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**Book Review: Owens, Michael Leo. (2007). God and Government in the Ghetto: The Politics of Church —State Collaboration in Black America. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 304 pp. \$22.00 (paperback)**

John David Rausch

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and services—he praises the ability of Hollywood to subsidize good and daring moviemaking with the proceeds of lower-quality (but higher-appeal) blockbusters. He acknowledges the real and potential roles of individual consumers and consumer movements in making superior choices and the positive contributions of effective corporate social responsibility. But fundamentally, after railing about capitalism’s excesses and failures for most of the book, he hopes to save it, despite lamenting that (especially at the global level) it fails to serve those with the greatest needs, even given experimental and heterodox views. Here, he cites three prominent examples. Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto has advocated empowerment of the poor by retitling public land in the names of those who live and work on it, to provide them with the means to develop wealth by borrowing against land that they own. Mohammed Yunis is well known as the founder of Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which has promoted micro credit as a means of supporting social entrepreneurship. Business strategist C. K. Prahalad focuses attention on the potential for building up wealth by those who live at the “bottom of the pyramid” of income distribution but constitute the largest number of potential consumers.

*Consumed* is a provocative and inventive book that no doubt will engender both debate and approbation. It is not hard to be sympathetic to Barber’s overall thesis about the excesses of marketing; individual readers will make their own determination about the need for his particular style of rhetorical discourse. *Consumed* may be less useful for *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* readers trying to analyze consumer markets through the lens of voluntary sector and nonprofit studies. Philanthropy, voluntarism, nonprofits, and religion are barely noticed in the book, usually in passing mentions of high-profile nonprofits and the wealthiest philanthropists and briefly in his review of the successes of the consumer movement. Especially in his concluding pages, where Barber hopes for practical solutions, civil society organizations and movements would have been ideal illustrations. Although he urges citizens to pursue their rights and liberties more effectively, he leaves aside some of the best means they have to do so.

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Owens, Michael Leo. (2007). *God and Government in the Ghetto: The Politics of Church–State Collaboration in Black America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 304 pp. \$22.00 (paperback)

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Michael Leo Owens’s work is a timely examination of how churches and government work together to solve or attempt to solve community problems. The book is

especially timely in light of President George W. Bush's Faith-Based Initiative and the charitable choice provisions in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. Owens argues, "the analysis coming out of existing research on church-state partnerships have yet to yield a comprehensive and coherent logic of church-state partnerships, especially one that includes the perspective of activist churches" (p. 4). He presents an appropriate yardstick against which to evaluate this book: Does his analyses advance a more comprehensive and coherent logic of church-state partnerships?

With a careful and concise review of the literature on religion and politics, elections, and public policy, Owens places his research in the framework of religion and public policy. One of his first tasks is to define *collaboration*: "Collaboration, especially when it involves governmental and nongovernmental organizations, is a relationship of two or more actors working together to mutually achieve goals unlikely to be realized save for collective action" (p. 8). This relationship can involve actors who are not expected to work together. Collaboration may have negative consequences in the form of co-optation or positive results in the form of empowered cooperation.

After presenting a review of existing research in a brief introductory chapter, Owens divides the remainder of his argument and evidence into three parts. Part 1 examines activist African American churches' collaboration with government. Chapter 1 is a particularly interesting examination of African American churches' tradition of working with government to address problems. The sweeping historical analysis provides insight on the reasons why African American churches have worked with federal, state, and local governments in the past. Owens also reviews the motivations of White politicians in working with Black churches and clergy and finds that it is too simplistic to argue that White politicians are seeking additional votes from the African American community by trying to appear as more "compassionate conservatives." The reader will encounter some sophisticated statistical techniques in the historical examination of church-state collaboration, but Owens does an admirable job of describing the findings in a way that the reader need not be intimidated by the statistics. Chapter 2 examines collaboration with government as political engagement by African American churches, focusing especially on the motivations of Black clergy.

Part 2 forms the heart of this empirical study, presenting what may have the widest appeal to an audience beyond the boundaries of religion and public policy. Here, Owens attempts to explain why activist African American churches in New York City collaborate with government. Owens documents his reasons for selecting New York City in a research note at the end of the book. This brief discussion of research methodology is an enlightening look at how a political scientist chooses the subjects of his or her research.

In chapter 3, Owens first examines the histories of four Black neighborhoods in New York City: Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, South Jamaica, and Morrisania. This

examination documents the formation and decline of these neighborhoods throughout the later half of the 20th century. Each of the neighborhoods became sites for church–state collaboration. The second half of the chapter is a detailed review of the policies enacted by the Koch, Dinkins, and Giuliani mayoral administrations in working to bring new life to the declining neighborhoods. The inclusion of these reviews should appeal to students of municipal government, especially those interested in how cities develop policies to redevelop communities. Chapter 4 examines how churches worked to redevelop these neighborhoods through community development corporations (CDCs).

Part 3 focuses on the provision of affordable housing to understand how African American churches and the government—specifically the municipal government of New York City—work together to address policy problems. The richness of Owens’s research methodology emerges most clearly in the chapters that form Part 3.

In the late 1970s, New York City faced a housing problem: It was the landlord of “approximately 10,000 buildings containing 60,000 vacant and 40,000 occupied apartments” (p. 113). Although it could collect rent from the occupied apartments, the vacant apartments were a drag on the city’s tax revenues. Activist African American churches regularly collaborate with government to provide more adequate and affordable housing to area residents. In chapter 5, Owens describes the process of churches using CDCs to partner with government. It is here that the reader learns about the important role played by third-party governments in the implementation of affordable housing policy in New York City. In this context, third-party governments can be understood as nongovernmental organizations employed by governments to spend money to implement policies. The church-created CDCs were in a perfect position to serve as third-party governments. Owens also delineates why African American churches decide to enter into partnerships with government despite the important challenges they present.

Chapters 6 and 7 continue the detailed look at church–state partnerships, focusing on how the partnerships help churches provide benefits to their neighborhoods (chapter 6) and how the partnerships constitute one type of political engagement (chapter 7).

Owens writes in an easy yet careful style, and he seems to anticipate the reader’s needs. A person less familiar with church–state collaboration at the local level may not completely understand the role of CDCs. Owens describes CDCs and their history and provides an overview of how these church-affiliated organizations have worked in New York City. In this analysis, the most important aspect of CDCs is that they are community-based organizations serving the needs of their communities.

With respect to the yardstick presented at the outset for gauging the contribution of this book, Owens succeeds in advancing a more comprehensive and coherent logic of church–state partnerships. Even though the effects of such partnerships may be limited, African American churches participate in them from a tradition of political engagement to serve the Black community. In his concluding chapter, Owens

raises a particularly interesting point worthy of further investigation and discussion: He suggests that some activist Black clergy, especially those who lead churches that collaborate with government, are “shifting their support from Democrat to Republican candidates, as well as from progressive Democrats to conservative Democrats” (p. 207).

Students of religion and public policy will learn much from this book that may spur additional research on similar collaboration activities among other ethnic and racial groups in other cities. Owens’s work also serves readers interested in the inner workings of a feature of municipal government previously neglected because of its local nature. Collaboration with government gives churches the opportunity to access greater resources to serve their parishioners and neighbors. It offers another way for previously demobilized segments of the population to participate in politics and influence policy. Collaboration may not make dramatic changes in the lives of ordinary people, but it can help to save neighborhoods. With this research, we can now better understand the process of church–state collaboration.

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