

CHAPTER FOUR
CONCLUSION: THE NEW CITIZENSHIP AND THE POLITICS OF
IDENTITY IN THE COUNCILS

The data and issues examined in this thesis express the complexity and difficulty of articulating a politics of identity through the construction of new citizenship claims. Interviewees expressed promising views of the Council as an institutionalized forum due to its institutional legitimacy, its ability to bring the community together, and the process of creating politically engaged citizens. However, people also conveyed difficult issues such as a lack of understanding of the social implications of race, a lack of resources, and a fear of co-optation. The views expressed raise questions about the actual legitimacy of the Council, both to the members and to the municipal government, as well as the difficulty of making race an issue that is understood both by government officials and society more broadly. The Council members are indeed challenging racial democracy by confronting historical social constructions of race, redefining the meanings embedded in social practices and race relations, and redefining the meaning of politics. The struggle over meanings and who has the power to attribute them is both a political struggle and constitutive of politics (Dagnino 1998). The Council is a forum through which the negotiation of the politics of identity is a struggle over both the meaning and substance of a black political identity, as well as the very meaning of political participation by citizens. By bringing the race question into the sphere of public discourse and municipal politics in a manner that points out the contradictions in Brazilian race relations and discourse, the Council (re)constructs claims to citizenship based in recognitions of historical racial difference as a condition for equality.