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## “Black Names in the Halls of Congress”

### Introduction

Economics and other academic literatures reflect considerable study of Black names. The brief list of selected references below is just a small sample of the extensive research on this topic. In many cases, the research concerns Black first names and considers related racial discriminatory outcomes for the wearers of these names. Generally, the evidence is that wearers of Black names reflect less favorable life outcomes than wearers of more traditional or White names.

Relying mainly on Fryer and Levitt (2004; p. 786), typical Black given names are assigned by parents with comparatively lower income and wealth than their Black middle-class or well-to-do counterparts. Importantly, these parents comprise a sizable portion of the population in most districts from which Black US Congressional members are elected. Clearly, poor Blacks’ votes count. However, are voices of the poor heard in the US Congress?

We have contended [here](#) that Black congressional members are distant from their constituents—especially the poor. Why? In part because the poor have few opportunities to influence their representatives. At the same time, it is common knowledge that congresspersons are busy people and that their staffers perform much of the heavy lifting in and around the halls of congress. Yet, how can voices of the poor be heard if they are not among the staffers who work in those halls?

In a “democracy” context, voices of the poor should be heard. Members of the US Congress can ensure this outcome by hiring constituents from their districts/states or persons of similar backgrounds from the Washington, DC region or elsewhere. Do they? This Analysis Brief answers this question by performing a very abbreviated Black names study.

### The Approach

We generated an EXCEL database of 565 unique male and female Black first names.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The 565 Black first names were collected from the following sources. Internet Sources: (1) 332 Black Names for Girls, <https://www.craftymotherfather.com/names-for-black-girls/>; (2) Fifty Black Boys Names,

[https://baby.lovetoknow.com/wiki/Black\\_Baby\\_Names\\_for\\_Boys](https://baby.lovetoknow.com/wiki/Black_Baby_Names_for_Boys); (3) Common African American First Names and Meanings, <https://www.familyeducation.com/baby-names/first-name/origin/african-american?page=1>; and (4) The

In addition, we selected 10 Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) members (two Senators and eight House members), 10 White House members, and 10 White Senate members from the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress.<sup>2</sup> For these 30 congressional representatives, we generated a database of the first names of their paid personnel (including interns) at the end of

fiscal year 2020.<sup>3</sup> We then matched (using the Countif EXCEL function) the list of congressional personnel first names with the list of Black first names. We tabulated matches for each congressional representative and report full results in an Appendix Table. A summary of the results appears in Table 1 below.

## Results

**Table 1.—Congressional Staffers with Black Names as a Percentage of Total Staffers<sup>4</sup>**

| Line No. | Representatives                    | (1)<br>Black Names as Percentage of Total Personnel | (2)<br>Total Number of Black Name Matches | (3)<br>Total Number of Personnel |
|----------|------------------------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|
| 1        | CBC Members of the House (n=8)     | 4.35%   | 6   | 138                              |
| 2        | CBC Members of the Senate (n=2)    | 6.12%   | 9   | 147                              |
| 3        | White Members of the House (n=10)  | 4.35%   | 7   | 161                              |
| 4        | White Members of the Senate (n=10) | 3.24%   | 17  | 524                              |

Source: BlackEconomics.org

Column 1, rows 1 and 3 of Table 1 show that the sample of Black and White House members (on average) reflect an equal percentage (4.35%) of staffers with Black first names. On the other hand, column 1, rows 2 and 4, show that the two CBC Senators nearly doubled the percentage of staffers that they hired with Black first names (6.12%) compared with ten White Senate counterparts (3.24%).

Let us be explicit: These results do not reflect the total number of Black American staffers hired by congressional representatives. Rather, they indicate the percentage of staffers who wear one of the 565 “Black” first names described in footnote 1 above.

Blackest Girls and Boys Names from ABC News; <https://abcnews.go.com/2020/top-20-whitest-blackest-names/story?id=2470131>. Also, Black first names were collected from the following articles: (1) Cook, Logan, and Parman (2013); (2) Fryer and Levitt (2004); and (3) selected names from Pharr (1993).

<sup>2</sup> The two CBC Senators were selected with certainty. CBC House members were selected as about every eighth entry from an alphabetized list. Similarly, White House members were selected as about every 40<sup>th</sup> member from an alphabetized list. White Senators were selected as every 10<sup>th</sup> member from an alphabetized list.

<sup>3</sup> The names of congressional members’ personnel were collected from two documents: *Statement of*

*Disbursements of the House as Compiled by the Chief Administrative Officers from July 1, 2020 to September 30, 2020*

([https://www.house.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/SODs/2020q3/2020q3\\_singlevolume.pdf](https://www.house.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/SODs/2020q3/2020q3_singlevolume.pdf)); and *Report of the Secretary of the Senate from April 1, 2020 to September 30, 2020*

(<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CDOC-116sdoc19/pdf/GPO-CDOC-116sdoc19.pdf>).

<sup>4</sup> We must caution that these results may slightly over- or under-state percentages because certain congressional members’ personnel list include duplicates. If duplicates are of Black names, then there may be a slight overstatement. If duplicates are of “non-Black” names, then there may be a slight understatement.

## Conclusion/Questions/Implications

The foregoing analysis reveals that, except for the two CBC senators, congressional staffers in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress with Black first names comprised less than 5%, on average, of the staff of Black and White House and Senate members whose personnel were examined. Because the percentages of staffers with Black names do not necessarily represent the total percentages of Black Americans hired by congressional members, we cannot concern ourselves here with “representativeness”—although we acknowledge that the percentages cited are far below Black Americans’ representation in the US population in 2020 (about 13%). Besides, in this case, the issue of representativeness should be assessed on a congressional district-by-district or state-by-state basis. However, the critical and glaring question raised by this abbreviated study is: **Why do Black House members, on average, hire no greater percentage of staffers with Black names than do their White House counterparts?**

Given the origin of most Black House members (from districts with sizeable Black populations), it seems reasonable that they would reflect a much higher percentage of staffers with Black names than White House members. **Is the fact that this is not true further evidence of CBC members’ estrangement from their constituents?**

Accordingly, these results enable us to confirm that, if assignment of Black names is strongly associated with low income and low

wealth families as Fryer and Levitt (2004) indicate, then it certainly appears to be the case that the voice of this segment of the population is well muted in the halls of congress. In our view, these results stand as solid evidence concerning CBC House members’ estrangement from their constituents.

## Selected References

Betrand, M. and Mullainathan, S. (2004) “Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination.” *American Economic Review*: Vol. 94, No. 4; pp. 991-1013,

Brown, S. (2013) “On a First Name Basis: Effects of African American Sounding First Names on the Hiring Decision.” Electronic Theses and Dissertations. Georgia Southern University.

Cook, L., Logan, T., and Parman, J. (2013) “Distinctively Black Names in the American Past.” National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 18802.

Fryer, R. and Levitt, S. (2004) “The Causes and Consequences of Distinctively Black Names.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*: Vol. 119, No. 3; pp. 767-805.

Pharr, P. (1993) “Onomastic Divergence: A Study of Given-Name Trends Among African Americans.” *American Speech*: Vol. 68, No. 4; pp. 400-409.

Appendix Table

**Congressional Staffers with Black Names as a Percentage of Total Staffers**

| Line No.  | Congressional Representatives        | (1)<br>Black Names as Percentage of Total Personnel | (2)<br>Total Number of Black Name Matches | (3)<br>Total Number of Personnel |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|
| 1         | Kamala Harris (CA)                   | 5.00%   | 4   | 80                               |
| 2         | Cory Booker (NJ)                     | 7.46%   | 5   | 67                               |
| 3         | Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC)           | 20.00%  | 3   | 15                               |
| 4         | Henry (Hank) Johnson (GA)            | 0.00%   | 0   | 17                               |
| 5         | Andre Carson (IN)                    | 0.00%   | 0   | 18                               |
| 6         | William Lacy Clay, Jr. (MO)          | 5.56%   | 1   | 18                               |
| 7         | Steven Horsford (NV)                 | 0.00%   | 0   | 18                               |
| 8         | James E. Clyburn (SC)                | 10.53%  | 2   | 19                               |
| 9         | Marc Veasey (TX)                     | 0.00%   | 0   | 16                               |
| 10        | Gwen Moore (WI)                      | 0.00%   | 0   | 17                               |
| <b>11</b> | <b>Mean for CBC Members</b>          | <b>5.26%</b>  | <b>1.5</b>                                | <b>28.5</b>                      |
| 12        | Vern Buchanan (FL)                   | 0.00%   | 0   | 19                               |
| 13        | Gerald Connolly (VA)                 | 7.69%   | 1   | 13                               |
| 14        | A. Drew Ferguson (GA)                | 0.00%   | 0   | 15                               |
| 15        | Brett Guthrie (KY)                   | 0.00%   | 0   | 16                               |
| 16        | John Katko (NY)                      | 7.69%   | 1   | 13                               |
| 17        | Alan S. Lowenthal (CA)               | 0.00%   | 0   | 17                               |
| 18        | Debbie Mucarsel-Powell (FL)          | 6.25%   | 1   | 16                               |
| 19        | Jamie Raskin (MD)                    | 15.79%  | 3   | 19                               |
| 20        | F. James Sensenbrenner (WI)          | 0.00%   | 0   | 13                               |
| 21        | Rashida Tlaib (MI)                   | 5.00%   | 1   | 20                               |
| <b>22</b> | <b>Mean for White House Members</b>  | <b>4.35%</b>  | <b>0.7</b>                                | <b>16.1</b>                      |
| 23        | Michael Braun (IN)                   | 3.77%   | 2   | 53                               |
| 24        | Christopher Coons (DE)               | 3.08%   | 2   | 65                               |
| 25        | Michael Enzi (WY)                    | 2.70%   | 1   | 37                               |
| 26        | Margaret Hassan (NH)                 | 1.72%   | 1   | 58                               |
| 27        | Doug Jones (AL)                      | 7.14%   | 5   | 70                               |
| 28        | Kelly Loeffler (GA)                  | 0.00%   | 0   | 51                               |
| 29        | Lisa Murkowski (AK)                  | 0.00%   | 0   | 41                               |
| 30        | James Risch (ID)                     | 0.00%   | 0   | 46                               |
| 31        | Rick Scott (FL)                      | 3.64%   | 2   | 55                               |
| 32        | Thom Tillis (NC)                     | 8.33%   | 4   | 48                               |
| <b>33</b> | <b>Mean for White Senate Members</b> | <b>3.24%</b>  | <b>1.7</b>                                | <b>52.4</b>                      |

Source: BlackEconomics.org

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