

The Economics of Movement Success: Business Responses to Civil Rights Mobilization¹

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This article explores why movements are successful in obtaining concessions from economic actors. While social movement theorists have suggested that economic actors weigh the costliness of protests, the author considers the vulnerability of movement targets to both the cost of disruptions in routine transactions and the cost of conceding to movement demands. By addressing the magnitude of these costs and their interaction, the author derives an economic opportunity structure to predict the receptivity of economic actors to movement demands and the likely struggles among them over the decision to yield. Also, this cost-assessment approach reveals patterns of vulnerability across economic sectors to the costs of disruptive mobilization. The author tests this analysis based on case studies of the responses of economic actors to civil rights mobilization in the 1960s in five Southern localities. These cases depict how the character of protest and variation in the configuration of business communities defined the range of movement outcomes from relatively swift accommodation to persistent resistance.

For social movements, creating disruptions is often the only effective means to compel change. Surprisingly, the theoretical underpinnings of this commonplace assumption are seldom specified. It is regularly suggested that social movement success depends on expanding political opportunities or attracting outside support but, as conducive to movement triumph as these factors may be, the conditions under which they will be

¹ I thank David Card, Michael Donnelly, Edward Haas, Arnold Hirsch, Morton Inger, Glen Jeansonne, Doug McAdam, Bruce Nelson, Charles Payne, Lawrence Powell, Kim Rogers, David Shein, Charles Tilly, Johanna Warshaw, Donna Wells, and the AJS reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions. Direct correspondence to Joseph Luders, Department of Political Science, Yeshiva University, 245 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10016. E-mail: luders@yu.edu

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0002-9602/2006/11104-0001\$10.00

AJS Volume 111 Number 4 (January 2006): 963–98 963

sufficient to bring victory are often unclear (Koopmans and Statham 1999). Moreover, confronted with ostensibly similar circumstances favorable to success, social actors vary in their receptivity to movement demands (Giugni 1999)². This variation highlights the fundamental question at issue: What explains the responses of targets and bystanders to movement demands? It is only by devising a theoretical account of the conditions under which these actors choose to yield that movement success or failure can be explained.

Recent debates about social movement outcomes underscore the need for further theoretical development in this area (Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999). For instance, there has been considerable disagreement over whether disruptive or violent movements are more successful than those that are less contentious. A related dispute concerns the significance of the broader structural context in which a movement is situated. Some argue that general external circumstances are determinative whereas others suggest that internal, movement-controlled variables better explain movement outcome. In assessing both debates, Giugni (1999) concludes that the veracity of the competing positions "varies according to the situation." What is needed, then, is a theory of how situations and actors differ or, put another way, an account of the factors that make certain movement targets more or less receptive to movement demands.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of movement-imposed costs, but the theoretical analysis has been narrow and limited. I propose a consideration of these costs to enhance explanations of the responsiveness of targets to movement demands. Since a general theory that conflates the differing costs for diverse actors runs the risk of excessive generality, I focus here on the responses of economic actors. Extending the logic of prior studies, I advance three main propositions: first, economic duress is a major proximate cause behind the decision of economic actors

² Receptivity and responsiveness refer here to movement targets offering concessions on formally stated movement goals. Of course, many ambiguities cloud the meaning of success. For instance, the term implies a monolithic movement in which demands are uniform across all participants (Giugni 1999). See Tilly (1999) for a discussion of further complexities regarding the specification of movement outcome. Despite these difficulties, Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander (1995) argue persuasively that a focus on the achievement of stated goals establishes specific criteria with which to evaluate movement success and facilitates comparative analysis. This approach coincides as well with the conventional emphasis on "new advantages" (Gamson 1975; Amenta and Young 1999). Thus, following Burstein et al. (1995, p. 282), I regard movements as successful "to the extent that they achieve their formally stated goals." Some studies (Kitschelt 1986; Burstein et al. 1995; Andrews 2001) go further to distinguish various types of success or outcome; however, these theoretical refinements have principally addressed political and institutional responsiveness, ever

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over the target, and the more likely it is to succeed. A central task for any protest group, then, is to increase the target's dependence, directly or indirectly" (1995, p. 293). Although the clarity of this formulation rep-

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impose upon economic actors, two general types should be distinguished. First, by carrying out protests, demonstrations, picketing, litigation, and so on, social movements can disrupt regular business activity, attract negative publicity, or impose financial penalties upon recalcitrant firms. Movements may also enlist the assistance of third parties, including state actors, to impose costs upon targets or bystanders. These third parties can, for instance, withdraw investments, support boycotts, reduce funding, or impose fines. The losses resulting directly and indirectly from movement actions will be referred to as disruption costs. Most movements—including environmentalism, animal-rights activism, antinuclear activism, gun control advocacy, and others—have used similar tactics to generate potent disruption costs. Second, acceding to movement demands may also harm the profits of certain firms or sectors. The actual or anticipated losses resulting from movement success are designated here as concession costs. Included in the assessment of concession costs must be a consideration of opposition to capitulation from private third parties or public officials. For instance, white opponents of racial equality often threatened store owners with retaliatory boycotts if they desegregated, and local officials sometimes warned businesses of legal harassment should they integrate their facilities. In weighing the decision to resist or yield

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the specific combination of disruption and concession costs, economic actors can be expected to respond differently to social protest.

From the convergence of aggregate disruption and concession costs, I derive an economic opportunity structure to predict the responses of specific economic actors to social movement demands as well as the general prospects of movement success. The economic opportunity structure can

SECTORAL VARIATION IN COST EXPOSURE

Various studies demonstrate that the characteristics of economic sectors shape the processes of democratic transitions, strike outcome, economic development, and even the likelihood of civil wars (Shafer 1994; Card and Olson 1995; Paige 1997; Ross 1999; Boix 2003). Following a similar logic, a cost-assessment perspective also provides a basis for speculation about variation in the vulnerability of specific types of enterprises to disruption costs. For violent, revolutionary movements intent on supplanting the economic order, it is not surprising that the universal threat posed to all eliminates most subtle distinctions among economic actors. However, distinctions can be made for the more common situations found in modern democratic polities in which reformist movements engage in nonviolent protests, demonstrations, boycotts, picketing, and similar forms of disruptive behavior. Under these more typical circumstances, economic interests dependent on local consumption are especially vulnerable as consumers shy away from the sites of contention. Local consumers might change their behavior to honor a boycott or to avoid harassment by picketers or boycotters, or they may refrain from consumption because of anticipated inconvenience (e.g., extra traffic, crowds, etc.) or violence. Thus, the interests most vulnerable to the disruption costs of standard protest activities include retail merchants, hoteliers, restaurateurs, and tourist-related businesses. Similarly, the prospective profits of interests reliant on local growth likewise suffer from protest activities that attract negative publicity, frighten away new investment, and discourage in-migration. These interests may include local financial institutions, real estate brokers, developers, utilities, and various service-sector enterprises. In general, then, relatively immobile, locally oriented, consumption- and growth-dependent sectors are more susceptible to disruptions in routine spending and investment behavior, and thus are more vulnerable to disruption costs. Although not necessarily troubled by local disorder, similarly exposed to boycotts or reputational damage are makers of brand-name products selling in consumer markets and national chain stores or franchises.

By contrast, other interests are more insulated from disruption costs. Although demonstrations, protests, boycotts, and pickets may be sufficient to dampen ordinary consumption and local growth, they are less effective at interrupting manufacturing processes unless the employees of the targeted enterprises are rendered unwilling or unable to execute their routine tasks (e.g., the sabotage of machinery, a strike among industrial workers, etc.). Shielded from external disruption as well are those enterprises in uncompetitive, high-demand markets (such as operators of key transportation nodes) and those selling undifferentiated goods or services in high-

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to movement grievances, general movement outcomes are predicted. This analysis predicts outcomes for movements targeting multiple actors to the extent that the preponderant interests of an economic community fall within a single cell of the economic opportunity structure. In diverse and divided communities (including, e.g., both accommodators and conformers), this analysis clarifies movement outcome by predicting the divisions and struggles within the business community. Next, although particular circumstances and movement tactics matter, this analysis also predicts the characteristic patterns of vulnerability among various types of economic actors to nonviolent protest activities. More generally, this formulation escapes the sterile debate over whether it is internal, movement-controlled factors or the external environment that determines movement success. This analysis combines agency and structure by concentrating on the convergence of movement disruption capacity and demands, on the one hand, and the peculiar vulnerabilities of the relevant actors and their aggregate cost assessments, on the other. In the case studies below, I elaborate upon and evaluate these propositions.

CIVIL RIGHTS AND SOUTHERN BUSINESS

To assess the merit of the hypotheses above, I consider the responses of economic actors to Southern civil rights mobilization in *ve* localities during the 1960s. Although discrete economic actors are the units of analysis, local case studies are used for three reasons. First, since the behavior of countermovements, other economic interests, and public officials can affect the magnitude of both disruption and concession costs, economic actors cannot be easily abstracted from their specific context without omitting relevant considerations. Second, if a movement expands the scope of conflict as suggested by Schattschneider (1960), additional actors beyond the immediate targets may be drawn into the fray, and their behavior, too, helps to substantiate the theoretical approach presented here. To the extent that movement protests generate broader economic disruptions, interests unharmed at the outset might become accommodators urging conciliation. Also instructive is the constellation of actors that continues to oppose the movement, and those that linger on the sidelines as bystanders. Thus, an analysis that considers multiple interests within a single locality can provide a more robust test of the hypotheses about the relationship between cost assessments and responsiveness to movement agitation as well as sectoral variation in cost exposure. Finally, case studies are used because they can be sufficiently refined to demonstrate the central hypotheses of this analysis: the perception of financial duress is a major factor causing economic actors to support

concessions to movement demands; the variation in the behavior among these actors is consistent with the predictions based upon their assessment of aggregate disruption and concession costs (their position in the economic opportunity structure); and economic interests in certain sectors are consistently more likely to accept, ignore, or resist movement demands than others.

Applied to this reform movement, a cost-assessment approach predicts a set of responses based upon the specification of the impact of both disruption and concession costs on local business enterprises. For the vast majority of Southern economic actors, the cost of accepting the movement's principal goal of racial integration was low (Bloom 1987). Among local consumption and most service-sector businesses, the magnitude of the concession costs depended on the willingness of whites to continue to patronize their establishments. Unless white bystanders or customers actively oppose integration, it is predicted that these vulnerable economic actors will behave as accommodators and yield as disruption costs rise. White countermobilization against integration will raise concession costs and place these enterprises in the position of vacillators, as they cannot integrate without incurring the wrath of organized whites, nor can they refuse to do so as long as costly movement disruptions continue. Under these conditions, repression, wafing, and temporizing are expected. Insulated from the costs of movement disruption, the preferences of manufacturing interests likely varied depending upon local labor market conditions. Whereas those that benefited from racially split labor markets to keep overall labor costs down (Bonacich 1972) can be expected to behave as resisters, manufacturing employers that did not benefit substantially from these racial divisions are predicted to conform to dominant local customs and remain indifferent to negotiations. Finally, for local interests tied to labor-intensive agriculture and dependent upon black labor, racial integration represented a broader threat, and strong resistance is expected. Yet even for plantation interests, the swiftness of agricultural mechanization and spread of the use of herbicides during this period was eroding the economic imperatives for movement opposition (Payne 1995). Thus, except for those agricultural localities where resisters continued to flourish, differing combinations of accommodators, vacillators, and conformers populated most Southern communities.

From a cost-assessment perspective, successful civil rights agitation depended on the strategic targeting of vulnerable interests and imposing sufficient economic burdens upon them. These accommodators might be targeted not only to make unilateral concessions but also to push for a negotiated settlement over potential opposition of other actors. Other movement strategies might include increasing the magnitude of disruption costs to shift conformers toward accommodation. Along these lines, ef-

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fective mobilization may involve enlisting the support of national state

escalation of disruption costs compelled a coalition of vulnerable interests in consumption, services, banking, and real estate to emerge, successfully challenging steel interests and making possible a shift toward accommodation. The two phases of protest in Greenwood (1962–64, 1967–69) produced patterns resembling those seen in Albany and Birmingham, respectively. As in Albany, civil rights organizers initially neglected downtown businesses while organized opposition from plantation interests made certain that the movement won no substantive gains. Although the enactment of federal civil rights legislation allowed maverick activists to integrate the local movie theater, segregationist countermobilization eventually forced the venue to close. Tactics shifted in the latter 1960s with the implementation of an effective boycott against downtown businesses. This time, rising economic distress compelled merchants and other interests concerned about economic development to make concessions, and finally, in 1969, to unseat the mayor associated with planter intransigence. By that time, the mechanization of cotton agriculture had shifted planters from resisters to the position of conformers. In brief, these cases depict how target selection, the magnitude of local disturbances, and the shifting intensity of countermobilization define the disruption and concession costs that shape the responses of diverse economic interests.

Greensboro, North Carolina

As a bustling center for textile manufacture and insurance, major economic actors in Greensboro had neither a compelling interest in the defense of Jim Crow nor considerable exposure to the disruption costs of civil rights protests. Consequently, it is anticipated that these interests will largely conform to dominant local customs. Downtown merchants and other consumption-dependent enterprises are predicted to be vulnerable to protest events. Coupled with the weakness of Greensboro segregationists and their inability to heighten concession costs, these vulnerable interests should behave as accommodators.

In this context, on February 1, 1960, four African-American college students began a sit-in campaign to desegregate the downtown commercial facilities. Despite the exposure of these businesses, lacking prior experience with the costs of this form of protest, downtown merchants initially feared that integration “would lead to a major loss of profits and disaffection of white customers” (Chafe 1980, p. 93). The merchants vacillated and, with protests suspended during the negotiation process, they refused the April recommendations of a biracial committee for a trial period of integration (

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activities had cost the store some \$200,000, and 1960 profits dropped by 50%. After only a few months of sit-ins, downtown merchants buckled. In June, the local Woolworth's manager exclaimed to the mayor: "For God's sake do something, my business is going to pot" (Chafe 1980, p.

sistent with predictions, these segregationist organizations emerged primarily from the 22 parishes (counties) most committed to labor-intensive cotton agriculture (McMillen 1971, p. 63).¹¹ Without any organized demands for moderation, local authorities responded to student protests against segregated seating arrangements and employment discrimination with expulsion, fines, arrest, and imprisonment. At the urging of segregationist organizations and members of the legislature, Governor Davis introduced a set of "law and order" bills to further reinforce the legal resources available to punish demonstrators (McCarrick 1964). The small-scale pickets and sit-ins in 1960 generated enthusiasm, but the activities of this fledgling chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) failed to operate at a scale sufficient to harm local merchants. At the close of 1960, as local merchants in other states desegregated their lunch counters, the sit-in movement in New Orleans ended in failure (Oppenheimer 1989).

For those seeking to desegregate downtown facilities, the integration of two public schools in November by federal court order was fortuitous because it was far more disruptive to the city economy. This supportive federal action, which was not aimed at particular economic actors but instead at the local educational authorities, provoked a severe backlash. The White Citizens' Council promptly held a rally during which segregationists called on the audience of five thousand to boycott the schools and march on the offices of the school board to protest the board's compliance with the order (Keesing's Research Reports 1970, p. 74). The next day, thousands of whites walked through the downtown, passing through the state supreme court, city hall, the federal courts, and the board of education building. Later, the demonstration arrived in the business district and there deteriorated into a riot in which whites made unprovoked attacks upon blacks. After African-Americans began to fight back, law enforcement intervened. Taking up the call to boycott the school, a crowd of white women, who came to be known as the "cheerleaders," gathered to scream at and shove all who dared to enter. Verbal intimidation and disorder around the school persisted for the entire academic year without public officials offering any serious attempt to disperse the segregationists despite national and international publicity of this horrific racial hatred (Bartley [1969] 1999, p. 337). On the contrary, the city's mayor refused to intervene for the sake of protecting civil rights or quelling the public disorders wrought by the segregationists (McCarrick 1964, p. 202).

These events are striking because they deviate from the conventional expectation that disruptions in public order or negative publicity auto-

¹¹ Claiborne Parish, where the Louisiana Council originated and whose state legislative representatives provided the political leadership for state segregation policy, combined cotton plantation agriculture with interests from oil and natural gas.

matically compelled Southern economic actors to capitulate to movement demands (Ashmore 1958; Bloom 1987). Whereas in cities like Greensboro, Atlanta, Dallas, and elsewhere, business fears about the economic consequences of racial disturbances had prompted relatively rapid calls for moderation or even advance preparation for integration, New Orleans business leaders refused to accept any such leadership role for over a year.

Explanations for this lack of leadership in New Orleans typically highlight the greater “traditionalism” of the New Orleans elite (Inger 1969). Inger goes on to describe the New Orleans elite as closed, insular, and uninterested in attracting new investment or engagement in civic affairs. Likewise, Fairclough claims that “the city’s leaders did not fail to head off the crisis simply through miscalculation or lack of nerve. . . . One can argue that they indeed were more prejudiced than their counterparts in more ‘progressive’ cities” (Fairclough 1995, pp. 261–62). Lacking guidance from moderate business leaders, vehement organized segregationists were capable of directing the local response toward intransigence and tolerance for anti-civil rights disorders. Yet little evidence is offered to demonstrate that New Orleans elites were more traditional than elsewhere, and since similarly traditional elites capitulated to the civil rights movement in other cities, something more is necessary.

A cost-assessment explanation of this unwillingness to act draws attention to the exposure of economic actors to the costs of protest and movement success. As indicated above, from this perspective, the constituent elements of the “New Orleans elite” is perhaps less distinctive for their traditionalism than for their peculiar insulation from both disruption and concession costs of civil rights mobilization. The fundamental importance of the port and shipping in New Orleans economy, the relative insulation of these sectors from the costs of racial unrest, and the lack of interest in attracting new investment allowed for disinterest in racial equality. The major industries based on the extraction and processing of natural resources (petroleum and natural gas) were similarly shielded. With a strong market position, local and absentee owners or managers of these firms had less reason to worry about the negative effects of racial contention on routine economic transactions. Cobb (1988, p. 66) identifies both New Orleans and Birmingham as cities “whose well-developed heavy industrial base helped to make its Big Mule leadership less interested in further growth.” Finally, the common description of these actors as “old money” implies fortunes less dependent on robust local economic development.

Since this ensemble of interests lacked compelling economic imperatives to organize for the defense of Jim Crow institutions, a cost-assessment analysis accounts for conformity to dominant community preferences. Economic development, then, does not necessarily prompt local elites to

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embrace liberal or democratic values; instead, certain forms of development permit continued support of institutions and practices hostile to these currents. The opposition to racial equality among these actors should not be regarded simply as an expression of their traditionalism, but as evidence of their unusual isolation from the disruption costs that precipitate moderation, as well as of the strength of segregationist mobilization.

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A direct threat to the vulnerable sectors from expanded protests and a possible repetition of public school chaos prompted these interests to organize to avert financial catastrophe. Following the public school crisis, deference to the conformers diminished as the "boosters," seeking to attract industry and promote economic development, organized in June 1962 the Committee for a Better Louisiana to bypass the lethargic Chamber of Commerce (Inger 1969, p. 89). After a lack of leadership from insulated conforming interests and much hesitation, the mobilization of accommodators in New Orleans marked a turning point in the city for the civil rights movement.

Albany, Georgia

Situated in southwestern Georgia amid the vestige of the plantation economy, Albany was a city of stark contrasts. It was a city of stark contrasts, a city of stark contrasts.

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Committee (f) - SNCC) al organizers

American Moratorium

staged in the early months of the year, and a general boycott of white merchants was intensified in March. Further protest marches followed, frequently targeting city hall and always resulting in mass arrests. During these protests, police chief Laurie Pritchett made certain that the jails had ample capacity for further arrests and that the police applied local laws without resort to brutality or violence. After many months of agitation and mass jailing, the movement floundered without achieving the integration of the city's facilities.

Unlike the early explanations of this defeat, which pointed to squabbles within the movement and poor planning, more recent commentary emphasizes Pritchett's use of nonviolent, legal strategies of repression (McAdam 1982; Barkan 1984). McAdam argues that Pritchett's strategy of repression denied civil rights activists the violent clashes with supremacists that were necessary to compel federal action. Unable to provoke the white violence necessary to cause federal intervention, "insurgents lacked the leverage to achieve anything more than a standoff with the local supremacist forces in Albany" (McAdam 1982, p. 177). Absent violent countermovement reprisals to trigger federal intervention—McAdam's "critical dynamic"—he suggests that the movement failed because of insufficient leverage. Barkan, too, points to Pritchett's effective use of legalistic forms of repression, but Barkan's analysis suggests a resource-depletion hypothesis. The costs of fines, bail, legal representation, and lower movement morale resulting from harassment arrests and incarceration, Barkan argues, drained resources and thus administered the "decisive blow" against the Albany Movement. While valid, both accounts overlook a key component in the explanation of the defeat: the inability of the movement to impose substantial costs upon vulnerable local actors.

The cost-assessment hypothesis refines McAdam's and Barkan's investigations of the Albany defeat in several ways. First, this analysis clarifies how the federal government contributes to "movement leverage." Although McAdam does not elaborate upon the concept of movement leverage below the national level, this analysis indicates that federal support transforms the cost calculations of movement opponents. Federal intervention not only involves the obvious use of coercive capacity; the central state can also impose fines and penalties and necessitate costly litigation or withhold valued expenditures. Movement opponents must consider whether or not these added costs outweigh the benefits of continued resistance. Second, absent federal involvement, a cost-assessment analysis suggests that the task of imposing costs upon local actors fell solely upon the movement and the tactical ingenuity of the activists. In

of business" (Garrow 1986, p. 192), but the mayor was unable to persuade the six recalcitrant city commissioners to agree.

contrast to McAdam, who appears to assume that the movement was incapable of victory in Albany without federal intervention, this approach suggests instead that closer attention to the effect of movement tactics upon local actors is necessary.

A cost-assessment approach implies that an optimal movement strategy must involve selecting the proper targets (who are both vulnerable and potentially amenable to making concessions) and then mounting a serious and sustained disruption of their operations. In identifying the best targets and generating disruption costs, Albany Movement leaders made a series of tactical mistakes. The erratic choice of targets and the general lack of focus made the effective imposition of disruption costs virtually impossible. This interpretation echoes King's own assessment and others who have suggested that the disparate goals "spread the Movement too thinly" (Barkan 1984, p. 557).

In particular, to the extent that movement leaders fixed upon any target, they chose the wrong one: elected officials. Members of the city government had few reasons for entering into good-faith negotiations or making substantive concessions. Lacking a strident clamor from vulnerable economic actors, federal coercion, or a plausible threat of political reprisals, these officials had many reasons to resist capitulation. Thus the movement's irregular targeting of city officials wasted precious resources bailing out and defending those who marched to and demonstrated in front of city hall. Relatively few direct action events disrupted business operations and, to the extent that they were tried, they were uncoordinated with other efforts and used only after the movement was already reeling from prior setbacks. As Lewis notes (1970, p. 155), the boycott "pained . . . but did not seriously cripple the merchants." Had the many hundreds who were arrested in large demonstrations before city hall targeted those likely to be accommodators, the outcome of the Albany Movement might have been substantially different even without federal intervention.

Indeed, King ultimately arrived at strikingly similar conclusions about the failure of the Albany Movement. Summing up King's analysis, Garrow states that the Albany Movement would have been more successful "if the movement had targeted Albany's business leaders, rather than the city's elected officials. The boycott of downtown stores had been an effective but limited tactic, King decided, because the movement's direct action efforts had not been combined with the boycott so as to inflict a maximum penalty upon those business leaders" (Garrow 1986, p. 226). King likewise argued that the marches to city hall were misplaced. Instead, he suggested that, because of the political weakness of blacks in Albany, the marches should have been directed at "the businesses in the city" because "the political power structure listens to the economic power structure" (King quoted in Garrow 1986, p. 226). While Pritchett's strategies

reduced the likelihood of federal intervention and depleted movement resources, as McAdam and Barkan assert, the strategic mistakes of the movement's leaders made a difficult situation far more likely to end in defeat. King drew important lessons from the defeat in Albany and carried these lessons with him to Birmingham. Next time, he reasoned, downtown business interests would be targeted at the outset.

Birmingham, Alabama

As the "the Pittsburgh of the South," Birmingham's iron and steel interests dominated this industrial city. The local managers and owners of these enterprises supported Jim Crow as a means of keeping wages low, and they opposed efforts to attract new industry to Birmingham, as this was thought to increase the competition for workers and raise labor costs. These industrialists had supported the election of the notorious T. Eugene "Bull" Connor in the 1930s to the city commission "to crush the Communist-integrationist menace" represented by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (Thornton 1991, p. 47). Absentee ownership of the United States Steel Corporation and its subsidiaries, which overshadowed the urban political economy, further reduced the potential for indigenous reform leadership. These interests, unconcerned about attracting external investment and shielded from the disruptions of movement agitation, lacked incentives to bargain or compromise. Along with the backing of working-class whites, these sectoral interests bolstered local resistance to racial equality and refused the path of moderation.

While iron and steel interests benefited from sectoral insulation, other actors were far less sheltered, and movement activists appreciated this weakness (McWhorter 2001). As elsewhere, a worsening racial situation caused growing concern among consumer and service interests, and it was from these sectors that opposition to the likes of Bull Connor eventually coalesced (Eskew 1997). These interests, concentrated in real estate, services, and downtown consumption, sought to expand and diversify the city's economic base. Sidney Smyer, a real-estate executive and former head of the local Chamber of Commerce, organized the successful political drive to change the structure of city government in an indirect move to unseat reactionary elements like Connor. After Connor lost the 1963 election, he, along with the other city commissioners, refused to step down; consequently, for several months, the city had two separate governments representing differing economic elite factions. As Bartley explains (1995, pp. 332–33), "The basic rift was between the iron aristocracy, which identified segregation with low wages and a docile work force, and service-sector businessmen, whose goals were economic growth and maximizing of real estate values."

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The rise of mass protest in 1963 widened this split. As demonstrations, boycotts, and general disorder continued from April through May, graphic incidents of police repression drew enormous negative publicity and cost downtown retailers an estimated weekly loss of \$750,000. Continued disorder, the trade association of the merchants concluded, "would have a drastic and far-reaching economic effect on the metropolitan area" (McWhorter 2001, p. 268). Having learned from the defeat in Albany, King explained that these economic consequences were deliberate: "You don't win against a political power structure where you don't have the votes. But you can win against an economic power structure when you have the economic power to make the difference between a merchant's profit and loss" (King quoted in Bloom 1987, p. 174). Even as regular operations for iron and steel interests continued, the racial crisis engulfing the city devastated downtown commercial activity.

After hesitating because of fear of white reprisals, deteriorating economic conditions eventually compelled beleaguered merchants to agree to a settlement on the condition that the city's economic leadership publicly support the agreement (Eskew 1997; Morris 1993). Although steel interests resisted concessions, a committee of economic elites eventually endorsed the agreement that accepted the movement's principal demands: the desegregation of various downtown facilities, the hiring of more blacks in nonmenial positions, job promotions for blacks, the release of jailed demonstrators, and the creation of a biracial committee to continue discussions. With the endorsement of a major faction of the city's economic leadership and additional disruptive protests to compel compliance, vacillating interests reduced their exposure to concession costs and charted a jagged course to a position of accommodation.

The Birmingham case corroborates key elements of the cost-assessment logic. Iron and steel manufacturers, being insulated from disruption costs, behaved principally as resisters opposed to concessions. Also, after initial vacillation, downtown merchants, service, and real-estate interests, among others, rebelled against these resisters and shifted toward accommodation to negotiate an agreement under as much collective cover as possible. The accommodators were, as predicted, clustered in those sectors that were most sensitive to disruption costs, most eager to promote local growth, and lacking an economic interest in defending segregation. Lastly, the fate of the Birmingham struggle demonstrated the value of targeting vulnerable interests with severe disruption.

¹⁴ Time, June 7, 1963, quoted in a report by Patterson (1964). This report identifies similar stories in Business Week, the Wall Street Journal, and the Washington Post. Asked about the boycott, a merchant candidly observed that "it's on and it's hurting" (McWhorter 2001, p. 266).

Greenwood, Mississippi

While the dramatic clashes in Birmingham are widely remembered, a band of dedicated activists and their supporters encountered strong opposition in Greenwood. Situated in Le ore County at the edge of the vast plantations of the Delta, Greenwood served as a major center for the cultivation and trading of cotton. With Delta planters dependent upon cheap black agricultural labor, the civil rights movement potentially posed a fundamental challenge to these economic interests. At the same time, however, the mechanization of cotton agriculture was rapidly reducing the demand for farm labor. In 1954, the year of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, over 85% of the cotton harvest in Mississippi was still picked by hand, and therefore, the concession costs of the nascent civil rights movement were initially quite high, but by 1965, the proportion of the cotton crop picked by hand had plummeted to only about 25% (Wright 1991, p. 182). Thus, concession costs were declining swiftly in this period as planters became far less dependent upon African-American agricultural workers. On the other side, declining dependence on black labor and the corresponding economic vulnerability of tenant farmers and sharecroppers meant that the local movement was unable to impose disruption costs upon planters to coerce capitulation¹⁵. This convergence of factors predicts resistance from plantation interests that declines in fervor as agricultural mechanization shifts their position from staunch resisters to conformers. As elsewhere, downtown merchants, especially in a city with a large black population, were vulnerable to disruption costs. To the extent that organized white resistance elevated the costs of conceding to movement demands, vacillation can be expected. With this mixture of resisters and vacillators, movement success depended upon external intervention or a weakening of resistance among the opponents to change based upon declining concession costs.

Consistent with these expectations, Greenwood economic actors resisted change at the outset, indeed long before protests even began. In the wake of the 1954 *Brown* decision, local planters and their allies enthusiastically organized a chapter of the segregationist White Citizens' Council, which

¹⁵ Before committing to voter registration, SNCC organizers had discussed the possibility of organizing a strike among black agricultural workers, but decided against this because of the many anticipated difficulties, including the likelihood that planters might mechanize their operations more rapidly in reprisal (McMillen 1977). A strike among a limited number of plantation workers was attempted in 1965, but local planters united and, with the assistance of local law enforcement, easily crushed the strike (Cobb 1990).

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later served as state headquarters in the 1960s. Nor was this pattern exceptional among plantation counties. Across the South, it was in those

later, three whites abducted and beat Silas McGhee, and, in a separate incident, an unidentified white shot him in the head as he sat in his car. Not only blacks were terrorized. Threats of violent reprisal forced the newspaper editor of the Greenwood Commonwealth to leave town after he mildly criticized extremism in print and crossed the picket line at the theater (New York Times, November 8, 1964). Caught between the movement and recalcitrant whites, the theater eventually closed.

As SNCC disintegrated in Greenwood in 1965, local activists, under a variety of organizational auspices, intermittently targeted economic actors with picketing and boycotts. As was the case elsewhere in the Mississippi Delta, the application of disruption costs slowly widened an emerging factional split between "the new merchant-oriented upper class" in favor of adherence to federal law and plantation elites opposed to making concessions (Luce 1983, p. 359). This division appears clearly in a description offered by the state director of the segregationist State Sovereignty Commission of a comparable boycott in nearby Canton. Entreated to negotiate a settlement between the merchants suffering from a black boycott and the executive committee of the Canton Citizens' Council, the director began the meeting by asking the council members to stand up and state their occupation. Upon doing so, Johnston declared (1990, p. 332), "Not a single one of you is affected by the boycott. You are farming, or in various professions, and do not depend on retail trade for your livelihoods!" Johnston's account reveals the differences in cost exposure underlying this split within the business community with vacillating merchants, on one side, and an alliance between resisters and conformers, on the other.

The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968 vastly strengthened a boycott begun by the Greenwood Movement the prior fall. Local movement leaders channeled the anger into a highly organized campaign to gain the use of courtesy titles and better jobs in downtown stores, and to prompt local business leaders to pressure city hall into negotiations for jobs and better services. Like many others that had been organized across Mississippi, this boycott "crippled business" in the downtown center (New York Times, April 29, 1968). Remarking upon the efficacy of the boycott, one local merchant speculated: "As far as I can tell, it's 100 per cent effective" (Jackson Daily News, April 29, 1968). Similarly, the head of the local chamber of commerce retail committee explained, "All the damn stores [were] going broke. Retail stores. Not all of them but a great many of them. All of them suffering" (Alex Malouf, interview, August 31, 2003). Not long after the intensification of the boycott, the poorer storeowners and those most dependent upon black business began conceding to movement demands (Booth 1968). In addition to agreeing to the use of courtesy

titles and hiring more blacks, several boycotted merchants sent a petition to the city council to encourage a meeting with movement leaders.

This time, segregationists offered no organized resistance to change, and white moderates became increasingly critical of the mayor's lackluster record in promoting economic development and his intransigence amid painful boycotts. In 1969, the mayor ultimately lost his reelection bid against "a coalition of white merchants and blacks" (Luce 1983, p. 338). The ongoing decline in planter dependence upon black agricultural labor contributed to the shift of these die-hard resisters to the position of conformers. Describing the comparable mechanization of cotton agriculture in Alabama, an officer of the state Farm Bureau observed: "I don't find farm labor the big problem it used to be" (Greenberg 1980, p. 125). Coinciding with this transformation was the decline of the Citizens' Council and a business-led shift in state politics away from reactionary extremism.¹⁸ Greenberg's (1980, p. 125) eloquent depiction of this shift in Alabama is fitting for Mississippi as well: "The end was unheralded. There was no advertisement in twenty-two Alabama newspapers, like the one sponsored by the major business associations in 1965, announcing the demise of the racial order. By the late sixties, the Farm Bureau and white

consumer markets, commercial-transportation interests, and "old money" notables evinced the predicted responses of conformers. Threats to the racially split labor market placed Birmingham iron and steel interests in opposition to integration, and, consistent with findings regarding the reactionary commitments of labor-intensive agriculture, plantation interests provided the staunchest support for the preservation of Jim Crow (James 1988). Explanations of the responses of economic actors to protest activity must address variation in sectoral vulnerability, and additional research might offer further refinements.

Finally, these vulnerabilities to disruption and concession costs condition not only the preferences and unilateral behavior of economic actors, but also the probable struggles among them and the general likelihood of winning concessions from these targets. As depicted in all of the case studies, vulnerable actors negotiated compromises with movement activists. Insulated segments of the business community conformed and sometimes obstructed bargaining and conciliation. As expected, the struggles among economic actors and countermovement agitation shaped the bargaining process. In Greensboro, the weakness of white countermobilization allowed accommodators to respond with relative swiftness and ease to movement demands. By contrast, similarly positioned interests in New Orleans and Birmingham vacillated amid threats of reprisal. It is a curious

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