

ESSAY ROUNDTABLE

John Lewis and the Durability of Transcendent Race Politics

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Abstract

John Lewis's civil rights activism in the 1960s often obscures the fact that he won elective office as a racially moderate politician. Scholars have long noted the efficacy of using deracialized, or racially transcendent, campaign strategies to get elected, despite normative concerns. These strategies were critical to electing Black governors, senators, and even President Obama. However, in the age of Black Lives Matter, some have questioned the continued usefulness of the strategy. Using Rep. Lewis's life as a guide, I examine the ways that some Black politicians continue to use deracialization, even in this racially charged social and political moment, and I explain how younger cohorts of Black politicians challenge this approach. Ultimately, I argue that while deracialization is a contested strategy, its efficacy has not diminished. Rather, Black politicians have expanded the boundaries of what constitutes racially transcendent politics to include consensus issues like voting rights, which while highly racialized, are not likely to induce an erosion of support among non-Black Democratic voters.

Keywords: African American politics; deracialization; voting rights; campaigns and elections

Introduction

About six weeks before he died of pancreatic cancer, Congressman John Lewis traveled to Black Lives Matter Plaza near the White House to meet with some of the young people who had gathered to protest systemic racism and police violence in the wake of George Floyd's murder. In addition to meeting with protesters, Lewis took a now-iconic photograph with Washington, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser.¹ In posing together, Lewis and Bowser embodied the links between the twentieth-century activism of Blacks in the Greatest, Silent, and Baby Boom generations and the twenty-first-century activism of Millennials and Generations X and Z. Indeed, that photo symbolized the passing of the torch from one generation of Black leaders to another.

Lewis was well aware of his role as elder statesman and torch passer when he posed with Bowser. He referenced that visit to Black Lives Matter Plaza when he wrote his last op-ed piece, a letter that was published in the *New York Times* shortly after his death.² Lewis's purpose in penning that op-ed was to express solidarity with the new generation of activists but also to provide advice. The scars he bore as a result of his involvement in the 1960s protests had given him the credibility to counsel today's young activists, some of whom had been chided by other, older Black civil rights leaders for their hardball tactics.³ By

¹ "Rep. John Lewis Tours 'Black Lives Matter Plaza' with DC Mayor," Fox 5 Atlanta, June 7, 2020, <https://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/rep-john-lewis-tours-black-lives-matter-plaza-with-dc-mayor>.

² John Lewis, "Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation," *New York Times*, July 30, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/opinion/john-lewis-civil-rights-america.html>.

³ Richard Halicks, "Andrew Young Apologizes for 'Unlovable Little Brats' Remark," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, July 13, 2016, <https://www.ajc.com/news/local/andrew-young-apologizes-for-unlovable-little-brats-remark/koBWzSwV88DlTLW9XRQ500/>.



taking an encouraging tone, Lewis hoped to affirm the young activists while gently steering them in the direction of constructive action.⁴

To some, Lewis's final affirmation and exhortation may seem contradictory. However, in life and in death, Lewis provided a model of when and how to emphasize race. In what follows, I use Lewis to help contextualize the evolution of Black political style and to predict what his example portends for future generations of Black politicians as they seek to balance their obligation to address racial inequality while trying to build broad-based, multiracial electoral coalitions.

Historical Context

In order to understand Lewis, his electoral peers, and his heirs, it is important to understand the evolution of Black politicians' campaign and governance styles over time. Before the civil rights movement, factors such as Black disenfranchisement and residential segregation severely limited the number of Black elected officials. After the passage of the Voting Rights Act, though, many Blacks took Bayard Rustin's call to move "from protest to politics" seriously, taking advantage of the franchise and running for office in previously unprecedented numbers.⁵

In earlier work, I identify three cohorts of Black elected officials who have been elected in various waves since the passage of the Voting Rights Act.⁶ Since then, a fourth cohort of Black elected officials has emerged—one that has risen to national prominence in the tumultuous racial climate of the late- and post-Obama years. The first wave of Black elected officials was elected in the immediate aftermath of the long civil rights movement, from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. They were notable because of the notoriety of their often being the first Black officials elected in their jurisdictions and because of the centrality of civil rights issues in many of their campaigns. The focus on civil rights was a logical application of Rustin's exhortation to use formal politics to build upon the achievements of direct action. The challenge of being first and of giving legislative voice to civil rights issues in a still racially charged environment, though, meant that these trailblazing Black politicians were often pigeonholed, either by white flight, which left their jurisdictions overwhelmingly Black, or by the popular perception that they only cared about and could give voice to "Black" issues. This misperception would make it difficult for Black candidates to successfully run for statewide and national office, or for office in jurisdictions where the majority of voters were not Black.⁷

Though Lewis was a veteran of the civil rights movement, electorally, he was part of the second wave of Black politicians, who came to political office from, roughly, the 1980s to the 1990s. This cohort of politicians attempted to broaden their appeal using a technique that political scientists call deracialization. When Black candidates deracialize, they frame civil rights issues in broad, utilitarian terms, emphasizing how their proposals will help all constituents, not just Blacks. They also adopt a self-presentation style that seeks to counter stereotypes about Blacks being aggressive, threatening, and controlled by the liberal civil rights lobby. Finally, deracialized candidates attempt to avoid optics that would suggest that they intend to focus solely on Black constituents and issues, like not appearing at events populated by mostly Black crowds.⁸ Black politicians deracialized as early as the mid-1970s (Tom Bradley of Los Angeles is an example), but deracialization as a strategy really came into

⁴ Lewis, "Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation."

⁵ Bayard Rustin, "From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement," *Commentary*, February 1965, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/bayard-rustin-2/from-protest-to-politics-the-future-of-the-civil-rights-movement/>.

⁶ Andra Gillespie, "Meet the New Class: Theorizing Young Black Leadership in the 'Post-racial' Era," in *Whose Black Politics? Cases in Post-racial Black Leadership*, ed. Andra Gillespie (New York: Routledge, 2010), 9–42.

⁷ Gillespie, "Meet the New Class."

⁸ Charles Hamilton, "Deracialization: Examination of a Political Strategy," *First World* (March–April 1977): 3–5; Joseph McCormick II and Charles E. Jones, "The Conceptualization of Deracialization: Thinking through the

vogue by the late 1980s, when a critical mass of Black candidates won historic first offices in mostly non-Black jurisdictions around the country using the technique. In addition to the mayoral successes of candidates like Norm Rice in Seattle, Kurt Schmoke in Baltimore, and Wellington Webb in Denver, the 1989 elections of David Dinkins as mayor of New York City and Doug Wilder as governor of Virginia marked a turning point in American politics, with Black candidates winning high-profile elected offices (often in majority-white jurisdictions) with higher levels of white support than previous Black office seekers had achieved.⁹

I place Lewis in the second wave for two reasons. He did not win elective office until the 1980s, winning election first to the Atlanta City Council in 1981 and then to Congress in 1986. To win his congressional seat, Lewis ran against Julian Bond, his former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) colleague. In that contest, Bond, who infamously had been barred from taking his duly elected seat as a representative in the Georgia House of Representatives for endorsing SNCC's opposition to the Vietnam War,¹⁰ was framed as the more racially charged candidate. Lewis, despite having equally sterling civil rights movement credentials, positioned himself as the more moderate candidate, and used that reputation to forge a narrow victory. Bond won the majority of the Black vote, but Lewis forged a multiracial coalition of a sizable minority of Blacks and the vast majority of white voters in the district.¹¹

Lewis no doubt capitalized on his association with the less militant wing of the long civil rights movement, which by the 1980s had, intentionally or inadvertently, become associated with a sanitized myth of a beatified Martin Luther King, Jr.—a vision that ignores how controversial he was in life and overlooks his decreasing popularity in the last years of his life. In Lewis, Black voters could have the cachet of electing a civil rights legend, while white voters could associate their votes with the movement without acknowledging the more difficult demands that emanated from those protests that were yet to be achieved. Lewis was, then, a bridge candidate who was able to appeal to different constituencies on different dimensions and maintain his popularity throughout his nearly forty-year career as an elected official. This demonstrates the undergirding strategy behind deracialization—that practitioners are expected to maintain strong Black support while maximizing non-Black (particularly white) support by not alienating outsiders.¹²

To be sure, deracialization is a controversial strategy. Critics express normative concerns about candidates not openly advocating for Black interests. They worry about the implicit bargain that Black candidates make with their non-Black supporters by not talking about race, arguing that if elected, non-Black supporters will punish previously deracialized Black candidates when they forcefully address racial issues. Newer scholarship also raises concerns with Black politicians reinforcing racist tropes about Blackness and respectability in an attempt to curry non-Black support, though scholars are more likely to raise this concern about third-wave politicians than with the previous cohorts of Black politicians.¹³

Dilemma," in *Dilemmas of Black Politics: Issues of Leadership and Strategy*, ed. Georgia Persons (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 66–84.

⁹ Gillespie, "Meet the New Class."

¹⁰ See L. H. B., Jr. and A. S. C., "The Julian Bond Case," *Virginia Law Review*, 52, no. 7 (1966): 1309–35. Bond sued to be seated. Ultimately, the US Supreme Court ruled in his favor in *Bond v. Floyd*, 385 U.S. 116 (1966).

¹¹ Dudley Clendinen, "Ex-Colleague Upsets Julian Bond in Atlanta Congressional Runoff," *New York Times*, September 3, 1986, A16.

¹² Robert Albritton, George Amedee, Keenan Grenell, and Don-Terry Veal, "Deracialization and the New Black Politics," in *Race, Politics, and Governance in the United States*, ed. Huey L. Perry (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 179–92.

¹³ McCormick and Jones, "The Conceptualization of Deracialization"; Andra Gillespie, *The New Black Politician: Cory Booker, Newark and Post-racial America* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 66n28–29; LaFleur Stephens-Dougan, *Race to the Bottom: How Racial Appeals Work in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

The third wave of Black politicians emerged in (roughly) the late 1990s to late 2000s and includes politicians like Barack Obama. This cohort is largely made up of late Baby Boom and Generation X politicians who came of age after the twentieth-century civil rights movement. As a result, they did not have the same opportunities to burnish movement credentials in the way that John Lewis did. (Many of these politicians were born in the 1970s and would have been too young to have participated in the anti-apartheid protests on college campuses in the 1980s.) They are similar to John Lewis, though, in that many of them embraced deracialization as a campaign strategy. Many were also influenced by Bill Clinton's pragmatic posture, leading them to adopt neoliberal policy positions such as support for public-private partnerships in economic development or education (school vouchers and charter schools would be an example of such a partnership). Unless they were running for statewide or national office, they were less likely to be the first Black to run for their seats. This often meant that when they ran for office, they challenged Black incumbents from the first two waves.¹⁴

The fourth wave is still emerging, but some identifiable characteristics of this group are starting to crystallize. Its members can be classified as members of Generation X and Millennials who started running for office in the 2010s. As Generation Z comes of age, they will be part of this leadership cohort, too. They have been socialized politically by Black Lives Matter and by the surge in overt white supremacist activity hastened by the Trump Administration's caustic racial rhetoric. Because of the rise of Black Lives Matter, some officials, such as Congresswoman Cori Bush, bring their own activist bona fides to bear. Indeed, in rhetoric and style, this cohort more closely resembles the first post-civil rights wave of Black elected officials, bringing confrontational postures into legislative discussions. They also very self-consciously emphasize race and racial issues in the policies they champion, unlike the second- and third-wave politicians. In contrast to the third wave, fourth-wave Black politicians are also less likely to embrace pragmatism or neoliberalism, leveraging the Democratic Party's leftward shift on cultural and economic issues to take more progressive or even radical policy positions. Like the third wave, though, they do not shy away from challenging older Black incumbents to win political office.

It is important to recognize that all four types of Black politicians coexist in the same legislative spaces. While the historic first politicians of the initial post-civil rights cohort have largely retired or passed away, the youngest members of that wave, such as Congresswoman Maxine Waters, continue to carry the activist mantle. Despite the normative concerns with deracialization, politicians in waves two and three continue to use the strategy, whether we are talking about second-wave politicians like Georgia Congressman Sanford Bishop or the statewide and national officeholders of the third wave. In particular, if we look at the handful of Black Democratic governors, senators, and national executive branch officers, who started running for office before 2010 (such as Deval Patrick, Cory Booker, Kamala Harris, and Barack Obama), they all employed some version of deracialization to get elected.

Is Deracialization Dead? The Future of Transcending Racial Strategies

Despite the journalistic pronouncement that Barack Obama's election as president ushered in a postracial age,¹⁵ America still clearly struggles with its original sin of racism. Because of his age and activism, Lewis was able to speak forcefully about racism, though he was always optimistic about the possibility of achieving racial justice. Third-wave Black politicians often imitated his optimism, though their lack of connection to the long twentieth-century civil rights movement, their challenging other Black politicians for elected office,

¹⁴ See Gillespie, "Meet the New Class"; Gillespie, *The New Black Politician*. For example, Muriel Bowser became mayor of Washington, DC, after defeating a Black incumbent, Vincent Gray.

¹⁵ See, for example, Daniel Schorr, "A New, 'Post-racial' Political Era in America," *NPR*, January 28, 2008, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18489466>.

and their embrace of neoliberal politics often elicited suspicion.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that even deracialized Black Democrats publicly acknowledge the pervasiveness of racism in American society and politics—and were doing so even in the 2000s. For instance, in his 2006 book, *The Audacity of Hope*, Barack Obama noted racism’s continued salience when he stated that “when I hear commentators interpreting my [2004 Democratic National Convention] speech to mean that we have arrived at a ‘postracial politics’ or that we already live in a color-blind society, I have to offer a word of caution.”¹⁷

This cognizance can help to explain how Black politicians, regardless of whether they ever used deracialization or not, have met the increasingly volatile racial moment of the last decade. As I noted elsewhere, while respondents to Gallup polls had long mentioned race as an important issue, it reemerged as a top five issue of concern in 2015, as Black Lives Matter was organizing in the wake of the deaths of unarmed Blacks like Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, and Freddie Gray.¹⁸ Between the emergence of Black Lives Matter as a social movement in response to continued police killings of unarmed Blacks and other forms of systemic inequality; the election of Donald Trump, who never shied away from making overtly racial appeals to mobilize his base; and the debate about voter suppression and voting rights, racial concerns are increasingly recognized as among the most important issues facing America today.

The undeniable salience of race is giving Black politicians of many stripes political cover to address race and racism directly. The existential issues of police brutality and voting rights necessitate this type of advocacy from Black politicians, particularly those for whom Blackness is a strong political identity.¹⁹ As such, even those who were previously reticent about racial issues have become more vocal. I contend, though, that they still employ deracialization when it is electorally advantageous for them to do so.

Recent Black candidacies in Georgia exemplify this point. In 2018, Stacey Abrams made history as the first Black woman to be nominated by a major party for governor. Abrams was not the only Black gubernatorial candidate that year; her counterparts included Andrew Gillum in Florida and Ben Jealous in Maryland. Political scientist Melanye Price heralded these candidates and others for their explicit progressivism and for confronting race head on.²⁰ Their decidedly liberal policy positions notwithstanding, though, I contend that they simultaneously can be progressive and deracialized. For instance, a supporter of single-

¹⁶ Gillespie, *The New Black Politician*.

¹⁷ Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* (New York: Crown, 2006), 232.

¹⁸ Andra Gillespie, *Race and the Obama Administration: Substance, Symbols and Hope* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 15–16.

¹⁹ There are decades of data that corroborate the widespread prevalence of linked fate in Black communities. See Michael Dawson, *Behind the Mule* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994). That is, majorities of African Americans report believing that whatever happens to other Blacks affects them. In a related vein, newer work corroborates Blacks ascribing to high levels of intraracial group consciousness, or the recognition that being Black is politically important to them. See Tasha Philpot, *Conservative but Not Republican* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018). High levels of group consciousness and linked fate help to explain why most Blacks tend to vote Democratic and why class is not a good predictor of Blacks’ policy positions on economic issues such as social welfare spending. See Dawson, *Behind the Mule*. Given the high prevalence of linked fate and group consciousness, it is very likely that most Black Democratic elected officials, whether or not they choose to deracialize, have high levels of linked fate. Many of them were socialized in Black communities that reinforce the importance of making political decisions with racial group considerations at the forefront. And if their policy proposals deviate from the consensus about what Black interests are, there is often social pressure to reconsider their policy positions. Melissa Harris-Lacewell, *Bibles, Barbershops and BET* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Ismail White and Chryl Laird, *Steadfast Democrats: How Social Forces Shape Black Political Behavior* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). Furthermore, experimental evidence suggests that Black voters would penalize Black candidates whose policy views fall outside of the ideological mainstream. See Kevin Sparrow, “Racial or Spatial Voting: How African Americans Balance the Tradeoff between Ideological Congruence and Co-racial Representation,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists, March 2021 (virtual).

²⁰ Melanye Price, “Ayanna Pressley and the Might of the Black Political Left,” *New York Times*, September 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/05/opinion/ayanna-pressley-massachusetts.html>.

payer health care could defend it as a way to advance the health care of all constituents without highlighting racial health disparities that widely available health care could ameliorate. To take such a position would qualify as deracialization.

Stacey Abrams deftly combined progressive and racialized politics with strategic pragmatism and transcendent appeals. Take immigration as an example. Whereas Andrew Gillum was a vocal supporter of eliminating Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Abrams took a different approach to immigration, expressing support for immigrants and criticizing the 287(g) Program (which allows federal agents to interview arrestees in municipal custody and determine their immigration status), but not explicitly calling for the abolition of the agency. Indeed, despite what the national narrative said about Abrams's progressivism in 2018, those who worked with her in the Georgia State legislature remember her as pragmatic and able to build consensus across party (and implicitly racial) lines.²¹ Moreover, throughout her campaign, Abrams took positive steps to cultivate a broad-based appeal without denying her Blackness. For instance, her ad "We Are Georgia" depicted Georgians of all ages and backgrounds uniting in support of her candidacy.²² She is careful to include whites in her ad and to namecheck or claim unlikely types of supporters, including Republicans. The most surprising type of Georgian to identify as an Abrams supporter in this ad was a man who mentioned support for the Second Amendment. This was clearly a play to reach out beyond typical Democratic constituencies, to buttress her multiracial coalition, and to present herself in a counter-stereotypical fashion.

Two years later, when Raphael Warnock ran for the US Senate, he adopted a similar strategy to disarm non-Black voters. In his 2020–2021 campaign, Warnock released a series of ads explicitly intended to neutralize any attempt that his opponent might make to cast him as threatening. While the Republican nominee, Kelly Loeffler, tried to besmirch Warnock as an acolyte of Rev. Jeremiah Wright, whose controversial and highly racialized sermons nearly upended Barack Obama's presidential campaign,²³ Warnock campaigned with Christmas lights and, in a series of ads, a beagle named Alvin. According to reports from the *New York Times*, the choice of the beagle (who is not Warnock's actual dog) was deliberate and designed to make him appear less threatening.²⁴

Both Abrams and Warnock are known for their leadership in the New Georgia Project, a nonprofit organization that has registered hundreds of thousands of voters in Georgia. And Warnock's association with Martin Luther King, Jr. (he is pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, a church that Rev. King served) would further solidify his association with voting rights, one of the key successes of the long civil rights movement. I contend that their embrace of a "mainstream" civil rights issue such as voting rights gives them license to transcend race while advocating for a highly racialized issue. Cathy Cohen notes the difference between "consensus" and "cross-cutting" issues in *The Boundaries of Blackness*.²⁵ Consensus issues are framed as affecting all Blacks, while cross-cutting issues affect only a subset of the Black community. If the subgroup affected by a cross-cutting issue is not marginalized within the Black community, civil rights and elected leaders will be more likely to champion their cause. However, if the subgroup is marginalized or controversial, leaders are more likely to

²¹ Price, "Ayanna Pressley and the Might of the Black Political Left"; "Does Georgia Democrat Stacey Abrams Support Radical Abolish ICE Movement? She Owes Voters Answers," Republican Governors' Association News, September 10, 2018, <https://www.rga.org/georgia-democrat-stacey-abrams-support-radical-abolish-ice-movement-owes-voters-answers/>; Bill Barrow, "Stacey Abrams' Record Complicates 'Radical' Label from GOP," Associated Press, August 20, 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/73a6439465d04d14883f46d29277a3ba>.

²² Stacey Abrams for Governor, "We Are Georgia" (campaign advertisement), October 17, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RtC7psghco>.

²³ See Kelly Loeffler, "A Radical's Radical," Facebook, November 12, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/KellyLoefflerGA/videos/a-radicals-radical/372510793801309/>.

²⁴ Shane Goldmacher, "How Alvin the Beagle Helped Usher in a Democratic Senate," *New York Times*, January 23, 2021, A1.

²⁵ Cathy Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

ignore their concerns and focus on issues that have wide appeal across the Black community.²⁶

While the challenge to voting rights is real and reflects a fearful perception of Black political ascendance, it is the quintessential consensus issue for Blacks and their political allies. For instance, in a recent survey by Pew, when respondents were asked whether voting was a fundamental right that should not be restricted or a privilege that came with responsibilities and potential limits, 81 percent of white Democrats, 80 percent of Black Democrats, 70 percent of Hispanic Democrats, and 75 percent of Asian American Democrats responded that voting was a fundamental right.²⁷ As such, while it is difficult to deemphasize race when advocating for the franchise, voting rights is actually a pretty safe cause to champion, and one that many would expect any Black (Democratic) lawmaker to embrace.

Carrying Lewis's Legacy Forward

What does this have to do with John Lewis? He was able to leverage his activist credentials from the 1960s, along with his clear association with the nonviolent wing of the civil rights movement, to win over moderate, white voters while maintaining credibility among Black voters. This is the hallmark of the deracialization strategy, as it works best when a transcendent Black candidate maintains high levels of Black support while growing their non-Black base of support.²⁸

Lewis was part of a generational cohort of Black politicians who were unlikely to attempt to run for statewide or national office,²⁹ but younger politicians have been more likely to attempt to run for higher office. Those who have been successful so far in this endeavor have done so by using racially transcendent strategies. This speaks to the endurance of deracialization as a strategy. That said, candidates do not employ deracialization in a vacuum, ignorant of the increased salience of racial issues in America today. They are responding to this charged moment by not ignoring race, but they are being selective about what racial issues they embrace and how they embrace them.³⁰ Fifteen years ago, a deracialized Black candidate would never have made voting rights a centerpiece of their campaign. However, in a post-*Shelby*³¹ America, where Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act is inoperable, allowing states like Georgia and Texas, among others, to pass changes to voting laws that would have likely not passed preclearance, even the most racially moderate Black candidate can safely register their dissent without losing the support of non-Black Democratic voters.

In this environment, the boundary for what is racialized and what is deracialized has shifted, reflecting Christopher Stout's assertion that some forms of racialization are positive and can help Black candidates win support from white voters.³² Whereas McCormick and Jones defined deracialization as the near absence of public racial appeals,³³ in a post-Trump, post-*Shelby* world, such rigidity is untenable. Instead, I contend that right now, Black candidates who embrace consensus Black issues like protecting voting rights but are otherwise transcendent can still be classified as deracialized. Today, issues like defunding or abolishing police departments, where the extant public opinion data points

²⁶ Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness*, 11–15.

²⁷ Vianney Gomez and Carroll Doherty, "Wide Partisan Divide on Whether Voting Is a Fundamental Right or a Privilege with Responsibilities, Pew Research Center, July 22, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/07/22/wide-partisan-divide-on-whether-voting-is-a-fundamental-right-or-a-privilege-with-responsibilities/>.

²⁸ See Albritton et al., "Deracialization."

²⁹ Alan S. Gerber, "African Americans' Congressional Careers and the Democratic House Delegation," *Journal of Politics* 58, no. 3 (1996): 831–45.

³⁰ Gillespie, *Race and the Obama Administration*, 200–05.

³¹ *Shelby County v. Holder*, 570 U.S. 529 (2013).

³² Christopher Stout, *Bringing Race Back In: Black Politicians, Deracialization, and Voting Behavior in the Age of Obama* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

³³ McCormick and Jones, "The Conceptualization of Deracialization."

to heterogeneity of thought on the issue, reflect the more relevant fault lines.³⁴ Racialized Black politicians will more readily embrace the more radical policy prescriptions, while their more deracialized counterparts will engage the question in policy deliberations, but fall short of supporting the most radical proposals.

John Lewis did not live long enough to publically express a viewpoint on “defund the police” proposals, though his friend Jim Clyburn does say that Lewis opposed defunding the police.³⁵ However, his final written words evince his commitment to bridge building and his exhortation to future generations to pursue nonviolence, to seek multiracial coalitions, and to solicit advice from previous generations of activists.³⁶ Fourth-wave Black politicians will be encouraged by Lewis’s explicit endorsement of the Black Lives Matter protests, while their third-wave counterparts will take heart in Lewis’s conciliatory tactical advice. In any case, these politicians will work together, alongside their first and second wave colleagues, reflecting the wonderful diversity of Black political leadership that often gets obscured because they are nearly all Democrats. That Lewis can inspire them all is a credit to his legacy. He will likely remain a political inspiration to countless legislators and political aspirants for years to come.

³⁴ Michael J. Fortner, “Reconstructing Justice: Race, Generational Divides, and the Fight Over ‘Defund the Police,’” Niskanen Center, October 2020, <https://www.niskanencenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Reconstructing-Justice-Final.pdf>.

³⁵ “James Clyburn Says He and John Lewis Feared ‘Defund the Police’ Would Undermine Black Lives Matter Movement,” *CBS News*, November 9, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/james-clyburn-john-lewis-defund-the-police-messages-black-lives-matter/>.

³⁶ Lewis, “Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation.”