Clergy have an undeniable ability to shape the political beliefs and attitudes of their congregations and thus revealing how the framing activities of clergy affect behavior and influence mobilization is vital for political sociology. This ethnographic work delineates how, in 1972, the Second Baptist Church of Evanston’s new pastor initiated a rapid change from social conservatism to become one of the most politically and socially active African-American Baptist churches in the Midwest. Second Baptist’s radical change confirms the power of religious elites in shaping politics in spiritual institutions, and also demonstrates the vital impact of professional socialization on the theological and political orientations of clergy.

Social theologies combine the crucial religious purposes of ministry with a clear conception of the political (Jelen 2001). Political consciousness is defined as “those cultural beliefs and ideological expressions utilized for the realization and maintenance of group interests” (Morris 1989:21), and is an ongoing process in which participants reevaluate their subjective experiences and shared interests (Taylor and Whittier 1992). All structures of human domination enclose the impending possibility for inciting political consciousness (Morris 1992; Morris and Braine 2001), and liberation has been a chronic theme permeating the African-American experience (Peck 1982). Many of the preexisting codes that provide resources used in collective action and social movements are embedded in religion (Hart 1996), which continues to be an essential thread interweaving the fabric of African-American culture (Wilmore 1999).

Progressive African-American clergy often include in their spiritual mission the goal of improving African Americans’ position in the American society (Myrdal 1944; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Sawyer 2001). Nelsen and Nelsen’s (1975) model of the religion-society relationship depicts the varied manner in which African-American churches respond to the unique vicissitudes of their oppression. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) built on Nelsen and Nelsen’s approach by identifying pairs of dialectically related polar opposites that lead to a more dynamic view of African-American churches along a continuum of dialectical tension, struggle, and change. The two latter works depict disparity concerning African-American churches’ beliefs about their role in effecting political and social change in society. Guth et al. (1997) offered four helpful ideal types of ministers based on the combination of political goals and activity levels, demonstrating that clergy’s beliefs are crucial in determining their political goals and activities. Becker’s (1999) congregational models are sculpted by taken-for-granted assumptions about churches’ mission and are helpful in depicting broad orientations of local religious communities.

Several high-profile African-American churches have shifted in congregational models concerning social activism during new pastoral administrations. Olivet Baptist church changed from deploying 42 departments and auxiliaries for social action during L. K. Williams’s pastorate in the 1930s to adopting a more spiritual focus under his successor, Joseph Jackson (Wilmore 1999). Conversely, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church of Montgomery was a conservative middle-class church that changed to embrace progressive activism under the leadership of Vernon Johns and his successor Martin Luther King Jr. Cavendish (2001) discussed how the new priest of St. Sabina Catholic Church, an African-American congregation on the south side of Chicago, used collective action frames through preaching to mobilize participation for anti-drug marches.

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Cavendish (2001) and a small but important group of recent studies examined the strategies clergy use to mobilize African-American congregants’ participation in progressive activism. Morris (1984) delineated the critical role of African-American clergy in organizing boycotts and activism throughout the South, and their integral presence in local movement centers that mobilized and coordinated collective action against segregation and oppression. Pattillo-McCoy (1998) depicted how clergy use religious rituals as cultural tools for facilitating local organizing and activism among African Americans and displayed how they operate as political resources in the process of mobilization by legitimizing political goals. Harris revealed how the African-American church can equip political actors with organizational and institutional resources, including: “the indigenous leadership, the communication networks, the easy availability of mass membership, and the social interaction of political actors” (2001:49).

Clergy are increasingly more likely to function as important political actors in the future (Jelen 2001), and studying how they influence the political attitudes and behaviors of church attendants is imperative (Cavendish 2001). This current work discusses how Hycel Taylor, the new pastor of Second Baptist Church of Evanston, utilized collective action frames through preaching to ignite the church’s shift from conservatism so that it became one of the most socially and progressively active African-American Baptist churches in the Midwest. This work answers Guth’s (2001) call to bring biography into the analysis of clergy mobilization by delineating the vital role that Hycel Taylor’s seminary experience played in shaping his theological worldview and political attitudes. During seminary, Taylor learned what Jelen (2001) distinguishes as a Social Gospel outlook on life, through which Taylor influenced Second Baptist’s change via preaching and collective activism. Taylor’s liberal education provided the cultural tools to funnel the black conscious movement into Second Baptist’s collective consciousness.

METHODOLOGY

My primary means of data collection involves a year of participant observation at Second Baptist Church of Evanston, a small city north of Chicago. During this period I visited worship services, Bible studies, and special events, and interacted with a significant number of clergy and members. Field notes were taken during and after every participant observation experience. Data also come from 30 in-depth open-ended interviews with leaders and members of the church. These interviews, which ranged from 30 minutes to two hours, were the primary sources for my knowledge of historical developments that preceded my arrival at the church. My approach for choosing subjects was from a careful snowball process of meeting new prospects through previous contacts, as well as through visiting different Sunday school classes and church functions that exposed me to diverse members. I conducted the large majority of interviews by phone and all were recorded and transcribed. Although phone interviews may have diminished my capacity for nonverbal observations, they spared me the time and inconvenience of having to meet subjects at neutral sites for the sake of privacy.

SECOND BAPTIST: THE CHURCH OF FAITH AND FREEDOM

President Bill Clinton, Vice President Al Gore, Minister Louis Farrakhan, Senator Carol Moseley Braun, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr., Oprah Winfrey, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Rabbi Peter Noble are a few of the many celebrated political and social voices that have spoken from Second Baptist Church of Evanston’s pulpit in the last decade. It is one of the most progressive churches in the Chicago area. Second Baptist transformed from a conservative congregation into a force for social activism—a change generated during the senior pastorate of Rev. Dr. Hycel B. Taylor. It is first necessary to demonstrate how social changes in the City of Evanston prepared the congregation for a shift toward a political ministry orientation.
Evanston’s Rise of Black Consciousness

Contexts limit and define social action (Natanson 1968), and certain milieus turn embryonic beliefs and cultural idioms into particular demands for action (Swidler 1995). The seeds of social activism among African Americans in the City of Evanston go back to Edwin Jourdain’s political action as fifth ward alderman in the 1930s. African Americans in Evanston faced oppression as their numbers increased and by 1931 Evanston had become segregated along racial lines.

Institutions and facilities for Blacks had become an accepted fact. Blacks were directed to sit in the balconies of the movies when they attended. Negro Health Week in Evanston was observed annually one week early than National Health Week, which was celebrated by the remaining population. Northwestern University, the guiding light of the community, was stringent in its discriminatory policies. In addition, blacks who were segregated into one section of the city did not control it politically. They had little, if any voice in government. (Beverly 1973:46)

Jourdain’s radical public career as alderman instigated the emergence of African-American political power as they forged a collective agenda to address racism in Evanston. By the late 1960s events would take place on the campus of Northwestern University that would become the fulcrum of African-American protest against the racist status quo in Evanston. The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 provoked riots, protests, and unrest in well over 100 cities and the Chicago area was no exception. In the same year, Evanston reached a boiling point regarding Northwestern University’s refusal to acknowledge the numerous needs of African-American students on the campus. Four weeks after King’s assassination, most of the 100 African-American students on campus took part in a 48-hour takeover of Northwestern’s Bursar office to coerce the administration into addressing their grievances. At the time, Hycel Taylor was a professor at Garrett Theological Seminary on Northwestern’s campus and was cognizant of the burgeoning militancy.

The whole context at that time was very revolutionary; what was going on at Northwestern was that it was basically under siege most of the time as well as the community. (Taylor interview)

Students worked with African Americans in the community to forge unrest, which led to the administration capitulating to many of their demands in what is now referred to as the “May 3rd and 4th Agreement,” a series of concessions that precipitated the formation of African-American studies at Northwestern University.

Crisis in Leadership

Many described Second Baptist’s former pastor Nathaniel Hawk as a friendly and jovial pastor, always visiting people in the hospital and always accessible to his congregants. He had more of the old-fashioned style, I mean he knew everybody by name and by family and visited everybody. That was the old-fashioned style of pastoring, which people still liked and he was a very intelligent person but he was more involved with his congregation than involved in community and national affairs. (Dumas interview)
Hawk was a former military chaplain and frequently referred to his army days in sermons, demonstrating that he was very much a person of his era.

We needed a new pastor because Rev. Hawk, well, he just was old and he’d been in the war and he was preaching about that all the time [laughs]. He was a good man and we knew that but it was time to try something else and so Rev. Taylor came in and sort of took the church in a different direction. (Guillebeaux interview)

Hawk’s old-fashioned style of preaching might have been effective a decade earlier and possibly in a less progressive city than Evanston, but the unique makeup of Second Baptist’s intellectual and middle-class membership made the church more vulnerable to paradigms emanating from societal changes.

There were very few people who were not ready for change. The power structure was ready for change. The chairman of the deacon board, the trustees, those persons were ready for change. (Brown interview)

Although many Second Baptist members concerned themselves with new intellectual developments and questions brought on by the rise in black consciousness, Rev. Hawk seemed oblivious to the changes that were taking place in society and how they contributed to Second Baptist’s rapidly declining membership.

It was to the point when there was a lot of changes going on in Evanston as far as the whole sixties movement and the whole idea of looking at the civil rights movement and looking at a new beginning for blacks and that kind of thing, and also some of the congregation feeling that there was a need for more teaching, more kinds of things in connection with what was going on in society. Rev. Hawk just went through his routine and that was that. (Williams interview)

Belief systems are linked to social-structural realities through the strategies of action they support and they break down when they lose their plausibility (Swidler 1986). Tantamount to how scientific paradigms collapse from failure to passably regulate normal science (Kuhn 1962), Hawk’s old-fashioned style of pastoring became incommensurable with emerging black consciousness and social activism, making the church ripe for a shift to a more progressive model.

The black stuff was a big thing at that time and under Hawk things began to fade down and we needed an aggressive person that was going to go forward with this black movement. (Ransom interview)

Hawk’s aging pastorate and incognizance of broader changes contributed to his failure to resist emergent progressivism with a counterattack of conservative paradigms through sermons and interaction. As a result, Second Baptist became fertile ground for a pastor with a radically progressive vision for the church to become an agent of social change.

Cultures of subordination often restrain collective action by maintaining a legitimating frame that provides the citizenry with a reason to be quiescent (Gamson 1988). Many African-American Baptist churches of the 1960s were quite effective at countering civil rights activism and the rise of black consciousness with conservative counterframing activity that reinforced their other-worldly congregational model. If Pastor Hawk had provided a consistent and cogent conservative counterframe, Second Baptist members would have been less mentally receptive to black consciousness. Similarly, if Taylor had taken over a traditional Baptist church of 500 members in a rural location, he would almost certainly have encountered more resistance to his progressive program.

If [Taylor] were in a highly rural or traditional kind of place it might have been a whole lot different. But we’re in metropolitan Chicago, we’re in a university community, a lot of people have college degrees and beyond. The city of Evanston was ready, the people of Second Baptist were ready and I think it was just a match at that time. (Brown interview)
The Changing of the Guard

Since Pastor Hawk refused to be “honored” with a pastor-emeritus position, Second Baptist members conducted a church meeting and overwhelmingly voted for Hawk’s removal, setting the search for a new pastor. Fate would have it that they did not have to search far before accidentally stumbling upon the Garrett seminary professor who would command the helm for the next 28 years at Second Baptist.

They wanted a student to be an interim pastor so they called the seminary to inquire about getting an African American student to fill the pulpit during the time of their search for a new pastor. It just so happened that the lady who called on the phone reached my office and I told her that I was not responsible for field education and student appointments, that was Dr. Holly’s job and I would refer her to him and in the meantime she said, “You sound like you’re black, are you?” I said, I am. She said, “Do you ever speak at churches?” I said yes I do. She said, “Would you come over and speak for us?” I said yes, and I came and spoke for Second Baptist at that time. (Taylor interview)

Taylor’s first sermon impressed the congregation enough to invite him back to speak on several occasions, and “I’ve been coming back ever since” (Taylor interview). Second Baptist appointed Taylor as senior pastor in 1972 and his presence had an immediate impact on the congregation.

Along with societal changes and a crisis in leadership, other preliminary factors made Second Baptist predisposed for a shift in congregational models under Taylor’s initiative. For one, Second Baptist has always maintained a high proliferation of educated members as a “middle-class church” and these people were immediately impressed with Hycel Taylor’s faculty position at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary on Northwestern University’s campus.

Second Baptist has been a middle-class church since I have been there and I think back from the early days a lot of people have had some kind of formal education. So I think the church was impressed with his professorship status. (Williams, field notes)

Second Baptist’s capitulation to Taylor’s demands—including a reduced schedule and summers off—demonstrated their enthusiasm for him to be their pastor, providing leverage to circumvent resistance to his new approach to ministry.

Another important factor that facilitated change is that although Second Baptist has a strong contingency of long-time members, it has always been a transient church. Evanston is also known for its transient population, especially among the upper-middle class who occupy executive positions in corporations or as faculty and students of Northwestern University.

Second Baptist is more of a church that has people come and go because there’s a lot of college students from Northwestern and other colleges that come there. A lot of people who come to Second Baptist sometimes are only in the Chicago area four to five years and they go to another city or something like that. There’s a lot of movement at Second Baptist. (Rogers interview)

Several large corporate offices are located in the suburbs north of Chicago and Second Baptist has enticed African-American executives looking for a middle-class congregation. Second Baptist has also lost members in prominent positions, including several deacon board chairpersons, trustees, and ministry leaders, due to career-related relocation. As a result, current members such Clarence Weaver (chairperson of the deacon board), Debra Welch (leader of new membership ministry), and Kim Wright (singles ministry) occupy prominent positions after being members for a relatively short time period. This transience helped decrease resistance to Taylor’s new agenda by limiting the pool of old-guard traditionalists that might fight to maintain the status quo and also by increasing the number of new members socialized under Taylor’s tenure in positions of power in the church.
A dominant theme of the literature on clergy and politics is that theological worldviews shape political orientation. It is now important to discuss Second Baptist’s change of consciousness in light of Taylor’s seminary education, which introduced him to existential theology. This will demonstrate the compelling effect of clergy socialization on the theological worldview and political orientation of spiritual institutions.

**Taylor and Vanderbilt University**

Swidler (2001) argued that a person’s available strategies of action shape the type of goals he or she pursues, instead of the other way around. One of the neglected areas of research on clergy in politics concerns the socialization processes that influence some clergy to become involved in public affairs (Guth 2001). Knowledge is always contiguous with experience so analysts should appreciate processes such as education and training to understand the distribution of prior belief (Bloor 1991).

Hycel Taylor’s seminary experience, which took place at Vanderbilt University, rather than at a Baptist seminary, played a major role in shaping his theological worldview and hermeneutical frames.

The theology of the seminary at that time was very much German theology. The existentialist theologians dominated the life of seminaries, in particular the seminaries of universities. So you were reading Tillich and Niebuhr, and Karl Barth. These theologians were writing out of the milieu of Germany and the Nazi regime; we were reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer, all of the existentialist philosophers. (Taylor interview)

Vanderbilt’s approach to theology was analytical and critical, different from the traditional approach to biblical hermeneutics at Baptist or evangelical seminaries.

It was interpretation and application, and it was eclectic because you had to learn more than your own religious tradition; you had to learn many traditions. So it was enriching and it allowed me to be a critical thinker and an activist at the same time. (Taylor interview)

Existentialism is a philosophical outlook that radically interrogates the essence of human existence and had tremendous influence in theology through theologians such as Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, and Friedrich Gogarten.

My major theologian was Paul Tillich. You were dealing more with philosophical theologians who were in search for the very essence and quintessence of religion. So dogma and doctrine, though they were there, they were always subject to great criticism. (Taylor interview)

For existentialists such as Tillich, theology begins with the human condition rather than the constraints of dogma, which influenced Taylor to treat religion as something always open-ended rather than fixed to a biblical canon. Therefore, Taylor is more committed to the existential concerns of his congregation than to strict doctrinal tenants.

Clergy educated at prominent university-related divinity schools are customarily most disposed to political action (Guth et al. 1997). Vanderbilt had a reputation for being proactive and political, and for training ministers to function not only within the church but also in the political world.

At the time I got to Vanderbilt in 1964 I was right in the heat of the civil rights battle. James Lawson preceded me at Vanderbilt; he organized the sit-ins down there in Nashville, and was very much a part of the civil rights movement and I came in right on the heels of that. (Taylor interview)

Therefore, the social and intellectual milieu of Taylor’s seminary experience had a direct impact on his embrace of a progressive frame.
I was trained at a time of revolution and black consciousness, civil rights, Marxists, etc. My seminary experience was one that necessitated that you were involved in the community while you were in class, so what you learned in seminary you also had to apply; like organizing and marching in Nashville. So while I was in seminary I took white students with me and we went and integrated barbershops [laughs]; we were just militant. (Taylor interview)

Like his contemporary James Cone and other progressive African-American pastors and scholars, Taylor’s Christian existentialism emphasized human freedom as opposed to the traditional Christian spiritual emphases of salvation and sin. By socializing him to a Social Gospel outlook on life and ministry, Taylor’s Vanderbilt experience is vital for understanding his pastorate at Second Baptist.

**Taylor and Second Baptist**

While teaching at Garrett Seminary, Taylor became pastor at Second Baptist at a time when he was “at a very revolutionary mode” (Taylor interview) and the imposition of his style on the church was quite radical.

At that time I was much more radical than I am now: I was a young radical, I had a giant beard and wore those dark glasses and dashikis [laughs]. That’s what we so-called black radicals out there did. (Taylor interview)

When he was over at Garrett he had his dashiki and whatever that thing was called [beret] and he was bold and that was liked. This was forward motion, and this is what he advocated. “You express yourself, you’re strong.” And that’s why he’s still there. (Ransom interview)

Taylor was young and “very strong in what he would and would not do” (Davis interview) and was finding himself and his place in the scheme of what it meant to be black and Christian. Taylor came to Second Baptist as a soldier in the civil rights movement, merging his Christian existentialism from his seminary experience with radical activism to construct a new vision for the church by preaching a message of liberation and freedom. In this regard, a longtime member said:

People were ready for his message of empowerment; his message of “you are able to do anything that you want to do and you can do it” and that kind of thing. He uses the term “The Church of Faith and Freedom” and the point of being completely free; free to make your own decisions, free to conquer the world, free to be your own person; “There are no chains that can bind me now” kind of message and I think the fact that he was able to proclaim it so vehemently, people were very open to that. The church started growing under his pastorate because that’s what people needed to hear. (Brown interview)

Preaching is an important cultural domain in constructing shared meaning and group cohesion and contributes to collective identity. In Taylor’s first years at Second Baptist he introduced progressive preaching, which played a vital role in preparing the church for frame-reconstruction. Not everyone was ready for Taylor’s new existential preaching but his early success made it difficult to challenge him.

Some people challenged his new style of preaching but not enough to discourage it—I guess they decided as long as people were coming to church that they could live with it. (Guillebeaux interview)

Reynolds: A lot of young people took to Taylor because he had a lot of young ideas and all of that Black Power. Interviewer: How did some of the older members feel about the black power stuff? Reynolds: Well, we finally accepted it. You know I didn’t accept everything being an older person, but I did learn a lot and I got rid of some of my old thinking and I think you have to sort of progress; you can’t just stay the same because when I came up things were very different than they are now.

Snow and Benford (1992) define collective action frames as emergent action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns.
Movement theorists are cognizant that intensifying collective action involves redefining membership in the group to include activism (Cavendish 2001). Since the early days of his tenure, Taylor exposed Second Baptist to existential framing that changed members’ perception of the church’s responsibility to fight oppression. Taylor provided a Social Gospel understanding of Jesus’s requirement to be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” by stressing the church’s political, rather than spiritual, role in affecting society. This liberal vision inspired Taylor’s decision to add the subtitle, “The Church of Faith and Freedom” to Second Baptist’s name as a consistent theme that permeates the life and ministries of the church.

One of the things you may have picked up and I picked up when I became a member of Second Baptist is that there is a freedom—and of course it goes along with Taylor’s own philosophical theological grounding of the church and naming it The Church of Faith and Freedom—but there is a freedom that I think many of us have gained growing up through Second Baptist and that is this attitude of expectation that we can be free to do anything we want; and that has caused dissonance in a couple of ways when we interact with other Baptists. (Phillips interview)

Through the late 1970s and early 1980s, Second Baptist engaged in social activism inspired by Taylor’s sermons and teachings. “The Church of Faith and Freedom” was their mantra as members played active roles against gang violence and housing discrimination, as well as participated in Harold Washington’s Chicago mayoral race in 1983 and Jesse Jackson’s presidential runs in 1984 and 1988. Taylor’s activity as a radical voice and opponent of oppression made him a recognized player in Chicago politics and his interim appointment as national president of P.U.S.H., temporarily replacing Jesse Jackson, gave him national acclaim as a social activist. By the late 1980s, Second Baptist had developed a national reputation for being a politically active and socially conscious church and its shift to what Becker (1999) calls a “leader” congregation was complete.

By 1990, politicians throughout the Chicago vicinity besieged Second Baptist for support of legislative initiatives and political candidacies. The church’s reputation became so widespread that in 1992 during a presidential campaign stop in Chicago, Governor Bill Clinton traveled north to Evanston and addressed the congregation during Sunday worship. Countless other politicians have visited and solicited the support of Hycel Taylor and Second Baptist, demonstrating the church’s revolution from social conservatism to political activism. Taylor and Second Baptist recently launched a campaign against the prison industry to protest the “big business” resulting from proliferation of African-Americans in prison.

I ask God what are we doing at church on Sunday. I said to Congressman John Conyers, I said to Jesse Jackson, I said to Minister Farrakhan, we need a new militancy in our churches—so if we have to go to jail to stop the jails then so be it. We are sitting around us watching this happen before us. (Taylor, sermon 2/27/2000)

Taylor also assisted his personal friend, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, in organizing his Million Man March in 1995 and the recent Million Family March in 2000.

Many African-American leaders in Evanston are faithful members of Second Baptist, including the mayor of the city, who has a visible presence as a deacon. Second Baptist has been recognized with awards and acclaim for its ministry to the homeless, charity events, contributions to the poor. Its Youth Action Ministry (YAM) has inspired hundreds of inner-city teenagers to continue their education and pursue college.

Ninety-seven percent of the kids that have gone through our YAM program in the last ten years have gone on to college. The majority of them go to black colleges. We do everything from self-esteem workshops to tutoring, giving scholarships. We have kids out of Chicago, Milwaukee, Ohio, Michigan that we have actually worked with so we do a lot of different things. (Reynolds, Director of YAM, interview)

Second Baptist’s progressive revolution has not come without cost. African-American churches that embrace an activist model often receive pejorative labels such as “worldly” or
“carnal” by traditionalists who claim that social activism replaces the church’s spiritual mission to bring a message of salvation to sinners, demonstrating the dialectical tension among African-American congregational orientations (Nelsen and Nelsen 1975; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Second Baptist members are cognizant that other Baptists view them as not “spiritual” and Taylor’s existential preaching has not escaped critique by some of his own members.

HyCel Taylor is a frustrated Jesse Jackson or a frustrated Martin Luther King. What he wanted to be he couldn’t, so he preached. If he could have done any other thing else and been in the limelight with the black movement that’s where he would have been. And he would have loved it; if he could exchange places with Jesse Jackson he would love it. I think preaching comes second to him. (Wilson interview)

Some members perceive Taylor’s gospel of empowerment for African Americans as excessive.

His take is the African American thing, that’s it. If that wasn’t there I don’t know what he would do; he’s so wrapped up in that is what I’m saying. If he could not say the word black or Afro-American or African something, he couldn’t preach. I’m not saying he can’t preach because he can if he chooses to but this subject is so engrained in him that God almost comes second. Now if he had to preach just purely from the Bible he may preach five minutes and be through. (Frankford interview)

I would say that one of the critiques [Taylor] has had is that he’s not very Jesus oriented. He’s Christ-centered that’s for sure, but some people don’t see it though because he’s not like your traditional church and he doesn’t have a “Jesiology” that ends up ultimately in many black churches; exclusivity—you know, Jesus is the only way type of thing. And that happens theologically with a lot of black churches for a lot of historical and cultural reasons. But [Taylor’s] own theology has always been so much broader—and again it’s Christ-centered, but some people critique him and say that he doesn’t talk about Jesus enough and that he’s not biblical enough. (Smith interview)

Notwithstanding some dissenters to his existential preaching and progressive emphasis, the majority of the members have embraced the congregational shift, and Second Baptist has become a bastion of progressive activism under the tenure of HyCel Taylor.

My first impression of Second Baptist was that it was a church that was concerned about the issues confronting the African American community. It was a church where people were seeking healing and wholeness so that they could operate more effectively in every aspect of their life, particularly in confronting racism that you have to deal with on a daily basis. I think that’s one of the things that it gave me, which is the oomph to deal with what you have to deal with in job situations. (Green interview)

A major reason why I still go to Second Baptist is because I feel as if I am able to practice the Christian values that I feel are important at the same time [Taylor] promotes progressive ideas, he promotes knowing your heritage and being familiar with your past and realizing the importance of the people that came before you. (Leary interview)

Most of the long-term members I interviewed or confabulated with during participant observation were very supportive of Second Baptist’s radical change to an activist congregational model.

**DISCUSSION**

Social movement theorists contend that frame acceptance is contingent upon striking a responsive chord with the phenomenological experience of potential participants, and thus a frame’s experiential commensurability is a screening mechanism for frame acceptance (Snow and Benford 1988). In this way, Evanston’s oppositional consciousness created a crisis in Second Baptist during the last years of Nathaniel Hawk’s conservative pastorate and provided what movement theorists term “mental receptivity” for the shift in congregational models that Taylor would initiate in his new tenure. By responding to the vicissitudes of African-American oppression, Taylor’s progressive preaching and radical activism was commensurable with cultural changes in Evanston and among African-American Christians throughout the country.
Religious elites set the frames from which the laity approach theological and doctrinal issues. Clergy socialization plays a vital role in shaping the theological worldview and political attitudes of clergy, who in turn affect the spiritual institutions they lead. Taylor’s seminary experience imparted a cultural toolkit for progressive preaching, which he utilized to mobilize Second Baptist members in politics and social activism for the next two decades. Tantamount to Father Pfleger’s preaching to the African-American congregants of St. Sabina (Cavendish 2001), Taylor introduced collective action frames that incited his members to include political activism as part of their congregational identity.

Notwithstanding minor dissension with Taylor’s progressive preaching, Second Baptist Church of Evanston emerged under Taylor’s tenure as one of the most progressively active and socially conscious African-American Baptist churches in the Chicago area, thus demonstrating the powerful influence clergy have to shape political attitudes and mobilize members for collective action through preaching. This confirms Olson’s (2000) contention that it is vitally important to understand clergy’s orientations concerning political involvement because they have the potential to mobilize large groups of people to affect politics in their environments.

**References**


