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Understanding the “New” Black Pentecostal Activism: Lessons From Ecumenical Urban Ministries in Boston

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Abstract

Previous studies argue that theologically conservative churches are least likely to engage in political and social activism. Other studies assume that if such churches did act, their involvement would be limited to politically conservative causes, such as the New Religious Right. In recent decades, however, *black* Pentecostal churches have become increasingly activist, and have joined and established local community efforts previously dominated by the religious mainline. This paper seeks to understand the contradiction between theory and recent trends. Using in-depth interviews with activist pastors, I develop an explanation of why *black* Pentecostal churches have become politically and socially active. This explanation emphasizes: a) the influence of the civil rights/*black* power movement on the third generation of *black* Pentecostal clergy, b) the transformation of Pentecostalism from a relatively small sect into a major faith community, and c) the flexibility of Pentecostal ideas in the hands of innovative and entrepreneurial clerics.

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