

Commodification of Voting: Celebrity, Spectacle and Social Movements

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the role of social movements in encouraging minority youth political participation and mobilization, as well as the historical shifts in the tools movements have used to mobilize minority youth, a seemingly apathetic public.

An historical examination of two movements – Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) from the 1960s and Citizen Change from 2004 – and their respective slogans *black power* and *Vote or Die!* was conducted to determine if one of the trends has been a move toward a commodification of voting, whereby movements utilize celebrity, spectacle, commodities and consumption to market voting. Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* provided the theoretical foundation for this thesis, as Debord describes spectacle as the substitute for a direct experience. Accordingly, this thesis examines if an historical trend has occurred in which social movements substitute celebrity, spectacle, commodities and consumption for the direct experience of mobilization in elections.

A content of analysis of SNCC and Citizen Change newspaper articles discovered in 2004, Citizen Change's phrase *Vote or Die!* linked the act of voting to

celebrity, spectacle, commodities and consumption more than it did to mobilization. However, this was not indicative of an historical trend, as many of the variables used to gauge commodification in 2004 were not part of the social movement lexicon in the late 1960s. No correlation was made between the 1960s mobilization efforts and those utilized in 2004. In some ways, though, this finding makes the case that the commodification of voting may be a new, not necessarily good, development.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Political scientists make the claim that black youth refrain from political participation, are not as likely to vote as other groups, or do not vote at all (Olsen, 1970). Turnout for the first presidential election following the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 reached 57.6% for all African Americans. Since 1968, voter turnout in presidential elections has waned for black Americans. The closest African-American turnout has been to the record number in 1968 was the 2004 presidential election, which witnessed an impressive 56.2% turnout (U.S. Census Current Population Survey, 2005).

Why Minority Youth Don't Vote

Traditional logic held that as America became a more educated populace voter turnout would increase. In 1960, half of the American population had not completed high school and less than ten percent were college graduates. Today, twenty-five percent of Americans are college graduates, but turnout has trended downward (Patterson, 2002). “This despite the fact that young people today are the most educated generation America has ever had, and education once was a trusted predictor of who was likely to turn out on Election Day” (Eisner, 2004, p. B01).

Turnout for minority youth¹ has steadily declined since 1964, when 44.2% of 18 to 24 year-olds turned out for the presidential election. That number was down to 38.9% in 1968; fast-forward to 2000, and turnout plummeted to 33.9% of African-American 18 to 24 year-olds. However, the 2004 presidential election witnessed a reversal in the perpetual decline, as 44% of minority youth voted in the election (U.S. Census Current Population Survey, 2005).

A likely common denominator between minority turnout in the 1960s and the 21st century has been the presence of social movements that urge minorities to capture their political voices and mobilize around election time. During the period when turnout for African-American youth has been the highest, social movements have garnered substantial media attention for their mobilization efforts. In the timeframe from 1970 to 2000, there were no social movements operating at a magnitude significant enough to make a blip on the media radar, and minority youth turnout habitually declined (See Table 1.1). In the 1960s, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, phonetically pronounced ‘Snick’) captured the attention of minority youth; in 2004, Citizen Change emerged in the social movement space to mobilize a seemingly uninterested public.

This thesis is interested in the role social movements play in encouraging minority youth political participation and mobilization, and the historical shifts in the tools movements have used to mobilize a seemingly apathetic public.

Table 1.1²

African American Turnout	
18-24 year-old	
Year	Turnout %
2004	44
2000	33.9
1996	32.4
1992	36.6
1988	35.0
1984	40.6
1980	30.1
1976	27.9
1972	34.7
1968	38.9
1964	44.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2004 and earlier reports
Internet Release date: May 26, 2005

Minority Youth and Social Movements

A recurring theme among minority voter participation is the presence of social movements, which Eyerman and Jamison (1998) view as “central moments in the reconstitution of culture” (p. 6), during presidential election seasons. The presidential

election elicits the most political participation from citizens, and is arguably the most important act of civic duty. Social movements with the interest of minority youth in mind mobilize around elections because black enfranchisement—particularly minority youth enfranchisement—is important in ensuring a representative political climate. Minimal political participation from certain groups elevates the risk of unrepresentative elections. Without representative participation, elections disproportionately include “citizens who are older, who have higher incomes, or who hold intense opinions on issues such gun control, labor rights, and abortion” (Patterson, 2002). Moreover, access to politics opens social and economic channels for advancement, which could lead to social and economic success for minority youth (Nie & Verba, 1972).

Social movements (SMs) are indicative of a larger social, political and cultural context, and have been a mainstay in the African-American community with regard to mobilizing a seemingly apathetic public. In the 1960s, the socio-cultural context was one of a weary public that had tired of substandard and subhuman treatment; its supporters were willing to pay with an unrecoverable currency: their lives. By 2004, blacks had exercised the unabated right to vote for over forty years. The right seemed to have been taken for granted, so much so that voter participation was on a steady

decline, and no social movement had emerged to reverse the trend of evanescent enfranchisement.

Accepting the logic that minority youth are a politically inactive group makes them ripe for political influence at the hands of social movements. An historically significant movement in the mobilization space was SNCC, which began as a loose association of middle-class student activists in 1960. SNCC's original goal was to coordinate student protests over unjust laws that excluded blacks from an ordinary existence, but SNCC eventually took on the cause of black voter registration and mobilization full throttle (Blumberg, 1991). In the 1960s socio-cultural context, SNCC existed vis-à-vis the struggle for civil rights by black Americans. Minority enfranchisement was important in the 1960s for achieving an unrealized power granted by the 15th amendment. Voting was the final step for minorities being recognized as citizens with the basic rights enjoyed by other groups.

SNCC catapulted to notoriety when its then chairmen, Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Ture), coined the phrase *black power* in 1966 (Roberts, 1966d). While Carmichael, a former Howard University student and SNCC foot soldier, gained a certain degree of celebrity in the social movement space, the organization began to lose steam and subsequently faded from the mobilization radar in the late 1960s. Until the

present, there had not been a movement operating at the magnitude of SNCC and with the explicit goal of mobilizing minorities.

Sean “Diddy” Combs’ Citizen Change emerged in 2004 to continue a political revolution in abeyance. When Combs – a media mogul, recording artist, fashion designer, marathon runner and record company owner – turned his attention to the social movement space, the political and media climate were a stark contrast to the era when SNCC dominated. Although Citizen Change’s mission was politically grounded, the re-emergence of a social movement with the goal of mobilizing minority youth was void of the racial tension that plagued the 1960s. “Street agitation for social change was over. Now African-Americans could sit at the front of the bus...Now we could vote all over these United States” (George, 1998, p.1). Much had changed between the late 1960s and 2004: the proliferation of new media and technology, a fragmented youth occupied by individualistic technologies, and a public less inclined to engage in collective activity (Putnam, 2000). Though Citizen Change wanted to empower and educate a group “not adequately represented by politicians and thereby not well-represented at the polls” (Nir, 2004, ¶ 3), it existed in a socio-cultural context dominated by celebrity and powerful media images. Though youth were no longer expected to sacrifice their lives for the cause of voting rights, Citizen Change’s mantra

Vote or Die! dominated the air and radio waves in 2004, and used marketing consumable commodities such as t-shirts to engage minority youth.

Celebrity and Spectacle

Celebrity and spectacle are two variables utilized to varying degrees by social movements, and given the aforementioned historical shifts, this thesis will analyze how the presence of the two variables affect minority youth political mobilization.

In the current context, SMs that have emerged are part of a hip-hop culture that is spearheaded by entertainers. Social movements in 2004 attempted to realize a dream born in a decade memorable for the bloodshed spared for the dream of achieving voting rights. Social movements in 2004 were a continuation of groups that exploded in the 1960s. But what evolved were the tools social movements utilized to instill a sense of political efficacy in minority youth voters. A prominent difference between social movements in 1960s and 2004 is the degree to which celebrity and spectacle play a role in mobilizing minority youth. In the 1960s, celebrity was an afterthought, something achieved based on political involvement in the movement. In 2004, leaders were certified entertainment celebrities, and this may have blurred the line between social movements that encouraged mobilizing out of intrinsic political agency and those that encouraged mobilization based on the allure of celebrity and spectacle.

The role of celebrity and spectacle will be analyzed in this thesis to understand if and how it affects social movements, and if celebrity has been promoted more than voting and mobilization by social movements. I will utilize Guy Debord's (1994) *Society of the Spectacle* to examine the role of celebrity and spectacle in the social movement and political space.

Debord calls the spectacle "the heart of the unrealism of the real society. In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life" (# 6). This model has made its way into American political culture. The spectacle consists of signs, and in the hip-hop culture that sees political agency as its goals, those signs are celebrity, spectacle and consumption. This thesis questions the notion of entertainers entering the political fray and attempting to mobilize youth, and when compared to an historical SM, if movements today commodify voting by associating the process with celebrity, spectacle and consumption.

Underscoring this thesis is the question of how political and climatic disparities between 1960s and modern movements affect their relationship to promoting voting, and how celebrity and spectacle have evolved as tools utilized by SMs.

Traditional research on social movements examines how collective groups are used to inspire the individual decision to vote. Where this research differs is the

macro-level analysis of social movements and how celebrity and spectacle have evolved to affect the dynamic of social movements, not necessarily to individual's decision to vote. At the heart of this research is the question of whether or not the trend of celebrity and spectacle as driving forces behind social movements leads to a commodification of voting, whereby voting becomes a dispensable product rather than tool for exerting civic agency.

Research Outline

The interplay of celebrity, spectacle and consumption with regard to social movement and minority youth political participation leads to the following research questions that will be examined in this study:

Research Question 1: Why do social movements use celebrity and spectacle to impact African-American youth mobilization efforts?

Research Question 2: How do social movements impact political participation and mobilization among African-American youth?

Research Question 3: How has celebrity evolved from historical to current social movements, such as Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the 1960s and Citizen Change in 2004?

Chapter two uses resource mobilization theory to provide a comparative analysis of social movements SNCC and Citizen Change. The chapter contextualizes the social, cultural and political contexts in which the movements existed and acknowledges the schism between the civil rights generation in which SNCC existed, and the current hip-hop milieu that nurtured Citizen Change.

Chapter three examines social participation theory and political mobilization vis-à-vis minority youth. It observes how movements inspire political participation among minority youth and the techniques used to mobilize a public thought to be inactive based on its socio-economic barriers.

Chapter four highlights historical trends in the way social movements present the act of voting. Prima facie, SNCC seemed to focus on a more altruistic reason for promoting voting, while Citizen Change's intense celebrity presence and usage of commodities to promote voting may have turned the act into a spectacle.

The methodology chapter uses a content analysis of newspaper articles during the late 1960s, the era when SNCC promoted political participation, and Citizen

Change's presence during the 2004 presidential election to determine if an historical shift has occurred in the way SMs promote the act of voting. It will determine whether there has been a shift from the 1960s altruistic perspective of voting, to one that attaches voting to celebrities and purchasable commodities.

The conclusion indicates that in the two eras of social movements examined in the study, voting was presented in contrasting manners. In 2004, voting resembled a commodified act and was linked to celebrity, spectacle, and consumption.

Chapter 2 Social Movements

American social movements are contextual events that “emerge in particular times and places; they are the products of specific socio-political conditions as well as of deeper and more long-term historical and cultural traditions” (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998, p. 21). Social movements usually engage ordinary people who want to change some part of society (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003). The Women’s Rights, the Civil Rights and student protest movements of the late sixties are a few of the most notorious and successful 20th century movements. Social movements wield a unique type of influence by virtue of being a ‘group’ experience. Movements, today, are unlike traditional movements of the civil rights era. Early movements originated in the church and were led overwhelmingly by religious leaders. The most memorable of the civil rights leaders, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, promoted political involvement to congregations and communities in an effort to advance civil rights reform. But as black social movements evolved they tended “to approximate...the secular political forms of their neighbors, and...tend[ed] to diverge...from the revivalistic and messianic types of the past [as blacks became] urbanized and subject to the pressures of an industrial society” (Oppenheimer, 1963, p.159). This chapter provides an overview of the two movements of interest for this thesis, Student Nonviolent

Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Citizen Change, and how each fits into theoretical notions of social movements.

Resource mobilization, a prominent theory in the social movement space for its focus on movement growth and political effectiveness, operates under the core assumption that movements are to be understood “as deliberate, patterned frameworks of collective action” (Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks, 1995, p. xii). To understand conditions that promote movement growth and effectiveness, resource mobilization (RM) theory proposes that the study of social movements be historical and comparative, rather than focusing on why people protest (Darnovsky, Epstein & Flacks, 1995). This thesis follows that framework by viewing two movements in tandem – SNCC and Citizen Change.

RM theory deals with the formation and organization of movements and the outcomes of challenges movements encounter (Jenkins, 1983). A significant contribution of resource mobilization theory is the postulation of a shift from classical social movements “with indigenous leadership, volunteer staff, extensive membership,....and actions based on mass participation, towards professional social movement organizations (or professional SMOs) with outside leadership....small or nonexistent membership...and actions that ‘speak for’ rather than involve an aggrieved group” (Jenkins, 1983, p. 533). SNCC and Citizen Change fit into this framework in

that SNCC was an organization with a volunteer staff that engaged in extensive Deep South canvassing in the name of voting rights. Citizen Change lacked a group membership base, with its most visible member being its celebrity leader.

The Study of Social Movements

Social movements have been a mainstay in the black community, particularly after the failure of Reconstruction and the overt disregard for the 15th Amendment. While the 15th Amendment stated the right to vote “shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any other State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude”, the right was dismissed by Southern states under the guise of Jim Crow laws. These failures angered a beleaguered population and created the framework for SMs, such as SNCC, that campaigned for minority voting rights (Davidson & Grofman, 1992).

In the 1960s, there was a human and political exigence for movements to become the voice for a disadvantaged public. In 2004, the same travails were not present, as minorities had the ability to exercise voting rights unabated for several decades, and movements in 2004 were no longer struggling to attain a basic right. By 2004, Citizen Change was more or less admonishing minorities to execute a right secured by prior movements. This frames the debate of the effectiveness of a group

such as Citizen Change in motivating young blacks to vote in the 2004, compared to the historical efforts of a group such as SNCC.

History of SNCC

Four young men – Joseph McNeill, Ezell Blair, Jr., Franklin McCain and David Richmond – enacted an ambitious department store test and inspired the organization that became the gold standard for youth political movements. SNCC “was not the product of radical intellectual ferment. Rather, it grew out of ‘bull sessions’ involving college freshmen who were, in most respects, typical southern black students of the time, politically unsophisticated and socially conventional” (Carson, 1995, p.9). The men, students at North Carolina A&T in Greensboro, purchased items at the downtown F.W. Woolworth department store, and thereafter sat down to have lunch at the counter reserved for whites in 1960 (Carson, 1995).

Their act of resistance ignited a sit-in movement that inspired over 6000 students from 78 Southern universities to stage sit-ins, and some 2000 were jailed. Nationally, they inspired nearly 70,000 young student participants in the sit-in movement (Carmichael & Thelwell, 2003). SNCC fits into the RM discussion as a classical social movement as its volunteer staff and organization-bred leaders engaged the public in its universal cause.

In April 1960, the organization that began as “a loosely organized committee of part-time student activists, uncertain of their roles in the southern struggle” evolved to a “cadre of full-time organizers and protesters” (Carson, 1995, p. 31). Ella Baker, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference’s (SCLC) executive director, called the founding meeting, which was held in Raleigh, North Carolina. The SCLC provided the seed money of \$800 for SNCC, though SNCC would go on to part ideological ways with the King-helmed SCLC by the end of the decade (Carson, 1995). One of the most salient characteristics of SNCC members was their comfortable and elite backgrounds. That early SNCC recruits were from elite colleges and universities created a class bias and a clash of backgrounds with the people they were largely attempting to mobilize (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003).

SNCC organizers concluded that the disenfranchisement of Southern blacks and voter registration were the most pressing issues confronting blacks and the entire nation. The middle class and intellectually oriented students took the movement to Mississippi and Georgia counties known as the “Black Belt”, where the paucity of black voters was paramount (Blumberg, 1991; Carson, 1995). SNCC migrated away from coordinating sit-ins of lunch counters, bus stations and the like because they saw voter registration “as an opportunity to transform small-scale, nonviolent protest

activities into a massive political struggle for radical advancement” (Carson, 1995, p. 39; Stoper, 1977).

SNCC became a formidable force in the civil rights movement by focusing on voter registration, but the “economic haves” (Miller and Shanks, 1996, p. 95) leading the have-nots aggravated the cultural schism between SNCC members and those they attempted to lead.

SNCC amassed a fieldworker base of 150 volunteer staff-members by 1964, and the cause of voter rights and voter education brought beatings, jail and death to some volunteers (Blumberg, 1991). What differentiated SNCC from other canvassing movements was that a person could only join SNCC by becoming a full-time member, essentially taking an oath of poverty, and accepting subsistence pay that averaged \$20 to \$35 per week. By 1966, SNCC had 135 members (Roberts, 1966c).

Black Power

Stokely Carmichael, SNCC chairman from 1966 to 1967, believed SNCC had to change because struggle is “a dynamic, complicated, and organic process” (Carmichael and Thelwell, 2003, p. 524). The change that befuddled many was SNCC’s evolution from a student-helmed voter registration advocate to a radical, somewhat militant group known for the phrase *black power*. Carmichael replaced 3-

year chairman John Lewis, who was more aligned with Dr. King’s “nonviolent, direct-action philosophy” (Nelson, 1966, ¶ 3). SNCC considered integration irrelevant once it adopted the militant *black power* philosophy (Roberts, 1966d).

[T]he philosophy tells Negroes that white society has failed them, that American democracy is a collection of impressive catchwords that command only lip service from the white man, that the Negro is as good if not better than the white man, and that his only salvation lies in seizing political power wherever he possesses the numerical strength to outvote the white man (Roberts, 1966a, p. 89).

Carmichael questioned the allure of the phrase he first uttered at a Greenwood, Mississippi rally. How two simple words elicited fear, ire, disgust and confusion baffled Carmichael (Carmichael and Thelwell, 2003). While the phrase catapulted Carmichael to worldwide celebrity, it offered adverse affects. The phrase he viewed as “entirely beyond the cognitive reach of the white national media and public” (Carmichael and Thelwell, 2003, pp. 523-4) received a sinister and menacing connotation, and made Carmichael a vilified leader.

The phrase was alienating and hastened SNCC’s decline as a formidable social movement. Lewis said of the term,

I think ‘black power’ had the connotation that it is time for us to share the political power and the economic power... Black Power, on one hand, it was catchy, but it frightened the majority population—they couldn’t deal with it. And, it made it appear that black people were going to come in, get millions of people registered and take over all of the elected positions (personal interview, April 6, 2006).

The black consciousness associated with *black power* divided the older civil rights guard, middle-class Blacks, white supporters and the general public (Roberts, 1966b). A *Washington Post* survey in 1966 noted the backlash the phrase received from white Americans. Accordingly, 77% of white Americans felt the phrase hurt the Negro cause. Others felt it led to violence and 43% of whites reported the phrase made them feel uneasy (Harris, 1966).

Figure 2.1



1968 Olympics in Mexico City. Two American medal winners—Tommie Smith and John Carlos—give the black-power salute during the national anthem.
(Photo Credit: Associated Press via <http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/centennial/october/photo/olympic.html>)

History of Citizen Change

Citizen Change mirrored what RM theory would call a more professional social movement organization that spoke for an aggrieved group, and whose membership base is either small or nonexistent (Jenkins, 1983). Citizen Change spoke for “young people, often...of color, who have tended to tune out politics” (Danton, 2004, p. A9). Combs founded the non-partisan group in July 2004 because he said President George W. Bush and Democratic nominee Senator John Kerry had not addressed young, urban voters on issues directly affecting them: education, jobs and healthcare (Ferguson, 2004).

His plan for mobilizing minorities aged 18 to 30 offered an inventive take on the way social movements attempt to mobilize and stimulate voter participation. Combs attempted to parlay his success as a media mogul into mobilizing minority and youth voters under the logic that if “hip-hoppers are wearing his Sean John clothes and buying his Bad Boy records...they’ll listen up when he tells them to register and get to the polls” (Gerhart, 2004, p. C01). At the group’s groundbreaking press conference he announced Citizen Change planned to overwhelm voters by saturating the marketplace with his *Vote or Die!* message. He planned to make voting cool, hot and sexy by using the same techniques that would be used to market a hip-hop album, clothing line or motion picture (Nir, 2004).

He enlisted the help of celebrities such as Mariah Carey, Leonardo DiCaprio, Ben Affleck and Mary J. Blige to spread his message. Each served almost as members, who instead of canvassing the ground to encourage voting, canvassed the media with their message.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of his movement was the T-shirts he designed and sold to “make politics fashionable” (Combs, as quoted in Nir, 2004). He reasoned that people regularly make statements vis-à-vis fashion, and the phrase *Vote or Die!* emblazoned on a shirt not only added shock value, but also attracted attention to his mobilization initiative. Fashion labels including his own Sean John, Ecko and Phat Farm created the shirts that were sold nationwide for thirty-dollars (*The Economist*, 2004; Eisner, 2004; Moody, 2004).

Combs tackled the political apathy of minority youth by using old-fashioned get-out-the-vote efforts such as fund-raisers, voter-registration drives, and aptly-titled hip-hop summits (Danton, 2004). Combs even chartered a jet nicknamed ‘Air Force Change’, and embarked on a tour of New York, Miami, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit and Milwaukee to mobilize minority youth. He aimed to expedite a long-awaited political revolution and impress the ‘sexiness’ of voting on minority youth (Lang, 2004).

Differing opinions exist on the effectiveness of social movements in stimulating the youth vote. In a post-election analysis, the *New York Times* reported that youth were not as decisive as they were made out to be. Even though turnout increased among youth voters, it increased among other age groups, meaning youth voters constituted the same percentage of total voters as in 2000 (Quart, 2004). Conversely, the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement reported participation increased by 11 percentage points from 2000 to 2004 among 18 to 24 year-olds (The Youth Vote 2004, 2005). For African-American 18 to 24 year-olds, 36% turned out in 2000, and 47% mobilized in the 2004 presidential election (CIRCLE, Trends by Race, Ethnicity, & Gender, 2004).

Vote or Die

Like SNCC, Citizen Change was associated with a jarring, extreme slogan designed to create urgency as far as voter participation was concerned. SNCC had *black Power*, and Citizen Change put forth *Vote or Die!*. Phrases or slogans arise “whenever there is a period of slowdown and confusion (Roberts, 1966b, p.1), and *Vote or Die!* came during a social movement lull. The two phrases are of particular interest because they served dual purposes. Carmichael once discussed *black power* in the context political power via voting blocs, but it also inspired rioting, violence and

disdain from staunch civil rights advocates (Raspberry, 1966). Combs told *CNBC's Capital Report* he invented the campaign slogan *Vote or Die!* to awaken a disenfranchised people. There was an exigence for the phrase because, according to Combs,

People's lives are at stake because people are dying because they can't get the proper health care and medicine. People are also dying from poverty. And when you vote a president into office, you're putting your life and the lives of your families into somebody else's hands. And no matter who you vote for, you need to treat it like it's life or death (2004).

In addition to drawing attention to voting, the *Vote or Die!* slogan was linked to a t-shirt supporters were encouraged to purchase as an act of civic engagement and political support. The differences in the two captivating slogans are furthered explored in the content analysis undertaken by this thesis. SNCC and Citizen Change garnered considerable attention from the slogans and utilized them in different manners. The way the movement's utilized their individual slogans will emphasize historical trends in social movements, such as if movements have trended toward using their power to promote activism through consumer purchases or through voting.

SNCC's influence on Combs' Citizen Change was very much evident on the group's web page. Notably, the symbolic representation of Combs' group was the same symbol used to indicate black power in the 1960s: a clenched, raised fist above a

bowed head. At the height of spectacle is the ability to present and interchange visual images that become symbols for reality, and re-appropriate their meanings. A close look at the Citizen Change homepage reveals linkages between both SNCC and Citizen Change, as the latter's logo was the Black Power symbol – a phrase and symbol popularized during Carmichael tenure with SNCC (Reed, 1966).

Figure 2.2³



Similarities and Differences

There has been increasing discussion of a schism between what is known as the “Civil Rights Generation” and the “Hip-Hop Generation”. SNCC, an organization that was part of the larger Civil Rights Movement from the 1960s, is associated with an altruistic period of mobilization. Citizen Change, an organization inspired by and part of the hip-hop generation, is associated with a capricious mainstream industry for those seeking wealth and fame (Smothers, 2004). The psychological and sociological differences between the two underscore the debate of whether or not movements that emerged in 2004 used celebrity, spectacle and commodities to motivate minority voters more than those in the sixties.

On a 2003 broadcast of *The Tavis Smiley Show* on *National Public Radio* (NPR), commentator Glen Ford stated the hip-hop generation may have a false sense of its own power. Black youth, ambiguously described as the hip-hop generation, have been pitted against what is described in the media as an antiquated and irrelevant civil rights generation (Ford, 2003).

Young African-Americans are the most media dependent generation, and the hip hop generation “has been convinced by social engineers of market capitalism” that they are a unique demographic (Ford, 2003). The hip-hop generation has placed great value on their age and hyper-valued ethnic group, and embracing their own commodification renders youth politically impotent. They are bombarded by images

from merchandisers, “flushed with illusions of power based solely on market status”, and are “vulnerable to political appeals from anyone offering attention and flattery” (Ford, 2003).

It must be said that in the same way the modern hip-movement seems divorced from the elder civil rights generation, not all youth in the 1960s were involved with traditional organizations from the Civil Rights Movement; SNCC “demonstrated that black students could initiate a social struggle without the guidance of older black leaders and existing organizations” (Carson, 1995, pp. 17-8). Thus, talk of a disconnect between the hip-hop generation and the civil rights-centered SNCC is not a new phenomenon.

In an interview with Alexis McGill, Executive Director of Citizen Change, the disconnect between the two generations was made apparent. Said McGill,

[T]he hip-hop generation is the first generation to experience nostalgia around the movement because it’s not something we were ever a part of; our parents have stories, but we were never marching. So there’s a romanticism that has happened around the movement...The disconnect, I think, happened in a couple of ways. First it happened when there was transition for the civil rights movement to black power. Once the political rights were secure and as Dr. King was transitioning into talking about economic rights, a lot was lost in that space...so I think there was an ideological disconnect because there wasn’t something coherent to organize around. And I think every generation has it; we’re not a monolithic community, but in the 80s, we didn’t really make concerted efforts to either be apprentices with civil rights leadership, or the civil rights leaders didn’t create a next generation of civil rights

activists. So I think there is a bit of a disconnect there, but it's probably more structural than anything (personal interview, March 26, 2006).

However, noticeable differences between the groups point to an evolution in the way social movements attempt to inspire political engagement among minority youth. Student leaders involved in SNCC genuinely believed the changes they demanded would advance the nation. As such, leaders were groomed to understand the academic and political dynamics of social change (Carson, 1995). Combs' movement used marketing techniques reserved for music and fashion, and displayed the attention-grabbing slogan *Vote or Die!* on 70,000 t-shirts to convince a politically estranged population that political participation and voting were worthwhile activities (Eisner, 2004; Malone, 2004).

The inspiration behind each group's mobilization efforts differs, fundamentally speaking. SNCC dealt with securing voting rights for a disenfranchised public, while Citizen Change stimulated turnout among individuals who had the right to vote, but were not exercising it. By 2004, the fight/struggle/movement was no longer legally based. Citizen Change tackled voter registration because minority youth simply were not exercising the right. SNCC tackled voter registration because the right simply did not exist, or was legally stifled.

Another key difference was the element of violence. When SNCC's then chairmen, John Lewis, led a group of voting rights marchers through Selma on Bloody Sunday (March 7, 1965), "they were set upon by club-wielding troopers, teargassed...ninety to 100 demonstrators were injured...with wounds including broken bones, deep head cuts, and smashed teeth" (Davidson and Grofman, 1992, p. 16). Lives were sacrificed to gain the franchise in the sixties. In 2004, while the slogan *Vote or Die!* dominated, no lives were on the line. Assemblers were not greeted by belligerent police officers, canines, pepper spray and metal batons. Literally speaking, no one was expected to sacrifice his life in the name of voting.

In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam (2000) points to a declining social capital as the culprit behind voter apathy. He writes that people are less inclined to participate in mass movements because of diversions such as electronic entertainment, suburbanization, temporal constraints and a generational change. The overwhelming dismissal of social responsibility opens the door for new social movement groups. The physical and strenuous tactics used to mobilize minority youth in the 1960s are no longer applicable—meaning new techniques that utilize entertainment celebrities and commodities have emerged.

Chapter 3 Social Participation and Mobilization

For this research, it is necessary to note the difference between participation and mobilization. Participation refers to the decision to attend a political meeting or any event related to voting, while the term mobilization addresses the process of voting or voter turnout (Leighley, 2001). The fissure between the two allows social movements a great deal of authority in determining if the individual migrates from participation to mobilization.

From an historic examination of social change, it would seem that minorities have participated in social movements more than other groups. Minority involvement in SMs is predicated on the “underlying premise that individuals of lesser social status rely on the political mobilization of organized groups more heavily than do individuals of greater social status” (Leighley, 2001, p.5). Furthermore, Verba, Nie and Kim (1978) state organization is the weapon of choice for the weak. Lower-status groups need organized movements to arouse political activity designed to close the gap between upper-status groups. Through participation and mobilization, minorities are able to legitimately make demands on the government. Political effectiveness becomes a reality because organized groups are important for citizens that desire political advancement (Nie & Verba, 1972). Dependence on social movements for participation

and mobilization cues renders blacks susceptible to movements, arguably, inclined to promoting voting as a product or dispensable commodity.

Wherein the traditional research posits that black Americans are less likely to participate in social groups, and thus less likely to vote, the social movements that step in to engage them become all the more important. Steven E. Schier (2000) explains that many groups, including African-Americans, do not vote “because no one invites them to participate” (p. 3). In the past, mobilization efforts were inclusive and sought to engage all possible voters through personal and print communication. The current political tool of choice, activation, is an exclusive process where only citizens from an elite stratum, those who are “far more politically sophisticated than the average citizen...[and] have much more knowledge of an interest in politics than their fellow citizens” (Schier, 2003, p.16), receive invitations to participate. If the evolution from mobilization to activation casts off minority youth, social movements represent the one opportunity for blacks to go against the theoretical grain and participate in a social group.

Importance of Black Enfranchisement

Of the total electorate, Kara Z. Buckley and L. Sandy Maisel (2005) write that voters are interested in politics, but not to a great degree. Even though the average

American votes, he neglects other political activities and does not stay abreast of politics. Maisel and Buckley (2005) also write that while the overall percentage of the black voting-age population has risen, black turnout has been on the decline.

The argument is made that low occupation levels, education and income achievement prevent many blacks from becoming politically active (Olson, 1970). When low-income and less-educated voters are not mobilized, inequities in public policy further disadvantage voters, making it difficult for them to mobilize and affect political change (Morton, 2004).

Social Participation Theory

Prior to the 1960s, “researchers tended to see protesters as swept up in crowds, acting in abnormal and sometimes irrational ways because of frustration with their individual circumstances” (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003, p.51). Orum (1966) frames the inclination for black participation in SMs in terms of a frustration with the status quo. Fed up with being deprived of everyday social and psychological satisfactions, they are driven to solicit such satisfactions “collectively through other means...Quite naturally, then, clubs and associations become focuses for Negroes’ social life” (p. 45).

Another explanation, the “ethnic community” approach, reasons that ethnic minorities engage in social and political activities because others in their communities

do so. To avoid being viewed as an outcast within the ethnic community, the individual conforms to community norms and joins the call to improve the status of the ethnic group (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Olsen, 1970).

Social movements spur feelings of collective identity; the sense of belonging is an important factor in devoting time and effort to social participation because individuals must feel as though they are part of a larger group where their efforts are relevant (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003). Once part of a larger social movement, individuals are thought to become more politically active and even demonstrate higher rates of voter turnout (Olsen, 1972).

While this thesis does not question social movement participants for their individual impressions, it does examine historical trends in the messaging tactics movements employ when promoting political participation and mobilization.

Mobilization

The groups examined in this study not only encouraged political participation by conducting summits and rallies, they also wanted to mobilize minority youth to the polls. The individual who mobilizes fits into a particular bracket, according to the standard socioeconomic model. The model posits that voting turnout regularly coincides with factors such as age, race, sex, education, income, participation in

voluntary organizations, media exposure and feelings of political efficacy (Goel & Milbrath, 1977; Matthews & Prothro, 1966; Nie & Verba, 1972; Olsen, 1972).

Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee's (1948) seminal work, *Voting*, cosigns with the following point:

In general, the closer the voter is in socioeconomic position to the perceived groups, the more likely he is to see them as voting his own way. And this holds whether proximity is indicated by objective status (e.g., occupation or socioeconomic status level) or by subjective designation (e.g. identification with class)...The closer the voter is to a group socially, the more he 'pulls' the group into a similar proximity politically (p. 81).

Compared to white Americans, black Americans are likely to have less education, lower income and hold lower-status jobs (Nie and Verba, 1972). All of which stymie political activity (Pateman, 1979). Nie and Verba (1972) elaborate on this point by examining if being black, per se, leads to lower political activity or if the confluence of low income and education of black citizens inhibits their political participation. They concluded race alone is not an indicator of political activity, but "the socioeconomic conditions that usually accompany being black...lead to lower participation" (p. 157).

A continuing debate on mobilization is if "mobilizing voters would be more effective if done by neighbors and members of existing groups that voters were already involved in and where voting could be tied to the preferences of the group" (Morton, 2004, p. 50). At the heart of this issue is whether or not telling someone to vote is

more effective than telling people *how* to vote or *for whom* to vote. The two groups analyzed in this study, SNCC and Citizen Change, did not support a particular candidate. On the mobilization continuum, they rested on telling citizens to actually vote. They stopped short of telling citizens for whom to vote.

There is a paradox of mobilization that has witnessed declining turnout as the number of eligible voters increased (Cloward & Piven). The Voting Rights Act of 1965 removed voting obstructions black Americans encountered, but voting decreased to 38.9% of black 18 to 24 year-olds in 1968 (down from the historic high turnout of 44.2% in 1964). The 26th amendment lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 in 1972, but turnout decreased to 34.7% in 1972, and to 27.9% in 1976 (Hampson, 2004; Jones, 2004; U.S. Census Current Population Survey, 2005). According to Cloward and Piven (2000), declining participation is conducive to movements.

Linking Mobilization and Participation

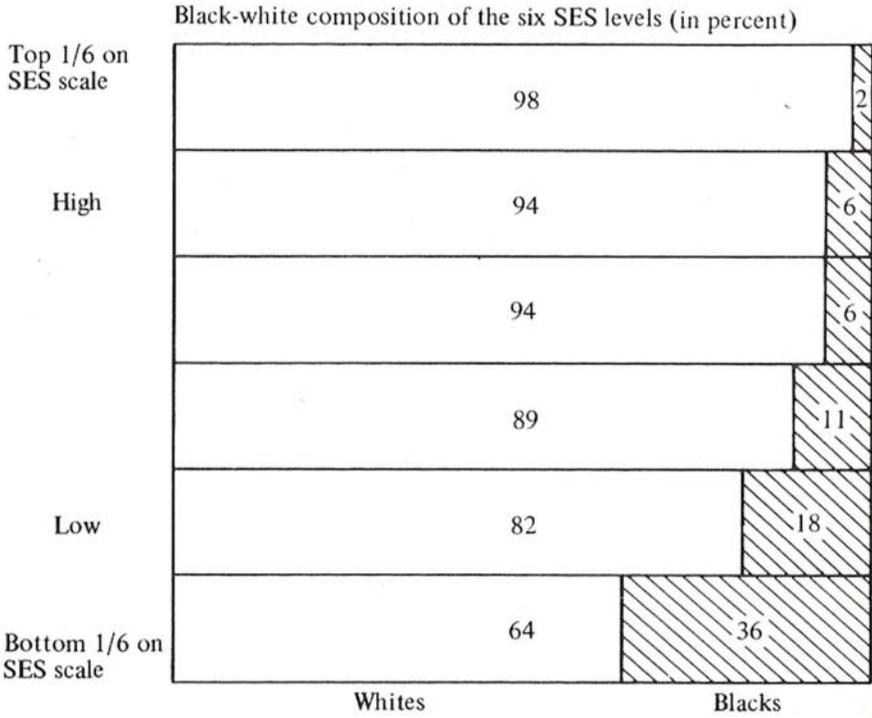
Social and psychological factors, lower incomes and lower education levels compound to form a breeding ground for minority youth involvement in social movements.

Failure to mobilize is a common trait among those who refrain from social participation, posit Herbert H. Hyman and Charles R. Wright (1958). They suggest the isolation thesis as one possible explanation for the disconnect between black

participation and mobilization. The thesis says, “racial minorities are apathetic and lack the necessary impetus for formal participation due to social and structural constraints imposed by the dominant members of society” (Edwards & Klobus, 1976, p. 150). The argument follows that social involvement increases the likelihood of voting and blacks are less inclined to vote because of their minimal social participation.

One of the limitations of using the “standard socioeconomic model” (Verba & Nie, 1972) is that implementing controls for socioeconomic conditions reveals that, historically, blacks “participated as much as and perhaps more than Anglo-Whites” (Brady, Schlozman, & Verba, 1995, p. 230; Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Olsen, 1970; Orum, 1966). Nie and Verba (1972) reason blacks of higher socioeconomic levels have a higher turnout percentage among their socioeconomic group when compared to their white cohorts. Figure 3.1 illustrates that blacks comprised only 2% of highest level on Nie and Verba’s (1972) socioeconomic scale. However, in Figure 3.2, they comprised 11% of the same category on the participation scale.

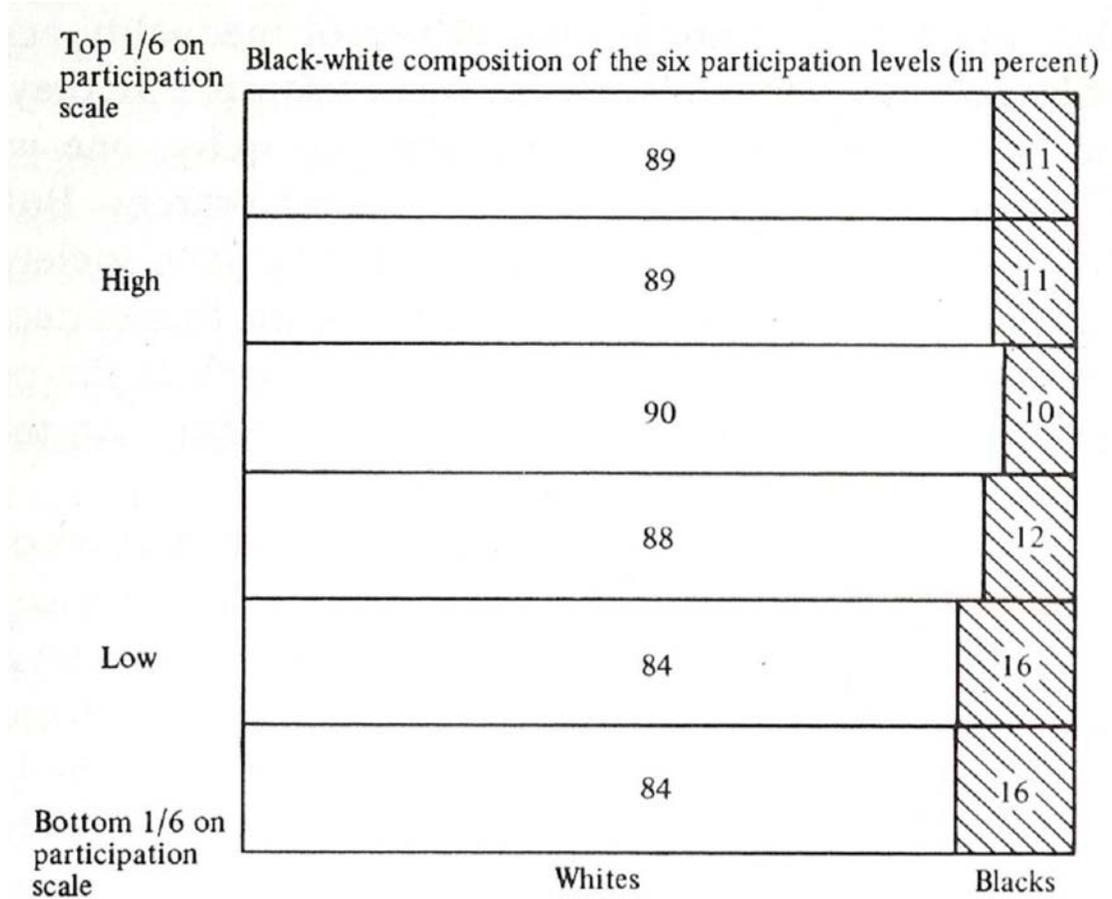
Figure 3.1⁴



(a) Family socioeconomic status (SES) scale: Proportion of blacks and whites at each level (r between SES and race = .29)

Source: Nie & Verba, 1972, p. 154

Figure 3.2⁵



(b) Participation scale: Proportion of blacks and whites at each level (r between participation and race = .05)

Source: Nie & Verba, 1972, p. 154

Mobilization in the 60s

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was part of the larger civil rights movement that engaged a wide range of citizens with the purpose securing social, political and economic equality for black Americans (Hansen & Rosenstone, 1993). SNCC members had a high inclination to act and required minimal convincing. Such was true of many minority activists in the 1960s because there was a burning desire to achieve equality through voting rights.

Stokely Carmichael, SNCC chairman from 1966-1967, referred to youth in the 1960s as “the movement generation” and stated that he and other youth believed they could change the world, which was why they participated in the movement (“Carmichael Out as S.N.C.C. Chief”, 1967). He writes of 1960s youth, “...we were a solid, highly visible community united by our interest in politics and...by a conviction that youth could change the world. That we ourselves could change at least that part of it which most oppressed our people; and that consequently, it was our duty to try” (Carmichael & Thelwell, 2003, pg. 136).

Carmichael painted an idealized portrait of youth mobilization and depicted the 1960s as an era when youth participated in social movements and mobilized out of an intrinsic desire to exert political efficacy. He stated,

Other qualities my brothers and sisters shared were as important as physical courage. One was the casual selflessness of purpose and a cheerful readiness to risk the things the society had programmed our peers to value most highly: education for personal advancement, jobs, careers, security, 'the future,' all that we'd all come to college to secure...once in the movement few of us allowed ourselves to be held hostage by the threat to future status and material affluence (2003, p. 136-7).

Carmichael's imagery revealed a population united by a common desire.

However, a common barrier that affected SNCC's ability to mobilize was the class disconnect between the leaders and the public. SNCC leaders were products of an upbringing more affluent than the poor minorities they attempted to mobilize in the Deep South. The elite backgrounds from which SNCC organizers were drawn attracted disdain from its supporters.

SNCC concentrated its mobilization efforts in the South, but its reception was met with a degree of resistance, bitterness and lethargy from "Negroes who had worked out at least a tenuous relationship with the white man" (Roberts, 1966d, p. 242). Most blacks in local communities "coalesced only around the presence of Dr. King, who mobilized not only the lower class, but the middle class as well" (Roberts, 1966d, p. 242).

SNCCs mobilization roadblock was due, in part, to the radical *black power* stance it adopted in 1966. Many African-Americans were struggling to assimilate, and adopting an inflammatory attitude might have produced unwanted ire. SNCC's mobilization barriers substantiate Nie and Verba's (1972) claim that the woes of belonging to a lower class often inhibit political activity. SNCC's newfangled philosophy led to riots and retaliation, which in turn produced "reaction and inaction" (Roberts, 1966a, p. 89) from its target public. SNCC constituents were not necessarily apathetic, but weary. Targeting poor, lower class blacks with a militant message may have discouraged a group already viewed as an outcast from further alienating itself.

Mobilization in 2004

Citizen Change attempted to "accomplish what years of pulpit preaching, radio special-service announcements and door-to-door leaflet campaigns have failed to do: get young blacks to vote" (Young, 2004). Its mission was to empower, motivate and educate the *forgotten ones*—18 to 30 year-old voters whose votes Combs said had not been counted (Ferguson, 2004). Citizen Change pledged to reinvent the process of youth and minority mobilization to the polls. Olsen (1972) surmised that involvement in social organizations serves as a political activator, and Combs attempted to engage minority youth in Citizen Change events to increase the likelihood of their turnout.

For Citizen Change, the underrepresentation of poor and minority voters created a political climate ripe for a social movement (Cloward and Piven, 2000). In three days, Combs jetted from New York to Detroit, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Miami to educate minority youth and the importance and ‘sexiness’ of voting (Lang, 2004). Ostensibly, fans/voters showed up not to hear music, but to hear to hip-hop celebrities rap about politics and voter registration (“Makin’ It Hot: Bruce Springsteen and P. Diddy in Search of Votes”, 2004). Political groups led by hip-hop luminaries fostered a sense of community and belonging. According to social participation theory, group identification is a key factor in political activity.

Citizen Change faced a somewhat daunting task in mobilizing minority youth. In recent elections, most had not participated and the same readiness to act that existed in the tumultuous 1960s was not as apparent in 2004 (Gamson, 1975). In the 2000 presidential election, 42% of eligible African-Americans aged 18 to 29 voted. In the 1996 presidential election, a paltry 39% participated (CIRCLE). According to the US Census, turnout for African-Americans aged 18 to 24 was 33.9% in 2000, but ballooned to 44% in 2004.

Credit for the jump in participation is not awarded to Citizen Change; but the possibility exists that Citizen Change's tactics may have had a part in stimulating a public that demonstrated historically low turnout numbers.

Chapter 4 Commodification of Voting: Celebrity, Spectacle and Consumption

This chapter highlights the disparate presentations of the act of voting by SNCC and Citizen Change. SNCC, while shrouded in controversy over the phrase *black power*, used its movement to present voting as an act vital to a race that aimed to level the socio-economic playing field. Citizen Change employed alternative tactics to mobilize minorities, including the phrase *Vote or Die!*, intense celebrity presence and a focus on using consumption as a act of civic responsibility. This chapter explores if Citizen Change presented voting as a spectacular commodity.

Current research on marketing voting as a consumer product or commodity is mostly rooted in a market research background. That research focuses on political campaign staffers who use marketing techniques to understand individual voting patterns and to determine the candidate for which citizens are likely to vote (Curran & Takata, 2004). Similarly, a recent *PBS Frontline* special examined the roles marketing and advertising play in influencing voting decisions. Political campaigners rely on an “army of pollsters” to gauge the political pulse using a technique called “narrowcasting”, or reaching out to voters on a one-to-one basis (*The Persuaders*, 2005). The practice involves sending directed messages to target audiences based on issues to which they will likely respond.

This thesis departs from the market research aspect of the commodification of voting, or researching the electoral tendencies of voters; rather than focusing on the individual citizen's feelings toward voting, this thesis addresses voting on a macro level and the way voting is presented by social movements vis-à-vis celebrities, spectacle and commodities.

The Power Elite

In his classic, *The Power Elite*, C. Wright Mills (1957) categorized the power elite as “men whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major consequences” (pp. 3-4). Leaders from the military, corporate and political institutions comprise the power elite and are viewed as having the ability to influence the lives and decisions of ordinary people. No one can be truly powerful unless he commands major institutions, and the strategic positions occupied by leaders of each domain afford a great degree of power, wealth and celebrity (Mills, 1957).

While transcending one of Mill's domains permits a degree of power influence not enjoyed by most, the leader who supplants his power in multiple institutions enters a realm beyond the ordinary luxuries enjoyed by the typical power elite. Corporate impresario Sean ‘Diddy’ Combs, who earned his wealth and status from a corporatized

hip-hop/entertainment culture, demonstrated this in 2004 when he attempted to parlay his business acumen to the political field with the creation of his social movement, Citizen Change. For the power elite, the corporate route is the primary source of wealth, but one's place in the political economy can open new revenue streams and grant power over consumer goods and productive capital (Mills, 1957). In Combs' case, pairing a political organization with a purchasable consumer product that carried his political message (*Vote or Die!*) offered a double-barreled assault on the political and corporate institutions. Combs' explanation for entering the political game rested on the goal of motivating a traditionally inactive group to mobilize.

SNCC's Stokely Carmichael entered the power elite via the political realm. He differed from Combs in that he was not a commercial celebrity prior to becoming SNCC's chairman, but was a prominent social movement figure. Popularizing the slogan *black power* offered him a degree of political stature among existing civil rights leaders and politicians.

The notoriety Combs and Carmichael gained through membership in the power elite granted them substantial credibility with regard to capturing the attention of potential minority voters. The differences in the nature of their celebrity influenced their social movements in distinct ways which will be explored further in this research.

Spectacle

Guy Debord's (1994) *Society of the Spectacle* is the theoretical foundation for the idea that social movements have evolved from organizations that promote voting for efficacious reasons to organizations that promote voting as a commodity.

Moreover, voting in 2004 resembled a dispensable commodity tied to consumer goods such as t-shirts. This may not be negative, but the content analysis in this study will reveal historical trends in social movement tactics used to mobilize minority youth.

For Debord (1994), spectacle is a substitute for direct experience. He puts forth that individuals do not really live the spectacle, but it is a series of images that dominates our lives through media, advertising and public relations. The public becomes caught up in the spectacle, comes to apply codes of the spectacle to their lives, and applies the spectacle as reality. In 2004, a social movement led by an entrepreneur in the hip-hop music industry linked that industry, its spectacular imagery and its power to politics. Combs appeared on CNBC's *Capital Report* in 2004 and noted the power of the hip-hop culture. He said that hip-hop is beyond music; it is a culture that has the power to touch and influence millions of people. As it were, Citizen Change attempted to leverage the power of hip-hop into the political realm. Perhaps the allure of a well-known celebrity leading a social movement translated to a new view of political participation and voting, as politics acquired elusions of money, celebrity and media adoration.

If the spectacle becomes the “epitome of reality” (Debord, 1994, #36) – in this case, the spectacle was the commodified image of voting – a possible result is the image social movements present of voting becomes reality, and an act like voting resembles a dispensable product. Debord (1994) reasons, “the spectacle is the stage at which the commodity has succeeded in totally colonizing social life. Commodification is not only visible, we no longer see anything else” (1994, #42). For the commodification of voting to occur, commodity and spectacle would dominate the act of voting. The ability of a social movement to link voting to celebrity, spectacle and purchasable commodity colonizes the act and promotes a view of voting as a marketed commodity.

The representation of voting in 2004 differed from the one in the 1960s because of the way the groups used celebrity, spectacle and consumption. Social movements in 2004 gave birth to “the practice of marketing voting as if it was a trendy T-shirt – with [a] real trendy T-shirt included” (Quart, 2004, p. A19). In the 1960s, SMs proclaimed voting as a mechanism to secure equal housing, jobs and education.

To make the t-shirts more appealing, the catchy phrase *Vote or Die!* appeared prominently on the front of the shirts. The question to now ask is if this was an effective way of mobilizing minority youth. One critique is that Combs’ approach was

nothing more than insincere marketing that valued self-betterment above long-term social betterment; it sold t-shirts, but did not sell democracy (Quart, 2004).

The commodified presentation of politics through signs and symbols of a consumer culture became the political frame for voting. In 2004, political participation became an act of consumption, as full participation required purchasing a product to make the act of voting real. Debord describes spectacle as a substitute for a direct experience; participating in a social movement led by a hip-hop star and purchasing political items marketed by the star, in many ways, substituted for the direct experiences of being a celebrity. “Behind the celebrity process stands...the possibility of upward mobility; for the follower or the fan, there is chance that one might achieve what the star has achieved” (Gitlin, 2003, p. 148). In the case of Citizen Change, citizens became part of a certain lifestyle by virtue of having a hip-hop artist lead a political movement. For Citizen Change followers in 2004, it is unknown if they participated and mobilized out of civic duty or aspiration to be near a celebrity. This study will utilize a content analysis of news articles to understand if SMs have historically gravitated to a focus on celebrity associations and commodities, rather than the act of voting as a form of political agency.

Celebrity

A result of having access to major institutions is not only power, but celebrity (Mills, 1957). Celebrity is the element that drives spectacle. Debord (1994) describes celebrity as the “spectacular representation of a living human being...the star is the object of identification with the shallow seeming life that has to compensate for the fragmented productive specializations which are actually lived” (# 60). Celebrities provide a temporary escape from one’s daily life and offer, for some, a fantasy of money, fame and popularity. Social movements attract exhibitionist personalities who enjoy performing, know how to flaunt symbolic attributes, and who speak quotably (Gitlin, 2003). As a result, the “all-permeating spectacular culture” (Gitlin, 2003, p. 153) readily identifies social movements with the celebrity leaders. The threat of having celebrities, whether fabricated or existing, lead social movements is that they could overshadow the movement’s purpose.

With celebrities, there is “the presupposition of their excellence in everything” (Debord, 1994, # 61). Celebrities compensate for the mundane lives that non-celebrities live; people identify with them because they act out attractive illusions of grandeur that offer a diversion the viewer’s often banal life. The ability of celebrities to make a social impact is debatable, as some operate in a social principle vacuum void

of any value, save private gain (Gitlin, 2003). When a celebrity parlays his marketing savvy into the social movement arena and markets political participation as a t-shirt, the possibility exists that the celebrity stands for little more than advancing his own celebrity (Gitlin, 2003).

The Power of Celebrity

Youth, in general, have had difficulty gaining access to politics because they have few identifiable spokespeople and lack a significant mouthpiece (Owen, 1997). The inability to identify with political leaders manifests into political apathy. When youth find a leader to identify with, the message relayed by the leader/celebrity may cultivate an impression of voting attached to notions of marketing and consumption—those unlike the 1960s notion of voting to realize a basic human right. Since celebrity is the essence of spectacle and it represents an illusory world, the celebrity's representation of politics—wrapped up in the spectacle itself—may filter into the mechanisms SMs use to engage minority youth voters.

The success of celebrities using their star-power to get minority youth to vote is unclear. David Bositis, senior political analyst for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies told *AP*, “Celebrities can help, but it has to be combined with

organization[s] on the ground who have people...who actually go out and register people and at election time reminds people...[to] get out and vote” (Moody, 2004b).

Kevin Powell, political activist and hip-hop scholar, said efforts to mobilize minority youth are “too celebrity-driven. Unfortunately, we’re equating the rappers with being leaders, and they’re not leaders, they’re artists...Of course it (celebrity) helps, but there has to be an alliance between the celebrities and the people who [do] the work” (Moody, 2004b, *AP*).

In an interview with former SNCC chairman Representative John Lewis, D-GA, he noted the delicate balancing act of using celebrities as social movement mouthpieces. Versus a grassroots, door-to-door effort, he said,

I think you need both, and I think they tend to move down the same road; they tend to complement each other. It’s good to have a celebrity, to have someone like a P. Diddy coming along saying ‘Vote or Die’... we used celebrities in the sixties. We brought along Harry Belafonte and we brought Sidney Poitier and Marlon Brando. Martin Luther King was the embodiment of being a celebrity, in a sense. He was an unbelievable galvanizing force and he was able to mobilize the masses... So you need people to follow the presence of a celebrity to sort of get people to buy into it and keep it going (personal interview, April 6, 2006).

A common thread among SNCC and Citizen Change was the propagation of memorable quotes by their celebrated leaders. Flamboyant leaders like Carmichael and Combs had personalities “adept at manipulating symbolic devices like the

inflammatory slogan” (Gitlin, 2003, p. 154). In SNCCs case, the phrase *black power* was capable of inspiring a range of acts and emotions from racial pride to rioting. *Vote or Die!* was capable of inspiring consumer activity in the form of a monetary transaction as a show of political participation. A shift in SM tactics occurred as there was a leap between attaching politics to a militant stance such as *black power*, and commodifying voting on a t-shirt.

The Fabricated Celebrity

In black communities there was a spirit of resistance and revolt during the time SNCC dominated. A heightened political atmosphere served as a breeding ground for the fabricated celebrity—the one created by media in the 1960s because he and his movement advanced a radical cause that made for good copy. “In the sixties, a movement leader could become a star by being, or appearing to be a champion radical” (Gitlin, 2003, p. 149).

Media selected movement figures in the 1960s, covered them frequently, and elevated them to celebrity status based on two qualities: deviance because they brought radical credentials, and flamboyance because they utilized rhetoric the media could easily amplify. Celebrated leader Stokely Carmichael did not represent the majority opinion, values and practices of the larger black community. He was

presented as deviant by the media because he stood for inflammatory issues such as *black power* and draft resistance (Gitlin, 2003).

Carmichael was described as “a new Malcolm X” (Carmichael, 1966). His rhetorical agility, best known by coining the *black power* phrase, inspired fear of the unknown. *Black power* catapulted his celebrity into the realm of deviant flamboyance. To Dr. Martin Luther King the slogan meant “black supremacy”; to Vice President Hubert Humphrey it meant “apartheid”; to 1960s NAACP head Roy Wilkins it meant “antiwhite power” (*Black Power*, 1966).

Carmichael told the *New York Times*, “‘Black Power’ means nothing more than a way to help Negroes develop racial pride and use the ballot for educational and economic advancement” (Roberts, 1966c, p. 128). Disparate interpretations of the intoxicating phrase reveal how Carmichael used the power of celebrity and semantics to inspire fear based an unpredictable public reaction to the phrase (Roberts, 1966a).

The Existing Celebrity

In 2004, media celebrities who led social movements were first celebrated for their music and entertainment success, not because they led great social movements. The creation of their SMs was an adjunct to already existing celebrity; people admired and supported them not out of civic awe, but out of a commercialized allure.

Voting became a product supported with enthusiasm because it was marketed as “new”. When voting was paired with a marketing guru who made millions from promoting consumable products, voting became one of those products. Moreover, when the message the celebrity promoted (i.e. *Vote or Die!*) was consumerized, placed on a t-shirt, and marketed and sold to potential voters, the purpose of voting may have been diluted in a consumption culture.

The type of celebrity evident in the sixties inspired a collective revolutionary ambition; people joined organizations like SNCC because they believed they had political agency and because leaders like Carmichael and Dr. King allowed them to believe such was true.

However, in 2004, social movement activity may or may not have been based on innate feelings of political agency. “[F]or all the organizations’ well-meaning fervor, it’s unclear whether...Combs would be able to claim any successes without the irresistible lure of celebrity” (Graham, 2004, p. D1). Though Combs lacked the fervor and eloquence of historical leaders, he embodied “for this generation something just as important -- a shared experience. One in which music, money and mating are hyped concepts while thought, work and duty are largely ignored” (Young, 2004, ¶ 7).

Citizen Change acknowledged that the likelihood of minority youth divorcing themselves from traditional political campaigns because they did not identify with the

traditional white, male presidential candidate. Combs' remedy was injecting 'sexiness' into the political space, a 'sexiness' that came in the form of his ubiquitous *Vote or Die!* t-shirts. The shirts adorned the bodies of celebrities who appeared on television and in magazines, and were available to voters for a price. Throughout the election, Combs prodded supporters to exercise political agency wearing his shirts, but that message may have overshadowed messages about going to the polls on Election Day.

Media

Celebrity and consumption would be meaningless were it not for media outlets that disseminate SM messages. One of the primary and most powerful players of the multifaceted media institution is news media. William A. Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld (1993) make the case that movements depend on news media for mobilization, validation and scope of enlargement.

Regarding mobilization, most movements must reach their constituents in part through some form of public discourse...carried out in various forms, including the movement's own publications and meetings...Beyond needing the media to convey a message to their constituency, movements need media for validation...the spotlight validates the fact that the movement is an important player. Receiving standing in the media is often a necessary condition before targets of influence will grant a movement recognition and deal with its claims and demands...Finally, movements need media to broaden the scope of conflict...Making a conflict more public offers an opportunity for the movement to improve its relative power...and mass media coverage is a vehicle for this. Here it is not the merely attention but the content of the

media coverage that affects whether and in what ways third parties will enter the conflict (p. 116).

Media are inescapable and are the primary resource for political information. Because most never meet their elected representatives and therefore default to the media to form political impressions, the image that many youth have of politics is the one presented by the media (Beck, Dalton, & Huckfeldt, 1998). In some cases that image formed may be, more or less, spectacle.

Mass media incubate the relationship between celebrities and the public (Gitlin, 2003). When celebrities become driving forces behind social movements, processed media images become *the movement*. Furthermore, a movement becomes ‘good copy’ in the presence of a media-certified celebrity (Gitlin, 2003). Things celebrities do and say are adopted as reality in the same way “[w]aves of enthusiasm for a given product, supported and spread by all the media of communication, are thus propagated with lightning speed” (Debord, 1994, # 67).

News media, including print and television news, are powerful in America because constant viewing allows it to become so (Davis, 1994). With the power to filter, distort or alter messages, news media effectively control political reality for citizens (Ansolabehere, Behr, & Iyengar, 1993).

News “is increasingly used as a vehicle to sell consumer goods, particularly fashion and new technological innovations” (Deshpande, Devanathan, Keum, Nelson, & Shah, 2004, p. 374). The content analysis undertaken by this study examines newspaper stories to determine if such was the case with Citizen Change in 2004. Citizen Change utilized a multi-media assault on minority youth. T-shirts, text messages, phone messages, e-mail and urban radio *Vote or Die!* sermonettes all bombarded youth and registered voters in the weeks leading up to the election (Ferguson, 2004; Segal, 2004). This thesis explores newspaper articles to determine if selling clothing products under the guise of *selling* voting created a shift in the way social movements promote and encourage voting.

Media’s effect on minority enfranchisement and political activism evolved from the Civil Rights era, the point when television began to proliferate as a medium. Society and politics changed, and continue to do so, because of electronic technology such as the printing press, telephones, computers, and various other machine inventions (Strouse, 1975).

Television’s role during the 1960s demonstrated its importance and influence in motivating political activity. McLuhan (as cited in Strouse, 1975) said the medium suggests a message independent of the content of the message. Whenever viewers watched civil rights protests and images of oppression they became part of the action.

Empathy developed for disenfranchised minorities as televised images evoked feelings of agency and the power to exact change through participation.

Scholars purport that media penetration throughout the twentieth century led to an erosion of civic participation (Putnam, 2000). Where I depart from Putnam's notion is that this thesis does not question the claim of a declining civic mobilization due to increased television consumption, but how celebrities advance the message of their social movements and how social movements present the act of voting to target groups. Further, Putnam's square blame on television as the culprit in the decline of social capital has been called into question for being too simplistic. Putnam's view of television as a monolithic medium discounts the complexity of media consumption and media's influence on civic participation (Deshpande, et al., 2004; McLeod, Shah, & Yoon, 2001). This thesis acknowledges the possibility of evanescent enfranchisement based on media consumption, but will further examine news articles to determine if the relationship between spectacle, consumption and celebrity has changed the way social movements promote voting.

SNCC's media use came under fire in the later 1960s. "Media attention was a resource for the movement as a whole, but the sum of it was limited, and therefore individuals were thrown into competition for something intrinsically scarce" (Gitlin, 2003, p. 162). A perennial tension SNCC experienced was over its leaders' access to

media and the spotlight some enjoyed based on their political rhetoric. Many locally rooted SNCC organizers were uncomfortable with the notoriety of the *black power* phrase, and felt the rhetoric was not their own (Gitlin, 2003). In a sense, media attention caused the phrase to metastasize, which created a fissure between local fieldworkers and those who monopolized the media spotlight. In fact, Carmichael believed the “raging media-generated controversy about Black Power” (Carmichael and Thelwell, 2003, p. 537) created a maligned space in history for the phrase. Carmichael shunned media attention, saying it was never his goal to seek the celebrity image. He argued that his goal was not to sell sneakers or move products. He said, “I wasn’t trying to be either ‘angry’ or ‘confrontational’ ...I wasn’t about *cultivating* some *image* to make whites more comfortable. Hell, no” (Carmichael and Thelwell, 2003, p. 545).

The goal of this thesis is not to paint SNCC as a pristine social movement and Citizen Change a dubious representation based on the intense presence of celebrity and media attention on the latter. However, historical trends in the nature of celebrity from the 1960s to the 21st century changed the dynamic of social movements and the way they promote voting. When SNCC dominated, voting was treated as an altruistic experience; for Citizen Change, the act of voting resembled celebrity fabrication due to its link between voting and consumer products.

Chapter 5 Method

To examine the way celebrity, within the context of social movements, has evolved from an historical to current context, I performed a content analysis of newspaper articles from 1966 and 2004. The content analysis was undertaken to note the difference in the way social movements promoted the act of voting, and to determine if there has been a trend toward promoting voting as spectacle and a marketed commodity that could be gained or exercised by making a purchase. Furthermore, this study is interested in the way celebrity, spectacle and commodities have evolved within social movements, and how social movements have utilized these variables to promote voting.

The theoretical framework motivating this content analysis is Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. The content analysis portion of this study will examine if, in the course of social movement's evolutionary cycle, voter mobilization has become associated with celebrity, likening the act of voting to spectacle (or a commodity).

Data Collection

A sample of newspaper articles from 1966 and 2004 was selected for the social movement analysis. Only the articles that mentioned *black power* or *Vote or Die!* were retained to analyze the tone, with the paragraph as the unit of analysis. The phrases

were analyzed with respect to the way each addressed the act of voting. This is important because a common thread among each group was the presence of a catchy, and often marketable phrase used to draw attention to the act of voting or political engagement. Debord (1994) regards spectacle as images that dominate people's lives through marketing, advertising and public relations, and the phrases *black power* and *Vote or Die!* were identified with visual images and used to promote voting. Sentences with the individual phrase "black power" were selected to analyze tone because, during 1966, the captivating phrase was linked with their mobilization efforts. For SNCC, *black power* became their boiler plate; while associated with a variety of both positive and malevolent meanings, one was to inspire blacks to gain power in voting blocs where they were majority inhabitants through the act of voting. For Citizen Change, *Vote or Die!* served the dual purpose of selling a product, as well as inspiring voter turnout in 2004.

Paragraphs were coded for tone as positive, negative or neutral. In paragraphs where the phrase appeared multiple times, the sentence was used as the sub-unit of analysis. Overall tone for the article was determined by the rating receiving the majority tally.

For SNCC, the year 1966 was selected because SNCC's then chairmen, Stokely Carmichael, popularized the phrase *black power*, and it received substantial press during that year.

For Citizen Change, the 2004 election year was selected because Citizen Change was formed that year, presented the phrase *Vote or Die!*, and concentrated its mobilization efforts during the 2004 presidential season.

Using online databases ProQuest, Factiva, LexisNexis, Washington Post Historical and New York Times Historical, a total of 101 articles were collected for the content analysis. Only the articles that explicitly mentioned *black power* in 1966 were retained, and those that mentioned *Vote or Die!* in 2004 were retained for the sample. As a result, 60 SNCC articles were retrieved and 41 Citizen Change articles were retrieved.

Initially, 1968 was selected for the SNCC portion of the analysis because it was an election year, and articles for Citizen Change were pulled from an election year. Analyzing the phrase 'black power' for its presence in the 1968 election as a mobilizing agent proved difficult, since the phrase was introduced by Carmichael in 1966, gained extensive press coverage, and began to fade by 1968. In 1968, SNCC and the Civil Rights movements were culminating; the *black power* phrase was on the

decline. Stokely Carmichael was no longer with SNCC and very few articles were published with the phrase *black power* in the context utilized by this thesis.

By 1968, one of the few news articles the phrase generated surrounded the notoriety the phrase gained at the Mexico City Olympics when two track runners saluted the American flag and National Anthem with bowed heads and raised fists. By then, the phrase manifested into a physical representation of the black power struggle.

Variables

Seventeen mutually exclusive variables were operationalized and coded for word count. Determining the frequency of each word facilitated an understanding of the language that each movement used to mobilize and if there has been an historical shift toward associating voting with celebrity and commodities.

Variables were analyzed using frequency distribution and cross-tabulation to understand how slogans have been semantically linked.

Procedure

To examine the research questions, the coding scheme was developed and reviewed with my thesis colloquium, which consisted of the thesis adviser and peers. The conceptual and operational definitions were reviewed and suggestions were made

to ensure the codebook fully addressed the research questions. Based on class discussion, operational variables such as ‘rally’ and ‘riot’ were added to account for the visceral political undertone in 1966.

To understand tone, I conducted an analysis of each paragraph where the phrases “Black Power” or “Vote or Die” appeared; paragraphs were then assigned a positive, negative or neutral label. At the end of the article, a count of the number of positive, negative and neutral paragraphs was taken to determine which occurred most often, reflecting the overall tone of the article.

Overall article tone was a more subjective code, as coders were instructed to determine if the phrase encouraged the reader to mobilize politically, and if the reader was likely to finish the paragraph with a positive, negative or neutral feeling about voting.

Coders were instructed to code an article that associated “Vote or Die” with encouraging mobilization and political participation (voting) as positive. Code an article that mentioned “Vote or Die” in the context of a commodity, consumer good or a t-shirt as negative. Code an article that neither mentioned “Vote or Die” in the context of mobilization, nor encouraged political participation as neutral. Code an article that associated “Black Power” with encouraging mobilization and political participation (voting) as positive. Code an article that associated “Black Power” with

rioting and violence, or defined the phrase as dangerous as negative. Code an article that neither mentioned “Black Power” in the context of mobilization nor rioting and violence as neutral. Examples of how a coder would list tone are below:

Examples:

- **POSITIVE:** “Hip-hop mogul Sean "P. Diddy" Combs brought his "**Vote or Die**" campaign to the city Wednesday, urging young people to turn out in force on Election Day and influence the outcome.”
 - The paragraph associates “Vote or Die” with encouraging mobilization
- **NEGATIVE:** “Combs, who started Citizen Change earlier this year, strolls through the plane and greets everyone. He's sporting a "**Vote or Die!**" T-shirt, of course, beneath a denim ensemble by Sean John, his personal fashion label.”
 - The paragraph associates “Vote or Die” with a commodity/t-shirt.
- “...the term ‘**black power**’ is reverse racism, a Negro version of white supremacy”.
- **NEUTRAL:** “Combs said the "**Vote or Die**" slogan was chosen because the occupant of the Oval office makes life-and-death decisions that affect millions of Americans.”

With regard to the research questions, a positive tone would demonstrate that the slogans were used as a mobilizing tool. A negative tone would demonstrate that the phrase was associated with commodification in Citizen Change’s case, and with violence and rioting in SNCC’s case. Using tone to understand mobilizing trends allowed me to understand if there is been a shift in the way social movements promote

the act of voting, and if there has been a shift toward promoting voting as commodity in the 21st century socio-political landscape.

A battery of operationalized variables were counted for frequency of appearance in news articles. To ensure the operationalized variables were not coded out of context, all articles were read in their entirety, and the word counts were coded by hand. Words associated with consumption and spectacle included: purchase, celebrity, t-shirt and fashion(able). Words associated with the act of voting included: vote, voter registration, Election Day.

The semantic exploration of newspaper articles from 1966 and 2004, as well as the discussion of tone leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: Modern social movements have shifted to a focus on celebrity and commodities, more so than on voting, political participation and mobilization.

Because particular attention is paid to the phrases and the way they were used to promote the act of voting – as either an act of civic engagement or to encourage consumption – additional hypotheses were generated. Additional hypotheses that resulted from conducting the content analysis include:

H2: Historical social movements do not associate voting with celebrity and commodities.

H3: SNCC relates “Black Power” to voting and mobilization.

H4: Citizen Change relates “Vote or Die” to commodities and consumption.

Inter-coder Reliability

To determine the accuracy of the coding scheme, three coders took part in the inter-coder reliability test. Twelve of the total 101 articles were coded. Using Kendall’s Tau, nominal level variables were tested. Among the 12 articles, there was only one difference in tone among the three coders. For tone, the inter-coder reliability measured .854 for the 12 cases, and 100% reliability for the operational variables.

An emphasis is placed on tone because it was the most subjective category. The operational variables were straight word counts, and tone required more analysis on the part of the coder.

Table 5.1

Drake's Inter-coder Reliability

			ktone	tone
Kendall's tau_b	ktone	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.854(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001
		N	12	12
	tone	Correlation Coefficient	.854(**)	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.
		N	12	12

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Interviews

To further address the research questions and hypothesis, interviews were conducted with individuals directly involved with each movement. For SNCC, Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) was interviewed. Rep. Lewis served as SNCC chairman from 1964-1966, the period adjacent to Carmichael's tenure as chairmen from 1966-1967. Citizen Change's Executive Director, Alexis McGill, was also interviewed. The interviews were designed to understand how social movements evolved from the 1960s to 2004, and to place an historical frame on those changes by speaking with individuals who were directly involved in either movement.

Dr. Mark H. Lopez, Research Director at The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) was interviewed because of his expertise in youth voting and civic engagement.

Chapter 6 Results

The results of the content analysis reveal a sharp difference in the way SNCC and Citizen Change presented the act of voting via the slogans *Black Power* and *Vote or Die!* in the coded newspaper articles. The variable used to measure how each group used its slogan was tone, which examined news articles to see if there has been a shift from encouraging the act of voting, itself, to a commodification of voting where consumption and spectacle dominate how a social movements encourage political participation. This allowed me to see if voting had become a commodified product, where the act of consumption became the substitute for actually mobilizing on Election Day. The slogan was used as a determining factor in social movements linking voting with a commodity and spectacle because in 2004, the slogan *Vote or Die!* was used to not only sell a product, but to also sell or inspire voting; the slogan *black power* carried many intentions, one was to engage a disenfranchised public, and this content analysis discovered another was to inspire rioting and violence.

Based on the results of running a tonal analysis, the phrase *Vote or Die!* was linked to commodity and spectacle more than it was the voting in 2004. Hypothesis one was validated in that the modern social movement examined in this study linked voting to celebrity and commodities. Whether or not a trend occurred where social movements evolved from presenting voting as an altruistic act in the late 1960s to a

commodified act in 2004 is not the conclusion reached. However, the differences in the way the movements presented the act of voting differed between the historical and current movement observed.

Regarding tone, 57.4% of SNCC articles were coded as neutral, meaning that over half of the references to *black power* were basic mentions. In this case, the slogan was not mentioned in the context of rioting and violence, nor was it mentioned in the context of voting or mobilization. *Black power* was mentioned in a negative context in 23% of coded articles, which indicates the phrase was used in the context of rioting and violence. However, only 8.2% of *black power* mentions in SNCC news article were coded as positive, meaning the phrase was used to promote voting. This indicates the phrase *black power* was seldom used as to inspire voter participation or mobilization. This measure also does not support hypothesis three, which stated that the historical social movement associated its slogan with voting and mobilization. The phrase *black power* was most often used in a neutral context, followed by the negative context of rioting. In essence, the basis for establishing an historical trend where voting shifted from an altruistic view of voting to a commodified view did not exist, as the SNCC newspaper articles from 1966 did not overwhelmingly use the phrase to inspire turnout.

Citizen Change's overall tone average was quite the opposite of SNCC's. Thirty-four percent of Citizen Change articles were coded as negative, indicating the phrase 'Vote or Die' was associated with a commodity or consumer good more than it was with voting. The phrase was mentioned in the context of inspiring voting and mobilization 24% of the time; these mentions were coded as positive. Neutral mentions of 'Vote or Die', meaning the phrase was neither mentioned in the context of mobilization or political participation, nor in the context of commodification, followed close behind at 22 percent. The results indicate that, in the coded articles, Citizen Change associated its slogan with consumption and spectacle more often than encouraging voting and voter registration, and this supports hypothesis four.

Table 6.1

Drake Analysis: Social Movements and Tone

arttype * tone Crosstabulation

			Tone				Total	
			Neutral	Positive	Negative	Could not determine		
Arttype	citizen change	Count	9	10	14	8	41	
		% within arttype	22.0%	24.4%	34.1%	19.5%	100.0%	
		% within tone	20.5%	66.7%	50.0%	53.3%	40.2%	
		% of Total	8.8%	9.8%	13.7%	7.8%	40.2%	
	Sncc	Count	35	5	14	7	61	
		% within arttype	57.4%	8.2%	23.0%	11.5%	100.0%	
		% within tone	79.5%	33.3%	50.0%	46.7%	59.8%	
		% of Total	34.3%	4.9%	13.7%	6.9%	59.8%	
		Total	Count	44	15	28	15	102
			% within arttype	43.1%	14.7%	27.5%	14.7%	100.0%
% within tone	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
% of Total	43.1%		14.7%	27.5%	14.7%	100.0%		

Note: Could not determine indicates there was no majority tone (i.e. 2 positive mentions and 2 negative mentions)

Results for tone were determined to be statistically significant. The Pearson Chi-Square value for tone was .003.

Table 6.2

Social Movement & Tone Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.702(a)	3	.003
Likelihood Ratio	14.231	3	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.861	1	.091
N of Valid Cases	102		

0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.03.

So does this mean that in 2004 there was a commodification of voting? Based on the research conducted by this thesis, yes. This conclusion is gathered from the way the phrase ‘Vote or Die’ was used in newspaper articles. Because the phrase served a dual purpose by promoting voting and the purchase of a t-shirt, the content analysis supported hypotheses one and four, and revealed the phrase appeared most often in the latter context.

In an interview conducted with Alexis McGill, Citizen Change’s Executive Director, this hypothesis was also supported. McGill said of the phrase ‘Vote or Die’, “I think the work we did with Vote or Die was a communications campaign, a marketing campaign that was grounded in an organization and that worked with a much better organization” (personal communication, March 26, 2006).

While the analysis of article tone revealed that more Citizen Change articles were coded as negative, an analysis of the operational variables tells a different story. The operational variables, which were coded as a word counts, reveal the frequency of appearance of words related to voting and commodification.

‘Vote’ was in the grouping of operational variables concerned with the actual act of voting. For Citizen Change articles, the word with the highest mean appearance was ‘vote’, which appeared an average of 5.1707 times per article. ‘Election Day’ appeared an average 2.1707 times per article, and ‘voter registration’ appeared an average 1.5054 per article. Operational variables associated with spectacle and consumption – purchase, celebrity and t-shirt – appeared less frequently in Citizen Change articles than words that promote the actual act – vote, voter registration and Election Day. The variable ‘purchase’ appeared an average .1707 times per article, ‘celebrity’ .7073 times, and ‘t-shirt’ appeared an average of 1.1951 times per article. Although the variables associated with commodification appeared less frequently than variables associated with voting, the tonal analysis demonstrated the phrase ‘Vote or Die’ carried a commodified meaning most often (based on the way the phrase ‘Vote or Die’ was applied).

Using the operational variables to examine hypothesis two reveals the hypothesis is supported. It stated, historical movements do not associate voting with

celebrity and commodities. The operational variables aligned with a commodified view of voting – purchase, t-shirt, fashion, etc – rarely or never appeared in SNCC articles (see table 6.3).

The Independent Samples t-test revealed that many of the operational variables used to measure commodification in *Vote or Die!* articles were not prevalent in the 1960s social movement lexicon. For example, the variables ‘purchase’, ‘t-shirt’ and ‘fashion’ were not present in 1966 *black power* articles.

McGill cautioned against making the comparison between ‘black power’ and ‘Vote or Die’. She stated,

The black power movement and black power as a slogan was more than a campaign... Vote or Die in itself as a movement, I have a hard time equating it with something like the Black Power movement... what Vote or Die did was try to create a sense of urgency around why it's so important to connect and to vote...and the slogan really was part of that campaign, and honestly I don't think we could be compared to the Black Power movement. That's what we aspire to get to, but I really don't think we were there in '04 (personal interview, March 26, 2006).

Table 6.3

Group Statistics

	Arttype	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
bpwr	citizen change	41	.0000	.00000	.00000
	Sncc	61	5.0656	5.66530	.72537
voteordie	citizen change	41	1.5122	.89783	.14022
	sncc	61	.0000	.00000	.00000
vote	citizen change	41	5.1707	5.77885	.90250
	sncc	61	.1967	.57212	.07325
regis	citizen change	41	1.5854	2.55906	.39966
	sncc	61	.1475	.47736	.06112
elecday	citizen change	41	2.1707	2.88013	.44980
	sncc	61	.0492	.21804	.02792
celeb	citizen change	41	.7073	1.41852	.22154
	sncc	61	.0000	.00000	.00000
purchse	citizen change	41	.1707	.80319	.12544
	sncc	61	.0164	.12804	.01639
fashion	citizen change	41	.4390	1.16294	.18162
	sncc	61	.0000	.00000	.00000
tshirt	citizen change	41	1.1951	3.61400	.56441
	sncc	61	.0164	.12804	.01639

However, the average appearance of the variables was not shown to be statistically significant based on t-tests (see table 6.4). The statistical insignificance of the averages was expected, as many of the words coded for the 2004 Citizen Change articles were not present in 1966 SNCC articles. As such, there was no point of comparison; the goal of finding the mean presence of the operationalized variables was

to understand which variables appeared most often in the coded articles. For example, the variable 'vote' appeared on average more than the variables 'purchase', 't-shirt' and 'celebrity' in 2004.

Table 6.4

		t-test for Equality of Means						
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
bpwr	Equal variances assumed	5.716	00	.000	5.06557	88622	6.82381	3.30734
	Equal variances not assumed	6.983	0.000	.000	5.06557	72537	6.51652	3.61462
voteordie	Equal variances assumed	3.187	00	.000	.51220	11467	.28468	.73971
	Equal variances not assumed	0.785	0.000	.000	.51220	14022	.22881	.79559
vote	Equal variances assumed	.690	00	.000	.97401	74351	.49892	.44910
	Equal variances not assumed	.493	0.528	.000	.97401	90547	.14472	.80330
regis	Equal variances assumed	.288	00	.000	.43782	33528	77265	.10300
	Equal variances not assumed	.556	1.878	.000	.43782	40430	62184	.25381
elecday	Equal variances assumed	.743	00	.000	.12155	36944	.38859	.85451
	Equal variances not assumed	.708	0.308	.000	.12155	45067	.21094	.03216
celeb	Equal variances assumed	.904	00	.000	70732	18118	34786	.06677
	Equal variances not assumed	.193	0.000	.000	70732	22154	25958	.15506
purchse	Equal variances assumed	.477	00	.000	15434	10452	.05303	36171
	Equal variances not assumed	.220	1.370	.000	15434	12650	.10107	40975
fashion	Equal variances assumed	.956	00	.000	43902	14854	14433	73372
	Equal variances not assumed	.417	0.000	.000	43902	18162	07195	80609
tshirt	Equal variances assumed	.551	00	.000	.17873	46203	26208	.09538
	Equal variances not assumed	.088	0.067	.000	.17873	56465	03759	.31987

To further explore the relationship between Citizen Change’s predominate usage of the phrase ‘Vote or Die’ in a commodified manner, a cross-tabulation was conducted between the variables ‘purchase’ and ‘t-shirt’. This is because the phrase ‘Vote or Die’ appeared on a t-shirt that was sold to its constituents. The results of the cross-tabulation were statistically significant, with a Pearson Chi-Square value of 0.000.

Table 6.5

Purchase * T-Shirt Crosstabulation

		T-Shirt					Total	
		.00	1.00	2.00	4.00	23.00		
Purchase	.00	Count	84	6	7	1	0	98
		% within Purchase	85.7%	6.1%	7.1%	1.0%	.0%	100.0%
		% within T-Shirt	100.0%	66.7%	100.0%	100.0%	.0%	96.1%
		% of Total	82.4%	5.9%	6.9%	1.0%	.0%	96.1%
	1.00	Count	0	3	0	0	0	3
		% within Purchase	.0%	100.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
		% within T-Shirt	.0%	33.3%	.0%	.0%	.0%	2.9%
		% of Total	.0%	2.9%	.0%	.0%	.0%	2.9%
	5.00	Count	0	0	0	0	1	1
		% within Purchase	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within T-Shirt	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%	1.0%
		% of Total	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Total		Count	84	9	7	1	1	102
		% within Purchase	82.4%	8.8%	6.9%	1.0%	1.0%	100.0%
		% within T-Shirt	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	82.4%	8.8%	6.9%	1.0%	1.0%	100.0%

Table 6.6

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	133.918(a)	8	.000
Likelihood Ratio	26.792	8	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	86.134	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 12 cells (80.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .01.

An overview of the coded articles revealed that many that SNCC news articles from 1966 were noticeably longer in word count than Citizen Change articles from 2004. This may have been due to trends in news reporting. An independent samples t-test was conducted to gauge if there was a disparity in article length. The results showed that the average length of Citizen Change articles, at 758 words, was higher than the average length of SNCC articles, which averaged 745 words. The mean word count for each group was statistically significant based on the t-test value.

Table 6.7

Group Statistics

	arttype	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Wordct	citizen change	41	758.1463	536.32987	83.76065
	sncc	61	745.7049	883.45727	113.11511

Table 6.8

		t-test for Equality of Means						
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
wordct	Equal variances assumed	.081	100	.936	12.44142	154.24489	293.57605	318.45890
	Equal variances not assumed	.088	99.131	.930	12.44142	140.75111	266.83474	291.71759

Limitations

Newspaper articles report on real-time events, and using of newspaper articles for conducting the content analysis, as opposed to organizational propaganda, may have slanted the research. News, while intended as an objective outlet, does not

describe an organization in the same positive light as the organization's brochures or publications would.

Using only newspapers as the point of analysis does not conclusively support the idea that social movements have shifted to a focus on commodities and spectacle. This study could not conclude that a trend towards the commodification of voting exists, as the coding scheme could not measure whether or not voting was commodified in 1966. The phrase 'black power' was coded as negative if it inspired rioting, not a purchase or consumption.

Further, integrating television into the content analysis might have revealed an increased commodification of voting, as celebrities were depicted wearing and promoting *Vote or Die!* t-shirts on television broadcasts.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

This study showed that in two phases of social movement history, different variables were emphasized. As America's social and political landscape changes by the generation, so to must the mechanisms used to inspire a public that has historically experienced disenfranchisement. The celebrity and rhetoric employed by both movements received more attention than the message of actually going to vote in 2004. The coded news articles linked one movement and its slogan with rioting, while the other with commodities and consumption.

Future

If social movements continue to use marketing techniques to commodify voting and inspire turnout, measuring the success or effectiveness of groups that commodify voting is the next step in this research. Removing the study from the abstract and resituating it in the context of how individuals who participate in social movements react to celebrity and spectacle would be intriguing.

Political change is a slow and bureaucratic process, so measuring an elusive variable like success with respect to social movements would require a generational study of 21st social movements – one that moves beyond the examination of social movements by comparing 1960s movements to current movements. While success is

an intangible variable, “[i]s a group a failure if it collapses with no legacy save inspiration to a generation that will soon take up the same cause with more tangible results?” (Gamson, 1975, p. 28). This study does not determine if Citizen Change was more successful in mobilizing minority youth than SNCC, and vice versa, but measuring success is a future step to be taken in this research.

Debord relates commodity and spectacle to how the individual sees the world; this thesis stops short of exploring how the individual participants react to voting when presented as a spectacle and commodity, but focuses on how a social movement or group presents an act like voting by using celebrity, spectacle and commodities.

Exploring the bottom line for social movement participants, and if social movements inspire a sense of voter efficacy are possible lines of continuation. Understanding if the movement inspires its target audience enough to actually mobilize on Election Day might also offer a measure of success. Further research could also detail if the targeted subjects are motivated to mobilize and vote when voting is commodified, and if marketing techniques used to promote voting actually inspire mobilization and turnout.

Since most movements mobilize around presidential elections, the next opportunity to take a real-time analysis of social movement participants would be the 2008 presidential election. At this moment, Citizen Change appears to be in a

challenge period. The group has not formally dissolved, but has ceased mobilization activity (Gamson, 1975). Should the group continue its efforts during the next election, real-time data could be collected by attending summits or activities sponsored by Citizen Change.

Finally, this thesis only skims the surface of the hip-hop culture that saturated the socio-political landscape in 2004. Further research could explore this phenomenon in conjunction with its efforts to mobilize minority youth, which could detail just how much social movements have evolved from an historical versus a hip-hop context.

Appendix

Content Analysis Coding Scheme

Coding Instructions
Evanescent Enfranchisement: Social Movements and Minority Youth Voter
Participation
LaToya F. Drake

This thesis will examine the way social movements have presented the act of voting in the late 1960s and in 2004. The goal is to examine the way social movements (SMs) employ celebrity to mobilize minority youth¹. Underscoring this thesis is the question of how political and climatic disparities between 1960s SMs and modern movements affect the way social movements mobilize, and how celebrity, spectacle and commodities have evolved and impact mobilization.

These elements have been isolated and will be analyzed along with the phrases *black power* and *Vote or Die!* to determine their presence in news articles, and if the presence of each corresponds with a call to action as far as mobilization is concerned.

I will utilize Guy Debord's (1994) *Society of the Spectacle* to examine the role of celebrity in the social movement and political space. Debord calls the spectacle "the

¹ For the purpose of this study, minority youth refers to African-American youth.

heart of the unrealism of the real society. In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life” (6). This model has made its way into American political culture. The spectacle consists of signs (7)—and in the hip-hop culture that sees political agency as its goals, those signs are celebrity and media. This thesis questions the notion of entertainers entering the political fray and attempting to mobilize youth, and when compared to an historical social movement, do movements today commodify voting by associating the process with prominent celebrities and media images. The goal of this content analysis is to show that the presence of celebrity—in the context of a social movement—impacts the way social movements approach mobilization.

Research Question 1: Why do social movements use celebrity and spectacle to impact African-American youth mobilization efforts?

Research Question 2: How do social movements impact political participation and mobilization among African-American youth?

Research Question 3: How has celebrity evolved from historical to current social movements, such as Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the 1960s and Citizen Change in 2004?

Hypothesis: Modern social movements have shifted to a focus on celebrity connections and commodities, more so than on political participation and mobilization.

Universe of Samples: Newspapers

Sample: Newspaper articles and editorials from election years 1966 and 2004

Newspaper Selection: Selected from a list of the 100 top dailies by circulation (<http://www.infoplease.com/ipea/A0004420.html>) in cities Vote or Die visited in its social movement campaign (New York to Milwaukee, Detroit, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Miami) & the Southern regions in which SNCC originated and had a visible presence. Washington Post selected because it is one of the newspapers of record in the US.

Newspaper Study Dates: July 2004 to November 2004 because this is length of time Citizen Change existed and because campaigning generally picks up during this period. For SNCC, July 1966 to November 1966 because the SNCC's leader Stokely Carmichael popularized the phrase

“Black Power” in 1966, and it received substantial press coverage during this period two years shy of the presidential election.

Unit of Analysis: Paragraphs with the phrases “Vote or Die” and “Black Power”.

- Sub-unit of Analysis: Sentences with the phrases “Vote or Die” or “Black Power”.

Instructions: For Operational Definitions, mark the number of times the given phrase appears in the space corresponding to the article. For Outlet, Story Origin, Visual and Tone, mark the correct code number in the space corresponding to the article.

Conceptual Definitions:

Black Power: slogan coined by SNCC chairman Stokely Carmichael in 1966

Celebrity: “The spectacular representation of a living human being... is the object of identification” (Debord, 1994, p. 60). For this study, mentions of 2004 movement leaders such as Sean “P. Diddy” Combs and names mentioned in Citizen Change’s news release (Jay-Z, Leonardo DiCaprio, Jamie Foxx, Ellen DeGeneres, Ashton Kutcher, 50 Cent, Mary J. Blige and Drew Barrymore); 1960s leader Stokely Carmichael.

Citizen Change: non-profit, non-partisan group formed by Sean Combs in 2004 formed to promote voter mobilization and make voting “sexy”

Election Day: refers to Presidential Election; 1st Tuesday in November

Fashion(able): Conforming to a current style; stylish

Media: A catch-all “that includes transnational corporations, communications technologies, policy and regulatory frameworks, the practices of journalists, gossip columns, the nightly television news, blockbuster movies, advertisements, business magazines, music radio, the local newspaper and the Internet” (Craig, 2004, p. 3).

P. Diddy (Sean Combs): Media mogul, recording artist, fashion designer, marathon runner and record company owner who founded Citizen Change in 2004

Purchase: References to Citizen Change’s promotion of t-shirts bearing the slogan “Vote or Die”; citizens were encouraged to purchase the t-shirts

Rally: A political gathering intended to inspire enthusiasm for a cause

Riot: Unrestrained outbreak; violent disturbance by a group (three or more) of people

SNCC: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; pronounced “Snick”, and may appear phonetically

Social Movement: Conscious, concerted, and sustained efforts by ordinary people to change some aspect of their society by using extra-institutional means (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003, p. 3)

Stokely Carmichael: Chairman of SNCC from 1966 to 1968; popularized the phrase “Black Power”

T-Shirt: An article of clothing

Vote (verb): To cast a vote (in a Presidential Election)

Vote or Die: Phrase used by Combs’ Citizen Change to impress the importance of voting on its target group

Voter Registration: The process of registering to vote after reaching voting age

Operational Definitions

Black Power: the # of times ‘black power’ is mentioned in an article

Celebrity: the # of times celebrity is mentioned in an article

Citizen Change: the # of times ‘Citizen Change’ is mentioned in an article

Election Day: the number of times Election Day, or the term ‘election’ as an indicator of a pending Presidential Election is mentioned in an article

Media: the # of times media is mentioned in an article

P. Diddy (Sean Combs): the # of times Sean Combs is mentioned—in any variation of his name, i.e. P. Diddy, Diddy, Puffy, Sean Combs; only direct mentions are coded; do not code for pronouns (i.e. he, him)

Purchase: the # of times purchase as a reference to a t-shirt being sold, is mentioned in an article

Rally: the # of times rally is mentioned in an article

Riot: the # of times riot is mentioned in an article

SNCC: the # of times SNCC is mentioned in an article in a varied of its name, i.e. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or the phonetic ‘Snick’

Social Movement: the # of times social movement is mentioned in an article; also code the word ‘movement’ as an indicator of social movement

Stokely Carmichael: the # of times Stokely Carmichael is mentioned in an article

T-Shirt: the # of times T-shirt is mentioned in an article; the term ‘clothing’ when used to refer to ‘Vote or Die’ t-shirts should be coded.

Vote (verb): the # of times vote is mentioned in an article

Vote or Die: the # of times ‘Vote or Die’ is mentioned in an article

Voter Registration: the number of times voter registration appears in the article; also in the variation of ‘register to vote’

Coding System

Outlet:

- 2—Washington Post
- 3—New York Times
- 4—Boston Globe
- 5—Philadelphia Inquirer
- 6—Cleveland Plain Dealer
- 7—Miami Herald
- 8—Atlanta Journal Constitution
- 9—Birmingham News
- 10—Women’s Wear Daily
- 15—Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
- 45—United Press International (UPI)
- 55—Associated Press (AP)
- 65—Reuters
- 75—Chicago Sun-Times
- 76—Chicago Tribune

85—Cincinnati Post

95—USA Today

00—Unknown

****NOTE:** A wire story that appears in one of the above newspapers will be coded under the wire.

Story Origination: What part of the country does the news originate? If there is no city mentioned in the dateline, code origination as the city where the newspaper is published.

1—South (MS, NC, GA, AL, TN, FL, DC, MD)

2—Midwest (OH, MI, IL, WI)

3—Northeast (NY, PA, MA)

00—Unknown

****NOTE:** For wire stories, code story origination based on the story's dateline.

Visual: Presence of visual image in newspaper article

100—No image present

101—1 or more image(s) present

00—Unknown/Not Applicable

Tone: Is the phrase used to encourage the reader to become involved in the organization or to mobilize politically? Is the reader likely to finish the paragraph with a positive, negative or neutral feeling about voting? To determine tone, examine each paragraph that includes the phrase “Vote or Die” or “Black Power”. Determine if the paragraph is positive, negative or neutral in how the reader is likely to feel about voting from the paragraph.

Code an article that associates “Vote or Die” with encouraging mobilization and political participation (voting) as positive.

Code an article that mentions “Vote or Die” in the context of a commodity, consumer good or t-shirt as negative.

Code an article that neither mentions “Vote or Die” in the context of mobilization or political participation, nor in the context of a commodity, consumer good or t-shirt as neutral.

Code an article that associates “Black Power” with encouraging mobilization and political participation (voting) as positive.

Code an article that associates “Black Power” with rioting and violence, or defines the phrase as dangerous as negative.

Code an article that neither mentions “Black Power” in the context of mobilization nor rioting and violence as neutral.

Examples:

- **POSITIVE:** “Hip-hop mogul Sean "P. Diddy" Combs brought his "**Vote or Die**" campaign to the city Wednesday, urging young people to turn out in force on Election Day and influence the outcome.”
 - The paragraph associates “Vote or Die” with encouraging mobilization
- **NEGATIVE:** “Combs, who started Citizen Change earlier this year, strolls through the plane and greets everyone. He's sporting a "**Vote or Die!**" T-shirt, of course, beneath a denim ensemble by Sean John, his personal fashion label.”
 - The paragraph associates “Vote or Die” with a commodity/t-shirt.
- “...the term ‘**black power**’ is reverse racism, a Negro version of white supremacy”.
- **NEUTRAL:** “Combs said the "**Vote or Die**" slogan was chosen because the occupant of the Oval office makes life-and-death decisions that affect millions of Americans.”
 - The paragraph mentions the phrase, but not its ability to mobilize or its appearance on a commodity.

Coders can use the following chart to access tone:

# Paragraphs	# Positive	# Negative	# Neutral

After calculating the paragraphs for tone, positive, negative or neutral will be based on the frequency of occurrence of each. For instance, and article with 8

paragraphs that has 4 positive, 1 negative and 3 neutral will be coded as positive. If a tie results, code as “could not determine”.

Mark the code with the corresponding article.

1—Positive

2—Negative

00—Neutral

11—Could not determine

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Operational Definitions

- Black Power
- Celebrity
- Citizen Change
- Election Day
- Fashion(able)
- Media
- P. Diddy (Sean Combs)/P. Diddy/Diddy/Sean Combs
- Purchase
- Rally
- Riot
- SNCC
- Social Movement
- Stokely Carmichael
- T-Shirt
- Vote (verb)
- Vote or Die
- Voter Registration

Outlet

- 2—Washington Post
- 3—New York Times
- 4—Boston Globe
- 5—Philadelphia Inquirer
- 6—Cleveland Plain Dealer
- 7—Miami Herald
- 8—Atlanta Journal Constitution
- 9—Birmingham News
- 10—Women’s Wear Daily
- 15—Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
- 45—United Press International (UPI)
- 55—Associated Press (AP)
- 65—Reuters

- 75—Chicago Sun-Times
- 76—Chicago Tribune
- 85—Cincinnati Post
- 95—USA Today
- 00—Unknown

Story Origination

- 1—South (MS, NC, GA, AL, TN, FL, DC, MD)
- 2—Midwest (OH, MI, IL, WI)
- 3—Northeast (NY, PA, MA)
- 00—Unknown

Visual

- 100—No image present
- 101—1 or more image(s) present
- 00—Unknown/Not Applicable

Tone

- 1—Positive
- 2—Negative
- 00—Neutral
- 11—Could not determine

Interview Request Letters

February 22, 2006

Dear Alexis McGill:

My name is LaToya Drake, and I am a Master's candidate at Georgetown University's Communication, Culture & Technology Program.

I am conducting research for my graduate thesis on historical and present social movements and minority youth voter participation. I am being advised by Dr. Diana Owen, and I am writing to inquire if you would be able to grant me an interview for research purposes.

Given your work with Citizen Change and your knowledge on social movements and minority youth mobilization, I feel that my research would benefit from speaking with you on an academic level.

If you are able to grant an interview, please contact me using one of the methods of communication listed below.

Regards,

LaToya F. Drake
4513 Southland Ave.
Alexandria VA, 22312
703.349.2107 (h)
706.302.6128 (c)
dfd@georgetown.edu
LFDrake@gmail.com

February 22, 2006

Representative John Lewis
343 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Rep. Lewis:

My name is LaToya Drake, and I am a Master's candidate at Georgetown University's Communication, Culture & Technology Program.

I am conducting research for my graduate thesis on historical and present social movements and minority youth voter participation. I am being advised by Dr. Diana Owen, and I am writing to inquire if you would be able to grant me an interview for research purposes.

Given your knowledge of minority political activism and your experience with SNCC, I feel that my research would benefit from speaking with you on an academic level.

If you are able to grant an interview, please contact me using one of the methods of communication listed below.

Regards,

LaToya F. Drake
4513 Southland Ave.
Alexandria VA, 22312
703.349.2107 (h)
706.302.6128 (c)
lfdrake@georgetown.edu
LFDrake@gmail.com

February 22, 2006

Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton
2041 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave., S.E.,
Suite 300
Washington, DC 20020

Dear Delegate Holmes Norton:

My name is LaToya Drake, and I am a Master's candidate at Georgetown University's Communication, Culture & Technology Program.

I am conducting research for my graduate thesis on historical and present social movements and minority youth voter participation, and I am writing to inquire if you would be able to grant me an interview for research purposes.

Given your knowledge of minority political activism and your experience with SNCC, I feel that my research would benefit from speaking with you on an academic level.

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Regards,

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4513 Southland Ave.
Alexandria VA, 22312
703.349.2107 (h)
706.302.6128 (c)
lfid@georgetown.edu
LFDrake@gmail.com

February 22, 2006

Dr. Mark Lopez
School of Public Affairs
2101 Van Munching Hall
College Park, Maryland 20742-1821

Dear Dr. Lopez:

My name is LaToya Drake, and I am a Master's candidate at Georgetown University's Communication, Culture & Technology Program.

I am conducting research for my graduate thesis on historical and present social movements and minority youth voter participation. I am being advised by Dr. Diana Owen, and I am writing to inquire if you would be able to grant me an interview for research purposes.

Given your work with CIRCLE on youth and minority mobilization, I feel that my research would benefit from speaking with you on an academic level.

If you able to grant me an interview, please contact me using one of the methods of communication listed below.

Regards,

LaToya F. Drake
4513 Southland Ave.
Alexandria VA, 22312
703.349.2107 (h)
706.302.6128 (c)
dfd@georgetown.edu
LFDrake@gmail.com

Informed Consent Form

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE

Evanescent Enfranchisement: Social Movements and Minority Youth Voter Participation

PROJECT DIRECTOR

- Dr. Diana Owen

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

- Latoya F. Drake

TELEPHONE

- 703.349.2107

SPONSOR

The Georgetown University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved this research project. For information on your rights as a research subject, call the Institutional Review Board office at 202-687-1506.

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to consider participating in a research study to investigate Evanescent Enfranchisement: Social Movements and Minority Youth Voter Participation. This form will describe the purpose and nature of the research, its possible risks and benefits, other options available to you, and your rights as a participant in the study. The decision to participate, or not to participate, is yours. If you decide to participate, please be sure to sign and date the last page of this form.

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH STUDY BEING DONE?

In this research study, we are investigating/testing/comparing/evaluating the effect of social movements on minority youth voter participation. This thesis will examine the role social movements played in affecting minority youth voter turnout in presidential elections in 1968 and in 2004. The goal is to examine the way social movements (SMs) employ celebrity and media attention to mobilize minority youth. Underscoring this thesis is the question of how political and climatic disparities between 1960s SMs and modern movements affect the political mobilization of minority youth, and how two particular variables of social groups—celebrity and media—have evolved and impact mobilization.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

About ____10____ people will take part in this study. Participants in the study are referred to as “subjects.”

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?

- *You can expect to be asked 15-20 questions.*
- *Your opinions will be recorded and will be used for empirical research purposes and to demonstrate the role of social movements on minority youth voter participation.*
- *The interview will last approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour.*
- *This study will be complete on May 1, 2006.*
- *You will interact with only the primary investigator.*
- *Names of interview subjects will be collected and used for research purposes only.*
- *If, for any reason, you wish to remain anonymous, your name and identity will not be used in this research.*

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

We expect that you will be in the study for 30 minutes to 1 hour. The investigators or sponsors may stop the study or take you out of the study at any time they judge it is in your best interest (e.g., if you experience an injury, if you need additional or different interventions, or if you do not comply with the study plan). They may also remove you from the study for various other reasons, (e.g., your participation is no longer necessary). They can do this without your consent.

You can stop participating at any time. However, if you decide to stop participating in the study, we encourage you to talk to the researcher first.

Names of interview subjects are used for research purposes only. If you do not wish to be identified in this study, your name and title will be withheld.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

Risks to the subject are minimal and all subjects will be participating with their informed consent. To protect raw data collected during interviews, tapes used to record interviews will be secured in a locked file cabinet. Interview notes transcribed by hand will be secured in a locked file cabinet, and digitally transcribed notes will be stored in a password protected and restricted digital format.

ARE THERE BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

It is reasonable to expect the following benefits from this research: Comments made by the subject will be used for research purposes and to advance the study of minority youth participation in political elections.

However, we cannot guarantee that you will personally experience benefits from participating in this study. Others may benefit in the future from the information we obtain in this study.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY?

This study is designed for organizers and staffers of social movements that have attempted to mobilize minority youth with groups such as SNCC and Citizen Change.

Your suitability for this study will be determined by current and historical research demonstrating get out the vote efforts made by each group and the presence of each group during the 1968 and 2004 presidential elections.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

Study subjects will not be paid for participating in this study.

WHOM DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

Call LaToya Drake at 703-349-2107 day or night if you have questions about the study, any problems, unexpected physical or psychological discomforts, any injuries, or think that something unusual or unexpected is happening.

Call the Georgetown University IRB Office at 202-687-1506 with any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Upon signing, the subject or the legally authorized representative will receive a copy of this form, and the original will become part of the subject's clinical record. If there is no relevant clinical record, the original will be held in the subject's research record.

Statement of Witness

I have personally witnessed (check as applicable):

- The subject (or legally authorized representative or parent or guardian) sign this informed consent document.
- The informed consent process involving both the subject (or legally authorized representative or parent or guardian) and the person obtaining consent.

Witness Signature

Date

Interview Transcripts

Dr. Mark Hugo Lopez Interview, Research Director, CIRCLE

Interview Date: 3/3/2006

1. Question: Are minority youth viewed as a politically apathetic group?

Answer: I think the last election, 2004 showed that you can get youth interested in politics. But frankly, over the last 30 years there has been a decline in the political participation of young people. That's been offset to some degree by an increase in participation on the civic side. I think young people today are more likely to volunteer than they were 20 years ago. However, on the political side, voting numbers have been dropping. It has particularly been true for young people, more so than adults. And non-college youth have lower rates than college-educated or college going youth. Numbers have been coming down over the last 30 years with the exception of 92 and 2004 because there was a real interest in the 92 election and the 2004 election, you got a lot of young people interest in voting.

2. And speaking of civic participation, Robert Putnam writes of a declining social capital in *Bowling Alone*. He writes that participating in social group activities is dissipating and he blames it on television. Is he right?

Civic participation among young people hasn't really been decreasing, so you can't apply that explanation to young people. I think for adults it's a combination of things and researchers have been trying to figure out how this combination works. It might be things like television or internet gaming. It could also be the nature or construction that we live in that are not conducive to civic engagement—because you live in a house that's detached from everyone else. But at the same time, if you're a parent you're going to be engaged. So people who have children are more likely to be engaged than people who don't have children. So you see a sort of different story depending on the group we look at, so I don't know if we can say that civic participation has been down

everywhere, but it may be down for specific groups based on the three reasons I gave.

3. Thinking about that and the fact that we are a more individualistic culture, do you think we could use those technologies to engage students? Like today, everyone has a MySpace or Facebook account, and everyone is instant messaging. Is there a way to integrate that media in the social movement space?

I don't know how we would do that, but I would certainly say that young people are figuring out how to do some of that, and they are getting involved in ways that are new and different from what previous generations have done. I would also say we need to be cautious how we specify civic engagement because frankly we can measure it with some really hard numbers like voting and volunteering, which are easy to get. But different communities might engage differently, and we may not be able to pick it up with our traditional measures. On top of that, as we move forward in time, the way people get engaged may change over time. Everybody seems to like to talk about measuring engagement in a 1960s and 50s conception of engagement which is, we believe you should be voting and volunteering, but young people may be engaging in other things we haven't picked up with our surveys. So maybe young people aren't disengaged. So I wonder whether or not 1) we're measuring the right things; 2) if we're using a particular conception of engagement we need to change 3) whether or not we've really seen a decline in civic engagement.

With regards to technology, I think young people are more open to using new technologies than other groups. But I will also say this with regard to political participation: young people don't want to be contacted by email; don't want to be contacted by text messaging and don't want these new technologies to be used to send them what they would consider to be spam. So you might send out 20,000 emails telling people, "Hey, you gotta go out and vote," in a very nonpartisan way, and maybe only 500 people only clickthrough. On text messaging, we found in our CIRCLE survey that young people don't want text messages reminding them to go out and vote. So maybe those things have changed b/c we did this 2 years ago; but my sense is that no that haven't. But a lot of political activist think the way to go to reach out to young people is to reach out to young people through text messaging and through email. But I don't see young people necessarily liking it.

4. You were talking about how we view civic participation as the act of voting; why is that we see voting as the perennial act of participation? If you don't vote, it seems almost as if you have no political agency, or you don't care.

I think it's the 1960s conception of voting where you get out there to vote and change things. But voting is also a passive activity relative to other things. It's a one time and a one-shot deal; you only do it once or twice a year, and only ever so often does a big election come up. My sense is that voting became the dominant thing because of political science and political scientists. Some of the longest running surveys on civic participation deal with voting, so I think it sort of creates an infrastructure around voting. Also, when we think of public policy we think of the leaders that we elect to make public policy. But I certainly think that there are other measures of civic engagement.

An example of where you might look to measure civic engagement is with immigrant youth. We measure their engagement in the standard sense of voting and contacting your congressman. Young immigrant youth are way behind their native born counterparts. But if you think of immigrant home associations or neighborhood associations that help them assimilate. These associations have blossomed over the last 10 years, and our surveys aren't picking them up. So immigrant youth may look unengaged but that may be doing stuff around these community organizations that we just aren't measuring. So, it's those type of examples where we are missing stuff where I would say that we need to be looking. So to take the Putnam position that everything has been declining and everything is going down, to say that voting is the best form of civic engagement—I think those are wrong. I think there is much more that is going on, but we just don't have the tools to measure them.

5. Thinking about the historical perception of voting and given that social movements (particularly those from the civil rights era) were led by notable religious/church figures, has there been a decline in religious figures as leaders? (i.e. Rev. Sharpton, Rev. Jackson)?

Let me say a couple of things; young people who are more religious, and people who are more religious—and what I mean by more religious is they go to church on a more regular basis—they are more likely to vote; so there is still that link. Whether or not the leaders who are saying, “Hey, you gotta go out and register to vote,” or “you gotta go vote for this candidate”, those things

probably have changed for a couple of reasons. I would think that if you're a leader of a church and you tell people who to vote for, those leaders have been getting in a lot of IRS trouble. So I think there is an institutional barrier now that may not have been, or may not have been enforced in the 60s. also, I think that a lot of organization in 2004 that came out to get out the youth vote were non-partisan—non-partisan in quotes; and they were directed at specific communities; one group was trying to get our college students; one was trying to get out African-Americans, one was trying to get our Latinos, or one group that was trying to get young people who have never gone to college. We had these organizations aiming to get out the youth vote, and they didn't have any religious links as far as I can tell.

I would add also that in 1984, it was an important year for African-American youth because that was the year their turnout rates shot up, and also began to match that of whites. Today there's virtually no difference between the turnout rates of young whites and young blacks, and that's, I think, because in 1984, Jesse Jackson (who was running for President) really made an effort to go to college campuses and get young people registered to vote. That made a big difference and created a civic responsibility that said you need to get registered to vote and you need to get out and vote. African American youth today look like the white-counterpart are far as turnout rates. But they are voting in very different ways. In 2004, 88% voted for John Kerry to 12%. Whites, on the other hand, went 55-45 for Bush. So there are some really clear differences in minority youth as far as how they are voting and how their white counterparts are voting.

6. Is there a difference in targeting college-aged youth and non-college youth?

Yes, and I think most efforts to get out the youth vote have focused on college students because they are easy. They're in one place. What's happened over the last 30 years for non-college youth is that unions have diminished in importance. So if you go to a labor union, you get a really small % of non-college youth. And they are scattered, so if there are efforts to get them out. You might have 5 efforts to get out college students and only one effort to get our non-college students. Literally, everyone's going for the college kids because they're the easiest to reach. You can literally go to the middle of a college campus and reach out to them. You can't do that with non-college youth. Union membership among non-college students has dropped

tremendously since 1972. It's dropped from about 20-25% to less than 5% today. That's a big drop when you think about it.

Getting back to this idea about religious leaders and how they don't have as prominent a face in social movements. Do you think it's effective to use celebrities and entertainers to engage youth?

I don't think I know the answer to this question. I am suspicious or cautious about it because of the following reason. To believe that young people who are following a specific celebrity are going to be influenced by what that celebrity does. So if Jennifer Lopez decides she needs to register to vote...I remember when she did a commercial for MTV get out the vote effort, she admitted that she'd never registered to vote and it was her first time registering...It makes me feel like she's not too sharp, and I can't believe that they would affect a lot of people. [Tape: 421] To have a concert where you try to register people to vote where the purpose of the concert is to register people to vote. It think what you're going to do is draw in people who are already leaning that way. People who probably would have registered anyway, but they just so happen to register at the concert. So to have concerts where celebrities are pushing the mission of 'we need to get young people to register to vote', I just don't think that you're going to convert a lot of young people. People who are already committed are going to go out and say I'm going to register, but I'm going to register at that concert. I think it's misleading to say that you got 10,000 people to register to vote at your concert, when they were probably going to register to vote in the first place. I think it has minor, if zero effect.

7. What happens when you, in the case of Citizen Change, attach voting to a commodity; there's a t-shirt that says 'Vote or Die' and you show your spirit through buying the shirt. Is it effective to attach voting to a commodity?

I don't have an answer to that; but my sense is that people who are committed are going to do it; so a person who is going to be buying something that says 'vote today', you're probably either already engaged, or you might wear it around, but I don't think you're going to affect that many people. I just get the sense that it's reaching out to the converted, to those who already are going to be civically engaged. This is a real problem with the policy groups you've mentioned. These are really all policy proposals, not like federal policy folders, but like—How can we increase the youth vote? Well we have to do it though

technology, we have to reach out to them through technology; let's make voting into a commodity by selling t-shirts encouraging people to vote; let's have celebrities go out and do voting. All those things require people, to a certain extent to opt-in. And the people who are going to opt-in are going to be the people who already want to do it anyway. It's what we call a 'self-selection effect'. The purveyors who say let's get people out to vote who say we'll sell t-shirts, hats, and flyers to get people to vote, and then want to use that money to get more people to vote, are probably going to have very little impact in changing people who weren't already doing to vote. But that's me being a skeptical economist. But I haven't seen in evidence suggesting this things work.

On the commoditization of voting; one thing that happen in the last election or prior to the election, I think it was Urban Outfitters that sold a t-shirt with text that said "voting is for dummies"; I forget, but it was a very negative story. The entire youth-vote community jumped on them saying, "why would you sell a t-shirt discouraging voting." Obviously people were buying them; people were probably apathetic anyway and those who were apathetic probably said, 'I'm never going to vote, so I'll buy the t-shirt'.

There might be something to the story of the commoditization of voting, though I don't know how much, and I think we need better research to tell us how. We don't have effective research.

8. Do minority youth need a movement to mobilize them? Are they capable of organizing without the aid of an established movement, led by a celebrity, religious figure or otherwise? Do minority youth have political agency or a sense of efficacy? Is there any individual agency? Can I watch the news and be inspired or do I need a group to inspire me?

That's an interesting question, I hadn't thought of it that way. What we've found in terms of research is that simple, straight-forward, non-partisan face-to-face or friend-to-friend non-partisan, young person to young person non-partisan messages without the celebrity or without the large organization, even a campus organization, that actually has a pretty big effect on getting young people to vote. Public service announcements have some effect, but not very much; telephone calls or mechanical or computerized telephone calls tend to have virtually no effect on getting young people out to vote. In fact the most effective way to get someone to vote is to talk to them face-to-face. So there

are some combinations that seem to work better than others. But nonetheless, it's this face-to-face, nonpartisan, very straight-forward, what some call the shoe-leather approach is the right way to go; w/o the hoopla of other get out the vote efforts.

I would also say there might be something about churches and other institutions. It's pretty evident in the last election among all adults that along churches, conservative voters came out to vote b/c there were issues they were concerned about—gay marriage, re-electing Bush—those issues really got conservative voters out to vote, and it was really organized around the church. The Republican party really organized their get out the vote efforts around the church and it was really effective. That wasn't the case w/ the Democrats, they didn't do it through churches, but with a face-to-face on the ground organizing, which was also very effective. Don't forget that even though Bush won and Republicans were very organized, they were slightly more organized. So we had a 20 million increase in the last election, and it was due to organizing on both sides.

Another thing I would add on the issue of what's the most effective way to get someone out to vote, another thing that seems to increase engagement overall or be associated with higher engagement is if parents discuss politics or volunteer with their kids. If you have either one of those activities happening, you find that the kids in that family grow up to be more civically engaged. I don't know if it's a causal relationship; I wonder if there's just something about those families that make them more engaged, but discussing politics with your kids is just an indicator for how civically engaged that family is anyway. But there does seem to be a link b/t family discussing politics/volunteering then that tends to lead to or be associated with greater volunteering as adults.

9. Historical research says individuals of a lower socioeconomic status—education and income—are less prone to political participation². Is income related to higher turnout?

There is a positive relationship, whether or not it causes it, I don't know. Political scientist tend to think the more education the more civic engagement. Again I wonder if it's a self-selection story. In order to assess the effect of

² "Blacks in American society are likely to be in lower-status jobs than whites, to have less education, and to have lower incomes. These characteristics... inhibit the rate of political activity of citizens" (Nie & Verba, 1972, p. 152)

income, education and socioeconomic status on civic participation, we need to randomly assign socioeconomic status or education level. Unfortunately is very hard to do that. It's very hard to access if this link is a causal link or a correlation, and I think it's just a correlation, so to say that in order to increase civic participation more people should go to college, I don't think that's the case. Frankly, over the last 30/40 years, the US has become more educated. More people are graduating from high school, going to college, and graduation for college, but up until 2000, civic participation had been falling. Even among adults. That suggests to me that the link b/c education, greater wealth is not necessarily a causal link.

10. Is 'hip-hop' the current civil rights movement, and is the civil rights movement still around today?

I think hip-hop can be the new civil rights movement. More modern songs are hip-hop songs, so you have a sense of social activism in the lyrics, but let's be clear that a lot of the lyrics are not about activism. I think among minority youth communities, there is a more general sense of something needs to be done, something that needs to be changed, we're all working for some sort of a positive change. Perhaps the hip-hop movement today is like the civil rights movement of the pass. I think the civil rights movement picked the 'low hanging fruit'. There was an obvious thing that needed to be changed or fix. Today it's a little bit harder to identify that thing that needs to be changed or fixed because things are more subtle. There's no stark discrimination, no stark differences b/t people like there used to be. Things have gotten better and the civil rights movement opened the door to making things a lot better. Issues that are relevant today in terms of civil rights, like gay rights, people don't seem to be ready to accept all of those rights for guys. That seems to be a relatively smaller issue of importance for most of America in terms of the civil rights movement of the 60s.

I would say yes, hip hop can represent a broader social movement for progress and change and also for political engagement; but I don't know to what extent it has an impact. My sense is that most of the songs out now are not about political change.

11. Is there a problem with leadership. When we look back historically, we can point a specific leader who was the face of the civil rights

movement. Do we have that type of leadership today—where there is a great leader? Is there anyone in the queue?

No, I don't think so. I can't think of a strong leader or a strong set of leaders. Every time I think of people who are involved in getting out the youth vote. They really strike me as grassroots or people on the ground type of people. They don't strike me as the leader with the big image. I don't get that vibe. I don't see any specific leaders. I'm thinking in the Latino community...who would it be? It certainly

12. What about Bono?

I think he's certainly made the jump from one thing to another. Because frankly, most celebrities, when I hear them talk, and I like their music, I'm sometimes disappointed and it really turns me off to celebrities being the spokesperson.

Alexis McGill Interview, Executive Director, Citizen Change
Interview Date: March 26, 2006

Question: Are youth as interested in politics today as they were in the past? Specifically in 2004 compared to the 1960s.

Answer: It's kind of a broad question; yes I think that what happened in 2004 was somewhat of a perfect storm in that the 2000 election was still fresh in everybody's mind and all of the concerns around what happened in Florida; the fact that the country was at war and perceived to be an unjust war. More in the context of why young people, or knew that other young people were over there fighting that war; particularly people in the inner raising legitimate questions about how are we spending \$86 billion over there and our school systems are failing; we are a great democracy and we can't create a public education system, which is the foundation for our democracy. And I think the 3rd thing is there were a # of organizations that helped channel this discontent into something concrete like voter registration and helped some type of sustainability around the movement and the process. That was very concerted effort by the orgs who were involved. Many of whom began working in 2000. I tend to think that discontent and frustration around what's happening in the political system continues to exist or is ever present; but it really does take real institutions, or people to organize and channel it effectively.

Is there a disconnect between the civil rights generation and the hip-hop generation? Is there a difference between then and now, as far as who the leaders are as far as registering and mobilizing youth voters.

I think that, Nelson George wrote this and it sticks in my mind that this generation, the post-civil rights generation, the hip-hop generation is the first generation to experience nostalgia around the movement because it's not something we were ever a part of; our parents have stories, but we were never marching. So there's a romanticism that has happened around the movement and what it means and they way we've learned about it. The disconnect, I think, happened in a couple of ways. First it happened when there was transition for the civil rights movement to black power. Once the political rights were secure and as Dr. King was transitioning into talking about economic rights, a lot was lost in that space. And then within the black power movement, there was certainly a need for organizing in the north and in the inner city where a great majority of the civil rights activity was in the south. So I think the disconnect that has happened in the

way we've experienced, b/c most of us came up in the 80s, we came up during Reaganomics, we came up in the inner city, focusing on civil rights as we learned it was about political rights, it wasn't about the economic rights it was transitioning into, so I think there was an ideological disconnect because there wasn't something coherent to organize around. And I think every generation has it; we're not a monolithic community, but in the 80s, we didn't really make concerted efforts to either be apprentices with civil rights leadership, or the civil rights leaders didn't create a next generation of civil rights activists and so, I think there is a bit of a disconnect there, but it's probably more structural than anything.

Can we equate the phrase 'Vote or Die' to 'Black Power'? Looking at a movement as a slogan, or a boiler plate, could it be seen in the same way as 'black power'—that there is an urgency around mobilizing.

The black power movement and black power as a slogan was more than a campaign. Let me do it differently. I think the work we did with Vote or Die was a communications campaign, a marketing campaign that was grounded in an organization and that worked with a much better organization. Vote or Die in itself as a movement, I have a hard time equating it with something like the Black Power movement; if you remember what the Panthers were doing, they serving breakfast to public school students; they were engaged in a community on the ground in a very real connected way that affected their condition; what Vote or Die was, and this is in all humility, and I appreciate you trying to make the comparison, but in our own humility I think that what Vote or Die did was try to create a sense of urgency around why it's so important to connect and to vote; it was tie that brought all of these organization together. So we were all kind of working—a number of organizations were working trying to capture young people because that's a place where we can grow and there is traditionally low participation. And, the slogan really was part of that campaign, and honestly I don't think we could be compared to the Black Power movement; that's what we aspire to get to, but I really don't think we were there in 04.

Do you think you could ever get there—in 08 or 2012.

Yes absolutely.

I want to just piggyback off something you said as far as capturing the attention of young people; do you think that it takes a movement or does mobilizing work better if it's door-to-door, personal, and dependent on family members saying go vote. Does it take a mediated social movement to inspire mobilization?

I think that what we did was normalize a conversation; what we did was we made it easier for a grassroots organizer, or another peer or parent or church leader then talk to young people. In a way because we created a buzz and created an ice breaker almost. I think that when it comes down to it, while we encouraged everyone to vote, I think people determined who they were going to vote for based on their peers and family member influence, which is traditionally how it's been. We can't take credit for that, you know we were a non-partisan campaign; we were focused on getting everyone, no matter what their affiliation, out to vote and to be engaged. And trying to just explain why its so important—that change can be created and can be created over night. I think that we just made a conversation work.

Are you still involved with Citizen Change, and what are your plans for mobilizing young people or voters in general in the future beyond 2004, to 2008, and even the 2006 midterm elections?

After the election we took a step back to try to figure out—it's really important when you're building something, you think about how long it took the civil rights movement to blossom and create the significant change it created...that probably started in the early 1900s. But the work that we had to do was to take a step back and say we had a really great campaign. We know the marketing techniques we used worked, we used those everyday on a consumer basis. Now we know we can use marketing and innovative techniques to connect with young people around political and social issues. And now, the question is what's the kind of organization that we need to build and sustain it. The past year for us is trying to think through what sustainability looks like, how do you build an organization that's accountable and legitimate and will carry on. And/or whether or not it needs to be something; in terms of engaging young people and people of color, it's still very much a part of the work all of us were doing. We're just trying to figure out what the model will be, and that's going to take time. Whether or not we'll have an impact on 06, we have some limited test cases happening, but we're really building out to 2008, 12, 16 and I think that's when we'll see how this plays out.

Finally, you touched on something I'm interested in. As far as using marketing techniques around voting, do you think that's the wave to use in your face techniques to get people to vote?

Look, politics is marketing; every time you see an ad for a candidate on tv, that's marketing, that's branding. A candidate being packaged, you being told how he/she thinks, what they will do. It's really not much different from PR, to the talking points are built by an organization that supports the candidate. I think it's a very similar

model that happens in entertainment, and the parallel is there. I wrote an article when I first got into this around this question, and it was basically suggesting the fact that it's not that it's the new wave, it's just that we're using the same institutions that we've always used the same networks we've always used to talk about something different.

Rep. John Lewis, D-GA Interview
Interview Date: April 6, 2006

1. Question: Are minority youth a politically apathetic group? Are they as interested in politics as people from the civil rights generation?

Answer: Today minorities as a group, we're still very interested in politics, social action to bring about change. You may not have the same drama, excitement, or interest, to the degree we had in the 60s. During the 60s, many minorities had to sit on the sidelines. They couldn't register, they couldn't go out and vote. In many instances, in many parts of the South—11 states of the old Confederacy—it was hard, almost difficult for minorities to become involved in the political process. We had to change that with the Voting Rights Act that was passed many years ago.

2. What do you think it takes to get people engaged? Does it take a movement or an organized coalition to get people going?

It takes organizations like we had during the 60s, organizations like SNCC, organizations that are committed and dedicated to the idea of mobilizing and organizing people; sometimes going door-to-door and going to the churches, beauty shops, barbershops—going out into the fields. You need a powerful coalition saying to people that the vote is important; it is important to know who controls your government and who makes the decisions. Saying what impact their decisions are going to have on your lives. People have to be inspired, especially in minority communities where people have been left out of the political process so long. You have to get in the habit of participation, and sometimes it takes years for people to get in the habit of participating.

3. Speaking of motivating people, I'm looking at celebrities leading movements, such as Sean "P. Diddy" Combs. Do you think it's successful to have celebrities motivate a group of people, or does it take grassroots, door-to-door canvassing?

I think you need both, and I think they tend to move down the same road; they tend to complement each other. It's good to have a celebrity, to have someone like a P. Diddy coming along saying 'Vote or Die'. Some people thought it was a little radical, harsh; but the Vote controls everything that we do, from the time that we're born to the time that we die. But you also need, not just the presence of a celebrity—we used celebrities in the 60s. We brought along Harry Belafonte and we brought Sidney Poitier and Marlon Brando. Martin

Luther King was the embodiment of being a celebrity in a sense. He was an unbelievable galvanizing force and he was able to mobilize the masses. When Dr. King would come to Selma, or Birmingham, or Nashville, or Mississippi, he would bring out people. And you can get the message over. So you need people to follow the presence of a celebrity to sort of get people to buy into it and keep it going. In many instances, a celebrity will come in for a day, or maybe a few hours, and then disappear, but you need local organization and indigenous leaders to stay there day in and day out to do the hard work—the nitty-gritty work. The necessary work of getting people to go down to the court house and get registered, or go to a high school and say, ‘If you are 17 ½, you need to get registered to vote.

4. You mentioned ‘Vote or Die’; when you have an inflammatory or catchy slogan like ‘Vote or Die’ and you think of a phrase like ‘Black Power’ in the 60s, do you think there is a comparison that could be made between those slogans?

You need a message, you need a simple message. Vote or Die was catchy. Black Power, on one hand, it was catchy, but it frightened the majority population—they couldn’t deal with it. And, it made it appear that black people were going to come in, get millions of people registered and take over all of the elected positions. To give you an example, the rooster was the symbol of the Democratic Party in Lowndes County, Alabama. The black folk, through the help of SNCC in Lowndes County, created an independent party, and they used a panther, and the whole idea was that the panther was going to eat up the white rooster. So that was too much for a lot of people, because the county was more than 80% African-American, and there was not a single registered African-American voter in the county. So people, after the Voting Rights Act was passed, did get registered, and they were able to take over the county government. But we had another symbol or slogan that SNCC used when we went into Selma and Mississippi. It was lifted from our speech at the March on Washington. It was on a letterhead, it said something like ‘One man, one vote’. When I spoke on August 28, 1963, I saw a group of black women in southern Africa saying ‘one man, one vote’. So I said ‘one man, one vote’ is the African cry, and it must be ours too. So people embraced it all across the South, and you even saw bumper stickers saying ‘one man, one vote’.

5. At the heart of it, did 'Black Power' mean that black should go out and take control of areas where they were the majority population, or did it have another connotation?

I think 'black power' had the connotation that it is time for us to share the political power and the economic power. But it was much more than that. It was also a culture thing. The way we dressed and wore our hair. It was all-consuming, and people would use black power to almost mean anything they wanted it to mean. We put on the dashiki, and we had the afro. But it also was a strong political and economic message.

6. Today, do you think the Civil Rights Movement still relevant today in the same way it was previously?

I think there is a movement; it's not as focused, not as powerful, not as unified. You don't have the same sense of solidarity in the African-American community among the different civil rights organizations. They may come together and say, 'yes, we need to renew the voting rights act, we need to see that all of the people in Louisiana and New Orleans need to be able to vote'. But in terms of being on the same page on most issues, we're very diverse. And maybe there's a reason for that. During the 60s, it didn't matter if you were a PhD, or no degree, you couldn't register to vote in Selma, AL, or in parts of Tuskegee or parts of Mississippi or part so GA. We were all in the same boat. With desegregation, parts of society and more and more black moving into the middle-class, the walls of segregation were tumbling down in the areas of public accommodation. We have options, so we all don't end up going to Pascal's restaurant in Atlanta. We can go to other places. We can stay at the Marriott, so there's a different mindset, a different world.

7. Do you think there's a problem with leadership, that a next generation has not been trained? Are we lacking the level of leadership that could unite those organizations and impart solidarity?

I think there's a different breed of leadership today. The leadership 45-50 or 60 years ago was, I think, much more authentic. Today, and one of the reasons I say something like this is I was walking through a major office building in downtown Atlanta. They had photographs of a King celebration, and they had a picture of an elected official who was a speaker. They described this person as a civil rights leader. I think today, the media and others call almost every elected official a civil rights leader. I don't see every elected official being a civil rights leader. They call entertainers a civil rights leader; baseball players

and basketball players because they make some word about race. So I think it's a mistake to define someone who becomes very visible in the African-American community as the leader of a movement. But they want to make black mayors, and black elected officials to Congress civil rights leaders. I don't think people have the same type of understanding of struggle. The people that came through the 60s, whether it was somebody like a Martin Luther King, Jr., a James Forman who was head of CORE, an A. Phillip Randolph—and unbelievable black labor leader, a Roy Wilkins, a Whitney Young—the NAACP and the Urban League—they had a different understanding. They got out there. Whether it was someone like Ella Baker or Fannie Lou Hamer in the Delta Mississippi. Or Daisy Bates, who failed to get a lot of credit and was head of the state branch of the NAACP in Arkansas, and was the chief advisor to the Little Rock Nine in 1957. These were men and women who literally put their bodies on the line, and they had a following. They didn't get concerned about my piece of the action, and my piece of the pie. I think in this period of our history, too many of our so-called leaders are too concerned with getting 'my piece of the action, and my piece of the pie'. We didn't speak like that during the 60s. We talked about our pie, our piece. We did it for the great majority and for the common good.

8. Additional Comments:

The only think I would add is that I am very hopeful and optimistic about the future of African-Americans and other minority's involvement in the arena of politics. In a matter of a few short years, the majority of this country will be made up of minorities. The country will be browner, and there must be a coalition between the African-American community, the Hispanic community and other minorities. And you will see a different brand of leaders on the elected scene. People that will infuse American society with a greater scene of ethics, fairness, with this idea that we can create a peaceful society, and we have to make it work, and I think it will work.

Tables

Youth Turnout

The following are the percentages of **18-24 year old citizens** (not residents) who voted in recent presidential elections:

	White Americans	African Americans	Native Americans	Asian Americans	Latinos
1992	52%	41%	37%	32%	33%
1996	38%	34%	25%	35%	24%
2000	38%	36%	30%	28%	26%
2004	50%	47%	37%	36%	33%

Source: CIRCLE Trends by Race, Ethnicity, & Gender

Table A-1. Reported Voting and Registration by Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex and Age Groups: November 1964 to 2004

(Numbers in thousands)

Year	Total voting-age population	Total percent		White		White non-Hispanic		Black	
		Total population	Citizen population	Total population	Citizen population	Total population	Citizen population	Total population	Citizen population
18 to 24 years									
Voted									
2004 ²	27808	41.9	46.7	42.6	47.5	48.5	49.8	44	47
2004 ³	27808	41.9	46.7	42.6	47.4	48.4	49.7	44	47
2002	27,377	17.2	19.3	17.4	19.4	19.9	20.4	19.3	20.6
2000	26,712	32.3	NA	33.0	NA	37.2	NA	33.9	NA
1998	25,537	16.6	NA	17.2	NA	19.2	NA	15.6	NA
1996	24,650	32.4	NA	33.3	NA	36.9	NA	32.4	NA
1994	25,182	20.1	NA	21.1	NA	23.1	NA	17.4	NA
1992	24,371	42.8	NA	45.4	NA	NA	NA	36.6	NA
1990	24,831	20.4	NA	20.8	NA	NA	NA	20.2	NA
1988	25,569	36.2	NA	37.0	NA	NA	NA	35.0	NA
1986	26,425	21.9	NA	21.6	NA	NA	NA	25.1	NA
1984	27,976	40.8	NA	41.6	NA	NA	NA	40.6	NA
1982	28,823	24.8	NA	25.0	NA	NA	NA	25.5	NA
1980	28,138	39.9	NA	41.8	NA	NA	NA	30.1	NA
1978	27,678	23.5	NA	24.2	NA	NA	NA	20.1	NA
1976	26,953	42.2	NA	44.7	NA	NA	NA	27.9	NA
1974	25,719	23.8	NA	25.2	NA	NA	NA	16.1	NA
1972	24,612	49.6	NA	51.9	NA	NA	NA	34.7	NA
1970	13,027	30.4	NA	31.5	NA	NA	NA	22.4	NA
1968	11,602	50.4	NA	52.8	NA	NA	NA	38.9	NA
1966	10,751	31.1	NA	32.6	NA	NA	NA	21.9	NA
1964	9,919	50.9	NA	52.1	NA	NA	NA	44.2	NA

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2004 and earlier reports
Internet Release date: May 26, 2005

The Harris Survey (1966) – Perception of ‘Black Power’ phrase by White Americans

“Does the fear of racial violence make you feel personally more uneasy on the streets or not?”

	Total Whites	Big Cities
Make me feel uneasy	43%	59%
Don't feel uneasy	50	38
Not sure	7	3

	Hurt Negro Cause	Help Negro Cause
October, 1966	85%	15%
June, 1966	69	31
June, 1963	49	51

Source: Harris, L. (1966, October 10). Black Power and Rioting Increase White Backlash Across the Nation. *The Washington Post*, p. A4.

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¹ For this study, minority youth refers to African-Americans

² U.S. Census Current Population Survey, 2005

³ Screen shot captured from www.citizenchange.org in March 2005; the site is currently disabled.

⁴ See Nie & Verba, 1972, p. 154

⁵ Ibid.