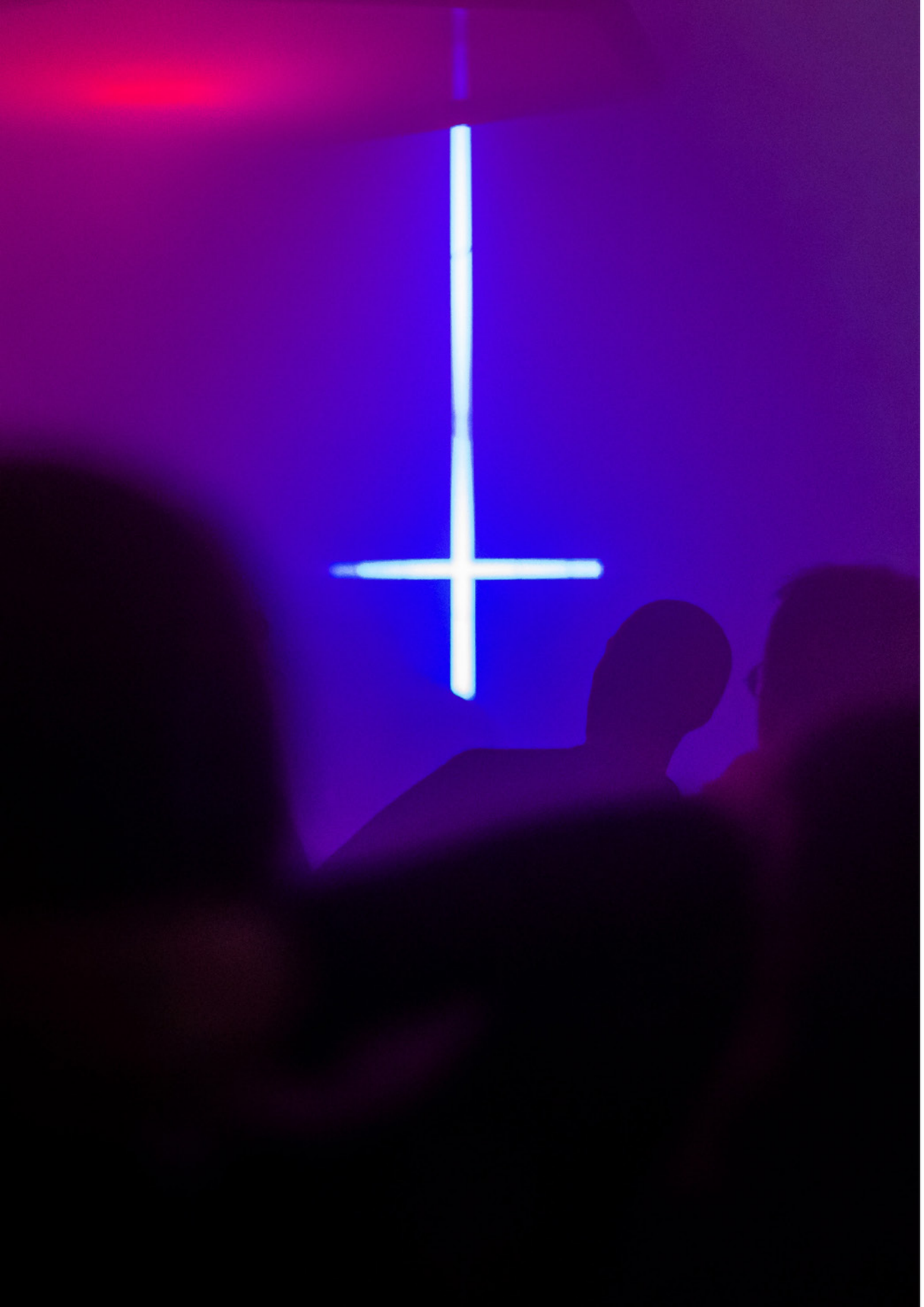

The Political Mobilization of African American Churches: Forms, Models, Mechanisms

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Abstract

African American churches are famous for their political involvement and advocacy efforts on behalf of their own ethnic group. However, while some of them have been heavily involved in various forms of political activity, others have avoided it, focusing mainly on matters of the spirit. In this article, I will present the origins and various forms of Black churches' political engagement, but foremost I will analyze the debate concerning the mechanisms of their political mobilization, trying to answer the question regarding the key factors, which according to researchers, influence churches' activism. Different research perspectives will be considered, and special attention will be paid to the comprehensive model by Eric L. McDaniel.

Keywords:
The Black Church, African American churches, political mobilization, religion and politics, 'political church, ethnic churches.

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Introduction

Regardless of the secularization processes taking place in the modern world, especially at the level of institutional differentiation[1], and contrary to the predictions of early supporters of secularization theory, religion continues to play an important role in the public sphere of many countries, often also at the strictly political level[2]. Moreover, despite the varied forms of separation of state and church that have been introduced in many countries, religion usually still keeps a special status that distinguishes it from various ideologies. Religious actors who, in addition to fulfilling spiritual functions, choose to become political actors retain this special legal status, while being able to use political strategies characteristic of secular actors, such as lobbying or political mobilization (Potz, 2020, p. 121).

The political activity of religious institutions has been of interest to historians, sociologists or political scientists for years. In the United States, according to their research, religious institutions play an important role in the public sphere and civic activity (McDaniel, 2008, p. 3). Although in liberal democracies religious actors are not allowed to conduct political activity through mechanisms or techniques acceptable in theocracies, they adapt to new conditions by using methods of other political actors, and considered to be acceptable in modern democratic systems, most often also supplementing them with typically religious strategies (Potz, 2020, p. 125). Thus, in order to promote their values and interests, they can support political parties, use lobbying (like interest groups do) or create social movements, mobilizing the faithful to protest or to participate in elections, but they can also complement these tactics by presenting political goals in moral terms, or exert pressure on members of religious groups through religious sanctions (ibid., pp. 126–132).

The history of social movements in the US is particularly marked by African American churches[3], which played an important role in political mobilization in the 1950s and 1960s, during the period of the struggle for civil rights. However, this was not the only time in history when Black churches[4] were actively engaged in socio-political issues. While not all of them, and not in every period, were willing (or able) to enter the political sphere – whether in pre-election mobilization, social politics, or so-called contentious politics – a wide range of scholars emphasize their political potential. Therefore, in this article I will briefly outline the political activism of Black churches and the various forms of their involvement, but foremost I will analyze the debate concerning the mechanisms of political mobilization of Black churches, trying to answer the question regarding the factors which, according to researchers, are crucial for African American congregations in deciding what level and what forms of activism they are willing to undertake.

When discussing African American churches, which are also an example of ethnic churches, it is important to note that religion can represent not only a particular belief system and membership in a community of believers, but also ties and affiliation with a broader ethnic or racial group, as well as a desire to preserve its history, identity, institutions and way of life. In many ethnic and minority groups, it is often difficult to separate the religious culture from the ethnic culture (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2011, p. 275)[5] . This is also true in the case of the African American group due to its difficult and complicated history, marked by long-term marginalization. Experts on African American issues agree that it is impossible to understand the culture and history of African Americans without considering their churches (Raboteau 2004; Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007). Indeed, over the years, they have become some of the most significant ethnic institutions and, in some periods, the most important (independent) institutions of African Americans. In the initial absence of other institutions in Black communities, churches met both spiritual and secular needs, and religion became a base of cultural cohesion for African Americans (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2011, p. 278).

As numerous scholars (starting with Alexis DeTocqueville) have noted, in American democracy, places of worship can be seen as a special kind of civic associations – moreover, the most common kind of such institutions in the US. If they are additionally associated with specific ethnic groups, they can also reflect the problems and aspirations of those groups. Moreover, when racial, ethnic and religious divisions are linked to differences over the status of a group, the potential capacity for religiously motivated political mobilization considerably increases (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2011, p. 276). However, while religion in minority groups has political potential and serves to strengthen group identity and culture, it does not always become a tool for a group's political aspirations. Sometimes it can help articulate the group's concerns in political terms, and sometimes it does not (ibid.).

This can also be observed in the case of African American churches, some of which, using religious justifications, were heavily involved in various forms of political activity on behalf of their group, while others shied away from politics, focusing only on matters of the spirit. The reasons for these different approaches have been explained by researchers in different ways. Some have emphasized the fact that most religions contain both prophetic elements pertaining to the principles of life on earth, as well as elements that are mainly relevant to the spiritual realm (ibid.; Marx, 1967; Johnson 1986; Baldwin, 2003)[6] , and that representatives of the clergy may place more emphasis on one or the other depending on their theological orientation. However, some authors deny the impact of this division on the

1 That is, the process "by which sectors of society and culture liberate themselves from the domination of religious institutions and symbols" (Berger, 1997, p. 177).

2 On the distinction between the public sphere understood broadly or narrowly, and on the levels of public spheres in the concepts of J. Habermas and J. Rawls, more in: (Buksinski, 2011).

3 In English-language literature, the terms *the Black Church* and *Black churches* are used in relation to African American churches. It is important, however, to distinguish the two terms. The term *the Black Church* evolved from the phrase *the Negro Church*, which was also the title of the pioneering sociological study by W.E.B. Du Bois (1903). It is usually used to denote "the collective reality of black Christianity across denomination lines" (Pinn, 2002, p. ix). The term *Black churches* on the other hand is used to describe local Black Protestant churches within a particular denomination (Pinn, 2002, p. ix.). I will use both terms, depending on the context but, in order to respect the multiplicity of Black churches and their various responses to political mobilization, I will use the second term more often.

4 There is a debate among scholars whether to capitalize the term *Black/black*. For example, the authors of *Black Church Studies. An Introduction*, capitalize it as "a means of moving beyond skin color towards a notion of shared history, cultural heritage, and group identity." In this text I follow their decision. In: Floyd-Thomas, Stacey/Floyd-Thomas, Juan M./Duncan, Carol B. et al.: *Black Church Studies. An Introduction*. Abington Press: Westfield N.L. 2007, p. xxvi)

5 More on this topic (Babinski, 2003, pp. 9–13).

6 This division is referred to as *prophetic/priestly* or *this-worldly/otherworldly*. Priestly functions are concerned with worship and the spiritual life, while prophetic functions involve social and political engagement. The prophetic or thisworldly dimension is often associated with the motivational/mobilizational function of religion, and the otherworldly (focused on prayer, rituals and questions of salvation and the afterlife) – with the compensatory function (DuBois 1903; Frazier 1964). According to researchers, both dimensions helped the Black community survive (West 1999, p. 438), although some emphasize that they involved completely different methods (Myrdal, 1944; Frazier, 1964).

activity of African American churches, noting that the level of involvement has been rather influenced by external and practical reasons (mainly related to racism and violence, occurring at different times in history in varying degrees of intensity) (Calhoun-Brown 1998; McDaniel, 2008; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990)[7] .

In this article, the political mobilization of African American churches will be analyzed through the lens of different research perspectives and approaches, and special attention will be paid to Eric L. McDaniel's proposal. In 2008, he proposed a new research scheme that was intended to be a more comprehensive approach to analyzing the causes of the political mobilization of (Black) churches, and although he declared a departure from earlier findings regarding the influence of theological differences (especially in the context of the conservative-liberal divide), he also placed some theological considerations among the many external and internal factors taken into account. After discussing McDaniel's model in detail and analyzing his attitude toward the role of theology, I will try to relate the model under discussion to the research perspectives advocated in the political science of religion (Potz, 2019; Potz, 2020).

African American churches: definitions, origins, divisions

African American churches, also referred to as Black churches, are primarily Protestant churches[8] , which bring pastoral ministry predominantly to African Americans and are led by them. They range from entire separate denominations (e.g., African Methodist Episcopal Church) to congregations that are part of larger multi-ethnic denominations[9]. They were the first institutions created by the Black population back in the period of slavery. As a result of the restriction of other forms of activities of people of African descent (both during slavery and in the following years – especially in the South), in addition to religious functions, they soon began to perform certain social and political functions.

Some authors emphasize the importance of the socio-political activities of Black churches so much that they even include them in their definitions. Among them, for example, is Robert W. Gaines II, who draws attention to the fact that Black churches function both as centers of "spiritual empowerment and social agency" (2010, p. 368), and their members are united not only by common religious practices, but also by "race consciousness and civic engagement". Other authors caution, however, that ideological differences and pastoral styles can sometimes undermine political activism (Barnes and Nwosu, 2013, p. 226). They take into account that while the history of Black churches is inextricably linked to political and social involvement, the level and forms of this involvement varied significantly from congregation to congregation and from one historical period to another. However, due to the fact that Black congregations were formed, among other things, in protest against the treatment of slaves in white churches and in defense of their dignity, some scholars believe that they were political institutions from the beginning (serving as agents for social change and engaging "in a broad range of political activities") (James, 2007, p. 390).

The first "Black congregations" formed in the South in the 18th century[10] , and the first denominations were formed in the North in the early 19th century. The history of their formation is complicated because initially, white Protestant missionaries emphasized those verses of the Bible that justified slavery and obedience (Raboteau, 2001, p. 15). This made Africans reluctant to quickly embrace the Christian faith[11]. However, this situation changed as a result of the so-called Great Awakenings and under the influence of evangelicalism that was taking shape at the time[12]. It was not only the expressiveness of evangelical prayers that appealed to the sensibilities of the Black population, but also the fact that revivalist preachers carried a much more egalitarian message than pastors of traditional Protestant churches (Marsden, 1990, p. 67)[13].

The first separate prayer meetings and then small Black congregations began to appear after the First Great Awakening and with a wave of conversions in Georgia and Virginia. Some revivalist preachers and white Christians offered their help (James, 2007, p. 389). With time white planters expressed their partial acquiescence for separate Black congregations, but wanted to maintain the control over them by sending representatives of their own churches to supervise them. Nontheless, the growing number of Black congregations became places for the development of self-help, as well as Black culture and identity (Marsden, 1990, p. 68). Moreover, in the face of oppression and racism, Black preachers not only advocated reform, but also occasionally attempted to organize slave uprisings[14] , leading in some cases to the abolition of Black churches and in others to increased control over them.

In the North, meanwhile, not only Black congregations, but entire separate denominations began to form. This process also began with the separation of Black congregations, but over time it became a religious and political protest, ending with the creation of new independent structures. The history of the first Black denomination began with Pastors Richard Allen and Absalom Jones leaving the white congregation of St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia because of discrimination against its Black members (Raboteau, 2001, pp. 22–23). Although they were free people they were ordered to occupy only balcony seats, and their pastors (despite being officially ordained) were not allowed to

7 Lincoln and Mamiya recognize the above-mentioned division and its importance, but believe that other reasons were more important.

8 Although some African Americans belong to Catholic parishes, and some follow Islam, Judaism and other religions, the traditional term "Black churches" (*Black Church*/*Black churches*) is used specifically for Protestant churches. This text analyzes the political activity of Protestant African American churches.

9 According to Helmut Richard Niebuhr, a denomination is an intermediate size between a church and a sect, understood according to the classification of M. Weber and E. Troeltsch. For example, Baptism, may have many separate, mutually respectful church organizations, or denominations (in the US, e.g. Southern Baptist Convention, National Baptist Convention, Progressive National Baptist Convention, etc.). Denominations, in turn, may have multiple congregations. J. Casanova also emphasizes that under conditions of separation of state and church, all religious associations function as equal denominations (Casanova, 2005, p. 65). Although sociologically and theologically the terms church, sect, confession and denomination are not the same, they are usually used interchangeably in the US.

10 I have written about the origins of the Black churches and their early history in more detail in my earlier articles (Napierała, 2022; Napierała, 2021a; Napierała, 2020). I use parts of these previous analyses, but for the purposes of this text, I focus primarily on the history of the separate Black denominations.

11 Some of them had already been baptized by Catholic colonizers in Africa.

12 An interdenominational religious movement characterized by a specific style of spirituality and a belief in the necessity of being born-gain. This style combines intense emotional spontaneous prayer, a personal inner relationship with Christ, experiencing a moment of conversion called the new birth (that is, feeling an inner transformation under the influence of divine grace), as well as recognizing the authority of the Bible, embarking on a sanctified life and sharing the faith through evangelism. More in: (Siemieniewski, 1997).

13 E.g. To become a preacher, one did not have to be a minister, ordination (not available to slaves) was unnecessary.

14 For example, the uprisings of Nat Turner (1831), Gabriel Prosser (1800) and Denmark Vesey (1822).

preach to white members of the congregation. In 1787, many Black members left, and in 1793 they built a new building, where they formed the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church congregation in 1794. Allen then formally separated from the white Methodists in 1816 and formed a new independent Black denomination: African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990, pp. 51–52). A second Black denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion (AMEZ), established in 1821 in New York, was soon brought into being under similar circumstances.[15] Both new denominations quickly became famous for their activities in the abolitionist movement and their support of the so-called *Underground Railroad*[16], and during the civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s, many of their congregations supported the protests.

Other African American denominations were formed after the Civil War, between 1870 and 1961. A denomination called the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (now the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church) was founded by 41 freedmen in Jackson, Tennessee. They initiated a movement to secede from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which, prior to the Civil War, openly supported slavery. In 1870, two white bishops of that church ordained two freedmen as bishops. The CME was thus, unlike the AME and AMEZ Churches, created by agreement with the white hierarchs. They were willing to make the agreement because during the Civil War and later during Reconstruction, their Church lost more than half of its Black members. Those who remained were therefore allowed to form an African American denomination, which would still retain some ties to the white denomination, additionally receiving financial support from it. In return, however, CME clergy were required to be neutral in political matters, to which many Black pastors agreed (McDaniel, 2008, p. 88). By creating a separate Black southern Methodist church, its members were also able to maintain a more emotional style of religious expression, which the AME and AME Zion Churches did not accept. The clergy of the Black northern churches opposed it, among other reasons, because of its ecstatic, folk character associated with slavery and syncretism (Raboteau, 2001). For the formerly enslaved, however, it was a part of their culture and heritage. For northern AME and AMEZ pastors, both the style and apolitical nature of the CME were problematic. They perceived the CME's neutrality as an expression of a lack of full independence. Eventually, CME abandoned its apolitical nature in 1956. That's also when it changed its name to the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (McDaniel, 2008, p. 88).

In 1880, Montgomery, Alabama, began the process of forming the first separate Black Baptist denomination, which was finally established in 1895. The National Baptist Convention, or rather, initially, the Baptist Foreign Mission Convention, after many transformations and subsequent splits (including in 1897 and in 1915), eventually took the name: the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (NBC USA). Among its founders and early activists was the grandfather and later also the father of Martin Luther King Jr. From its inception, NBC USA members were involved in the struggle for the rights of African Americans, especially in the US South. When another split occurred between them in 1915, a second Baptist denomination was formed: the National Baptist Convention of America International (NBC America). The dispute was mainly over control of the convention's publishing house (the National Baptist Publishing Board), but the dispute was not resolved and unity was not maintained.

Both the NBC USA and the NBC America were initially theologically conservative, committed to a literal interpretation of the Bible and to emotional evangelicalism. The NBC America remained theologically conservative, committed to the theological currents represented by the white denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, known for its traditionalism[17] (and, at certain times in its history, radicalism and segregationism). Meanwhile, the NBC USA, despite retaining many conservative elements of evangelical theology and an emotional style of worship and an emphasis on individual conversion, soon began to emphasize more strongly the principles of the social gospel movement[18]. Some of its members are even known as the founders of its African American version (Dorrien, 2018). Over time, too, a progressive approach was gradually promoted, not only to social issues, but eventually to theological ones as well.

Nevertheless, at the time of the civil rights struggle, the then president of the NBC USA, Joseph H. Jackson, opposed Martin Luther King Jr.'s strategy, especially participation in protests and demonstrations. He was unwilling to give institutional support to the civil rights movement, and motivated his opposition not only by practical reasons, but also by theological ones. Therefore, as the last Black Baptist denomination, the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) was formed in 1961 on the initiative of King Junior, Ralph Abernathy and Garner C. Taylor, among others. The PNBC not only supported the tactics of civil disobedience and socio-political involvement of Black churches, but also a strong emphasis on the social gospel and more and more other elements of liberal theology. It was the representatives and authorities of this denomination that actively cooperated with activists from the civil rights movement (McDaniel, 2008, p. 86).

In addition to Methodist and Baptist denominations, African Americans also formed a denomination linked to the Pentecostal movement: the Church of God in Christ, which was formally established in 1907. It was created at a time of contention between proponents of the so-called New Theology and supporters of the newly emerging Protestant fundamentalism[19], and sided with the latter.

15 It separated first from the John Street Methodist Episcopal Church, forming a separate Black congregation in 1800, and then a separate denomination, which was initially called the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America. It was renamed in 1848, More on this (McDaniel, 2008, p. 87).

16 Seen as a resistance movement, the action of smuggling slaves to the North, initiated by Harriet Tubman.

17 Over time, some NBC America members began to accept a slightly more moderate approach.

18 The social gospel movement is a Protestant movement started in the 19th century as an ethical response by Protestants to social problems in developing cities: poverty, child labor, low wages, economic inequality, crime and racial tensions. Developed by Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbush, it was inspired by the social message of the New Testament and its passages that present Christ as a challenger of the status quo. It was, so to speak, a response to conservative Protestant theological ideas, such as extreme individualism and the view of sin as the cause of poverty. It promoted in their place the idea of social justice and action for social reform. Cf. (Marsden, 1990, pp. 55–56). Although it became characteristic of liberal and mainline Protestantism, in the beginning it was also accepted by pre-fundamentalist, postmillenial evangelicals (including Black evangelicals).

19 American Protestant fundamentalism developed mostly within white Protestant denominations, but also reached some Black churches. They rejected 19th-century scientific discoveries, departures from biblical literalism, and a positive view of human nature. While Protestant churches associated with the so-called New Theology focused more on Christian ethics and the social dimension of the Gospel, churches associated with Protestant fundamentalism emphasized the sinfulness of human nature and advocated literalism in reading the Bible. Their belief in the sinfulness of the world and the illusiveness of earthly aspirations for reform determined their negative attitude toward broader socio-political activities. They believed that the world could only be changed

Pentecostals' professed premillenarianism[20] has made theological justification for political involvement much more difficult. What is important in the Pentecostal churches is conquering sin at the individual level, trusting the Holy Spirit, reforming the world through spiritual improvement and seeking the salvation of individual souls. Hence there is much less emphasis (and sometimes just residual) on the social gospel. Nonetheless, some Pentecostal pastors were involved in the civil rights movement[21] , while others considered their duty to be mainly spiritual and supported the movement with prayers. Some have also seen their duty as carrying out church-based charitable and sometimes local socio-religious initiatives.[22]

Although until recently about 80% of African Americans belonged to these seven historically Black denominations (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990), and now about 60% attend Black congregations (Pew Research Center, 2021), it is important to remember that some African Americans belong to Black congregations that are part of white denominations, and some belong to multi-ethnic congregations. Others belong to non-Protestant denominations, and a small percentage declare no religious affiliation. It is Black Protestant denominations, however, that have historically been considered the cultural representatives of African Americans, and it is they who have shown the greatest commitment to political mobilization over the years. It is noteworthy that most Black congregations and denominations emerged mainly because of racism and discrimination in white denominations, rather than due to doctrinal differences (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2011, p. 277). The only exception is the COGIC denomination, which was formed in the wave of the formation of new theological views. The emergence of most separate denominations is thus considered one of the first examples of socio-political mobilization.

Level of involvement and forms of political mobilization of Black churches over the years[23]

At different periods in history, however, Black churches showed varied levels of socio-political involvement, while some of them never engaged in political activities directly. Prior to the American Civil War, northern churches were involved in the abolitionist movement and the *Underground Railroad* as well as in publishing activities as a form of peaceful contentious politics (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990, p. 52; Raboteau, 2001, pp. 24–25). Although southern congregations were much more limited in what they could do, the transmission of coded (quasi-political) messages of freedom in so-called *spirituals*[24] can be considered one of the main forms of their peaceful protest (Cone, 1992). After the few slave uprisings led by members of Black congregations and the repression that followed, many southern churches tended to focus on the spiritual needs of their members. Others, however, did not give up their covert opposition activities, including those associated with some forms of support for the *Undergound Railroad* (James, 2007, p. 390).

After the American Civil War, African American churches formally became participants in public life and sought to participate in it, respecting the existing laws on state-church relations in the US. In addition, they learned to apply strategies taken from other political actors – in order to advance the interests of their community within a democratic system (still, however, fraught with racism). Shortly after the war ended, they provided assistance to the formerly enslaved and lobbied for their rights to be respected (McDaniel, 2008, p. 14). They also sought education for the freedmen or organized it themselves. In addition, their representatives, including pastors, as the best educated African Americans, began to take an active role in local, state and federal politics, holding public offices.

In the South, churches were centers of African American communities as well as venues for business, education and politics. Particularly during Reconstruction (1865–77), they began to serve as forums for political mobilization, with politicians soliciting opportunities to speak at African American congregations in order to win the support of the pastor and, through him, the rest of the community (James, 2007, p. 392). After the Reconstruction period, and especially after the introduction of Jim Crow laws, political activity by African Americans in the South was no longer possible, causing them to engage in so-called *surrogate politics* at the level of their own congregations. Some pastors, however, informally still tried to play a role as representatives of their communities. Others, meanwhile, abandoned their involvement, exhorting their members to focus only on matters of the soul and issues of individual salvation, thus choosing to play the role of spiritual, religious and psychological refuge (Baldwin, 2003).

In the North, Jim Crow laws were not formally in effect, but racism effectively hindered political activities of African Americans. Churches there, however, served as forums for political debates, and sometimes hosted white politicians who promised financial support in exchange for major party endorsements. And while Black pastors tended to be middlemen in negotiations with the white establishment, the most typical form of their engagement was to provide material and organizational support to Black communities. During the Great Migration, northern congregations also tried to assist newcomers, but they were unable to help everyone. Thus, during this time, many new small congregations (*storefront churches*) were established by migrants from the South. They usually did not have the

through prayer, reforming of individual souls, renunciation of sin, 'new birth' and individual conversion. Thus, fundamentalism modified traditional evangelicalism, in which the pursuit of personal spiritual improvement did not exclude advocating social reform (as was often the case in Black churches). Initially, it was evangelicals who sought reforms, but since the rise of Protestant fundamentalism, the social gospel movement has become characteristic to mainstream Protestants. This had to do, among other things, with the transition of fundamentalists from post-millenarian to premillenarian positions. Cf. (Marsden, 1991). Interestingly, however, many Black churches (as opposed to many white evangelical churches) accepted elements of social gospel, continuing, in a sense, the original version of evangelicalism. Even those that have moved to premillennialist positions have never completely rejected at least some social activities, especially for the benefit of the community.

20 An interpretation that assumes that the physical return of Christ to the Earth will happen before the Millennium. It is related to the belief in the corruption of human nature and the ineffectiveness of human reforms to bring about the Millennium before the return of Christ, as postmillenarists postulated. Read more: (Marsden, 1991).

21 The example of the Pentecostal Mason Temple in Memphis, where Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his last sermon on April 3, 1968, is usually used as an example of their engagement (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990, p. 223).

22 More on the activities of Pentecostal churches (Taylor, 1994). It is worth mentioning that Al Sharpton, who was raised in the Pentecostal church, wishing to become more involved in the civil rights movement changed his denomination and joined the Baptists. Raphael Warnock also left Pentecostalism for Baptism.

23 I wrote more about the political activities of Black churches, especially the political role of their pastors, in (Napierała, 2022). This excerpt is intended to provide an overview of the forms and levels of political mobilization, and serves as an introduction to the section on models explaining their involvement or lack of it.

24 That is, religious songs associated with African Americans and their experiences of being held in bondage in slavery.

financial and organizational capacity and resources to get involved in politics. Rather, they provided spiritual support or did charity work for their own community. Their pastors were often poorly educated, which dissuaded them from broader socio-political activities. Some of them also belonged to the Pentecostal movement, which was gaining popularity at the time. So they focused mainly on individual religiosity and otherworldly themes, sometimes moving to positions of religious orthodoxy. Additinally, the Great Depression further restricted the political and social activities of many Black churches.

In the North as well as in the South, however, there was a small group of large, relatively powerful congregations, operating especially in the big cities, which invariably remained politically engaged over the years. Their representatives were aware that financial aid from whites limited their ability to bring about systemic change. That's why pastors such as Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., his son Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, as well as A.D. William, Martin Luther King Sr. and Martin Luther King Jr. of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta never gave up on the politics of peaceful protest. In New York, in particular, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. engaged in contentious politics (James, 2007, p. 394). He organized a number of strikes in the 1930s and 1940s, including the famous Harlem bus boycott (1941). He fought primarily for the labor rights of African Americans and for the development of public housing. Later, he became the first African American elected to the New York City Council (1941), as well as the first Black pastor since Reconstruction to be elected to the House of Representatives (1945). In Atlanta, A.D. Williams, fighting against racism, organized boycotts and protests, including a boycott of the local newspaper, known for its racist language, and for a campaign to restrict African Americans' voting rights (Evans, 2021). He also collaborated to establish a local branch of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in Atlanta and sought voter registration for African Americans (Warnock, 2022, p. 121). Similar efforts were made by his successor, Martin Luther King Sr. who turned his church into a center for political mobilization and in 1935 led several hundred members of his congregation to court, getting them registered to vote. He repeated this in 1939 (Warnock, 2022, p. 124).

Protest actions, boycotts, marches, rallies and attempts to register Black voters are forms of contentious politics that were developed on a larger scale during the civil rights movement, with Martin Luther King Jr. becoming its symbol. The activity of Black churches in the 1950s and 1960s is the best-known form of their political involvement. In mobilizing the Black community to protest for change, King built on the cultural legacy of the Black Church (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2011, p. 278; Chappell, 2003), additionally using, however, a philosophy of nonviolent resistance drawn from Mahatma Gandhi. King is known for forming the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an organization that was supposed to coordinate the efforts of local congregations in support of peaceful protests. Even at that time, however, there was no consensus among African American churches about participation in the protests. In fact, as research suggests, only a small portion of them joined the protests (McDaniel, 2008, p. 4; Wilmore, 1998, p. 209; Payne, 1995; Marable, 2015).

Thanks to the achievements of the civil rights movement, African Americans were able to move from contentious politics to focus on pre-election voter mobilization actions, electoral or even party politics (McDaniel, 2008, p. 75). Black churches continue to organize voter registration centers and serve as forums for political discussions. Their pastors have again entered politics, participating directly as congressmen and officials at various levels of local, state and federal government (McDaniel, 2008, p. 75)[25]. In addition, many Black churches have engaged in extensive cooperation with state governments and with the federal government in the provision of social services. For this purpose, they formed so-called community development corporations, which were able to use not only private but also government funds without violating the principles of separation of state and church (McDaniels, 2008, p. 76; Owens, 2003, p. 216; Napierała, 2021a, p. 265).

Some researchers, however, began to point out that while many congregations were socially engaged at the local level, their involvement not only in contentious politics, but also in activities to introduce and implement broader social reforms had declined since the 1970s (Pinn, 2002, pp. 34–36). Pastors were accused of being content as members of the middle class with reforms that made little difference to the situation of lower-class African Americans (Pinn, 2002, pp. 19–20). Over time, researchers began to notice that more and more Black churches were promoting the individual dimension of religion, including (in some cases) the prosperity gospel[26] , while neglecting the social gospel ideas (Glaude, 2010; Smith, 2021). Eddie S. Glaude Jr. even stated in his article for the Huffington Post, *The Black Church Is Dead* (2010), referring to the "death" of an active church that fought for the rights of African Americans. Black churches have also been accused of getting involved only on a small scale, reforming local schools, for example, but no longer seeking reform on a national level (Kelsey, 2020)[27] . These problems were also evident in 2013, when few Black churches were willing to support the *Black Lives Matters* movement[28] .

Mobilization or accommodation of African American churches? Perspectives and exploratory models

The above-discussed differences in the level of political involvement among Black churches have influenced the development of several research concepts and exploratory models regarding their activism. In the American literature, the most prominent concepts have long been those known as the 'opiate view' and the 'inspiration view', which overlap to some extent with the two different approaches presented by Karl Marx and Max Weber regarding the compensatory or motivational function of religion.[29]

Advocates of the 'opiate view' focused on the fact that Black churches often retreated from engagement with the world, focusing on issues of salvation and individual relationship with God, and promising rewards and righteousness only in heaven. Admittedly, most of them acknowledged that Black churches helped their members survive in

25 E.g. Floyd Flake, Jesse Jackson, John Lewis, Raphael Warnock and others.

26 This is a theological orientation derived from conservative evangelical theology, with strong ties to Pentecostalism and charismatic movements. It emphasizes that poverty can be overcome through individual conversion, sanctification of life and religious devotion, as well as through positive thinking and donations to the church, for which God rewards not only in the afterlife, but also in temporal life. More in: (McDaniel, Dwidar and Calderon, 2018).

27 Nevertheless, the average political activity of Black churches is still higher than that of white churches (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2011, p. 278). And some, such as Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta are involved in promoting structural reform (Warnock, 2022).

28 This changed mainly after the death of George Floyd (2020), although some Black churches (especially conservative ones) still only partially support young activists.

29 I wrote about them in more detail in: (Napierała, 2021b)

difficult circumstances, but they did not, in this view, (sufficiently) encourage their members to change their lot on earth, emphasizing rather the '*otherworldly*' dimension of religion (DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1921; Mays and Nicolson, 1933; Myrdal, 1944; Frazier, 1964; Marx, 1967; Reed, 1986). Thus, they paid special attention to the compensatory function of religion (or its choice by pastors).

Proponents of the 'inspiration view' on the other hand, focused on the fact that the very formation of Black churches was an expression of socio-political protest, and that many congregations had been working in opposition to the white mainstream since their inception, supporting reforms, seeking and encouraging to change the lot of African Americans (while additionally providing them with shelter) (Nelsen and Kusener Nelsen, 1975; Raboteau, 2004; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Chappell, 2003). They tied this largely to the mobilizing function of religion and its '*thisworldly*' dimension.

Interestingly, when the first academic studies of Black churches were undertaken in the early 20th century, the 'opiate view' prevailed among researchers and scholars, many of whom were African American. While most of them recognized the organizational potential of Black churches, they criticized them for the lack of its realization as well as for the passivity of the clergy at the time, their focus on moral issues and religious emotionalism, and for distracting their members from worldly matters. Many early theoretical models, including the "assimilation model," the "isolation model" and the "compensatory model," further suggested anti-intellectualism, anti-democratic and apolitical attitudes, and sometimes even authoritarianism of Black churches (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2011, p. 278)[30] . This perspective dominated the literature on the subject until the early 1960s, but similar views were also expressed by some later scholars (e.g., Gary Marx and Adolph Reed).

A certain modification to the 'opiate view' was introduced by Gary Marx (1967), who, while emphasizing the compensatory function of religion and arguing that the more religious African Americans were, the less likely they were to protest, saw deviations from the rule. He continued to link the lack of commitment to a theology that emphasized a focus on otherworldly matters and questions of salvation, but pointed out that not all Black churches stressed this kind of theology. Some focused on the prophetic dimension of religion and preferred a thisworldly attitude. Highly religious people who belonged to the latter ones were, according to his research, more prone to political involvement. As he argued, the first option, the consequence of which is acceptance of one's fate, is usually present in fundamentalist factions of Christianity, while the prophetic orientation, which encourages people to fight to change their fate, is present in mainstream churches. Ronald L. Johnstone (1969) and later Stephen D. Johnson (1986) came to similar conclusions. The former emphasized that activist pastors were more theologically liberal, while the latter elaborated that higher levels of activism were found among members of congregations emphasizing the social gospel. These researchers thus recognized the varying motivational potential of Black churches – depending, in their view, on the dominant theological interpretation within a given church.

In the late 1960s, however, the 'inspiration view' (which gained particular popularity in the 1980s) began to gain importance. Researchers became less and less interested in the compensatory function of religion as they turned their attention to the churches involved in SCLC activities. The first model that decisively rejected previous conclusions about the inactivity of Black churches was the so-called 'ethnic community prophetic' model, developed by Hart M. Nelsen and Anna Kusener Nelsen's (1975). They emphasized that Black churches were not only bases for ethnic identity building, but could also play a prophetic role 'in a corrupt white Christian nation' (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990, p. 11). The motivational function of religion was thus strongly emphasized by them.

In the 1980s, the 'inspiration view' was further combined with studies of social movements, now supplemented by the religious factor. This is because researchers paid attention to the fact that religion could not only motivate efforts to transform society, but that churches could also lend their structures to social activists. Thus, in addition to the identity and cultural perspective emphasized by earlier sociologists, the perspective of the social movement theory was added to the discussion. The role of Black churches in the civil rights movement was analyzed, among others, by Doug McAdam (1982) and Aldon Morris (1984), who studied the local structures and resources provided by churches. Morris further concluded that Black churches provided the ideological framework through which collective mobilization occurred (after Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990, p. 165).

Among scholars advocating the 'inspiration view' were also C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, whose 1983 and 1990 surveys indicated strong support among Black pastors for political involvement. They acknowledged, however, that not all Black churches supported the civil rights movement. However, they did not tie this to the theological divide suggested by Gary Marx, but rather to practical considerations such as the threat of violence or disillusionment with the system. Interestingly, however, they also developed what they called a 'dialectic model', recognizing that Black churches can simultaneously work for accommodation as for civil resistance. They listed six pairs of poles between which, in their view, there is an ongoing dialectical tension in Black churches, including, among others, the otherworldly and the thisworldly dimensions (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990, pp. 11–15). In their view, in different historical periods, churches may emphasize one or the other more. Therefore, they considered Gary Marx's division too simplistic.

Later models focused on the dual function of religion and Black churches, i.e. supporting both some accommodative and oppositional activities, sometimes even at the same time (Harris, 1999; Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, 2002). Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, on the other hand, developed the so-called dialogic model (1993), in which extreme approaches in Black churches are in constant dialogue with each other, and which, according to some researchers, can also be applied to the issue of political involvement (Barber, 2015, p. 251).

Quantitative studies conducted in the second half of the 20th century indicated that highly religious African Americans attending historical African American denominations were more politically active (e.g., Leege, Wald and Kellstedt, 1993). Some researchers, however, have begun to pay more attention to the fact that it is not so much religion or religiosity per se, but rather the shared collective experiences and common history of Black churches that can influence political awareness and involvement. Indeed, attending Black churches strengthens group identification, and this ultimately motivates people to seek political solutions to their problems (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2011, p. 279). Churches also provide a safe space for discussion and can strengthen the social capital of their members, which fosters engagement (ibid.).

Nevertheless, research continued to indicate that not all Black churches have similar

30 Summary and analysis of earlier models in: (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990, pp. 11, 222).

attitudes toward political involvement and differ in political effectiveness (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2011, p. 280). Some researchers have recognized that religious activism among African Americans does indeed positively affect political involvement (including in contentious politics), but provided that they attend so-called political churches" (Fitzerald and Spohn, 2005, p. 1015)[31] . This brings back the question of what makes a church a 'political church'? Is theology related to this, as earlier researchers have suggested, or are there rather entirely different causes at play? Erik L. McDaniel, who in 2008 developed a research model to answer this question, firmly rejected the thesis that a conservative theology focused on individual salvation prevents a church from becoming political.

Causes and mechanisms of political mobilization of Black churches according to the concept of Eric L. McDaniel

In a study titled *Politics in the Pews. The Political Mobilization of Black Churches,* Eric L. McDaniel proposed a model for analyzing the mechanisms of churches' political mobilization, in which a number of factors must be taken into account, including: the views of the pastor, the view of the congregation members, organizational issues, and the environment in which the church in question operates. Each of these is in turn influenced by additional determinants, which the author discusses in detail.

McDaniel stressed that he agrees with researchers who believe that religious institutions can promote skills needed in the social and political sphere, as well as with those who pay special attention to the role of so-called 'political churches'[32]. Such churches, in his view, not only promote civic participation, but also actively involve their members in the political process, mobilizing them and providing them with the necessary information on political issues and candidates (2008, p. 3). In his view, however, most researchers have not tried to answer the question of what exactly influences churches to become politically active. Although, he says, they did not ignore the fact that Black churches could be political institutions, they focused mainly on how they influence the behavior (mobilization) of their church members, but not on what causes the institution itself to undergo politicization. They also tended to focus on answering the question of whether or not churches are politically active and which tendency dominates, and this, according to him, led to the disputes between proponents of the 'opiate view' and the 'inspiration view' (2008, p. 3). However, he believes it is a mistake to treat the political activism of the churches as something permanent – it is better to see it as a process rather than a condition (2008, p. 3, p. 6). The author also believes that in previous analyses (e.g. in: Reed, 1986; Frazier, 1964) there had been too much emphasis on the clergy's role in determining the level of church's political involvement with disregard to other factors (2008, p. 5).

In his study, McDaniel further emphasizes that although some scholars have spoken of 'political churches', the term has not been defined precisely.[33] Therefore, he decides to define it and to analyze exactly how and why religious institutions (whose main purpose is to meet spiritual needs) are transforming into politicized institutions (2008, p. 10). Thus, he explains, he understands 'political church' as "a church that holds political awareness and activity as salient pieces of its identity" (2008, p. 11). In his view, for religious institutions to integrate politics into their identity means that they recognize politics as an important means to achieve their overall goals (2008, pp. 9–10). For this to happen, according to the author, four conditions must be met: leaders must be supporters of their churches' political involvement, their members must agree to it, the institutional structure of the church must enable and sustain political involvement, and the political context must foster such involvement (2008, p. 5).

Because the process of integrating political identity involves internal conflicts and even struggles between different elements of the church's identity, it should not be surprising, according to McDaniel, that the level of engagement of an institution varies over time, nor that individual Black churches are involved to different degrees. In addition, the process of politicization requires a redistribution of resources, so churches with more resources may retain a political identity for longer periods than those with fewer resources. According to the author's concept, no church can sustain activism continuously (at the same level) (2008, p. 12).

As McDaniel repeatedly emphasizes, the process of becoming a 'political church' is primarily the result of negotiations between the pastor and members (who are key actors in it) within a specific organization and environment (that influence negotiations as well) (ibid.). This additionally makes the process dynamic and the level of involvement variable. Therefore, according to him, researchers who did not take this into account came to different conclusions about the activism of Black churches (2008, p. 5).

In general, McDaniel's model can be presented as follows: the environment affects both the pastor and the members of the congregation, as well as the organization. In turn, the pastor, members and organization influence each other (2008, p. 13).

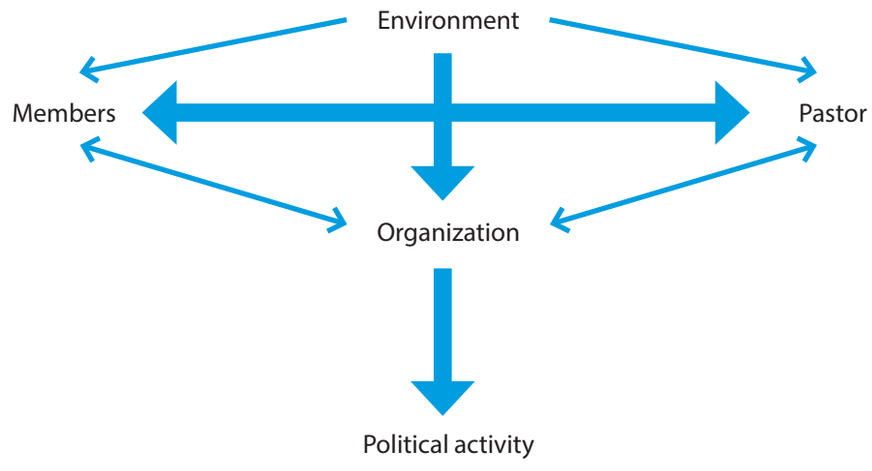

Fig. 1. Model of the creation and maintenance of a political church created by McDaniel (2008, p. 13)

31 The study also found that attending a politicized church increases the likelihood of participating in contentious politics, but only for members without a college education and those who do not already belong to community organizations working on behalf of African Americans.

32 Among others, from: (Brown and Brown, 2003; Calhoun-Brown, 1996; Guth et al. 1998; Tate, 1993)

33 However, he mentions several researchers who have made some attempts in this direction, such as Calhoun-Brown (1996) Tate (1993).

According to this model, churches adapt to circumstances, while the other elements of the system are in constant dialogue and negotiation with each other regarding political involvement. Pastors are catalysts for activity, but are constrained by the support of congregational members. Both pastor and members are further constrained by organizational factors. And while pastors have always had a tremendous influence on the involvement of their congregations, as McDaniel points out, referring to earlier research, other factors have been equally important (2008, p. 5). In support of his thesis, he recalls that even Myrdal and DuBois (who criticized pastors for their lack of involvement and attributed to them the main role in promoting activism, or lack of it), recognized the potential of the organizational structures and resources of Black churches, while DuBois also paid attention to the context, differentiating between the involvement opportunities of northern and southern churches (2008, p. 6). McDaniel, however, emphasizes that most researchers have tended to take into account only one, possibly two, of the factors he listed, while all should be considered (2008, p. 6). He goes on to explain in detail what influences each of the elements in his model.

Environment

According to McDaniel, one of the most important, if not the most important, element influencing the negotiation of the identity of the church is the external environment. Analyzing environmental factors, he pays special attention to the socio-political and legal situation at different times. This is because the conditions present in a given social context strongly affect religious institutions, while changes in the social environment can affect the negotiation of elements of church identity (2008, p. 18). In the case of African American churches, numerous legal restrictions, limitations and discriminatory attitudes toward the African American community have been of great importance. As McDaniel points out, aware of the restrictions on traditional forms of political participation, African Americans transformed their legally existing religious institutions into political organizations (2008, p. 19). Thus, their churches took over (as churches often do in a difficult environments) certain functions that traditionally would have been performed by other institutions. However, the degree of restriction and certain elements of the system regarding the position of African Americans have been changing over time, which has been affecting the different degrees of Black churches' involvement. According to McDaniel, in general, Black churches were more active at times when political activity was necessary from the Black community's point of view, but its traditional forms were prevented by a number of barriers. It was then that the churches took over the functions traditionally performed by other institutions. Black churches' political involvement, on the other hand, was lower, as the author argues, in periods and places where either African Americans were relatively well off or where the cost of political participation was too high due to violence (2008, p. 7).

McDaniel concludes that in order to be politically active, "the Black church must be located in an environment that not only requires political action but also fails to place external restrictions on the church's activities" (2008, p. 19). At the same time, he adds that in some periods of history, "same barriers that have prevented Blacks as individuals from participating politically have also constrained the activities of the church" (2008, p. 19). In this context, however, it is worth noting that, thanks to the American model of state-church relations, Black churches for a long period of time had greater scope for action than other African American institutions[34] . Nevertheless, McDaniel seems to mean by the above statement that, depending on the circumstances, barriers and restrictions, Black churches chose different forms of political participation. In his view, when African Americans had greater access to public institutions or entered the political mainstream, their churches followed them by adopting techniques of other members of the system, such as campaigning and lobbying. But when they were eliminated from the system, their churches engaged in contentious politics (2008, pp. 58, 76).

Taking political opportunities and access to institutions into consideration helps, in McDaniel's view, to better understand how the socio-political situation affects the behavior of individuals as well as their institutions (2008, p. 58). Explaining the different forms of involvement of Black churches in different periods in this way, the author emphasizes that for a Black church to transform itself into a political organization, it must be in a legal and political environment in which participation is possible in some form. Only then can the pastor and church members move on to determine whether the church is an appropriate institution to fight for political goals and what forms of political participation should be chosen.

In discussing various forms of participation, McDaniel also notes, admittedly, that some pastors believed that (despite some opportunities for participation) the best strategy for protecting Black communities was to "look inward and focus on their spirituality" (2008, pp. 19, 76). However, he pays little attention to this option and does not link it to a choice of religious orthodoxy or conservative theology. The intensification of religious orthodoxy, however, might also be considered a certain form of politicization of religion – being a kind of protection from the world as well.[35] While shifting to positions of orthodoxy and disengagement from the world (including politics) might be considered political manifestation, it is not necessarily connected to political mobilization. And although it seems to be often combined with the choice of a conservative theological orientation, the role of theology in this case it is not analyzed by McDaniel. He generally stresses that other factors are far more important in choosing various forms of involvement or lack thereof (and later seems to suggest that theology usually serves only as justification for certain choices).

In addition to the (difficult) socio-political and legal situation, among the environmental factors responsible for such a choice, McDaniel also draws attention to the geographical location of the church (2008, pp. 53–54). In the past, the North-South division was of particular importance, as a result of different laws. While this division may still have some relevance, the size of the African American population in a given region, a small-town, rural, or metropolitan setting, seem to be more important at the moment. In addition, as he points out, the fact that various regions differ in their level of economic and technological development, poverty levels, and the level of racial tension also affects the activities of the churches (2008, p. 54).

In conclusion, McDaniel stresses that both the geographic environment and the socio-political situation influence the process of negotiation between pastor and congregation members regarding the degree of politicization of the church. No organization exists in a vacuum. To become a 'political church',

34 For more on this topic: (Napierała, 2022).

35 While it serves to protect African Americans, it can be considered a political choice, but according to some researchers, it is not strictly a political mobilization strategy. On the other hand, it sometimes stressed by scholars that even accommodation can be subversive (Barber, 2015).

a Black congregation must exist in an environment where political activism is needed, possible, and where the pastor and members of the congregation agree on the forms of its political activity (2008, p. 19).

Organization

As McDaniel points out, differences in political activism also depend on organizational factors. This is because the interactions between the pastor and congregation members are constrained by resources, the structure of the decision-making process and by the so-called organizational culture of the church (2008, p. 22). According to the author, resources are the key factors. For without them, churches would not be able to perform their basic spiritual function, not to mention political activism. Resources should not be understood only as financial capital, but also as human capital. This is why *storefront churches* tend to have less capacity to act, while congregations with more resources tend to be more socially and politically engaged. Financial stability and the individual resources of members are also important, as the author points out (2008, p. 17).

Discussing differences in decision-making structure and organizational culture, McDaniel mentions denominational divisions. He stresses, however, that regardless of which denomination an African American congregation belongs to, it has its own individual operational style (2008, p. 52). Decision-making procedures in individual churches may be more or less formalized, and pastors may have more or less decision-making power. In addition, as the author notes, some churches have clear guidelines on permissible political activities (e.g., regarding inviting politicians). Some of these rules may depend on the denomination, but some come from the congregation itself (2008, p. 17). Indeed, in the case of Black churches, organizational culture is partly the result of tradition and denomination and partly the result of negotiations with congregation members. Also important, according to McDaniel, is the history of activism: churches that have traditionally not engaged in politics tend to continue to stay out of it, while those that have participated in it tend to continue their activism (2008, p. 18). However, the author does not link this to denomination or theology.

Overall, in the context of institutional differences, McDaniel pays relatively little attention to denominational-theological differences. Although he points out that individual congregations must take into account the views of their denomination, he concludes that religious traditions play a minimal role. More than theology, he stresses the different hierarchical structures in different denominations (e.g. more formalized in Methodist than in Baptist churches) (2008, p. 81). In the case of the COGIC, he notes that the denomination has a unique structure, in which while denominational hierarchy exists, individual congregations have a fairly high level of independence (2008, p. 89).

Although he discusses the history of the formation of the seven Black denominations and, in doing so, notes the different circumstances of the COGIC's formation (theological reasons) (2008, p. 84), he does not emphasize the impact of their theology on political activity. Rather, he criticizes the conclusions of some scholars who have suggested that otherworldliness and conservative theology formulated under the influence of Protestant fundamentalism decreased Pentecostals' interest in political involvement. He also does not analyze the possible impact of premillennialism or Pentecostals' lesser emphasis on the social gospel.[36] While Pentecostal pastors had not been included in his research sample (for interviews), he did analyze the existing statistics. However, while some of his quantitative analyses have also indicated that Baptists and Methodists are more politically active than Pentecostals (2008, p. 92), he stresses that, in his view, this is hardly the result of theology. According to him, a multivariate analysis, which takes into account, among other things, a lower income and lower education levels among Pentecostal pastors and congregants, better explains the lower activity of Pentecostal churches (2008, p. 92). Thus, the influence of a religious tradition on political involvement, in McDaniel's opinion, takes place through resources rather than theology (2008, p. 94).

The author also cites research that suggests that some elements of Pentecostal theology may have the effect of limiting engagement in social activism, while others may nevertheless be interpreted to motivate at least some forms of it (McRoberts, 1999). He further points out that, according to McRoberts' research, Pentecostal churches are active and even allow cooperation with secular social organizations. McDaniel, however, seems to give far less weight to the aforementioned author's conclusion that the involvement of Pentecostal churches usually involves charitable activities for the benefit of the local community, and while they allow cooperation with secular organizations, they prefer church outreach programs. This is because all social programs and activities should, in their view, be "holistic," that is, they should also include spiritual improvement (McRoberts, 1999).

Thus, within an organization, human and financial resources and the traditions of individual congregations are more important in McDaniel's model than denominational or theological differences – even in the case of Pentecostal churches, which have a somewhat different history and whose preferred forms of involvement, as some research suggests, often do not include contentious politics (although they may assume some forms of outreach to the African American community) (Calhoun-Brown, 1999).

Pastor

Although McDaniel stresses repeatedly that focusing only on the pastor's role is misguided, he admits that pastors do have considerable power in directing their congregations. Therefore, he pays special attention to their position and motivations. He stresses that pastors play an important role in the process of churches' politicization, and that their attitudes toward politics (as well as leadership skills) matter, especially if they are charismatic and long-serving pastors. Pastors as representatives of religious institutions are often seen as members of the elite, and in 'political churches' they become members of the political elite (2008, p. 13). They often act as activists, bearing the direct costs of the politicization of their organization, as has happened more than once in African American history (2008, pp. 13–14). However, not all Black pastors choose to take on the role of political elite (2008, p. 98). Therefore, in an effort to answer the question of what influences pastors' decision, McDaniel creates a model in which he suggests taking into account internal, organizational and environmental factors.

36 Instead, he cites the example of Mason Temple and research suggesting that pentecostalism does not necessarily have a negative impact on Black empowerment and some social activities (Calhoun-Brown, 1999; Harris, 1999; McRoberts, 1999).

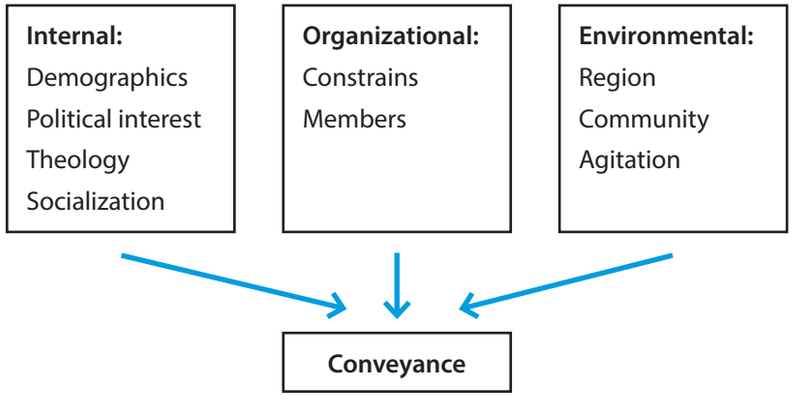

Fig. 2. Internal, organizational, and environmental determinants of conveyance. "Conveyance refers to a pastor's communication of a need for political engagement on the part of the church" (McDaniel, p. 98). Chart after: McDaniel (2008, p. 99).

The factors listed in the model, as the author points out, can additionally change over time. Among the internal determinants affecting the pastor's involvement are demographic factors (such as gender, education or age), political interest, theology and socialization. According to research, a higher level of the pastor's education may increase political involvement, while gender matters not so much for the level of involvement as for the choice of specific political topics (2008, pp. 99–100). Although pastor's attitude toward politics is crucial, it is important to remember that, according to McDaniel's model, it is ultimately very much limited by the opinions of congregation members (2008, p. 123). Socialization, in turn, plays an important role in that, as the researchers suggest, clergy who come from politically engaged congregations and who were born during a time of greater church activism will also be more engaged (2008, pp. 99–111).

Importantly, although McDaniel is generally against explaining political activism primarily through references to theology, and in particular against looking for reasons for pastors' lack of political engagement in conservative otherworldly theology, he does include theology as one of many constituent determinants influencing the pastor. He further notes that although pastors' decisions concerning politicization are influenced by many other factors mentioned above, it is theology that pastors prefer to cite (and possibly socialization) to justify their decision to enter the political elite (2008, p. 101). Moreover, research indicates that pastors who find religious justification for political involvement are more likely to become politically active through their churches. They find this justification, however, according to McDaniel, regardless of whether their theology is conservative or liberal. At the same time he notes, though, that in some cases theological conservatism may reduce the propensity to support group action, while liberation theology increases it (2008, p. 121). He also finds out that orthodoxy "significantly decreases political interest", while liberation theology has a positive effect. Nevertheless, in his opinion, "to conclude that orthodoxy is an opiate, as past scholars have, would ignore the complexity of the concept" (2008, p. 122).

Among the organizational factors influencing the pastor are congregational or denominational constrains, for example, regarding acceptable forms of involvement. While McDaniel notes that differences between historical African American denominations (e.g., between AME and CME or NBC USA and COGIC) have historically influenced different forms of political involvement or lack of it (2008, p. 100), he does not link this to theological differences among them. In discussing organizational factors, he pays more attention to the role of the members of a particular organization and their influence on the pastor. As he points out, there have been documented cases in history of pastors who wanted to remain neutral or active, but the members of the congregation had a different opinion and were able to force their pastors to change their positions (e.g., Chong 1991; Lee 2003; Charles Payne 1995, Ture and Hamilton 1967). The last group of factors influencing pastors are environmental ones. McDaniels lists among them the region, the type and size of the community and the forms of accepted agitation (as well as the economic, social and political-legal factors influencing it) (2008, pp. 100–101).

Church members

According to McDaniel, members of Black churches play a role similar to that of corporate stakeholders. They constitute the church's capital, but they provide not only financial resources, but also labor input. Therefore, the pastor must work with them – including to define the church's identity (2008, p. 15). McDaniel again cites research indicating the influence of church members on a pastor's decision to become politically active or neutral, as well as studies suggesting that Black churches were generally more politically active than white churches precisely because of congregants' support of activism (Harris, 1999). He emphasizes that regardless of who initiates the involvement, in order to create a 'political church', both sides must negotiate with each other on the issue (2008, p. 16).

However, whether the members of a particular church will be willing to form a political church and become politically active depends on factors similar to those that influence the pastor's decision. So among them are both internal, organizational and environmental factors. The internal ones include all the determinants that concerned pastors, i.e. demographics, political interest, theology and socialization. Among the organizational factors, McDaniel lists organizational constraints and the level of members' commitment. For environmental ones, the same elements that were important in motivating the pastors are again present: region, community and agitation.

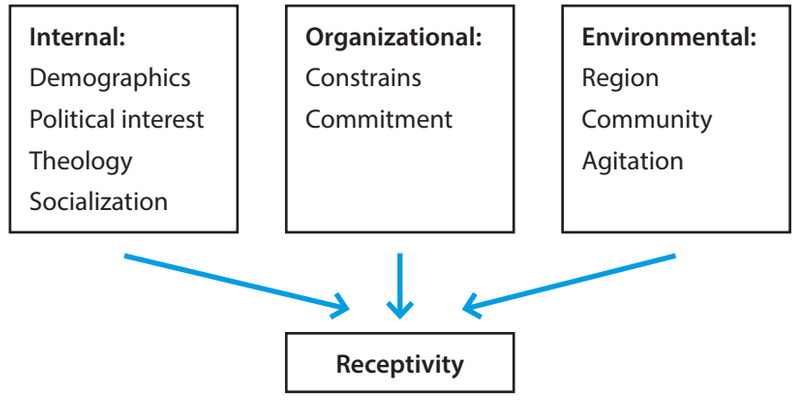

Fig. 3. Determinants of receptivity. After: McDaniel (2008, p. 128).

In discussing demographic factors, McDaniel again turns his attention to gender, education and income. What is important about gender this time, however, is that women tend to make up the majority of congregational members, but their roles in the congregation have historically been less significant. Therefore, the decision-making power of men and women in Black churches may be different. Higher levels of income and education, on the other hand, should influence congregants' greater involvement (2008, p. 127). According to McDaniel, members' attitudes toward politics and political interests are just as important as those of their pastor. Socialization and growing up in either activist or neutral churches also matter for later views on activism. Differences can be seen, moreover, among those born at a time when Black churches were active or when activism was negligible (2008, p. 128).

McDaniel again draws attention to theology, however – again only as one of many components influencing congregational members. He acknowledges that an internal interpretation of religious beliefs influences attitudes toward social activism. However, he reiterates that he disagrees with the thesis that higher religiosity or conservative religious beliefs should significantly reduce political involvement. He cites research suggesting that non-theological factors affect the degree of engagement much more than theology, as well as research indicating that otherworldliness and orthodoxy do not hinder racial empowerment (2008, p. 127)[37], and when combined with a commitment to the social gospel may even affect greater political engagement (2008, p. 143). He stresses, however, that in his view, theology is not the key element, as ethnic group interests are usually more important to African Americans than theology, and when their rights are violated, they turn to the church for political support (2008, p. 148).

Discussing organizational and environmental factors affecting church members, the author emphasizes that the institution is able to shape the level of commitment of members depending on the organizational structure and hierarchy (2008, p. 128). The socio-political environment, in turn, affects members similarly to how it affects the pastor (2008, p. 130). Thus, there may be differences between churches in urban and rural areas, and depending on the size of the community and its agitation (2008, p. 138). In conclusion, McDaniel emphasizes that pastors must meet the needs of their congregants. Church members usually allow pastors to become politically involved if they feel there is a need for it, and usually only after their spiritual needs are met. After all, the church is primarily a religious institution (2008, p. 12).

McDaniel's 2008 model is the most comprehensive model for analyzing the political mobilization of Black churches. First and foremost, it focuses on entire organizations that choose (or choose not to) transform themselves into so-called 'political churches.' Stressing that political activism of Black churches is a process rather than a condition, the author declares a departure from the 'opiate view' and the 'inspiration view' which were supposed to show which tendency dominates (although he seems to be slightly leaning toward the latter). He consistently shies away, however, from theological explanations that had previously been absolutized. Rather, he lists a number of factors, including the environment (legal-social-political, geographic and economic), the type of organization (its traditions and resources), and the relationship between the pastor and his congregants. Additionally, he distinguishes further sub-determinats that influence both the pastor and the members of the congregation, including internal and external ones, such as environment, organization, demographics, but also theology. McDaniel rightly argues for the combined consideration of all these elements that were previously either treated separately or neglected. While he does include theology as a sub-factor, he definitely departs from earlier findings on the impact of theological differences (especially in the context of the conservative-liberal divide) on political activism of Black churches. And although analyzing theology as one of the many determinants is a helpful approach, in 2008 McDaniel seemed to have been minimizing its role. He stressed that "[o]rthodoxy may not promote activism, but it does not necessarily completely stop activism" (2008, p. 122), but failed to give importance to the fact that while conservative theology does not prevent political mobilization, it can nevertheless influence its forms and levels (especially as the case of Pentecostal churches shows). When creating the 2008 model, McDaniel was right in his opposition to the traditional 'opiate view' (as numerous research proved that high religiosity, especially if connected to social gospel, it might boost social engagement). The choice of (the level of) social gospel is, however, also a theological choice – and not only at a personal pastoral level but also at the denominational level, which is downplayed in the 2008 model.

Summary and conclusions

The above analysis was aimed at presenting various forms of political involvement of African American churches within the limits of American democracy, which was first crippled by slavery and then by racism. It also discussed the debate taking place among researchers on the mechanisms of political mobilization of Black churches and on the factors that impact their political activism. The main research approaches and perspectives prevailing among researchers in different historical periods have been presented, and the comprehensive research model proposed by Eric L. McDaniel has been analyzed in their context.

In conclusion, it should be stated that differences of opinion on the causes of political mobilization of Black churches are usually determined by different research perspectives. Some authors, (following the lead of the precursors of the sociology of religion, such as M. Weber, E. Durkheim and K. Marx), pay attention to how beliefs and ideas affect the motivations of people and societies (including political and social)[38] . Some, therefore, place particular emphasis on the theological differences that exist in African American churches (Marx, 1967; Johnson, 1986; Johnstone, 1969). Others, especially proponents of social movement theory, tend to emphasize the role of resources or the type of leadership in minority communities and in their institutions, including religious ones (McAdams, 1982; Morris, 1984). Still others focus more on the external environment: the historical, socio-political and legal circumstances affecting whether religion may become politicized, how it can participate in political mobilization, and what influence it may have on state policy (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; McDaniel, 2008).

Some of these approaches have been favored more by sociologists or psychologists, others by political scientists or historians.[39] However, they do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive. In fact, there is considerable overlap between them and the research perspectives advocated in the political science

37 Including research by Calhoun-Brown (1999) who also admits that otherworldliness in Black churches does not predict support for typical civil activism, social protest or integrationist-oriented means to racial empowerment, although it can predict support for other forms of it.

38 For more on this topic: (Wald, Silverman and Fridy, 2005; Potz, 2019; 2020).

39 It should be noted, however, that most of the scholars working on the Black churches were sociologists and historians, only later joined by political scientists, represented, for example, by McDaniel.

of religion (Potz, 2019; Potz, 2020). The first is the so-called cultural/humanistic perspective, which "seeks to explain the relationship between religion and politics from the point of view of the individual" (Potz, 2019, p. 286). The second is the social movement theory perspective, which can be used to study "all manifestations of the use of mass mobilization by religious organizations for political purposes" (Potz, 2019, p. 284). And the last is the so-called transactional/economic perspective, through which it is possible to analyze how "religious actors interact with other actors within a specific legal and institutional order" (Potz, 2019, p. 289). According to this proposal, they are useful at different levels of analysis: the first at the micro (individual) level, the second at the mezzo level, where an organization is analyzed by looking inside it and studying the mechanisms of communication within it, its resources or other elements that affect its mobilization potential, and the third at the macro level – in the context of a religious organization's competition in the political marketplace of ideas (ibid.). Although, in the author's opinion, integrating of all perspectives would be best, this is usually impossible at the level of a single researcher (ibid.).

Interestingly however, although McDaniel's model is mainly concerned with the mezzo level, i.e. the factors that influence the mobilization potential of a religious organization, and largely reflects the approach of social movement theory, it also integrates elements of the other two perspectives. Indeed, if one were to expand the section on the environment/circumstances of Black churches and consider not only what in this environment influences their mobilization, but also to analyze to a greater extent their interactions with other political actors, public authorities, political parties and social movements, as well as the rivalry of Black churches among themselves, the transactional perspective could work here[40]. Admittedly, McDaniel's analysis of the environment tends to be one of the pillars of social movement theory, specifically the political opportunity structure, but nevertheless this element can also bridge the gap between social movement theory and the economic approach (Potz, 2019, p. 286).

Elements of a cultural perspective are also present in McDaniel's proposed model, especially when considering the influence of theology on the decisions of the pastor and congregation members. Although in his scheme, the contributions of the pastor and congregation members are seen more as part of organizational resources, and according to other theories of social movements, the beliefs of the pastor and congregation members (as well as their political interests) would constitute more of a level of motives influencing mobilization (Wald, Silverman and Fridy, 2005), there is no doubt that theology does influence individuals. And while McDaniel downplays the influence of theology on the church's decision to mobilize politically, it remains a component that motivates at least two basic elements of his model (the pastor and the members). Therefore, elements of the cultural perspective are present here, notwithstanding McDaniel's criticism of earlier scholars for focusing primarily on it.

According to McDaniel, the church's resources, its organizational structure and the influence of the environment are more important than theology. His take seems to suggest that it is external factors that influence the choice of theological interpretation. As he points out, although both members of Black churches and their pastors often give theological arguments supporting their decision to become politically involved, political interests prevail over theology. Other studies seem to confirm that theology is more of a cultural resource with which believers can both justify activism and its absence (McRoberts, 1999). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that once a certain choice is made, the selected theological interpretation will influence not only subsequent members socialized in a particular church, but also the institution itself as well as its tradition (the importance of which McDaniel emphasizes).

For McDaniel, it is important to point out that the 'opiate view' and the blaming of conservative theology for the churches' political neutrality is too simplistic (2008, p. 122). Indeed, many studies indicate that, unlike in white conservative churches, in African American churches it is possible for conservative theology focused on individual salvation to coexist with elements of the social gospel, so that conservatism does not have a diminishing effect on activism. However, if it does not coalesce with the social gospel or the so-called Black theology, the situation may be different. And although even Black Pentecostal churches, which place the least emphasis on the social gospel, do not abandon all forms of social activity, the forms of their involvement may be different than in liberal churches (as well as political topics of recognized importance)[41] .

Interestingly, as an analysis of McDaniel's more recent works (2018) indicates, he will place more emphasis on theological divisions over time, especially on those related to Black churches' commitment to social gospel, Black liberation theology or prosperity gospel, noting that the latter will undermine racial solidarity and commitment to structural reforms and social justice (McDaniel et al., 2018). By taking these issues into account, he will thus appreciate the cultural perspective, which he previously placed the least emphasis on.

40 One would still have to take into account that Black churches are a specific type of ethnic organization.

41 It is worth noting that in the case of white churches since the 1970s, when the Religious Right arose, conservative theology (*otherworldly*) does not preclude political involvement either. The topics of political struggle, however, are moral issues, not social justice reforms. Conservative Black churches, on the other hand, even the most orthodox ones, do not deny reform altogether, but also focus more on moral issues (although this very rarely involves the support of conservative politicians from the Republican Party).

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Mobilizacja polityczna Kościołów afroamerykańskich: formy, modele, mechanizmy

Abstrakt

Kościoły afroamerykańskie słyną ze swego zaangażowania politycznego i działań na rzecz własnej grupy etnicznej w warunkach amerykańskiej demokracji. Jednak choć część z nich mocno angażowała się w różne formy działalności politycznej, inne od polityki stroniły, koncentrując się głównie na sprawach ducha. W niniejszym artykule przedstawię genezę i różne formy zaangażowania czarnych Kościołów, ale przede wszystkim zanalizuję debatę dotyczą mechanizmów ich mobilizacji politycznej, starając się odpowiedzieć na pytanie o kluczowe czynniki, wpływające, zdaniem badaczy, na ich aktywizację. Uwzględnione zostaną odmienne perspektywy badawcze, a szczególna uwaga poświęcona zostanie kompleksowemu modelowi autorstwa Erica L. McDaniela.

Słowa kluczowe: Kościoły afroamerykańskie, czarne Kościoły, mobilizacja polityczna, religia i polityka, 'polityzacja Kościoła, Kościoły etniczne.