African-American Participation in Mainstream Greater Richmond Voluntary Organizations: A Report From The Field

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Dr. Kingman Brewster, former President of Yale University, in his introductory remarks to Carl Milofsky's edited volume *Community Organizations: Studies in Resource Mobilization and Exchange* (1988:ix) noted:

> The United States relies more heavily than any other country on the voluntary non-profit sector to conduct that nation's social, cultural, and economic business—to bring us into the world, to educate and entertain us, even to bury us. Indeed, the United States can be distinguished from all other societies by virtue of the work load it assigns to its "third sector," as compared to business firms or government agencies. Yet this non-profit universe has been the least well studied, the least well understood aspect of our national life.

Brewster's general remarks about our relative ignorance of "third sector" organizations and volunteerism apply with particular force to our lack of cognizance of the level of African-American participation in mainstream Greater Richmond voluntary organizations. This woeful state of ignorance is especially significant in view of the fact that Richmond, Virginia has a population which is approximately fifty percent of African-American heritage and this population category constitutes approximately twenty-five percent of the citizenry of the Richmond metropolitan area.

FOCUS OF THIS RESEARCH

The primary purpose of this study was to assess the extent of involvement of African-American citizens in the ten following prominent "third sector" groups functioning in the Greater Richmond area: (1) American Cancer Society; (2) American Heart Association; (3) American Lung Association; (4) American Red Cross; (5) Big Brothers/Big Sisters; (6) Easter Seal Society; (7) March of Dimes; (8) Virginia League of Planned Parenthood; (9) Salvation Army; and, (10) Meals on Wheels.

By way of learning contrast, a secondary facet of this inquiry was to gain some familiarity with the organizational nature and activities of the Richmond chapters of the volunteer community-centered Concerned Black Men, and the Continental Societies, the latter composed exclusively of females. The membership of each of these organizations is exclusively African-American and both are involved in volunteer self-help efforts specifically centered on the African-American community.

METHODOLOGY

A semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix A) was developed as a research tool to ascertain the involvement of African-Americans in mainstream voluntary organizations. A letter was forwarded in the Summer of 1990 to the Executive Director of each organization requesting an on-site personal interview. This was followed by a telephone call in order to arrange an appropriate time and place to conduct the interview. Although each of the executive directors (ultimately in several instances more than one telephone request was needed) agreed to be interviewed,

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several subsequently stressed at the time of the interview their desire to complete the interview schedule in writing at a later date and forward it to the investigator. It was clear that several of the executive directors displayed some measure of uneasiness concerning being queried about the subject matter. Finally, despite repeated requests, the Executive Director of one organization, Meals on Wheels, failed to provide most of the requested information.

The questionnaire administered to the executive directors of each of the mainstream voluntary organizations addressed a number of facets involving African-American participation in these groups including: Does the organization have a formal or informal policy promoting African-American participation? How many African-Americans volunteer their time to the organization? Has this number increased during the period 1980-1990? How many African-Americans are employed on your staff? What percentage of your voting membership is African-American? Concerning your Board of Directors, how many are African-American? What percentage of the leadership positions of the Board of Directors is held by African-Americans? Does your organization specifically "target" programs for the African-American community? Has your organization made a deliberate effort to increase African-American voluntary participation in your organization? What steps? How successful were these efforts? Do you feel that your organization is satisfactorily answering the needs of the African-American community?

In addition, informal interviews were conducted with a representative of the Concerned Black Men, and with a spokeswoman of the Continental Societies to gain some familiarity with the organizational nature, membership, and activities of these African-American organizations. These organizations, whose members are largely drawn from the professional strata of the African-American community, have enjoyed a long record of service in the Richmond region.

GENERAL FINDINGS: VOLUNTARY MAINSTREAM ORGANIZATIONS

As is demonstrated in the following section of this report, findings pertaining to the extent of African-American involvement in each of the mainstream voluntary organizations is somewhat specific for each organization. Nevertheless, bearing this qualification in mind, a broad generalizations may be advanced concerning African American involvement in these organizations. These generalizations include: (1) African-American involvement in these organizations is generally less than their proportionate share of the citizens in the area; (2) most organizations have adopted a policy, either formal or informal, seeking to enhance African-American involvement in their organization; (3) organizations have generally made use of mass media, mailing lists, churches, and personal referrals to increase African-American involvement in their organization; (4) most organizations reported that African-American involvement has increased in their organization over the past decade; (5) most significantly, the example of African-Americans on staff serves to enhance African-American volunteerism in these organizations; and, (6) finally, African-American involvement in these organizations is hindered by their often low visibility in the African-American community, due to economic constraints felt by many African-Americans which serve to restrain volunteer efforts, and the perception of many African Americans that members of their ethnic group do not participate in the decision making of these organizations.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS: VOLUNTARY MAINSTREAM ORGANIZATION

Following below are some specific findings concerning the extent and level of African-American involvement in voluntary mainstream organizations. It should be emphasized that because these organizations generally do not maintain records according to race the resulting data, in many cases, is based upon informed estimates. Nevertheless, this estimated data

provides us with an understanding of the extent of African-American involvement in Greater Richmond voluntary mainstream organizations.

STRUCTURAL ORGANIZATION

In order to gain some familiarity with the nature of the leadership structure, executive directors were asked to identify the manner in which members of the board of directors of their organization are selected. Table I provides this information.

As can be learned from Table I, the board of directors of the vast majority of these organizations is chosen by incumbent board members. Only the governing board of the American Heart Association is chosen by the entire voting membership. What this infers, of course, is that efforts to increase African-American involvement in these organizations is heavily dependent upon the commitment of the organization's leadership.

SOLICITATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Table II documents whether each organization has adopted a formal or informal policy of aggressively soliciting the involvement of the African-American community.

As can be seen in Table II, the following six organizations have adopted a formal or informal policy aggressively seeking to enhance African-American participation in their organization: American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Red Cross, Easter Seal Society, March of Dimes, and the Virginia League of Planned Parenthood. However, as is later documented in this report, the adoption of an affirmative action-type policy by these organizations seeking greater African-American involvement has generated mixed results.

Table III provides data concerning the extent of African-American volunteers and staff in leadership positions in voluntary mainstream organizations.

As can be gained from Table III, the extent of African-American volunteerism in these organizations varies considerably, although in terms of absolute numbers voluntary mainstream organizations have been able to secure a considerable amount of volunteer effort by African-Americans. Indeed, about one-out-of-every-three vol-

Table I
Method of Selection: Board of Directors

	A. Board of Directors Elected by Voting Membership	B. Self-perpetuating Board of Directors
American Cancer Society		x
American Heart Association	x	
American Lung Association		x
American Red Cross		x
Big Brothers/Big Sisters		x
Easter Seal Society		x
March of Dimes		x
Virginia League of Planned Parenthood		x
Salvation Army		x
Meals on Wheels	*	*
TOTAL	1	8
	10%	80%

Note: Tables I through VI are the tabled representations of the responses to the questionnaire found in Appendix A.

*Information not provided by Meals on Wheels

Table II
Adopted Policy: Soliciation of African-American Involvement

	YES	NO
American Cancer Society	x	
American Heart Association.	x	
American Lung Association		x
American Red Cross	x	
Big Brothers/Big Sisters		x
Easter Seal Society	x	
March of Dimes	x	
Virginia League of Planned Parenthood	x	
Salvation Army		x
Meals on Wheels	*	*
TOTAL	6	3
	60%	30%

*Information not provided by Meals on Wheels

Table III
Extent of African-American Volunteers, Staff, and Leadership
Positions: Voluntary Mainstream Organizations

Organization	3. Volunteers			4. Staff			5. Members			6. Directors			7. Leaders
	Total No.	A/A No.	A/A[1] %	Total No.	A/A No.	A/A %	Voting No.	A/A No.	A/A %	Total No.	A/A No.	A/A %	A./A %
1.	6,000	1,000	16.6	60	15	25	700	75	11	30	4	13	17
2.	8,000	1,000	12.5	85	7	8	120	25	21	26	4	15	12
3.	100	30	30	5	0	0	30	3	1	30	3	1	0
4.	3,300	825	25	46	12	26	72	22	30	72	22	30	11
5.	240	60	25	11	3	27	21	2	9	21	2	9	0
6.	900	225	25	2.5	0	0	24	0	0	24	0	0	0
7.	300	100	33.3	13	1	7	7	1	14	7	1	14	0
8.	65	0	0	9	1	11	35	2	6	35	2	6	0
9.	8,715	2,000	23	38	14	37	27	2	7	27	2	7	0
10.	*	*	20	*	*	18	*	*	14	*	*	14	*
TOT.	27,620	5,235	21% Average	269	53	16% Average	1036	132	11% Average	272	40	11% Average	4% Average

Organization Key:
1. American Cancer Society
2. American Heart Association
3. American Lung Association
4. American Red Cross
5. Big Brothers/Big Sisters
6. Easter Seal Society
7. March of Dimes
8. Virginia League of Planned Parenthood
9. Salvation Army
10. Meals on Wheels (*Information not provided)

Response Key: (the following numbers correspond to questions in Appendix A)
3. Total number of volunteers; number and percentage of African-American volunteers.
4. Total paid staff; number and percentage of African-American paid staff.
5. Total voting membership; number and percentage of African-American directors.
6. Total number of board of directors members; number and percentage of African-American voting membership.
7. Percentage of African-Americans who hold leadership positions on the board of directors.

[1]A/A = African-Americans

unteers canvassing for the March of Dimes is African-American. Many organizations reported that about twenty-five percent of their volunteers are African-American. Only the Virginia League of Planned Parenthood noted a total absence of volunteer efforts by African-Americans on behalf of the organization.

Similarly, the percentage of African-American compensated staff retained by voluntary mainstream organizations varies considerably. On the average, about one-fifth of the paid staff employed by these organizations are African-American, although the Salvation Army reported that almost two-fifths of its compensated staff is African American in ethnic background. This study lends credence to the conjecture that there is a positive relationship between the extent of African-American compensated staff and the ability of the

organization of secure voluntary efforts by African-Americans.

"TARGETING" THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Table IV contains data concerning whether or not voluntary mainstream organizations desire enhanced African-American voluntary participation and, in addition, whether these organizations have engaged in activities specifically designed to increase African-American voluntary participation in their organization, and if these activities were successful.

In addition, Table IV documents the number of these organizations which have specifically "targeted" programs for the African-American community.

As documented in Table IV, half of the organizations surveyed specifically target the African-American community in their

Table IV
"Targeting" the African-American (A/A) Community:
Mainstream Voluntary Organizations

	8. Programs Target A/A community		9. Desire participation of A/A community		10. Actively targeted A/A community	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
1.	x		x		x	
2.	x		x		x	
3.	x		x		x	
4.		x	x		x	
5.		x	x		x	
6.		x	x			x
7.	x		x		x	
8.	x		x		x	
9.		x	x		x	
10.	*	*	*	*	*	*
TOTAL	5	4	9	0	8	1
	56%	44%	100%		89%	11%

Organization Key:
1. American Cancer Society
2. American Heart Association
3. American Lung Association
4. American Red Cross
5. Big Brothers/Big Sisters
6. Easter Seal Society
7. March of Dimes
8. Virginia League of Planned Parenthood
9. Salvation Army
10. Meals on Wheels (*Infomation not provided)

Response Key: (the following numbers correspond to questions in Appendix A)
 8. Direct specific programs to the African-American community.
 9. Desire enhanced voluntary African-American participation in the organization.
10. Engaged in an aggressive program designed to increase voluntary African-American participation in the organization

programmatic efforts. All the responding organizations acknowledged that they are eager to gain more African-American volunteers; indeed, eight organizations have undertaken efforts specifically designed to enhance African-American volunteers.

Table V presents data pertaining to the various sources utilized by mainstream voluntary bodies designed to increase African-American voluntary efforts on behalf of their organizations. As can be readily gained from Table V, voluntary mainstream organizations have primarily relied upon churches (which is understandable, given the generally prominent role of the church in the African-American community), and informal person-to-person requests in seeking to enhance African-American voluntary participation.

In addition, in regard to the latter, voluntary mainstream organizations have made use of paid radio and television announcements, newspaper advertisements, and mass media public service announcements. As documented by Table V, the success of these varied efforts has been mixed.

The executive directors of voluntary mainstream organizations advanced a variety of reasons why their organizations enjoyed only a limited amount of success in attracting enhanced African-American voluntary efforts. These reasons include: (1) the often low visibility of these organizations in the African-American community; (2) the widespread popular perception held by African-Americans that members of their ethnic group play little

Table V
Specific Sources Utilized by Voluntary Mainstream Organization
Designed to Enhance African-American Voluntary Efforts:
Degree of Success

	What Media Sources were used to facilitate these program?								11. Success of Programs			
	Mailing Lists	Flyers	Churches	Referral	Radio Ads	TV Ads	Print Ads	Public Service Media	E	G	F	P
1.		x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		
2.	x	x	x	x						x		
3.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	
4.		x		x	x	x	x	x		x		
5.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x
6.												
7.		x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		
8.		x	x							x		
9.			x	x							x	
10.	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
TOTAL	3	3	8	7	5	5	5	5				
	33%	33%	87.5%	77%	55%	55%	55%	55%		55%	22%	11%

Organization Key:
1. American Cancer Society
2. American Heart Association
3. American Lung Association
4. American Red Cross
5. Big Brothers/Big Sisters
6. Easter Seal Society
7. March of Dimes
8. Virginia League of Planned Parenthood
9. Salvation Army
10. Meals on Wheels (*Information not provided)

Key to Symbols Utilized in Response to question Number 11.
E = Excellent   F = Fair
G = Good   P = Poor

role in the decision-making process of voluntary mainstream organizations; and, (3) the economic constraints under which many African-Americans labor, precluding their involvement in voluntary efforts.

Table Vl contains a variety of data relating to voluntary mainstream organizations and the African-American community including (1) whether or not a voluntary mainstream organization has attempted to address those factors which serve to impede African-American voluntary efforts; (2) the extent to which additional organizational appeals should be made to enhance African-American voluntary efforts; (3) whether ethnic groups and, more specifically, the African-American community is specifically "targeted" in terms of fund-raising efforts; (4) the approximate percentage of organizational funding derived from the African-American community; (5) whether or not the or-

Table VI
Voluntary Mainstream Organizations and the African-American Community:
Relevant Evaluative Data

	13. Programmatic Responses		14. Extent of Effort			15. Fund Raising Ethnic Groups		15. Fund Raising Target A/A		16. % from A/A	17. Answering Needs		18. Addition of A/A		19. Participation Increase	
	Yes	No	Sig.	Mod.	Some	Yes	No	Yes	No		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1.	x		x				x		x	N/A		x	x		x	
2.			x				x		x	10%		x	x		x	
3.	x		x				x		x	N/A		x	x			
4.	x		x				x		x	N/A	x		x			x
5.			x				x		x	0%		x		x		
6.					x		x		x	N/A	x		x			x
7.			x			x			x	N/A			x		x	
8.		x	x				x		x	N/A		x	x		x	
9.		x		x			x		x	N/A	x			x	x	
10.	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
TOTAL	3	2	7	1	1	1	8	0	9		3	5	7	2	5	2
	33%	22%	77%	11%	11%	11%	88%	0%	100%		33%	55%	77%	22%	55%	22%

Organization Key:
1. American Cancer Society
2. American Heart Association
3. American Lung Association
4. American Red Cross
5. Big Brothers/Big Sisters
6. Easter Seal Society
7. March of Dimes
8. Virginia League of Planned Parenthood
9. Salvation Army
10. Meals on Wheels (*Information not provided)

Response Key
13. Programmatic responses to overcome those factors which impede African-American voluntary efforts.
14. Extent of above effort: significant, moderate, or some.
15. Whether or not fund raising efforts are specifically "targeted" to ethnic groups, specifically the African-American community.
16. Approximate percentage of current funding derived from the African-American community.
17. Whether or not the organization is perceived by African-Americans as fully meeting the needs of the African-American community.
18. Whether the addition of paid African-American staff and the promotion of more African-Americans into organizational leadership roles would enhance African-American voluntary efforts.
19. Whether the organization has experienced enhanced African-American participation over the past five years.

ganization is basically meeting the needs of the African-American community; (6) whether the retention of increased numbers of paid African-American staff and the promotion of African-Americans into organizational leadership roles enhanced African-American participation over the past five-year period.

The data contained in Table VI allows us to posit the following general observations regarding the African-American community and voluntary mainstream organizations. First, about half of these organizations have adopted specific measures to increase their visibility in the African-American community and have encouraged and/or promoted African-Americans to assume leadership positions. Second, for the most part, voluntary mainstream organizations do not make specific, or "targeted," funding appeals to particular ethnic groups, including African-Americans. Third, because of the lack of pertinent record-keeping, executive directors were generally unable to advance an "informed estimate" of what amount of their funding is presently derived from the African-American community. Fourth, more than a majority of the executive directors subscribed to the belief that the retention of additional paid African-American staff and the promotion of African-Americans into leadership roles would encourage more African-American voluntary efforts on behalf of their organization. And finally, half of the voluntary mainstream organizations surveyed have experienced increased participation by African Americans, over the past five years.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS: CONCERNED BLACK MEN AND CONTINENTAL SOCIETIES

As previously noted, a secondary aspect of this inquiry was to gain some familiarity with the organizational structure and activities of the Concerned Black Men and the Continental Societies, each incorporated local chapters of a national African-American voluntary and self-help organization.

Concerned Black Men, organized in Richmond in 1987, has forty-five members who pay annual dues of $50. This organization also relies upon a varied array of financial donations to support its activities. The membership of Concerned Black Men is drawn from the professional and business strata of the African-American community. Concerned Black Men is particularly dedicated to improving the self-esteem and self-respect of young African-American males. It focuses its activities, consisting of workshops, field trips, and camping experiences, on African-American males attending the Mosby Middle School, a public school located in the City of Richmond.

The Continental Societies, established in Richmond in 1965, has a total membership of twenty-five females who pay annual dues of $100. The activities of the Continental Societies involve programs designed to promote individual self esteem and motivation among young African-Americans. Its activities center on children attending Richmond's Whitcomb Court Elementary School. On occasion, the Concerned Black Men and the Continental Societies have jointly sponsored field trips for young African-Americans to Virginia State University and Norfolk State University. The primary purpose of these field trips has been to help young African-Americans develop plans to achieve career and personal objectives.

Those volunteers involved in the Concerned Black Men and the Continental Societies are largely motivated by their desire to "pay back" the African-American community for the socio-economic success they currently enjoy, and to serve as successful "role models" for young African-Americans who are being raised most often in single-parent homes, and in a dysfunctional culture marked by poverty, drugs, and crime. The activities and volunteer efforts of both of these organizations have been well received by community residents, and these organizations enjoy a sense of visibility and rapport not usually experienced by the larger tradi-

tional mainstream voluntary organizations. Nevertheless, the voluntary efforts of the concerned Black Men and the Continental Societies are largely unknown by the larger community, due to their relative lack of coverage by the major local press.

CONCLUSION

This inquiry confirms that mainstream voluntary organizations in the Greater Richmond metropolitan area have attracted a considerable amount of voluntary effort from the African-American community. However, the vast majority of the volunteer members, compensated staff, and organizational leadership of mainstream voluntary organizations remain overwhelmingly white. Although these organizations are eager to attract greater voluntary efforts from the African-American community, and have engaged in various appeals to accomplish this result, these appeals have met with mixed success. The latter is largely because mainstream voluntary organizations appear to enjoy relatively low public visibility in the African-American community and are perceived by African-Americans as largely being devoid of African-American leadership. Further, economic constraints also serve to mitigate against increased African-American voluntary involvement with these organizations.

On the other hand, it should be recognized that "volunteerism" plays a significant role in the African-American community, particularly as is evidenced by the efforts of the Concerned Black Men and the Continental Societies. Through the voluntary efforts of their members, these organizations have enjoyed considerable success in providing young African-Americans with the appropriate varied assistance to develop personal skills and career objectives. Indeed, it is not rash to assert that whether or not the African-American community is successful in overcoming its myriad array of social problems will at least be partially determined by the extent to which volunteer effort is recruited to this cause.

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Appendix A

1. How is your organization structured?
    a) Voting membership, Voluntary Board of Directors (appointed by voting membership), Board appointed Committees, with the support of a paid staff.
    b) Self-perpetuating Board of Directors (Board appoints new Board members), Board appointed Committee, non-voting membership, with the support of a paid staff.
    c) Situation "A" with a voluntary staff (no paid staff).
    d) Situation "B" with a voluntary staff (no paid staff).
    e) Other _____

2. Does your organization have any policy (formal or informal) in regard to African-American participation?

3. Please estimate the number of volunteers that actively participate in your organization.

4. How many paid staff positions does your organization have?

5. Approximately how many voting members does your organization have?
    Approximately how many voting members are African-Americans?

6. How many members comprise the Board of Directors?

7. Approximately what percentage of the leadership positions of the Board of Directors are held by African-Americans?

8. Does your organization specifically target programs for the African-American Community?

9. Does your organization desire greater voluntary participation of African Americans?

10. Has your organization ever actively targeted African-Americans in programs designed to stimulate voluntary participation?

    What media sources were used to facilitate these programs?
    __ a. Mailing lists   __ e. Radio Ads   __ i. Membership participation
    __ b. Flyers   __ f. Television Ads   __ j. Other
    __ c. Churches   __ g. Newspaper Ads
    __ d. Referral of Current   __ h. Public Service Media

11. Please indicate the success of these programs.
    Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____

12. If these recruitment programs have not been as successful as desired, what factors do you feel preclude or limit more African-American participation?

13. Has your organization made any programmatic response to these factors?

14. To what extent does your organization feel it should make more appeals to the African-American community?
    Significant effort _____ Moderate effort _____ Some effort _____

15. Does your organization target specific ethnic groups in fund raising?
    Are African-Americans specifically targeted in fund raising efforts?

16. Approximately what percentage of voluntary contributions derive from the private African-American sector?

17. Does your organization feel it is satisfactorily answering the needs of the African-American community?

18. Does your organization believe its effectiveness in recruiting volunteers, fund raising efforts, and programmatic areas within the African-American community would be enhanced by the addition of African-American staff or increased African-American leadership roles within the membership?

19. Has African-American participation in your organization increased over the past 5 years?

20. What factors do you feel stimulated the greater participation?

21. Do you have any other thoughts concerning your organization's relationship to the Richmond African-American community?