

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

Joseph Luders
Yeshiva University

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

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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, not the behavior of economic actors. While some of these distinctions might be revised and applied to economic actors, doing so is not the aim of this analysis.

to make substantial concessions to movement demands; second, two general movement-imposed costs can be distinguished, and the uneven vulnerability among economic actors to these costs produces distinctive responses; and third, economic sectors vary in their exposure to the costs movements generate. Below I elaborate upon these propositions and evaluate their empirical merits in case studies of the responses of economic actors to civil rights mobilization in five Southern localities.

EXPLAINING MOVEMENT OUTCOME

A partial explanation for receptivity to movement demands appears in the existing literature. Gamson's (1975) finding that unruly groups with limited goals are highly successful is suggestive. Although much is left untheorized, Piven and Cloward (1977) argue that political or economic actors respond to the "institutional disruptions" resulting from insurgency.³ Likewise, Tilly (1999, p. 260) argues that power holders respond to movement displays of "worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment." Tilly indicates that these factors are salient because their increase threatens power holders—usually state actors—with more contentious behavior if social movement demands are ignored. Again, responsiveness follows from the perceived costliness of prolonged disruptions to routine social, political, and economic transactions. Similarly, McAdam (1982, p. 30) states, "In essence, what insurgents are seeking . . . is the ability to disrupt their opponent's interests to such an extent that the cessation of the offending tactic becomes a sufficient inducement to grant concessions." Although a relationship between cost assessments and receptivity to movement demands is indicated, this line of reasoning is not extended. Since the distinctive vulnerabilities of movement targets are not explored, it is unclear why certain tactics might give more offense than others and therefore are more likely to trigger the granting of concessions. To comprehend this dependence and the decision to yield, it is necessary to shift away from a movementcentric perspective to consider more fully the reasoning behind the actions of movement targets.

Building on the insights of Wilson (1961), Lipsky (1968), and Burstein et al. (1995), I propose a cost-assessment perspective that draws attention to the dependence of movement targets on other actors (see also Terchek 1974). Burstein et al.'s approach usefully highlights the interactions among social movement organizations, targets, and third parties: "Essentially, the more dependent the target is on the SMO, the more power the SMO has

³ Piven and Cloward (1977) point to the importance of economic factors in shaping the behavior of political authorities. Their analysis is useful for addressing the political costs that motivate elected officials to seek conciliation.

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 represents a theoretical advance, virtually absent from the analysis is a consideration of the factors that make targets dependent and more vulnerable. Indeed, Burstein and his coauthors bemoan the lack of research on how target characteristics affect movement outcome. The research presented here is meant to redress this deficiency.

From the logic embedded in these previous studies, a rudimentary hypothesis emerges to serve as a starting point for theory building: actors weigh the effects of accepting or resisting change, and they accommodate if they regard the costs of resistance as outweighing the costs of acceptance. What counts as a cost depends on the type of actor. For political actors in democratic regimes, social protest might cost an officeholder electoral support and thereby elicit concessions. Among economic actors, the focus of this study, I suggest that perceived threats to current or anticipated profits must be central to explanations of accommodation or intransigence.⁴ For instance, in the case of the civil rights movement, the operators of segregated lunch counters evaluated the cost of serving African-Americans against the losses from disruptive sit-ins, picketing, white violence, and reduced local consumption. Likewise, the manufacturers of cosmetics consider the value of animal testing against the damage from negative publicity and boycotts.⁵ This proposition is not meant to be pathbreaking; labor activists have long appreciated that threats to profits are a useful means to stimulate concessions. Labor economists (Hicks 1932; Ashenfelter and Johnson 1969; Kennan 1986) have likewise demonstrated in studies of bargaining theory that employers do indeed weigh the costs of concessions against the disruption of strikes.⁶ Yet, from this elementary beginning, a more sophisticated set of propositions about the factors shaping these cost calculations can be devised.

Among the costs that social movement activities directly or indirectly

⁴ Beyond the minimal assumption that economic actors will seek to avoid business failure, this account does not attempt to specify a priori the precise losses at which targets offer concessions. Also, *economic actors* refers here to operators, owners, or managers of for-profit business enterprises.

⁵ Following Wilson (1984, p. 85), I treat individuals and enterprises as "threat-oriented" in that they are "more sensitive to . . . circumstances that make costs seem likely to go up or benefits to go down than they are when they foresee a chance to reduce costs or enhance benefits." See also Hansen (1985) and Tversky and Kahneman (1991).

⁶ Labor historians, too, have devoted considerable attention to the struggles for unionization, the strength of organized labor, and the general factors affecting strike outcome (e.g., Edwards 1979; Montgomery 1979; Friedman 1988). In some ways, it is surprising that there has not been more cross-pollination between labor studies and social movement research.

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 to movement demands, it is assumed that economic actors consider both disruption and concession costs.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

Although these costs affect some actors more than others, missing from prior analyses of movement success is a theoretical approach to connect differential cost exposure to the behavior of movement targets or bystanders. Disruption costs will be higher for those economic actors that are more vulnerable to protests, pickets, boycotts, negative publicity, and general disruptions in public order. For example, whereas civil rights picketing and sit-in demonstrations are unlikely to hinder the operations of cotton planters, downtown merchants lose customers as residents shop elsewhere or not at all. The behavior of sympathetic third parties may cause certain economic actors to suffer greater losses than others. The cost of social movement success is likewise uneven. Prior to the mechanization of Southern cotton agriculture, the concession costs of the civil rights movement were high for planters, and they therefore had a considerable economic interest in defending the racial order that downtown merchants never shared (Greenberg 1980). The involvement of antagonistic third parties, such as state authorities or countermovements against capitulation, can raise concession costs unevenly as well. Depending on

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 be depicted in a schematic fashion by scaling the magnitude of disruption and concession costs into low and high, and overlapping the two dimensions (see fig. 1). Doing so generates four ideal-types from which I infer the likely responses of economic actors to their circumstances.

With a convergence of both the low cost of movement acceptance and high exposure to losses because of movement-initiated disruptions, economic actors in cell 1 will prefer to make concessions and act on behalf of accommodation. It is expected that these *accommodators* will act before others to advocate concessions, sway community sentiment in favor of reform, or serve as brokers of agreements.⁷ For economic actors capable of responding unilaterally to protest demands, this location in the economic opportunity structure is the most conducive to movement success. However, unless additional gains might be expected, this logic suggests that vulnerable economic actors will support the smallest compromise necessary to bring about the cessation of protests and a restoration of normal business activity. Next, vulnerability to both the costs of movement success and movement-initiated disruptions (cell 2) makes these economic actors an anxious lot. Without the choice of low-cost compromise, but desiring a means to end disruptions, these *vacillators* lack an optimal response. Depending on the formidability of the movement, they will waver between repression, perhaps in alliance with other opponents of change, engage in dilatory tactics (e.g., conducting protracted negotiations), and make nominal concessions to halt protest activities. To escape their situation, more mobile vacillators may pursue exit as an option by relocating their business operation. Or, to the extent that their concession costs are high because of fears of third-party reprisals, it is possible that vacillators will seek to outmaneuver or overcome these opponents of capitulation. Next, unaffected by either movement success or disruptions, the relatively comfortable position of actors in cell 3 allows them to respond in a manner consistent with dominant community standards; they

⁷ Although policy success is not considered in this analysis, it seems reasonable that accommodators indirectly contribute to these victories as well.

Economics of Movement Success

Disruption Costs	High	I. <u>Accommodators</u> . Concede to movement demands.	II. <u>Vacillators</u> . Respond with unstable mixture of minor concessions, protracted negotiation, and support for movement repression; exit.
	Low	III. <u>Conformers</u> . Resist or accept movement demands in keeping with dominant local norms.	IV. <u>Resisters</u> . Offer durable opposition to movement.
		Low	High
		Concession Costs	

FIG. 1.—Economic opportunity structure and the predicted responses of economic actors to movement demands.

will thus be *conformers* to local sentiment.⁸ Finally, the high cost of social movement success and the relative insulation of the economic actors in cell 4 will encourage them to offer durable opposition to change; hence, they are dubbed *resisters*. Like other opponents to movement ambitions, resisters are predicted to attempt to suppress movements, encourage others to do the same (including state authorities), and thwart the actions of accommodators. Against these adversaries, movement success is least likely.

Although thus far the calculation of disruption and concession costs by individual actors has been presented as relatively clear and unequivocal, three observations should be made about the impact of the social and cultural definition of costs upon central hypotheses of this analysis. First, while this analysis concerns individual decision makers, collective interpretation and action among economic actors is expected. In weighing the decision to make concessions, similarly situated economic actors likely to share their cost perceptions deliberate together and seek to act in unison to reduce their individual exposure to interpersonal sanctions and reprisals by the opponents of change. In addition, coordinated action reduces the social sanctions that might be applied to individual actors opting to deviate from local norms. It can be expected, then, that accommodators seek to unite into broad coalitions under the auspices of extant business groups such as local chambers of commerce or narrower sectoral associations.

⁸ It is possible that some of these insulated actors might favor change. Indeed, this approach predicts that local mavericks, who defy community norms to support a social movement, are likely to be found in this cell. Generally speaking, however, regardless of their personal preferences, most of these actors will likely free ride rather than organize or participate in collective action to restore public order (Olson 1965).

Next, to the extent that movement demands necessitate violations of personal or cultural norms, economic cost considerations may be less relevant. For example, in the case of the civil rights movement, an ostensible accommodator might respond as a vacillator because the cultural cost of "race mixing" is regarded as high, or a prospective resister might capitulate unexpectedly because of the perceived fairness of movement demands. While it is conceptually possible to treat these breaches within a broader definition of concession costs, doing so would violate the presumption of strategic behavior among economic actors. Ultimately, the contribution of cultural norms to the responses of economic actors to movement demands is an empirical question. If personal values or cultural norms are significant, then the patterns of capitulation or resistance should regularly deviate from the expectations based principally on disruption and concession costs. In this regard, the observation that the overwhelming majority of Southern business concerns opted to accept desegregation rather than close is suggestive.

Finally, cost interpretations can change over time. At the outset of a movement campaign, the general impact of public disorder upon the broader business climate may be relatively unclear, in particular for those economic actors that are not direct targets of movement agitation. Competing cost interpretations will be offered and debated. As time passes, however, the acquisition of new information based upon the outcomes of local or remote disturbances may enable actors to develop revised cost assessments. For example, following the widely reported decline in outside investment in Little Rock, Arkansas, after the 1957 school desegregation crisis, many economic actors elsewhere reconsidered the costs of resistance. The turmoil in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963 further reinforced the interpretation that racial disruptions were inimical to economic development. Likewise, after whites evinced a willingness to eat at integrated lunch counters or to shop in fully integrated stores, most proprietors could abandon the fear that accepting the civil rights agenda meant financial disaster. The position of actors in the economic opportunity structure is not fixed, but may shift as cost assessments are revised based on new information during a cycle of protest. If the apparent concession costs decline, vacillators might be expected to move toward accommodation. Thus, an explanation of the behavior of economic actors must be sensitive to the impact of cultural norms upon cost assessment as well as the changing interpretations of cost over time among individual decision makers during a broader cycle of protest.

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-

demand nonlocal markets (e.g., petroleum).⁹ Also, economic actors that do not depend on continued local growth or attracting new investment such as those relying on prior capital investments—including heavy manufacture, mineral extraction, and refining—may be less vulnerable to protest activity.¹⁰ These more insulated economic actors either conform to local custom or resist movement demands depending on the cost of offering concessions. While this sketch is not exhaustive, these hypotheses hint at distinctive patterns of sectoral vulnerability to disruption costs.

These general patterns of vulnerability also clarify the relationship between countermovements and concession costs. Like movements, countermovements can exploit the same sectoral vulnerabilities to disrupt business operations and raise the cost of conceding to movement demands. Whereas interests insulated from movement disruptions will be similarly untroubled by countermovement interference, those interests vulnerable to disruption costs find themselves comparably exposed to greater concession costs. A notable impact that countermovements have upon the responses of economic actors to movement demands is the amplification of concession costs to push prospective accommodators toward vacillation.

Although attention to the sectoral patterns of cost exposure should be useful in clarifying the responsiveness of economic actors to movement demands, cultural and political factors can complicate these predictions. As noted above, fervent cultural commitments might induce vulnerable or insulated actors to respond to movement demands in a manner inconsistent with their economic interests. State action that affects only certain economic interests and not others, or that enables movements to inflict costs upon actors otherwise insulated from disruption, can likewise introduce variation in disruption cost exposure that is unrelated to sectoral characteristics. An adequate account of movement success must be attentive to how these cultural or governmental factors may affect the magnitude of disruption costs in a manner inconsistent with predictions based on sectoral vulnerabilities.

Using these predictions for receptivity to movement demands, this analysis has the potential to enhance explanations of movement outcomes in several ways. Depending on the location of discrete actors within the economic opportunity structure and their ability to offer unilateral redress

⁹ Movements attempting to boycott enterprises will be more successful against companies selling a differentiated product in a competitive market where substitutions can be easily made. Boycotts will be less effective against those selling undifferentiated products or against monopolists.

¹⁰ On the other hand, if their own employees are involved in protest activity, especially strikes, these enterprises may be especially vulnerable because they are unable to exit the locality. Thus, as suggested above, the specific characteristics of protest activity influence how particular business enterprises will be affected.

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 five 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 fine grained 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, waffling, 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-

fective mobilization may involve enlisting the support of national state authorities or other third parties to intervene in a manner that modifies the cost assessments of adversaries or bystanders. Conversely, both poor target selection and the use of tactics that do not impose sufficient disruption costs upon targets reduce a movement's prospects for success.

Drawing upon the many rich sources on the movement, I sketch the interests and vulnerabilities of the key actors in each of the five cases. Next, I describe movement activities as well as countermobilization in these localities to estimate the magnitude of disruption and concession costs for various economic actors. Finally, I document the responses of local economic actors to civil rights mobilization and survey the evidence for the proposed relationship between their cost assessments and responsiveness to movement demands. The cases—Greensboro, North Carolina; New Orleans, Louisiana; Albany, Georgia; Birmingham, Alabama; and Greenwood, Mississippi—were selected to capture variation in the exposure of economic actors to disruption and concession costs.

The success against downtown merchants in Greensboro may be regarded as a case in which movement activists hit vulnerable interests with severe disruption costs, and other insulated enterprises with low concession costs offered no opposition. By contrast, the initial sit-in movement against local merchants in New Orleans faltered because of the inability to impose potent disruption costs and third-party mobilization against capitulation. The next agitation phase to integrate downtown facilities benefited from the simultaneous federal judicial intervention to compel public school desegregation, which generated massive tumult, negative publicity, and a broader economic disruption. This combination of heightened civil rights protests and disorders stemming from school desegregation placed not only merchants but also many other vulnerable interests in tourism, real estate, services, development, and banking in the position of reluctant accommodators. The civil rights defeat in Albany demonstrates the simple point that strategic decisions matter. Whereas in New Orleans, targeted and general disruptions brought victory, the movement's irregular and diffuse protests against downtown businesses in Albany were insufficient to produce serious economic distress and ultimately led to defeat. Other tactical mistakes and the general lack of exposure to serious disruption costs encouraged economic interests to conform during months of protest. Taking stock of the setback in Albany, movement activists tried something different in Birmingham. Instead of concentrating on public officials, the movement targeted specific downtown businesses and enlisted the unwitting assistance of the intemperate chief of local law enforcement to produce massive disorders and correspondingly broad disruption costs. Although segregationist countermobilization and resistance from the steel interests produced initial vacillation, the rapid

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 (*New York Times*, April 6, 1960). After protests resumed and an economic boycott was instituted, however, these same interests quickly relented. Woolworth’s managers estimated that protest

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. 97). By late July, an integration agreement had been reached in which the four main department stores would quietly and simultaneously desegregate their lunch counters. In retrospective interviews, the key actors on both sides agreed that the cause of this success "was the tremendous economic pressure put on the stores by the Negroes' boycott, along with the reticence of whites to trade there because of fear of trouble" (Wolff 1970, p. 173).

Whereas other cities desegregated their lunch counters after protests lasting a year or more, the relative rapidity with which prominent economic actors and public officials in Greensboro accepted the necessity of a brokered settlement is telling. In keeping with a cost-assessment logic, Greensboro merchants initially vacillated because of the uncertainty of concessions costs but eventually capitulated as profits plummeted. With this cost configuration, accommodating elements in Greensboro reluctantly accepted change and gave the movement an important early victory.

New Orleans, Louisiana

At the junction of the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico, New Orleans served as a major transportation node for the region. In addition, petroleum refining, petrochemical production, natural gas industries, and tourism contributed to the city's economic base. None of these sectors depended on Jim Crow for economic prosperity, and all but tourism were insulated from the disruption costs that movements might impose. Not only were industrial and shipping interests shielded from disruptions in production processes, but they also lacked motivation to act as "boosters" seeking out new investment. This combination of low vulnerability to disruption costs and low concession costs vested key economic actors with the capacity to conform to the dominant Jim Crow heritage and to remain indifferent to the costs of racial turmoil. The exposure of the tourism sector, downtown consumption interests, and a few progrowth boosters provided civil rights activists with a weakness, but unlike Greensboro, segregationist organizations exerted considerable leverage and had the capacity to push prospective accommodators toward vacillation. The combination of conformers and vacillators foreshadows a response not so much of intense resistance as indecision, drift, and fecklessness.

With the onset of the 1960 sit-in movement in March, local economic interests responded with indifference, abdicated a leadership role, and ceded control over the local response to organized segregationists. Con-

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

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.

Other business interests in New Orleans, however, suffered from the costs of public disorders. Consistent with predictions, tourism and downtown business activity fell with the escalation in black protest and press coverage of contentious white countermobilization against school integration. By the end of 1960, these disruptions reportedly reduced sales at the large department stores by as much as 40%, hotel and restaurant business was down 20%, and other tourist-dependent interests were likewise feeling hardship (Inger 1969, pp. 61–62). Against the backdrop of public school disorders, CORE's 1961 resumption of sit-ins and picketing in the downtown shopping section only intensified the financial pain of resistance.

After the disastrous tumult of the 1960–61 academic year and amid ongoing protests, these vulnerable economic actors in particular began to show greater interest in accommodation. As Rogers notes (1993, p. 85), “the events of 1960–1961 had made the city's white economic elites extremely sensitive to the costs of racial disruption.” With the economic situation worsening in early 1962, a representative of the Chamber of Commerce implored Harry Kelleher, a respected corporate lawyer, to negotiate a compromise with black representatives. Major bankers likewise supported action to head off further disruption. Describing the impetus for this action, Kelleher (SIER 1997) observed, “The specter of economic pressure certainly tipped the scales in favor of affirmative action.” At the same time, fear of economic reprisals instigated by the Citizens' Council produced secrecy, hesitation, and delay, and discouraged overt support for accommodation. Finally, after a visit from Martin Luther King, Jr., in late 1962, rising concern about strengthened sit-ins, pickets, and a tightened boycott prompted downtown merchants finally and very quietly to desegregate their lunch counters, toilets, and water fountains in September—two years after the onset of protests (Fairclough 1995, p. 284).¹²

¹² Elite business support for racial integration of the public schools coalesced at a meeting before the start of classes in the fall of 1961. The profiles of the participants at this meeting are suggestive: a real-estate magnate, a chairman of a major investment brokerage, a lawyer, a prominent real-estate broker, two executives of the local Coca-Cola plant, an insurance mogul, a newspaper publisher, and an unspecified entrepreneur (Baker 1996, p. 458). The predominance of those interests dependent upon local consumption, investment, and development is striking, as is the absence of representatives from the oil or transportation industries.

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 vestiges of the Old South, Albany served as a processing and transportation center for local agricultural products such as cotton, pecans, corn, and peanuts. Light industry and wholesale and retail enterprises also made up the core of the local economy. Since few economic actors continued to depend on subordination of black labor, most interests are predicted to conform to local Jim Crow traditions. Downtown consumption and growth-dependent interests can be expected to yield amid mounting protest. Also, the lack of strong segregationist organization in Albany meant that local interests had less fear of white reprisals. In some ways, then, Albany resembled Greensboro, but the outcome of civil rights activity was markedly different.

Protests began in the late fall of 1961 and stretched into August 1962. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizers arrived in the summer of 1961 to begin a broad campaign against “all forms of racial domination in Albany” (Morris 1984, p. 241). Although relations between SNCC and the local chapter of the NAACP and other organizations were tense, local activists formed the Albany Movement to bring together and coordinate the competing elements. Attempts to integrate the Albany bus terminal and train station resulted in the arrest of the participants. To protest these arrests, hundreds marched to city hall and were likewise arrested. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), joined the movement in mid-December, at which time 500 people languished in jail. His arrest generated a rush of enthusiasm, but his swift release two days later following a hollow truce confused and dispirited many. In January 1962, SNCC launched a bus boycott that, three weeks later, resulted in the closure of the bus line (Williams 1987, p. 171).¹³ Sporadic sit-ins were

¹³ In a telephone conversation with the Albany mayor, the president of the bus company explained that “the company would rather grant the movement’s request than go out

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."

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 \$750,000.¹⁴ 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 Leflore 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 capitulation.¹⁵ 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).

later served as state headquarters in the 1960s.¹⁶ Nor was this pattern exceptional among plantation counties. Across the South, it was in those localities most dependent on labor-intensive agriculture that the Citizens' Council found the greatest support and where the defense of white supremacy was most entrenched (McMillen 1971; James 1988). As a Mississippi Councilor candidly explained: "The NAACP's motto is 'The Negro shall be free by 1963'—and shall we accept that? We can't have it, for if we do, it would ruin the economic system of the South. The men of the South are either for our council or against it. There can be no fence straddling" (Vander Zanden 1965, p. 28). Often depicted as the upper-class variant of the Ku Klux Klan, the council relied upon more sophisticated modes of coercion. Whereas Klansmen resorted to private violence, Councilors used their influence over local livelihoods and law enforcement as weapons against agitators and to keep whites in line.¹⁷ In the years after *Brown*, such threats of economic reprisal against those involved in civil rights activities were especially common in plantation counties (*New York Times*, April 9, 1955). Further bolstering planter political leverage in Greenwood was the election of Charles Sampson as mayor in 1957, a Citizens' Council member and representative of plantation interests (Payne 1995, p. 135). Thus, SNCC's foray into the Mississippi Delta "appeared foolhardy, if not suicidal" (Dittmer 1995, p. 124).

Despite this resistance and enticed by the possibility of breaching this fortress of white supremacy, SNCC chose Greenwood to be the site of a major voter-registration campaign in 1962 and the state headquarters in 1964. Yet rather than protesting for the integration of public accommodations, SNCC activists were instead committed to grassroots organizing and the cultivation of local leadership for durable political engagement. Eschewing sit-in demonstrations and the like, key organizers believed that white dominance in black majority counties was "most vulnerable—at the ballot box" (Dittmer 1995, p. 124). Greenwood organizers canvassed local residents to encourage them to register to vote, held regular meetings, and marched to the courthouse with potential registrants. All of these activities helped to build up an organizational base, fostered a greater sense of solidarity, and reduced fears of challenging the status quo. How-

¹⁶ The city also served as the temporary headquarters of the national association—the Citizens' Council of America (McMillen 1971). The Greenwood unit of the Citizens' Council paid for the legal expenses of Byron de la Beckwith, a Greenwood fertilizer salesman and the recently convicted assassin of Mississippi NAACP chief Medgar Evers (*New York Times*, July 9, 1963).

¹⁷ In the mid-1960s, violence against civil rights activists and supporters was perhaps more common in southwest Mississippi, where the resurgent Klan operated unchecked. There, in a pattern similar to that of Birmingham, working-class white mobilization against integration encouraged vacillation among business interests.

ever, as in Albany, the targeting of political actors was ineffective at achieving movement goals. After a year of struggle, some 1,500 local blacks had attempted to register, but only 50 had been added to the voting rolls (Branch 1988, p. 725). Perhaps not surprisingly, Dittmer (1995, p. 213) reports that by the end of 1963 the local movement was thoroughly demoralized.

The registration drives in 1963 and 1964 produced some disruptions in public order and generated media coverage of antirights intimidation and violence, but they were insufficient to harm enterprises that were potentially vulnerable. As a newspaper correspondent reported in 1963: "Greenwood has felt no repercussions from the unfavorable headlines it has been winning in the Northern press because it is not making any real effort to attract new industry." Rather, the manufacturing industries that had already been lured to Leflore County "seemed happy enough" (*New York Times*, July 9, 1963). Commenting the following year on the difficulties of bringing about change in places such as Greenwood, a staff member of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission noted, "The process of change usually begins when community leadership decides the price of keeping the status quo is too high. Unfortunately, the price can be quite low in a small town where the loss of new industry or convention business may not be important factors" (*Wall Street Journal*, August 27, 1964). Despite the continued willingness of hundreds of locals to brave the threats associated with attempting to register to vote, the absence of significant costs imposed on vulnerable business interests, the reticence of the federal government, and the corresponding intransigence of local public officials made even modest gains elusive.

The enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 furnished activists with new weapons to impose greater costs upon noncompliant enterprises, but resistance continued. As Jim Crow barriers fell across the South, including in Jackson, the new civil rights law failed to sweep away segregation in Greenwood. To "test" for compliance with the newly enacted law, a few local activists unaffiliated with SNCC—the McGhee brothers and their followers—attempted to desegregate public accommodations through direct action. In response, restaurant owners converted their establishments to private clubs; lunch counters and soda fountains were removed for fear of a loss of white business (*New York Times*, August 27, 1964). A single movie theater, belonging to a larger chain, integrated only to have organized segregationists form a picket to accost both black and white patrons. During several visits to the theater, maverick activists had repeated encounters with a hostile crowd of three hundred whites. On one occasion, Jake McGhee was dragged from his seat and beaten; a few weeks later he was again injured by flying glass when a bottle crashed through the window of the car taking their group from the theater. Days

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 amplification 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 farmers had unobtrusively given up the race question; without sharecroppers, with machines, beef and soybeans, they could afford to." After years of vacillation, heightened disruption and falling concession costs allowed downtown interests to respond to movement demands. Although the enactment of federal legislation no doubt strengthened the hand of local activists, Payne notes that (1995, p. 328) "most Greenwood activists feel strongly that the immediate cause of real change, change that they could feel in their daily lives, came in response to economic pressure." The principal white representative for the merchants likewise concluded in retrospect that it was the boycott that "ended that whole era" (Malouf, interview, August 31, 2003).

¹⁸ Violent antirights reprisals declined after Governor Paul Johnson began in 1965 to speak out in favor of public order and articulated a greater willingness to punish whites for violence. Interestingly, this change in state policy also resulted from the growing awareness of the costs of racial strife among vulnerable economic elites. Following the brutality of the 1964 Summer Project campaign (or Freedom Summer), the Mississippi Economic Council, the Mississippi Banking Association, the Mississippi Manufacturing Association, and numerous chambers of commerce endorsed the preservation of law and order—a shift that journalist Hodding Carter described as "creeping realism" in state politics (McMillen 1973, p. 165). State officials, with active encouragement from nonplantation economic elites, stepped up their efforts to investigate and weaken violent white-supremacist organizations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While not an exhaustive treatment of these local struggles, the case studies support the basic proposition that economic actors weigh the financial impact of disruption and concession costs. Going beyond the simple assertion that costs matter, this analysis refines the distinctions among these costs and offers a set of propositions about how their convergence affects responsiveness to movement demands. Numerous historical studies of the responses of Southern business leaders to the civil rights movement further corroborate the hypothesis that the patterns of cost exposure stimulated concessions (e.g., Jacoway and Colburn 1982). This analysis comports also with studies of Southern political development that highlight the struggles between Old South plantation interests and modernizing New South interests dedicated to the promotion of Southern industrial development and economic growth (Nicholls 1960; Greenberg 1980; Luebke 1990; Cobb 1993; Wright 1996). Based on a consideration of the economic opportunity structure, the findings presented here suggest that the distinctive characteristic of these modernizers was not simply their commitment to industrial growth (since many industrial interests happily conformed to the regional norm of Jim Crow and low wages), but also the vulnerability of their agenda to economic disruptions and negative publicity of the sort that the civil rights movement produced. Next, the extreme rarity of Southern business closures in response to threatened integration suggests that economic interests generally trumped personal preferences or local cultural norms.¹⁹ Even as the economic actors in these case studies behaved strategically to protect their business interests largely irrespective of their personal views, more research on the impact of cultural norms upon the responsiveness of economic actors to other movements is necessary.

The case studies further demonstrate that, while exposure to disruption and concession costs is not structurally predetermined, sectoral regularities can be detected. The relatively immobile, local consumption, service, and growth-dependent sectors, for which disruption costs were generally far higher than concession costs, came forward to make concessions. Despite considerable unrest and negative publicity, the conspicuous lack of support for yielding in New Orleans among industrial firms outside local

¹⁹ Despite the general Southern white preference for segregation, the priority of economic interest can be further detected in the infrequency of Southern business closures following the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. With blame shifted to the federal government and the use of coercion to reinforce activist demands, few businesses closed on the basis of personal values or cultural norms. Indeed, closures were so uncommon that when Lester Maddox, the owner of a Georgia restaurant (and later state governor), opted to shut down his establishment rather than integrate, it was considered a newsworthy event.

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 paradox that the same racist violence that furthered the enactment of national civil rights legislation (McAdam 1982) deterred ostensible accommodators from making concessions and thereby reduced the local movement’s immediate prospects for success. In any case, these findings reinforce the proposition that explaining movement success involves a consideration of the extent of countermovement opposition (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996) and of how this agitation affects the cost calculations of movement targets. By revealing these factors, a cost-assessment perspective clarifies the underlying dynamics affecting the behavior of economic actors and, more generally, movement outcome.

While this investigation concentrates on the civil rights movement, the pattern should apply to other comparable movements as well. For instance, antinuclear activists often used the formal licensing procedure, which includes hearings and opportunities for legal challenges, to delay the construction of new facilities and thereby cause “financial problems for the utility” (Rüdig 1990, p. 308). Describing the activities of British environmentalists, Seel and Plows (2000, p. 126) observe that “the basis of the cost escalation strategy is that while corporations often do not want to understand the arguments or values of radical environmentalists, the one thing they do understand very well is a balance sheet.” Similarly, recent fears about negative publicity and boycotts over labor conditions in overseas factories have caused many American corporations to propose

and adopt new codes of conduct to reduce their exposure to such accusations (Spar 1998). Economic disruptions have often been important considerations for those seeking political changes as well. With some success, gay and black civil rights activists have urged sympathetic groups to boycott certain inhospitable states.²⁰ While many examples might be cited, the economic motivations for responsiveness are unmistakable.

This analysis also reveals that protest has limits for bringing about substantive change. While disruptive protests were effective at compelling vulnerable interests to desegregate, they had less impact on the many other economic actors shielded from these costs. Unable to threaten these other targets with economic harm, the effectiveness of movement agitation for bringing about racial equality had severe limitations. Without greater support from the federal government after 1964 and the creation of new legal weapons to impose costs upon the intransigent, movement contention would likely have obtained far fewer gains (Heckman and Paynor 1989). Also, had the ambitions of the civil rights movement been more threatening to Southern economic interests, the demolition of Jim Crow institutions would have been much more difficult to achieve. Indeed, the many successes of the civil rights movement must be attributed in no small measure to the disappearance of resisters from the region (Piven and Cloward 1977; James 1988).

This analysis suggests other possibilities for future research as well. Analogous to the economic cost-assessment hypothesis proposed here, a similar political cost-assessment approach might be developed to refine the concept of political opportunity structure (POS). While research on the concept of POS has produced many useful speculations and some generalizations about the responses of government authorities to movement mobilization (Tarrow 1994), POS is often less a predictive theory than a device to draw attention to a cluster of salient variables. Thus POS highlights factors such as the presence of elite allies, but the avail-

²⁰ The recent adoption of a gay-rights ordinance in Miami evinces an awareness of the economic costs of intolerance. Following the enactment of the ordinance, the *New York Times* (December 2, 1998) observed that “many Miami-Dade political and civic leaders rallied behind the measure by arguing that intolerance was bad for an economy that depended on tourism and new investments.” Similarly, in South Carolina, state economic interests urged legislators to take down the Confederate flag from the Capitol dome to end an NAACP-sponsored tourism and convention boycott. Because of the boycott, over 100 conventions and other events were canceled that cost the state “at least \$18 million in tourist dollars” (*New York Times*, March 26, 2000). According to Republican pollster Whit Ayres, “It’s the business community which has really supplied the heat on this. That is really what has brought the issue to a head” (*New York Times*, April 25, 2000). Also, before the recent vote to repeal Alabama’s constitutional ban on interracial marriage, governor Don Siegelman stated that failing to do so “will send the wrong message to the corporate world” (*New York Times*, November 5, 2000).

ability of these benefactors is treated as exogenous. Left relatively unexamined is how political opportunities are enlarged or why certain disruptions, and not others, should be advantageous to specific movements.²¹ To account for the ability of movements to cultivate alliances, garner broader political support, and convert disruptive behavior into “political pressure,” a theoretical description of the general structure of motives among public officials is necessary (Mayhew 1974; Arnold 1990). While this investigation has concentrated on the behavior of economic actors, prior research on political cost assessment might be usefully combined with social movement theory to produce more robust accounts of movement outcome. With a few exceptions (e.g., Burstein 1985), this sort of cross-fertilization has seldom been undertaken. Similarly, additional theoretical speculation might delineate the interaction between the economic and political structures of opportunity. In several cases, the escalation of disruption costs triggered political mobilization of vulnerable economic actors that, in turn, contributed to an expansion in political opportunities. Favorable legislation or judicial rulings can furnish activists with new weapons to impose costs upon recalcitrant targets. To tease out these interactions, further research might join studies of movement outcome with theories concerning variation in political influence based on the structure of economic sectors (Gourevitch 1977; Shafer 1994; Boix 2003) or on social network analysis (Knoke 1990).

My aim here has been simply to derive a more precise theoretical explanation of the responses of economic actors to social movement demands based on a set of rudimentary assumptions about variation in cost exposure. Refining prior theories, I argued that the vulnerability to disruption and concession costs define an economic opportunity structure that clarifies the prospects for the success of movements targeting economic actors. Further, I speculated that a pattern of sectoral exposure helps to explain why certain economic actors regularly respond more favorably to protest movement demands than others. While structural conditions may be conducive to movement success, taking advantage of these vulnerabilities depends on choosing the proper target and generating protests of sufficient magnitude to threaten the profit of these interests. By appreciating the specific costs that diverse movements impose and their variation across targets, the patterns of movement success and failure can be better understood.

²¹ In a similar vein, Rory McVeigh offers a structural analysis for grievance interpretation among conservative movements (1999).

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