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# U.S. Volunteering in the Aftermath of the Great Recession: Were African Americans a Significant Factor?

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**Abstract:** The Great Recession weakened U.S. families' abilities to make charitable gifts. Although African Americans are generally especially hard hit by these types of economic crises, they have a long and distinctive history of volunteerism and mutual assistance. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to examine African American volunteering in nonprofit organizations in the aftermath of the 2008–2009 recession. Specifically, we examined race as well as other factors with the potential to influence volunteering in four categories of organizations: poverty organizations, senior service agencies, social action groups, and religious affiliated organizations. Using the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) data, this secondary analysis produced significant findings regarding volunteerism among African Americans in these community-based organizations.

**Keywords:** volunteerism; philanthropy; race; African American; poverty

## 1. Introduction

The Great Recession of 2008–2009 represented the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Over 3 million workers in the U.S. lost their jobs in 2008 alone; over 3 million households received home foreclosure notices in that year [1]. This economic crisis, which involved a subprime mortgage scandal, hit new African American and Latino homeowners the hardest [2]. Many small nonprofit human service agencies in communities throughout the United States closed even as the demand for assistance soared. The capability of surviving programs including soup kitchens, community action programs, senior services, and homeless shelters to serve the needy depended considerably on community philanthropy. Yet according to USA Giving 2009, total giving to human services in the U.S. (adjusted for inflation) between 2007 and 2009 dropped by 13.5% [3]. Charitable gifts to most types of nonprofit agencies declined during this period, but the decline in charitable giving to human services was greatest.

The recession weakened U.S. families' abilities to make charitable donations. Although African Americans are generally especially hard hit by these types of economic crises, they have a long and distinctive history of volunteerism and mutual assistance. The term “philanthropy” generally refers to acts or gifts done for humanitarian reasons, and therefore, includes volunteerism as well as charitable gifts. However, social exchange theory maintains that no philanthropic effort is purely altruistic (*i.e.*, a one way exchange) [4]. Rather, like all social exchanges, philanthropy is a two-way exchange motivated by benefits to each party in the exchange—in this case, the giver and receiver. Based on social exchange theory and the African American tradition of mutual assistance, we would expect to see significant efforts by African Americans to contribute their assistance as volunteers to fellow community members negatively impacted by the Great Recession.

### 1.1. African American Philanthropic History

Much of the private nonprofit sector (such as voluntary health and welfare organizations) that developed in the United States is a result of organized religion [5]. The colonial church provided its impoverished members with essential health and human services. In this way, the church acted as extended family to promote well-being in the community. Over time, American religion became increasingly diverse with multiple denominations. For example, the Puritans, Quakers, Anglicans, Baptists, and Catholics were all influential. These groups further increased the complexity of the U.S. social welfare system by developing their own education, health, and human services. In addition to religious groups, social groups (based on race and ethnicity as well as trade) created mutual aid organizations providing a range of member services. Gradually, these aid networks evolved into a third sector, a private nonprofit or “voluntary” sector, which complemented the government and business sectors in colonial America.

The growth of the nonprofit sector was fueled by new religious movements in the colonies. That is, by the mid-1700s, there was an increasing belief that a charitable life led to salvation. This challenged the Puritan belief in salvation only through the grace of God [5]. Thus, philanthropy became more than a one-way act of kindness; it was a means to salvation—thus benefitting the giver of time and money as well. As a result, poor colonists, including colonists of African descent, were provided a chance at salvation through voluntary acts of kindness.

African American philanthropy, therefore, was also a product of the church and the nonprofit services derived from the church [6]. However, the church was even more influential in African American philanthropic history, because it faced fewer restrictions than other institutions. For example, poor black colonists were often denied assistance in the colonial poorhouse system of public assistance. Later, in the early 1800s, state laws in Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina banned the formation of charitable societies by African Americans. African American establishments unrelated to the church had to conceal their purpose and activities. To achieve this, in-kind services were frequently offered in place of money. For this reason, in addition to the relative lack of money due to slavery and discrimination, volunteerism plays a central role in African American philanthropic history. One of the most notable examples of early philanthropic African American activity was the participation of African American mutual aid organizations in the Underground Railroad. African American activists voluntarily supplied runaway slaves with food, shelter, and money as they sought freedom [7].

Giving and volunteering were also themes in the empowerment of women—both white and black—in the 1800s [5,8]. Traditionally, U.S. women have contributed to causes that benefited them as women and mothers. Faced with oppression, African American women used philanthropy as a tool to promote equality in addition to fulfilling other basic needs. Perhaps the most well-known example is Harriet Tubman’s volunteer work with the Underground Railroad. However, less famous African American women were also engaged in philanthropic activities, including mutual aid organizations and women’s clubs. For example, 24 African American women created The Phyllis Wheatley Home Association in 1897 to provide housing for elderly African American women in Detroit, Michigan. A second example is the National Association of Colored Women, an organization that offered employment services, child care, and kindergarten to homeless African Americans [5,7].

This tradition of humanitarianism in the African American community is a tradition often overlooked or ignored by U.S. media. That is, the tradition of volunteerism and mutual assistance by African Americans has sustained their local communities, making them better, healthier places to live. It has enabled African American community members to cope, not only with the home foreclosures and job losses of the Great Recession, but also, with the more recent wave of police shootings of young African American men in several U.S. cities. Media images of this violence in African American neighborhoods need to be countered by the more positive images of neighbors helping neighbors in African American communities.

## 1.2. Study Objective

This study examines African American volunteering in 2010, the year following the 2008–2009 recession. Specifically, we examined race and other potential factors influencing volunteering in four categories of community-based nonprofit organizations: senior service agencies, social action groups, religious affiliated organizations, and poverty organizations serving those in need of food, shelter, and other basic necessities. The negative impact of the Great Recession on vulnerable seniors and the poor was immediately visible. Social action groups are included in this study, because many often serve and advocate for these vulnerable populations. Furthermore, given the fact that local churches often provide basic services such as food and clothing to the needy in their respective communities, the study also examined volunteering in this fourth category of beneficiary.

## 2. Research

The body of empirical research on African American volunteerism is limited, and the topic is usually examined in the context of broader studies on philanthropy (*i.e.*, giving and volunteering). Findings regarding the influence of race in these studies have been inconsistent. Hall-Russell and Kasberg surveyed 180 African Americans in the states of Michigan, Ohio and Indiana. The 1997 survey, based on a nonrandom sample, was later continued with 650 African Americans in the same three states using face-to-face and telephone interviews. The research concluded that African Americans tended to value contributions of time more than the contributions of money, and view their philanthropy as a “distinctive tradition” based in kinship and general obligation to the African American community. Study participants also preferred contributing through the church when making formal contributions and favored helping in their local neighborhoods [9].

Hunter, Jones, and Boger surveyed alumni donors of Livingstone College, a historically African American college in North Carolina. No sample size was provided; however donors in the 1999 study ([10], pp. 533–34) tended to be more active on volunteer boards in their communities. They also tended to be female, married with children, employed, and a member of the A.M.E. Zion church (a church affiliated with the college) [10].

In 2000, O’Neill and Roberts published their findings of a survey on giving and volunteering in the state of California, which included an over-sample of minority groups in Alameda County. Using a probability sample, a total of 2406 interviews were done statewide, while 1210 interviews were conducted in Alameda County. This study found no significant differences in giving or volunteering among Whites, African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian/Pacific Islanders. Similar findings were obtained in both the statewide and Alameda samples [11].

Jackson examined the philanthropic motivations of young African Americans, employing focus groups with participants aged 26–32. Two focus groups of “balanced gender” were conducted for two hours with six different people in each session. In a 2001 publication, the researcher concluded that a desire to “uplift the race” through philanthropy is very important to young African-Americans and is reflective of the African-American desire to use philanthropy to promote racial equality and justice. However, a majority of these young study participants did not view the church as a viable way of accomplishing this goal, consequently giving very little of their time and money to the church. That said, these findings should be interpreted cautiously, since this study included a small number of participants [12].

Mesch, Rooney, Chin, and Steinberg in 2002 published the results of a random survey of 885 Indiana households, done through The Public Opinion Laboratory at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. A little over 13% of the sample classified themselves as a minority including 10.1% African American. Minorities in this sample volunteered on average more hours than did Whites (169 to 126 h annually), yet this difference was not statistically significant. In fact, the survey found no statistically significant differences by race in volunteering or charitable giving [13].

Four years later, in a 2006 study, Mesch, Rooney, Steinberg, and Denton used data from Indiana households again to examine the impact of race, gender, and marital status on patterns of volunteering

and charitable giving. In this study, the researchers used a multi-method, multi-group research design. This study also did not find race to be significant; the results did show that single females were 18% more likely to be a volunteer and to volunteer 146 h per year more than single men, *ceteris paribus*. In addition, the probability of being a volunteer increased with education and income levels [14].

Several studies specifically examining race and volunteerism have been published since the Great Recession. Like the earlier studies, findings regarding the influence of race have been inconsistent though. Farmer and Piotrkowski did a 2009 study on potential differences in civic engagement between African and European American women. The study was a secondary analysis using data from the 2000 Social Capital Benchmark Survey. The study found no significant differences between African and European American women in the extent to which they reported working on community projects and volunteering in their places of worship [15].

Tang, Copeland, and Wexler, in a 2012 publication, surveyed differences in volunteer experience and benefits between older Black and White residents of Pittsburgh. Convenience and purposive sampling produced a sample size of 180 residents aged 60 and over. Black participants were less likely than Whites to volunteer in formal organizations. Yet, once committed, Blacks in the sample contributed more time and perceived more benefits from volunteering than White volunteers [16].

More recently, Gutierrez and Mattis examined volunteerism among 211 African American women in a large urban center in the northeast region (city not identified). Participants in the survey ranged in age from 16 to 83 years of age with a mean of 32.42 years. The 2014 study found that current religious involvement was a positive predictor of volunteer engagement, while age positively predicted the number of hours women volunteer annually [17].

There have been several general studies of volunteerism published since the onset of the Great Recession [18–30]. This research found a wide range of factors other than race correlated with volunteerism. These factors include gender, age, religiosity, home ownership, psychological motivations, fields of employment, income, employment status, marital status, residency, and educational level.

Unlike this study, most of this past empirical research does not focus on the beneficiaries of volunteerism in terms of specific nonprofit categories or populations in need, nor did it produce consistent findings regarding race. This study uses the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) data to analyze the effects of race and several other independent variables on volunteering by U.S. households to organizations that serve the needy. More specifically, we investigate the following four research questions: Was race a significant factor in volunteering in 2010 for the following types of U.S. nonprofit organizations: (1) religious; (2) poverty relief; (3) senior service; and (4) social change.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Data

The PSID is a public use dataset produced and distributed by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, MI. Created to help evaluate President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, the PSID is essentially a longitudinal survey that has followed a representative sample of 4800 families and their descendants since 1968. The PSID family and individual files contain data on various demographic characteristics as well as other factors potentially influencing household charitable giving and volunteerism. The current study extracted data from the 2011 Public Use Family file, which included household volunteering activities in 2010—the year in which this data was updated.

Reliability is generally strong in survey research, particularly when standardized questionnaires are used, as in this survey [31]. In addition, the large representative sample allows for inferences regarding minority volunteer behavior in the U.S. However, standardized questionnaires tend to be somewhat superficial, thus limiting validity. Furthermore, this study, like all secondary analysis, is limited by the fact that variable operationalization is confined to the existing measurement instrument and data. As a result, validity is generally not as high as when data are collected directly by the

researcher for a specific purpose [31]. In this case, although volunteering with the intent to help the needy typically takes place in the four types of nonprofit organizations of interest in this study, the data do not allow for precise descriptions of volunteer activities within these organizations. In addition, the fact that the PSID dataset is not updated annually prevents a more longitudinal analysis of volunteering in the years immediately before and after the Great Recession.

### 3.2. Measures

#### 3.2.1. Dependent Variables

Regarding the dependent variables, a questionnaire item asked whether or not the Household Head/Wife volunteered (during 2010) for a specific charitable organization. The specific beneficiary organizations we are exploring in this study are categorized as Religious, Poverty, Senior Services, and Social Change agencies. Further descriptions of the dependent variables are found in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Dependent Variable descriptions.

Variable Name	Description	Coding
Religious	Person performed a volunteer activity at or through your church, synagogue, or mosque, such as serving on a committee, assisting in worship, teaching, or helping others through programs organized by (your/his) place of worship?	1 = Yes, 0 = No
Poverty	Person performed a volunteer activity through organizations to help people in need, such as working at a soup kitchen, building or repairing a house, or providing other basic necessities?	1 = Yes, 0 = No
Senior	Person performed a volunteer activity through organizations for senior citizens, such as helping at a nursing home or a senior citizens center, providing emotional or social support, visiting, driving, or delivering food?	1 = Yes, 0 = No
Social Change	Person volunteered through organizations to bring about social change, such as civic or community action, working for a political party or advocacy group?	1 = Yes, 0 = No

#### 3.2.2. Independent Variables

The study examined the following independent variables: race, Latino ethnicity; age, number of people and children in household; head of households' marital status, religious preference, retirement, education level, employment status, access to a computer; whether or not household lives in a city; household's income and wealth. Further descriptions of the independent variables are found in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Independent variable descriptions.

Variable Name	Description	Coding
Age (Head)	Age of head of family	1 = 0/39, 2 = 40/59, 3 = 60/79, 4 = 80/max
Race	Race of the head of the family/Wife's race	1 = White, 2 = African American, 3 = AI/AN, 4 = Asian, 5 = Native Hawaiian
Latino	Spanish descent head of the family	1 = yes, 0 = No
Children	Children in household	1 = Children, 0 = no Children
Household	Number of people in household	1 = Two or less people; 0 = 3 or more people
Religious Head	Head of family expresses a religious preference	1 = yes, 0 = No
Retired Head	Retired	1 = yes, 0 = No
College	Head's education status/ Attended college	1 = yes, 0 = No
Employed	Working	1 = yes, 0 = No
Computer (Head)	Head of family owns a computer	1 = yes, 0 = No
City	Head lives in city of 1,000,000 people or more	1 = yes, 0 = No
Family Income	Annual Household income in dollars that has been categorized	1 = min/25,000, 2 = 25,001/50,000, 3 = 50,001/100,000, 4 = 100,001/250,000, 5 = 250,001/max
Wealthy	Continuous variable sum of all assets in dollars including home equity that has been categorized	1 = min/25,000, 2 = 25,001/100,000, 3 = 100,001/500,000, 4 = 500,001/max

#### 4. Statistical Analysis

The paper's descriptive analyses use an unweighted cross-sectional sample of all PSID responding households in 2011. The study's multivariate analyses use a weighted (see Heeringa, Berglund, and Khan, 2011 for detailed descriptions of the PSID weights) longitudinal sample consisting of 8970 PSID individuals residing in the households at the time of the interview [32].

Bivariate and multivariate analyses were computed to examine the relationships among variables. Regarding multivariate analyses and more specifically logistic regression analyses, an initial model was created by running logistic regression analyses for each independent variable of interest and volunteer activities for beneficiary organizations of interest: religious, poverty, senior organizations, and social change agencies. The results generated odds ratios, standard errors, *p* values and confidence intervals. Those variables that were found to have a *p* values  $\leq 0.05$  were entered into a multivariate logistic regression analysis to identify those variables that were independently associated with each of the dependent giving variables.

#### 5. Findings

##### 5.1. Sample Characteristics

Our sample consists of 8907 respondents. A subsample of 793 respondents who volunteered were analyzed of whom 56% were White ( $n = 443$ ); 40% were African-American ( $n = 316$ ); 4% were other ( $n = 34$ ). (See Table 3.) A subset of Race was reported as 5% ethnically Latino ( $n = 39$ ) (all percentages are rounded off).

**Table 3.** Household characteristics of persons who did volunteer activities for organization in 2011;  $N = 793$  (Unweighted).

Variables	N		% Volunteered	Age Mean/Median	SD
	Yes	No			
Household Characteristics					
Race/ethnicity *					
White	443	350	55.86	46.92/45	17.32
African American	316	477	39.85	42.59/41	15.07
Other	34	783	4.29	43.82/43	16.53
Latino	39	751	4.94	41.85/39	15.46
Gender					
Male	239	554	30.14		
Female	554	239	69.86		
Religious Head	660	133	83.23		
Retired Head	106	390	21.37	50.17/51.5	16.89
College	614	172	78.12		
Household Characteristics					
Number of persons in household	—	—	—	2.60 (mean)	1.47
Number of children in household	222	571	27.99	0.80 (mean)	1.17
Employed—yes	523	270	65.95		
Computer (Head)	637	155	80.43		
City—resides	258	532	32.66		
Income					
min/25,000	264	529	33.29	64,873/45,883	83,648
25,001/50,000	274	519	34.55		
50,001/100,000	194	599	24.46		
100,001/250,000	54	739	6.81		
250,001/max	7	786	0.88		
Wealth					
min/25,000	468	325	59.02	206,077/22,415	885,400
25,001/100,000	130	663	16.39		
100,001/500,000	126	667	15.89		
500,001/max	69	724	8.70		

\* Note: Race/ethnicity variables American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Other (race/ethnicity), were not analyzed because their numbers were insufficient. Also, the exact percentages may be off because of missing data. It would be too cumbersome to note missing data for every analysis. The authors consider the data to be Missing Completely at Random (MCAR).



The percentage of heads of households who reported being religious was 82% (n = 660). In the sample, 21% of heads of households reported being retired (n = 108). The majority or 78% of the heads of household had attended college (n = 614). The average number of persons living in the household was 3 (SD = 1.48) and the average number of children was 1 (SD = 1.17). The employment rate of household heads was 66% (n = 523); 80% owned a computer (n = 637) and 33% lived in a large metropolitan city (258). The mean income for the head of household was \$64,873 (SD = \$83,648) and the mean wealth and equity was \$206,077 (SD = \$885,400).

*5.2. Research Question #1: Was Race a Significant Factor in Volunteering in 2010 for U.S. Religious Organizations?*

The influence of race as well as the other aforementioned independent variables was tested for possible associations with the dependent variable, the head of the family volunteering for religious organizations, many of which serve people in need (See Table 4). Chi-square results showed the following variables associated with household heads volunteering for religious organizations: being African American, age of household head, head of household reported being religious, city residence, and total household wealth.

Subsequent analysis using multivariate regression showed several of these independent variables to be strongly associated with household volunteering for religious organizations (See Table 5). These associations were being African American, being in the 60 to 79 age group, head of household was religious, and living in a city. The factors in the regression analyses are associated with Americans volunteering for these organizations. The results are in the form of odds ratios (OR). The odds ratio and beta coefficient are interchangeable statistics in a logistic regression. The odds ratio lets the reader know the likelihood that Americans are going to volunteer. A predictor that has an OR equal to 2.0, for example, indicates a person is twice as likely to volunteer. While an OR of 0.55 indicates a person is 45% less likely to volunteer. In this case, household heads who were African American were 1.82 times (OR = 1.82;  $p = 0.00$ ) as likely to volunteer for such organizations. Household heads aged 60 to 79 were 1.89 times (OR = 1.89;  $p = 0.00$ ) as likely to volunteer for a religious organization. Not surprisingly, household heads who reported being religious volunteered the most. They were 3.29 times (OR = 3.29;  $p = 0.00$ ) as likely to volunteer for religious organizations. On the negative side, city dwellers were 25% less likely (OR = 0.75;  $p = 0.041$ ) to volunteer.

The previously described set of independent variables was also tested for possible associations with the dependent variable, wife of head of household volunteering for religious organizations (See Table 6). Chi-square results showed several independent variables associated with the wife volunteering for religious organizations: age, African American, Latinos, head was religious, head is retired, and number of persons in household.

The results of subsequent multivariate regression analysis showed race, age, and household head religious to be statistically significant predictors of the wife (or as previously discussed, "partner") volunteering for religious organizations (See Table 7). More precisely, wives who were African Americans were 1.72 times (OR = 1.72;  $p = 0.000$ ) as likely to volunteer in religious organizations; those aged 60 to 79 were almost twice as likely (OR = 1.90;  $p = 0.001$ ). Furthermore, the wife was more likely to volunteer in religious organizations (OR = 3.58;  $p = 0.000$ ) if the head of the household reported being religious.

**Table 4.** Bivariate analysis of independent variables association with household head volunteering (weighted).

Variables	Volunteered Religious			Volunteered Poverty			Volunteered Senior			Volunteered Social		
	%Yes	%No	$\chi^2$	%Yes	%No	$\chi^2$	%Yes	%No	$\chi^2$	%Yes	%No	$\chi^2$
Household Characteristics												
Age years			11.0 *			0.89			6.23 *			2.74 *
0/39	33.02	46.72		41.61	40.76		29.4	42.52		34.93	41.57	
40/59	40.87	38.42		36.46	40.28		38.78	39.55		37.62	39.73	
60/79	22.39	12.6		19.45	15.95		27.05	15.31		25.37	15.73	
80/max	3.72	2.26		2.47	3s.01		4.77	2.61		2.08	2.98	
Race/ethnicity												
White	62.33	67.28	3.16	66.94	64.73	0.47	56.15	66.44	6.13 *	65.54	65.12	0.01
African American	32.72	26.04	6.36 *	29.05	28.72	0.12	42.76	26.93	16.12 *	32.03	28.5	0.71
Latinos	5.51	7.49	1.84	3.58	7.609	5.72 *	6.90	6.62	0.02	4.90	6.876	0.73
Religious Head	93.96	79.23	52.18 *	84.95	85.61	0.07	89.92	84.85	2.75	82.51	85.81	1.02
Retired Head	15.16	11.54	3.40	10.22	13.96	2.76	21.98	11.83	12.24 *	14.23	12.95	0.16
College	72.97	76.21	1.60	77.07	74.1	1.00	74.4	74.89	0.02	83.89	73.66	6.49 *
Household Characteristics												
Child	33.10	39.16	2.18	41.77	35.64	1.46	35.72	36.93	0.03	38.04	36.7	0.03
Household	51.93	51.07	0.09	61.19	48.39	14.3 *	61.76	49.99	7.39 *	59.11	50.44	3.46
Employed	73.56	73.72	0.00	76.55	72.87	1.50	59.32	75.65	18.3 *	71.09	73.93	0.49
Computer (Head)	85.96	86.86	0.20	87.21	86.24	0.17	83.09	86.95	1.63	90.38	85.99	2.04
City	25.40	30.77	4.15 *	33.03	27.14	3.69 *	27.54	28.63	0.07	38.29	27.21	7.01 *
Income												
min/25,000	15.53	19.21	2.13	17.73	17.51	0.28	22.56	16.97	1.11	15.28	17.96	1.05
25,001/50,000	24.25	23.43		22.44	24.21		25.62	23.52		20.37	24.09	
50,001/100,000	36.07	31.89		34.9	33.33		30.35	34.12		33.12	33.77	
100,001/250,000	21.42	20.27		19.98	21.02		19.0	21.00		24.67	20.31	
250,001/max	2.74	5.2		4.953	3.919		2.46	4.39		6.56	3.87	
Wealth												
min/25,000	36.76	44.93	3.66 *	38.74	42.36	1.09	41.03	41.53	0.15	38.55	41.75	1.85
25,001/100,000	17.4	18.27		16.84	18.25		17.43	17.97		13.7	18.43	
100,001/500,000	28.63	22.75		25.98	24.92		27.25	24.96		26.02	25.18	
500,001/max	17.21	14.04		18.45	14.47		14.29	15.54		21.74	14.64	

Source: Weighted data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics; \*  $p < 0.05$ .



**Table 5.** A multivariate analysis predicting Head volunteering in organizations (weighted).

Variables	Volunteered Religious		Volunteered Poverty		Volunteered Senior		Volunteered Social	
	OR (CI)	SE (p)	OR (CI)	SE (p)	OR (CI)	SE (p)	OR (CI)	SE (p)
Household Characteristics								
Age years								
0/39	Reference	-	-	-	Reference	-	-	-
40/59	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
60/79	1.89 (1.36–2.65)	0.32 (0.00) *	-	-	-	-	1.74 (1.10–2.75)	0.41 (0.004) *
80/max	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Race/ethnicity								
White	-	-	-	-	Reference	-	-	-
African American	1.82 (1.36–2.44)	0.27 (0.00) *	-	-	2.12 (1.45–3.10)	0.41 (0.00) *	-	-
Latinos	-	-	0.84 (0.36–1.11)	0.07 (0.042) *	-	-	-	-
Religious Head	3.29 (2.16–5.00)	0.70 (0.00) *	-	-	-	-	-	-
Retired Head	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
College	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.05 (1.26–3.34)	0.51 (0.004) *
Household Characteristics								
Child	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Household	-	-	1.51 (1.13–2.03)	0.19 (0.006) *	1.27 (0.83–1.94)	0.27 (0.26)	-	-
Employed	-	-	-	-	0.61 (0.37–0.98)	0.15 (0.04) *	-	-
Computer (Head)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
City	0.75 (0.56–1.53)	0.10 (0.041) *	-	-	-	-	1.71 (1.16–2.51)	0.34 (0.006) *
Income								
min/25,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
25,001/50,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
50,001/100,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
100,001/250,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
250,001/max	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wealth								
min/25,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
25,001/100,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
100,001/500,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
500,001/max	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: CI stands for Confidence Interval; Weighted data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; Note: to conserve space the data for the non-statistically significant variables American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Other (race/ethnicity), college were not shown in table.

**Table 6.** Bivariate analysis of independent variables association with wife volunteering (weighted).

Variables	Volunteered Religious			Volunteered Poverty			Volunteered Senior			Volunteered Social		
	%Yes	%No	$\chi^2$	%Yes	%No	$\chi^2$	%Yes	%No	$\chi^2$	%Yes	%No	$\chi^2$
Household Characteristics												
Age years			12.51 *			0.63			7.41 *			1.65
0/39	29.57	42.36		35.23	36.44		19.77	38.46		27.86	37.04	
40/59	44.1	46.56		44.01	45.6		47.75	44.95		45.5	45.28	
60/79	23.98	9.17		17.27	16.15		27.12	14.91		24.5	15.57	
80/max	2.36	1.90		3.49	1.80		5.36	1.67		2.136	2.119	
Race/ethnicity												
White	75.29	79.97	2.57	77.4	77.8	0.01	71.02	78.65	2.85	69.54	78.53	3.10
African American	19.5	12.97	6.34 *	18.47	15.58	0.79	27.62	14.54	10.79 *	25.02	15.26	4.66 *
Latinos	5.6	10.34	6.36 *	3.35	9.12	5.60 *	4.28	8.54	2.16	0.53	8.764	31.2 *
Religious Head	92.47	76.05	40.16 *	86.61	83.31	1.00	86.08	83.64	0.38	83.65	83.96	0.00
Retired Head	13.92	9.59	3.74 *	15.6	10.78	2.89	20.39	10.52	8.70 *	14.68	11.39	0.71
Household Characteristics												
Child	29.15	33.87	2.26	35.86	30.92	0.76	31.97	31.74	0.00	32.38	31.71	0.01
Household	37.68	29.43	6.17 *	37.69	32.4	1.55	45.87	31.71	8.14 *	42.12	32.55	2.72
Employed	78.61	83.4	3.09	75.26	82.45	4.39 *	70.1	82.58	9.33 *	77.56	81.44	0.72
Computer (Head)	89.75	92.58	2.03	87.05	92.19	3.94 *	85.41	92.01	4.55 *	90.03	91.33	0.15
City	22.24	25.67	1.32	26.35	23.4	0.58	18.76	24.66	1.53	24.91	23.87	0.04
Income			1.50			0.52			0.85			1.36
min/25,000	4.13	6.14		4.85	5.22		4.25	5.27		2.145	5.447	
25,001/50,000	17.5	13.88		15.1	15.74		21.01	14.9		18.34	15.35	
50,001/100,000	42	39.62		38.71	41.36		40.92	40.84		31.77	41.75	
100,001/250,000	31.45	32.78		32.62	31.96		29.7	32.4		40	31.31	
250,001/max	4.92	7.59		8.72	5.71		4.12	6.58		7.735	6.141	
Wealth			3.66			0.36			1.75			1.84
min/25,000	27.1	34.8		29.27	31.41		23.24	32.06		19.59	32.13	5.35 *
25,001/100,000	17.45	16.16		14.98	17.35		15.55	17.08		16.88	16.9	
100,001/500,000	33.89	28.8		33.65	30.68		39.92	30.04	3.96 *	36.7	30.7	
500,001/max	21.56	20.24		22.1	20.56		21.29	20.81		26.83	20.27	

Source: Weighted data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics; \*  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 7.** A multivariate analysis predicting wife volunteering in organizations (weighted).

Variables	Volunteered Religious		Volunteered Poverty		Volunteered Senior		Volunteered Social	
	OR (CI)	SE (p)	OR (CI)	SE (p)	OR (CI)	SE (p)	OR (CI)	SE (p)
Household Characteristics								
Age years								
0/39	Reference		-	-	Reference	-	-	-
40/59	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
60/79	1.90 (1.26–2.80)	0.38 (0.001) *	-	-	-	-	-	-
80/max	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Race/ethnicity								
White								
African American	1.72 (1.29–2.28)	0.25 (0.000) *	-	-	2.41 (1.45–3.99)	0.62 (0.001) *	2.11 (1.13–3.97)	0.68 (0.020) *
Latinos	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.076 (0.02–0.32)	0.05 (0.000) *
Religious Head	3.58 (2.32–5.53)	0.79 (0.00) *	-	-	-	-	-	-
Retired Head	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Household Characteristics								
Child								
Household	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employed	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Computer (Head)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
City	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Income								
min/25,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
25,001/50,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
50,001/100,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
100,001/250,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
250,001/max	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wealth								
min/25,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.48 (0.25–0.91)	0.16 (0.025) *
25,001/100,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
100,001/500,000	-	-	-	-	1.74 (0.26–1.49)	0.40 (0.017) *	-	-
500,001/max	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Weighted data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics; \*  $p < 0.05$ .

### 5.3. Research Question #2: Was Race a Significant Factor in Volunteering in 2010 for U.S. Poverty Organizations?

The set of independent variables was also tested for possible associations with the dependent variable, head of household volunteering for poverty organizations, which serve people in need of basic necessities like food, shelter, and basic health care (See Table 4). Chi-square analyses show that three variables were significantly associated with head of household volunteering for poverty organizations: being Latino, number of persons in household, and living in a city.

The multivariate regression showed that two variables were significantly associated with the household head volunteering for poverty organizations (See Table 5). Household heads who were Latino were 16% less likely to volunteer for poverty organizations (OR = 0.84,  $p = 0.042$ ), while heads of larger households were one and a half times more likely to volunteer (OR = 1.51,  $p = 0.006$ ).

This study also tested for possible associations with the dependent variable, wife of head of household volunteering for poverty organizations (See Table 6). Chi-square results showed three independent variables associated with the wife volunteering for poverty organizations. These variables were Latinos, employed, and head owns a computer.

Subsequent multivariate regression analysis, however, showed none of the independent variables to be a statistically significant predictor of a wife volunteering for poverty organizations (See Table 7). The aforementioned variables came close to statistical significance but all possessed negative associations. The variables Latinos, employed, and the head of household owning a computer decreased the likelihood the wife would volunteer for a poverty agency.

### 5.4. Research Question #3: Was Race a Significant Factor in Volunteering in 2010 for U.S. Senior Organizations?

Many senior citizens, because of their unemployed status and frail health, suffer from poverty. Because of this vulnerability, race and the other previously described independent variables were also tested for possible associations with the dependent variable, head of household volunteering for senior organizations, many of which serve senior citizens in need of necessities like food and basic health care (See Table 4). Chi-square results showed several independent variables associated with volunteering for senior organizations. These variables were race of household head as well as age, head is retired, employed, and number of persons in household.

Subsequent multivariate regressions showed two of these independent variables to be significant predictors of head of household volunteering for senior service organizations: being African American, and employed (See Table 5). African Americans (OR = 2.12;  $p = 0.000$ ) were roughly twice as likely to volunteer in senior service organizations. In contrast, household heads who were employed were 39% less (OR = 0.61;  $p = 0.04$ ) likely to volunteer in these agencies.

The wife's volunteering for senior organizations was examined (See Table 6). Chi-square results showed several independent variables associated with wife volunteering for senior organizations. These variables were race, age, head of household was retired and owned a computer, number of persons in household, and employed.

Subsequent analyses showed two independent variables to be statistically significant predictors of the wife volunteering for senior organizations (see Table 7). These were African American, and wealth. That is, wives who were African American were almost two and half (OR = 2.41;  $p = 0.001$ ) times more likely to volunteer in senior service organizations. In addition, household wealth being in the \$100,001/\$500,000 bracket (OR = 1.74;  $p = 0.017$ ) positively influenced the likelihood of the wife volunteering by over one and half times.

### 5.5. Research Question #4: Was Race a Significant Factor in Volunteering in 2010 for U.S. Social Change Organizations?

The fourth research question explored head of household volunteering for social change organizations, many of which advocate for people in need (See Table 4). Chi-square results showed

three independent variables associated with the household head volunteering for social change organizations. These variables were age, attended college, and city.

The results of subsequent multivariate regression analyses showed the same three independent variables to be significant predictors of the household head volunteering for social change organizations (see Table 5). More precisely, those head of households who lived in a city (OR = 1.71;  $p = 0.006$ ) were more than one and half times likely to volunteer in social change agencies. Household heads aged 60 to 79 (OR = 1.74;  $p = 0.004$ ) and those who had attended college (OR = 2.05;  $p = 0.004$ ) were approximately twice as likely to volunteer. Race was not a significant predictor of the household head volunteering for social change organizations.

The list of independent variables was also tested for possible associations with the dependent variable, wife of head of household volunteering for social change organizations (See Table 6). Chi-square results indicated three independent variables associated with the wife volunteering for senior organizations. These variables were African American, Latinos and wealth.

Subsequent multivariate regression analysis showed the same variables to be statistically significant predictors of the wife volunteering for social change organizations (see Table 7). The least likely to volunteer were Latinos. Compared to non-Latinos, they were 92% less like to volunteer (OR = 0.08;  $p = 0.000$ ). Those with a household wealth in the category of “min/\$25,000” were 52% less likely (OR = 0.48;  $p = 0.025$ ) to volunteer. However, African American wives were twice (OR = 2.11;  $p = 0.020$ ) as likely to volunteer in social change agencies.

## 6. Discussion

Our study results indicate that African Americans were significantly active in volunteering for nonprofit organizations that typically help groups most vulnerable to the negative impact of recessions. Historically, those most susceptible in the U.S. have been poor and frail minorities [5]. The Great Recession and its accompanying home foreclosure crisis was no exception, particularly targeting African Americans (as well as Latinos). More specifically, our analysis indicated that being an African American head of a household was a significant factor in that person volunteering for religious organizations—many of which serve people in need. In fact, household heads who were African American were 1.82 times (OR = 1.82;  $p = 0.00$ ) more likely to volunteer for religious organizations than other household heads in this study population (see Table 5). Similarly, multivariate regressions showed that being an African American head of a household was a significant predictor of the head of household volunteering for senior organizations (See Table 5). In this study, heads of households who were African Americans were over twice as likely (OR = 2.12;  $p = 0.00$ ) to volunteer to help seniors in their communities.

These results support earlier empirical research on African American philanthropy in general—that is, encompassing both contributions of cash and time. For example, the 1997 survey by Hall-Russell and Kasberg of 830 African Americans found that African Americans prefer making formal donations of money through the church when they do give, but generally value contributions of time more than cash donations [9]. The survey also found that African Americans view their philanthropy as distinctive with a greater emphasis on personal relationships and “kinship”, in the sense that all African Americans are viewed as brothers and sisters.

When our analysis focused just on the wives/partners of household heads, the results were similar. Multivariate regression results indicated that being African American was a significant factor in the wife volunteering for religious organizations (See Table 7). More precisely, wives who were African American were 1.72 times (OR = 1.72;  $p = 0.00$ ) as likely to volunteer for religious organizations. Comparable results were obtained in the analysis of senior organizations (see Table 7). African American wives were almost two and half (OR = 2.41;  $p = 0.001$ ) times more likely to volunteer to assist people in senior organizations than other wives. Furthermore, African American wives were also significantly active in helping others through volunteering in social change organizations. Regression analysis

findings (see Table 7) indicated that wives who were African American were over twice as likely (OR = 2.11;  $p = 0.020$ ) to volunteer their time in social change organizations.

This study's use of the PSID and its large representative sample allows for inferences regarding minority volunteer behavior. Yet, like all secondary analysis, this analysis is limited in that our variable operationalization is confined to the existing survey questions. As a result, although volunteering to assist the needy typically occurs in the four types of nonprofit organizations examined in this study, the questionnaire and related data do not allow for more precise descriptions of volunteer activities within these settings.

## 7. Conclusions

The results of this study are consistent with historical literature on African American philanthropy [5]. In times of crisis, African Americans have typically offered assistance through any number of voluntary acts of kindness. Whether the crisis was escape from slavery, surviving the Great Depression, breaking the bonds of segregation during the Civil Rights Movement, or coping with massive home foreclosure and unemployment in the Great Recession, African Americans made significant voluntary efforts to assist others in their communities. In contrast to media images of violence, hate, and hopelessness in African American communities, such "hands-on" philanthropy furthers trust, collaboration, and empowerment among participants, thereby building social capital and generally healthier communities [33]. Given this, philanthropy and those who practice it play a central role in the health of communities. Our findings indicate that African Americans represent a potentially valuable resource for nonprofit community services dependent on volunteerism. Future research on factors contributing to healthy, sustainable communities should further examine the role of philanthropic factors such as volunteerism, mutual assistance, and financial donations. Given the limitations of this study, such research should also incorporate qualitative data collection methods to offer a more detailed, in-depth examination of voluntary behavior in community nonprofit organizations.

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