights of Afro-Brazilians and is the current president of NUPAN, where she supports projects for women and Afro-descendants.

Carlos Santana, current president of the Congressional Caucus in Defense of Racial Equality (CCDRE), is more moderate than Pietá in his
approach to addressing racial issues. Santana is from Rio de Janeiro, while Pietá is from São Paulo. Historically, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo are both known for black movement activity (Hanchard 1994). Thus the cities they come from do not explain why Santana appears more moderate. One likely reason is that he presides over a caucus for racial equality that reaches out to all members of Congress. He is concerned with generating employment, the struggle against racial discrimination, and the rights of blacks.

I understand that the fight for quotas and the statute for racial equality are very important, like the struggle for blacks’ health. We have specific illnesses. I understand that this is an important point for us and I am engaged in this struggle. (Santana 2007)

Santana received a lot of his support through his experience in the labor movement and from campaigning in low-income communities. He was not involved in the black movement. He is nonetheless concerned with the needs of Afro-Brazilians, such as illnesses specific to blacks. It is interesting that he engages with the rhetoric that there are certain such illnesses. This implies that because of the political use of racial categories, he accepts the biological argument that blacks are different from other racial groups and have specific diseases or illnesses.7

In response to the question about the class composition of Afro-Brazilians who vote for black politicians, Santana believes that these voters represent a variety of economic groups, including a small group of middle-class blacks; lower-middle-class blacks; intellectuals, who, he says, are few; and poor blacks. By naming all these groups, Santana believes that voters who vote ethnically belong to all social and economic levels. Although Santana recognizes racism in Brazilian society, he does not discuss valorization of blackness in the way that Pietá does. Rather, he discounts the notion that politicians can gain votes based upon racial appeals.

Brazilian society still does not have this link to race. They don't identify. There is a small number of parliamentarians [who seek racial votes]. In Bahia, Luiz Alberto is the only deputy who was elected only [addressing] the racial question. We have O Paiño [Paulo Paim] from Rio Grande do Sul, who is another phenomenon and is a senator. The masses in Brazilian society do not have this racial formation. (Santana 2007)

Although Santana addresses racial issues, this is not his central focus, nor does he seek a racial vote. As the president of CCDRE, which brings together politicians from different racial backgrounds and political parties, it is not surprising that he addresses racial issues but is not taking on the radical approach of making people racially conscious. He
does not seek a racial vote because he assumes that Afro-Brazilian voters do not vote according to their racial background.

Domingos Dutra, who represents Maranhão, is concerned with rights for rural workers and issues relevant to quilombos, environmental issues, and indigenous people. When asked if he was concerned with racial issues, he talked about his support for quotas in universities and about quilombo communities. He claims that the highest number of quilombos has been identified in Maranhão. Dutra does not explicitly say that he seeks a quilombola vote, but he emphasizes the importance of addressing their issues in his campaign. He believes that quilombo issues only recently became “racial” issues. Jan Hoffman French (2006) finds that black identity is created to gain quilombo recognition, and thus a certain type of black identity was created that did not previously exist. Although Dutra states that quilombo land was known as the land of blacks, he does not make a racial or cultural claim about the land. He recognizes that blacks and indigenous people lived on the land but makes no remark about its historical significance. Furthermore, he does not recognize that by appealing to quilombolas, which have recently become a racialized group, he now seeks a racial vote. To the question about addressing the racial question during his campaign he replied,

This issue is not only an issue [that was talked about in our campaign], it was present in our action as much as in militant action as it is during my electoral period. First, because I am from a quilombo called Saco das almas, making clear that this terminology, the word quilombo is a new word for our political vocabulary. It comes from the Constitution of '88. A lot of times people considered it the land of pretos, the land of negros and now politically it is assimilated as a quilombo. Second, because I work in Alcântara, which is a municipality, declared as an ethnic territory of indigenous people, but the majority are blacks (negros). Third, we discuss the issue of quotas, which is a debate in this country. (Dutra 2007)

Like Santana, Dutra does not believe politicians can be elected who seek racial votes. Whether intentional or not, in answer to a question about politicians such as Luiz Alberto, who sought a racial vote, he stressed that candidates who talk only about racial issues could not be elected, though the question made no claim that Alberto talked only about racial issues. He responded,

I do not know if Luiz Alberto only talked about this. In Maranhão I knew two candidates whose campaign only focused on the racial question. . . . But I do not have any information about elected deputies that consider themselves black who based their platform only on this, and also I do not know about any deputies who were elected [in the past] who directed their campaign at the black segment with discussions only to win votes. In my case I do not con-
sider myself an activist of the black movement. I am an activist of causes. I recognize that I am black (negro). I accept that I am black but I am not a black activist. (Dutra 2007)

Although Dutra unintentionally or intentionally misconstrues the question by focusing on politicians who only talk about racial issues to be elected, it is clear that he does not believe seeking a racial vote is a viable way of winning election. Furthermore, he claims that he is an activist of all causes. Nonetheless, he is concerned with quilombo communities which have more recently become a racial group.

Evandro Milhomen is affiliated with the Communist Party of Brazil and is a federal deputy representing Amapá. He was elected to the City Council in Macapá, Amapá in 1996. After two years in office, he ran for federal deputy because of his experience in social movements. He has always been concerned with poor people, workers, and issues relevant to minorities. He claims he is concerned with these issues because he is from the Amazon. He also says he is concerned with racial issues.

The racial question is a very serious problem that we need to resolve in this country. It is not that we have extreme social conflict in relation to this but we have masked racial discrimination, which is worse. It is hidden by a discourse that everyone is equal, that we are all the same in society; that discrimination does not exist. What is most on the agenda is poverty and not discrimination between blacks and whites or indigenous people and whites. . . . I have tried to go a little deeper in relation to this because I have black ancestry. (Milhomen 2007)

Milhomen is concerned with racial issues and believes it is important because of his black ancestry. He is aware of the distinct nature of Brazilian racism. Like other candidates, he is also concerned with other issues, such as health and the environment. When discussing health, like Santana, he brings up the notion that there are specific health concerns for the black community, such as anemia. Further, he believes that public health policies should be specifically designed for Afro-Brazilians. He is in favor of quotas in university admissions and employment.

Blacks leave the university growing intellectually but when it’s time for employment, the boss says, “Bring your resume with a photo.” The photo is to say that if he wants a black or a white, a blond with blue eyes [will be chosen]. Therefore, it is a form of discrimination that we have in the labor market, and we want quotas in public and private service for the black population. (Milhomen 2007)

In addition, he calls for a number of seats to be reserved for blacks in political parties, stating that less than 10 percent of representatives in the
National Congress are black (negro). He discussed racial issues and quilombo communities during his campaign.

To the question of whether he targeted middle-class blacks, Milhomen said that Amapá did not have many middle-class blacks, that most of them were lower-class, but that there were a lot of blacks in these communities. Moreover, he did not seek a racial vote because he believes that Afro-Brazilian self-esteem is low, making voters less open to a discussion of racial issues.

It’s not easy for the black population to absorb this theme because they were discriminated against and restrained so much. The self-esteem of the black population is very low. As the self-esteem is very low, they have difficulties discussing this issue, difficulties to absorb the theme of racism and the racial question, and still at times do not. This is on account of them still not assuming the possibility of liberation of the subjugation of whites on them. . . . To not raise their voice because they are scared. . . . Therefore, this still exists and we have to stop this; to elevate the self-esteem of blacks for them to fight and say, “Look, you are not better than me.” (Milhomen 2007)

While it is evident that Milhomen wants to lift blacks’ self-esteem, he gives no concrete example of how he does this. When discussing quilombo communities that he serves, he discusses festivals related to quilombo history. However, he does not make a connection when he talks about Afro-Brazilians’ lack of self-esteem. Unlike Pietá, who visibly challenges notions of blackness, Milhomen does not. It appears that he is concerned with Afro-Brazilian issues and tries to address these but does not heavily rely on a racial vote.

Edson Santos, from the Workers’ Party, first ran for Rio de Janeiro’s City Council in 1988. In 2002, he ran for the senate but was not elected. In 2004, he ran for city council and was the fourth-highest vote getter. Subsequently he ran for federal deputy and won in 2006. He is most concerned with transportation, education, workers, and the poor. He discussed racial issues during his campaign, claiming that he always discusses racial inequality, and said that “there is an identity of the black (negra) population … and there is a need to review the divide that the country has had with the black (negra) population since slavery.” When asked why it is important to address race in campaigns, he stated,

A campaign is a moment of consciousness of the population and to raise the [racial] question. I think it is fundamental because it is a problem in the country. No one admits that it happens in Brazil, because it’s only been very recently that policy initiatives have given opportunities to the black population. (Santos 2007)

When pressed with the question of whether discussing racial issues only appeals to middle-class Afro Brazilians, Santos rejected this idea.
He believes that race is an issue that appeals to all Brazilians. Never-
theless, describing the profile of his voters, he admits that he received
votes in all areas in Rio de Janeiro but that in areas with a higher pres-
ence of blacks, there was more acceptance of his discussion, which
included employment, education, and the situation of black women.

Santos was the only man interviewed who paid special attention to
black women’s issues. Santos is the president of the Front in Defense of
Racial Equality, which is open to federal deputies and senators and has
more than one hundred members from different ethnic backgrounds
and political parties. In line with an openness to all people, Santos is
concerned with racial issues, but to the extent that all Brazilians should
be concerned with them. He does rely on racial appeals to Afro-Braz-
ilians. Nevertheless, he does not restrict consciousness raising around
issues of race to Afro-Brazilians; he believes it is important to do this for
the entire electorate. He is concerned that these issues continue to be
raised among the general population.

CONCLUSIONS

This exploratory research into the strategies Afro-Brazilian politicians
use in campaigns is a first step toward studying contemporary Brazilian
electoral politics in a more inclusive way. Although Afro-Brazilians con-
tinue to be underrepresented in electoral politics even though they now
outnumber white Brazilians, this trend is unlikely to continue in the
future. The enactment of pro–Afro-Brazilian policies, such as affirmative
action and a federal law requiring schools to teach African and Afro-
Brazilian history, demonstrates the influence of Brazil’s black move-
ments in Brazilian democracy. These policies, along with the attitudes
of Afro-Brazilians who embrace blackness, might lead to black group
identity. This black group identity might manifest itself in Afro-Brazilian
voting patterns. I believe that Afro-Brazilians who view themselves as a
group will vote for Afro-Brazilian politicians whose political platforms
include policy agendas specifically for Afro-Brazilians.

This research has focused on politicians, but future research should
also focus on the role that political parties play in addressing racial
issues. Because Afro-Brazilians tend to be affiliated with left-leaning par-
ties, special attention must be given to these parties. A number of polit-
ical parties now have sections that deal with racial issues. In the future,
will this be the norm for all political parties? Does a strengthening of
racial group identity enhance democracy? These are some of the ques-
tions research on race and politics in Brazil should answer.

It is likely that ethnic cleavage among Afro-Brazilians will increase
as more Afro-Brazilians claim black (*negro* or *preto*) identities. As the
black middle class grows, black group identity will increase, and this is
a segment Afro-Brazilian politicians can tap into to win election. Furthermore, research should examine Afro-Brazilian candidates who did not win their elections. Perhaps resources needed for campaigns are now used as a means of black activism. Afro-Brazilian politicians who run for office with the knowledge that their chances of winning are slim may use the democratic electoral process of campaigns as a way to raise black racial consciousness.

**NOTES**

1. For full versions of the abbreviations, see page 107.
2. I am not entirely convinced of these results because the 2001 Latin American Barometer used Spanish racial categories, such as *mestizo* instead of the Portuguese word *mestiço* and *mulata* instead of the Brazilian census category *pardo*. Further research should test the importance of discrimination in political parties to Afro-Brazilian voters.
3. Michael Castro (2008) finds that discrimination affects belief in democracy in a number of Latin American countries, including Brazil.
4. NUPAN members for the 2007–11 legislative session are federal deputies Domingos Dutra from Maranhão, Eduardo Valverde from Rondônia, Beto Faro from Pará, Carlos Santana from Rio de Janeiro, Dalva Figueiredo from Amapá, Eudes Xavier from Geraldo, Gilmar Machado from Minas Gerais, Janete Rocha Pietá from São Paulo, and Vicentinho from São Paulo. Senator Paulo Paim from Rio Grande do Sul is the only senator who is a member of NUPAN.
5. There are always efforts to challenge stereotypes of African-descended people. In São Paulo the clothing brand CrespoSim, which literally means “Curly Yes,” encourages Afro-Brazilians to take pride in their curly hair rather than chemically altering it.
6. My interview with Laudelino Conceição was lost due to technical difficulties.
7. Julia Elam, MPH, JD (2007), argues against the use of racial categories in medicine. When physicians use racial categories in medical practice they produce inequality; evidence of this has been found by the Institute of Medicine in the United States. In a country such as Brazil, using the political category of race as a basis for medical treatment is particularly dangerous.

**REFERENCES**


