Polity • Volume 37, Number 1 • January 2005

www.palgrave-journals.com/polity

Civil Rights Success and the Politics of Racial Violence*

Joseph E. Luders
Yeshiva University

This investigation revises the two main explanations for the successes of the civil rights movement: the backlash thesis and business moderation theory. While both theories hinge on the political significance of severe anti-rights violence, neither approach adequately explains variation in the intensity of this contention. Introducing a political mobilization perspective, which draws attention to the competition between segregationist and moderate business organizations, I argue that the structure of local electoral rewards determined the likelihood of official instigation or toleration for anti-rights violence. Case studies of four civil rights campaigns are used to demonstrate that the severity of anti-rights contention depended upon the relative political capacities of these interests. Refining the backlash thesis, it is suggested that the civil rights movement triggered the dramatic clashes necessary for advancing national legislation only where key economic interests lacked the will or political influence to challenge successfully segregationist political mobilization. Recasting business moderation theory, this analysis indicates that victories at the state and local level prior to substantive federal legislation depended not only upon the political leverage of moderate business organizations, but on a corresponding weakness among segregationists.
Polity (2005) **37,** 108–129. doi:10.1057/palgrave.polity.2300006

Keywords *civil rights; social movements; racial politics; violence; southern politics*

Joseph E. Luders *is Assistant Professor and Gottesman Chair of Political Science at Yeshiva University. He has written on social movements, racial contention, and American political development.*

*This research was supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation (#SBE-9521536). An early version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in 2003 in Philadelphia, PA. I thank Maya Haptas for research assistance and Michael Donnelly, Tova Glatter, Andrew Grossman, Morgan Kousser, David Shein, and Johanna Warshaw for helpful comments.

Introduction

Perhaps no social movement changed American racial politics and elevated the national commitment to democracy more than the civil rights movement. To explain the stunning triumphs of the movement over the defenders of Jim Crow from 1954 to 1965, two main approaches have been put forth.[1] Many argue that the dramatic clashes between nonviolent civil rights demonstrators and southern law enforcement in Birmingham and Selma were the principal impetus behind the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, respectively. To proponents of this *backlash thesis*, the movement's effective provocation of shocking clashes between southern police and nonviolent demonstrators heightened the national salience of the civil rights issue and caused Cold War grand strategists to worry about damage to the American image abroad.[2] The vehemence of the southern backlash, so the argument runs, ultimately compelled a reluctant federal government to take decisive action on behalf of African-American civil rights. Other studies, concentrating on civil rights successes at the state and local levels prior to the expanded federal involvement in the mid-1960s, argue that rising concern about the economic costs of white extremism caused business leaders to put aside their personal preferences for segregation in favor of some measure of accommodation.[3] According to this *business moderation theory*, local successes resulted from business agitation for concessions in response to fears about the actual or anticipated cost of civil rights

1. Drawing from William Gamson, success is used here to mean movement targets yielding new advantages to the challenging group. *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1975), 28–37. On the validity of concentrating on new advantages, see Edwin Amenta and Michael P. Young. "Making an Impact: Conceptual and Methodological Implications of the Collective Goods Criterion," in *How Social Movements Matter*, ed. Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 22–41.

2. David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978); Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle For Black Equality, 1954–1980* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981); Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Paul Burstein, *Discrimination, Jobs, and Politics: The Struggle for Equal Employment Opportunity in the United States since the New Deal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Michael J. Klarman, "How *Brown* Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," *Journal of American History* (June 1994): 81–118. Also, for the argument based on global Cold War politics, see Azza Salama Layton, *International Politics and Civil Rights Policies in the United States, 1941–1960* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Philip Klinkner, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

3. An implicit or explicit business moderation theory is found in countless studies of this period. See Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1969); Elizabeth Jacoway and David Colburn, eds., *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); James C. Cobb, *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877–1984* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1984); Jack S. Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

protests and anti-rights violence. Oddly, although the causal arguments of the backlash thesis and the business moderation theory connect in their focus on anti-rights contention, no attempt has been made to join them together in a more complete explanation for the success of the civil rights movement. This theoretical synthesis is the purpose of this study. First, I substantially revise business moderation theory with the introduction of a political mobilization perspective that addresses the patterns of political competition between business and segregationist organizations over the local responses to civil rights agitation. Secondly, I evaluate the empirical merits of this revision in a reinterpretation of conventional accounts of key struggles of the civil rights movement. Finally, I sketch the causal chain that connects local and national politics to provide a more integrated account of civil rights successes.

Politics and Violence

Although both theories hinge on the eruption of anti-rights violence against nonviolent protesters, neither offers a satisfactory explanation for such incidents. In accounting for favorable federal action, the backlash thesis is not so much wrong as it is incomplete because southern brutality and tolerance for the violent repression of civil rights supporters is merely assumed. Forgotten among the memories of the harassment, beatings, and murder of peaceful demonstrators are the differing responses to protest across the South. While all southern states met NAACP desegregation lawsuits and civil rights demonstrations with various forms of legalistic repression, few seemed to countenance widespread white violence or police brutality against civil rights protesters.[4] Not only is variation in the intensity of resistance overlooked, it is implicitly assumed that only a few southerners were aware that white violence might have negative repercussions or provoke federal intervention. Laurie Pritchett, the police chief of Albany, Georgia, who defeated a massive civil rights campaign, is singled out as unusually canny in responding to protest with nonviolent legal repression.[5] Yet many others responded in a similar manner and many—from the director of Mississippi's Sovereignty Commission to the notorious Bull Connor in Birmingham, Alabama—were well aware that violent white backlash might provoke federal intervention or attract negative publicity.[6] Why then, despite

4. For an overview of this legal assault, see Walter F. Murphy, "The South Counterattacks: The Anti-NAACP Laws," *Western Political Quarterly* 12 (June, 1959), 371–90.

5. Steven Barkan, "Legal Control of the Southern Civil Rights Movement," *American Sociological Review* 49 (August 1984): 552–65.

6. Charles M. Payne suggests that southerners were aware of the relationship between southern racial violence and federal intervention as early as 1943 due to threatened federal action against lynching. See *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition in the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 18–20.

an awareness of these risks, were certain states and localities nevertheless violent in their opposition to the civil rights movement? Soaring at the level of national politics, the backlash thesis assumes these violent eruptions and elides this puzzling southern diversity. To the extent that the backlash thesis depends on the generation of dramatic clashes against nonviolent demonstrators, a theory that explains the severity of southern anti-rights violence is necessary.

Closer to local politics, business moderation theory serves as a useful starting point. Although typically used to explain the eventual shift *away* from reactionary politics, this theory clarifies why certain places were far more violent than others. That is, if the shift among business interests toward moderation triggered a retreat from extremism, then a *prior* unwillingness or inability of business interests to organize effectively against racial backlash must be a critical factor in explanations of anti-rights contention.[7] Once elements of the business community—which suffered from the effects of unfavorable publicity, reduced consumption, and declining outside investment—organized and argued for the preservation of order, local officials were often willing to pursue and suppress violent white extremists.[8]

Even as business moderation theory usefully delineates how politics shaped the manifestation of anti-rights violence, this approach nevertheless suffers from one-sidedness. The prediction that organized economic interests provided electoral incentives to officials to suppress anti-rights contention is plausible only insofar as mass preferences for the stubborn defense of Jim Crow were diffuse and unorganized. However, in many cases, these preferences were not unorganized. From plantation interests and their allies to threatened white workers, the concentrated costs of black civil and voting rights stimulated the emergence of counter-movement organizations.[9] To the extent that these segregationists were politically mobilized and wielded significant electoral clout, fierce defenders of Jim Crow were more likely to be in office and moderate officials less willing to contain white extremists for fear of being branded "soft" on

---

7. Jacoway and Colburn, *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*; Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915–1972* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

8. Joseph Luders, "Countermovements, the State, and the Intensity of Racial Contention in the American South," in *States, Parties, and Social Movements: Protest and the Dynamics of Institutional Change*, ed. Jack Goldstone (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

9. The literature on these counter-movements is substantial. See Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*; Samuel DuBois Cook, "Political Movements and Organizations," *Journal of Politics* 26 (1964): 130–53; Harold C. Fleming, "Resistance Movements and Racial Desegregation," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 304 (1956): 44–52; Neil McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Resistance to the Second Reconstruction* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994 [1971]); James W. Vander Zanden, *Race Relations in Transition: The Segregation Crisis in the South* (New York: Random House, 1965). For a general treatment of the Klan, see David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965).

segregation.[10] In other words, in addition to the political mobilization of business interests, the political leverage of organized segregationists shaped the degree to which local officials supported or tolerated anti-rights violence. An explanation for the success of the civil rights movement in provoking the dramatic clashes necessary for national success must therefore address the interaction between these two factors. Yet, despite ample knowledge of both interests, business moderation arguments do not develop the implications of this interaction to provide an adequate theory of local politics across a range of cases.

Of course, other factors affected official support for anti-rights violence as well. To the extent that African Americans possessed local electoral leverage, organized black voters could be expected to influence official responses to civil rights mobilization and anti-rights violence. Additional considerations such as agitation of southern liberals or federal intervention, mattered in as much as they advantaged either of these competing interests. However, these factors were generally not sufficient to stem the tide of racial backlash because southern African-Americans were largely excluded from electoral participation, liberals in the region lacked political clout, and the federal government before 1964 was far too hesitant to make a difference.[11]

Elaborating upon the disparate insights of prior studies, I argue that tacit official support for, or acceptance of, anti-rights violence is predicted in those places in which segregationists were well organized and business interests were passive or politically weak. A lack of organized business demands for the containment of racial extremism coupled with segregationist mobilization meant that resistance forces had direct representation of their views or were able to limit the options of even relatively moderate officeholders. In this case, officials were far more likely to encourage or at least tolerate the eruptions of anti-rights violence of the sort that advanced the national legislative agenda of the civil rights movement. A political mobilization argument indicates that the severe contention witnessed in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi resulted from precisely this convergence of organized political demands for continued defiance, and the unwillingness or inability of business interests to push for the

10. This analysis borrows from Anna Harvey's argument that benefit-seeking organizations, which are independent from party organizations, serve as necessary instruments for publics to compel elected officials to deliver upon specific policies. See Harvey, "Women, Policy, and Party, 1920–1970: A Rational Choice Approach," *Studies in American Political Development* 11 (Fall 1997): 292–325.

11. See generally Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*; Michal Belknap, *Federal Law and Southern Order: Racial Violence and Constitutional Conflict in the Post-Brown South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987). The case of Memphis is the exception that proves the rule. Despite characteristics that presaged a violent reaction to civil rights agitation, the unusually high rates of African-American voter registration made local public officials far less tolerant of anti-rights violence see Earl Black and Merle Black, *Politics and Society in the South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); Anne Trotter, "The Memphis Business Community and Integration," in *Businessmen and Desegregation, eds. Jacoway and Colburn.*

preservation of public order and the suppression of white anti-rights violence. Stated more provocatively, I contend that civil rights protesters triggered the dramatic clashes necessary for advancing national legislation only in those states or localities in which key economic interests lacked the will or political influence to oppose active segregationist political mobilization. Thus, while many southern officials were aware that violent repression might benefit the civil rights movement, they chose this counterproductive strategy for defending segregation not because of ineptitude, but because it was politically optimal.

Next, concerning victories at the state and local levels prior to substantive federal legislation, these depended not only upon the political leverage of moderate business organizations in guiding local responses to civil rights mobilization, but on the corresponding weakness among segregationists as well. The greater acceptance of civil rights demands for desegregation in public accommodations and schools prior to the Civil Rights Act might therefore be regarded less as the product of racially liberal attitudes in these localities and more the consequence of a lack of organization among segregationists. This political mobilization perspective on civil rights successes thus highlights the electoral incentives and cross-pressures affecting state and local officials as they devised responses to civil rights protests and white opposition. Finally, although this account concentrates on the political context within which civil rights struggles transpired, it cannot be forgotten that it was ultimately the demands of civil rights supporters and their willingness to brave violent crowds and hostile police that generated the reactions necessary to win local and national victories. This analysis is not meant to eclipse or diminish these endeavors; rather it is intended to supplement the many studies of civil rights mobilization with a perspective that embeds this social movement within a broader constellation of political actors and interests.

Case Studies

To investigate these propositions about the centrality of business and segregationist mobilization to explanations of the outcome of civil rights struggles, I consider four cases: Albany, Georgia; Atlanta, Georgia; Selma, Alabama; and Jackson, Mississippi. A comparative analysis reveals how different combinations of business and segregationist mobilization defined a set of political rewards that favored or discouraged official support for anti-rights contention. Case selection is based on the variation in the configuration of business and segregationist organization as derived from the rich literature on the civil rights movement. Albany depicts a curious lack of either business or segregationist mobilization. Atlanta captures the standard case of the business moderation hypothesis in which powerful organized economic actors were

matched against weak segregationist organizations. In Selma, both local economic interests and segregationists contended to define the response to civil rights activity. Jackson combines business quiescence with statewide segregationist mobilization. In a rough manner, this survey delineates the relationship between anti-rights contention and patterns of local organization among the most salient interests. While a consideration of these cases cannot be regarded as an exhaustive test of the political mobilization argument sketched above, revisiting them with attention to the interaction of business moderates and organized segregationists offers suggestive insights concerning the bases of local and national civil rights successes.

Albany, Georgia

Situated within the heart of Georgia's rural black belt, the overwhelming vote (70.8 percent) for Goldwater in the 1964 presidential elections suggests that Albany whites were firmly committed to segregation. Nevertheless, during the peak months of the Albany Movement, which began in the late fall of 1961 and stretched into the following August, local authorities responded to massive civil rights demonstrations with nonviolence and legal repression designed to smother the movement. After months of protest at numerous venues and several hundred arrests, civil rights activists—notably, Martin Luther King Jr.—departed without desegregating any public facility. Without the provocative clashes between police and demonstrators, supportive federal intervention was simply unnecessary. For many, the Albany campaign stands out as a singular defeat for King and the civil rights struggle.[12] Of the insightful accounts of the failure of the Albany Movement, most highlight Chief Pritchett's strategy of nonviolent repression of civil rights activists.[13] Because Pritchett's strategic response is credited with defeating the movement, an account of this response is warranted.

The simplest explanation is that Pritchett was less hot-tempered than Bull Connor in Birmingham and other Deep South law officers. There is truth to this; Pritchett had carefully studied King's tactics and devised nonviolence as the effective answer.[14] However, personalistic explanations risk overlooking politics and the reason certain individuals might be in office in the first place. For proponents of the simple business moderation hypothesis, Pritchett's conduct is puzzling because business interests seem to be largely quiescent during the length of the campaign. Indeed, business organizations are curiously absent from

12. Ralph Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

13. McAdam, *Development of Black Insurgency*; Barkan, "Legal Control."

14. Howell Raines, *My Soul is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered* (New York: Bantam, 1977).

most Albany narratives. In his analysis of the Albany Movement, Morris frequently refers to the "white power structure" (composed of segregationists to be sure), but no specific organizations representing business interests appear to have urged negotiation.[15] In early February, the local business merchants and the Chamber of Commerce had expressed dissatisfaction with the unwillingness of the city commissioners to discuss the restoration of bus service after the movement's boycott had bankrupted the line. Other than this incident, business interests seem virtually invisible during the nine months of protest, and never did they seek to change Pritchett's strategy. Even as the local merchants smarted under the boycott of downtown businesses, they were unwilling to push for concessions.[16] Contrary to what might have been presumed from a business moderation perspective, Pritchett's self-control was not due to business mobilization.[17]

What is especially noteworthy about the Albany case is the political irrelevance of organized segregationists. Although comparable localities in Alabama and Mississippi would have almost certainly been home to a chapter of the Citizens' Council (initially the White Citizens' Council) and perhaps a branch of the Klan, this appears not to have been the case in Albany. Among Deep South states, Georgia had an exceptionally weak segregationist movement. Concerning the elite backed Citizens' Council, McMillen notes that ". . . The Peach State stands apart in the history of the southern resistance for it alone among the five states of the lower South failed to develop a viable organized segregationist movement."[18] The only such organization, the States' Rights Council of Georgia, lacked substantial membership and the political clout of this organization was questionable by the time of the Albany protests. As Bartley explains: "White Georgians gave every evidence of being in sympathy with the state's official stance of total devotion to white supremacy, but they did not support the organized expression of this dedication."[19] The political significance of this curious lack of organization cannot be understated as it was the weakness of organized segregationists at the state and local levels that allowed authorities to devise flexible responses to civil rights agitation and to suppress white extremists with less fear of electoral threats.

---

15. Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984).

16. David Lewis, *King: A Critical Biography* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 155.

17. It is striking that, in the analysis of over a dozen southern cities, the Albany case is not included in Jacoway and Colburn's otherwise magisterial edited volume on business and the dynamics of desegregation.

18. Neil McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Resistance to the Second Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994 [1971]), 80.

19. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 103.

While factions of the Klan thrived in sections of Georgia, they were more concentrated in and around Atlanta. A massive FBI investigation of the hooded order in the mid-1960s found not a single chapter of the Klan in Dougherty County (where Albany is located), very few in southeast Georgia generally, and only two within a 30-mile radius.[20] Although these Klan affiliates might have fomented trouble, they lacked the capacity to threaten Pritchett with electoral reprisals. Pritchett was able to make clear that these outsiders were not welcome in Albany. Consequently, Pritchett made certain that King was protected from harm, that unruly whites were kept in check, and that the sole Klan rally in this period held by United Klans of America occurred outside the city limits. Furthermore, without a local bastion of organized violent whites that might lash out against civil rights activists, Pritchett and others were spared the choice between tolerating the economic costs of white thuggery or the political costs of suppressing anti-rights violence.

In brief, despite the zealous commitment to segregation among Albany whites, there was a notable lack of organized political demands for harsher repression or independently initiated private repression. Even the segregationist editor of the sole local newspaper supported Pritchett's actions. Due to the unusual lack of competition between those dedicated to the brutal defense of segregation and others pushing for concessions, Albany was less likely to erupt into bloody violence.[21] Contrary to prior accounts, which concentrate almost entirely on Pritchett's disposition and tactical cleverness, I suggest that it was the peculiar absence of local segregationist and business mobilization that gave him the strategic flexibility to maintain segregation. While Pritchett's response was not an automatic outcome of this situation, his use of nonviolent legal repression depended upon the feebleness of state and local segregationist organizations.

Atlanta, Georgia

Whereas business interests seldom appear in studies of the response to civil rights mobilization in Albany, no account of Atlanta in this period passes over the influence of the city's business elite on local politics and the response to civil rights agitation. Without exaggeration, Atlanta is the classic example of the business moderation hypothesis—a "city too busy to hate." The city's leadership

---

20. United States House Committee on Un-American Activities, *The Present-Day Ku Klux Klan Movement* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1967); also, United States House Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings Regarding HR 15678, HR 15689, HR 15744, HR 15754, and HR 16099, Bills to Curb Terrorist Organizations: Hearings, 89th Congress, 2nd session* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 1399–1521.

21. David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 222.

had long cultivated an image of a progressive New South metropolis and the local officeholders maintained close ties to the business community. Both Mayor William Hartsfield (1942–1961) and his successor Ivan Allen, Jr. (1962–1970) emerged from the business community, the latter having been the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce president.[22] As the business moderation theory predicts, this ensemble of economic and political elites had no use for costly defiance. Bartley explains:

> The New South leadership in Atlanta was fully aware of the economic consequences of racial turmoil in Little Rock, and, well before the city desegregated in the fall of 1961, its leaders were maneuvering frantically to protect the city's progressive image from the type of publicity that racial hysteria had earned for Little Rock and New Orleans.[23]

In addition, the presence of a substantial black middle class and the incorporation of African-American voters into a dominant coalition with upper income whites weighed heavily against a reactionary defense of segregation. Hornsby maintains that after 1949 this coalition became "invincible" and "no person could expect to be elected mayor of Atlanta . . . without its support."[24]

As previously noted, organized segregationists were comparatively weak in Georgia. The Citizens' Council, which generally flourished in plantation counties, lacked a following in Atlanta, and the Georgia States' Rights Council, after a flurry of elite support in the middle 1950s, declined as state factional politics rent the organization in the 1958 gubernatorial election. At the time Atlanta shifted toward compliance with the 1954 *Brown* decision in 1961, the state's political leadership was already in the process of retreating from massive resistance and therefore no outside assistance was available to bolster a local segregationist faction.[25] Atlanta segregationists thus lacked sufficient political clout to thwart the business and upper income moderates. Without electoral leverage, the many Klan chapters that encircled Atlanta were vulnerable to local state repression.

Consequently, civil rights events advanced on two fronts. First, in the wake of the Greensboro sit-ins, students from local black colleges initiated a campaign to desegregate downtown stores on March 15, 1960. Some 200 students sat-in in numerous establishments and afterwards continued to picket and boycott these downtown businesses. These events triggered the beginning of protracted

22. Alton Hornsby Jr., "A City That Was Too Busy to Hate," in *Businessmen and Desegregation*, ed. Jacoway and Colburn, 121.

23. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 332–33.

24. Hornsby, "A City that Was Too Busy to Hate," 124.

25. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*.

negotiations with these interests.[26] Secondly, the ongoing litigation to desegregate Atlanta's public schools approached culmination in the fall of 1961. Local political and economic actors devised and promoted a plan to bring about the peaceful desegregation of city high schools. On August 30, 1961, under the close watch of the police, these schools were calmly desegregated. In addition, downtown businesses agreed to a plan to desegregate their lunch counters, restrooms, and other facilities within thirty days of public school integration.[27]

Upon closer inspection, somewhat greater complexity is revealed. The operators of Atlanta's downtown commercial businesses resisted integration for a considerable period of time despite entreaties from the mayor to negotiate. Although members of the business community believed that the protests were damaging to the city's reputation, they lasted almost a year before these commercial and retail interests accepted a negotiated settlement. Even then, the agreement allowed the merchants to delay integration until the September following the desegregation of the schools. The more radical students accepted this plan, which older members of the black community had arranged, only because of King's personal intervention. Although the civil rights movement achieved a local victory, the lethargy with which these downtown interests responded to movement demands suggests that the picketing by the Klan had slowed the pace of change.

Unlike Albany, dominant economic interests in Atlanta kept violent whites under control and eventually brokered a settlement to bring about the cessation of protests. Thus, in this case and others, organized economic actors encouraged local officials either to preempt civil rights agitation through accommodation or to support a negotiated settlement as costly protest activity mounted. Segregationists, while likely discouraging downtown merchants from integrating sooner, lacked the political resources to block integration. Without the political control over local law enforcement, white extremists had few opportunities to conduct unpunished anti-rights violence. Only two years later in public speeches, Atlanta police chief Jenkins made clear his respect for civil rights and his opposition to reckless, obdurate resistance. Such statements convey the political import of backing from the "invincible coalition". Yet, despite this local victory, achieving the dramatic strife necessary to advance federal legislation obliged the movement to go elsewhere in search of venues where both organized segregationists were strong and business interests either belonged to the segregation coalition or lacked the political leverage to contain anti-rights

26. David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: W. Morrow, 1986), 131.

27. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 151–52.

violence. After much contemplation following the defeat in Albany, the movement went to Birmingham in 1963, and then to Selma in 1965.

Selma, Alabama

"They picked Selma just like a movie producer would pick a set," declared the city mayor in retrospect.[28] Aware of the value of provocative confrontations, King and his associates chose Selma because of the high likelihood of anti-rights violence in defense of egregious inequalities. Situated in the heart of the Alabama black belt, the prospects in Selma for a hostile response to civil rights mobilization seemed promising indeed. The economic base of Dallas County, where Selma is located, was closely tied to labor-intensive agricultural production (including cotton), and rural white reliance on black tenant farmers persisted. Although nearly all were denied voting rights, African Americans made up about half of the city's 30,000 residents. Under these conditions, white mobilization to protect Jim Crow against black voter registration was hardly surprising. In contrast to the weak segregationist movement found in Georgia, both the Citizens' Council and the Klan had strongholds in Alabama.

Dallas County provided the Citizens' Council with especially robust support. In 1954, "1,200 Dallas Countians gathered" to hear the call for organization and 600 "became charter members of the Dallas County Citizens' Council"—the first such entity in the state after the *Brown* decision. After a single year, the local organization claimed a membership of 1,500—one-quarter of all adult white males in the county—and the mayor "immediately led his municipal machine into a firm alliance with the new segregationist organization."[29] In 1958, state senator Walter Givhan, the head of the Dallas County Council and member of the segregationist Alabama State Sovereignty Commission, assumed leadership of the state association and relocated the headquarters to Selma.[30] Although the council had been in decline since 1958 and exerted leverage in only a few counties, it seems reasonable to assume that the organization was strongest in the city in which it was headquartered. Due to this segregationist mobilization and the ties to local officials, key conditions for harsh reprisals were met. As Thornton confirms:

> The close association that was thus established from the outset between the Citizens' Council on the one hand and the Selma city government, the county

28. Mayor Joseph Smitherman quoted in Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize, America's Civil Rights Years, 1954–1965* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1987), 272.

29. Mills J. Thornton, III, "Municipal Politics and the Course of the Movement," in *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies*, ed. Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 55. Unlike the many studies that overlook the subtleties of local politics, Thornton's essay is a rare gem.

30. McMillen, *The Citizens' Council*, 57.

> Democratic party, and various local officials and state legislators on the other appears to have been the principal source of the unusually aggressive and unanimous commitment of the white community of Dallas County to an extremist racial position.[31]

None of the various Klan factions had a local unit in Dallas County; nevertheless the Klan had sufficient statewide membership to be a factor in electoral calculations. George Wallace, who had spurned the Klan in the 1958 gubernatorial election and lost to John Patterson, vowed that he would never again be outdone in appeals to racial hatred. In his next run for the governorship in 1962, Wallace cultivated the support of white supremacist organizations.[32] Segregationist mobilization made taking even slightly moderate positions politically untenable. Although in Georgia weakly organized segregationists allowed for Governor Vandiver to assist Pritchett in keeping order, Wallace's political support in Alabama from white supremacist organizations likely inclined him against using the state police to keep violent whites in check.

Local economic interests in the mid-1960s were divided over the best response to civil rights demands. Closely tied to the conservative political machine that had dominated city politics, the Dallas County Chamber of Commerce lacked any interest in providing leadership. However, other business interests were less satisfied with the machine's lackluster efforts to attract new business investments to the city. Joseph T. Smitherman, a local merchant and political insurgent, helped to organize "a committee of businessmen to seek new industry for the county."[33] Based on this support, Smitherman challenged and defeated the machine candidate in the mayoral election of 1964. Even before Smitherman's inauguration in October 1964, key business leaders with a "passion for industrial development" and afraid of negative publicity arranged to meet with representatives of the movement and agreed to continue to do so regularly.[34] To implement his plan to burnish the city's image, Smitherman created the position of director of public safety (with jurisdiction within the city limits though not around the county courthouse) and appointed Wilson Baker, a racial moderate, to the post. With the mobilization of supportive urban business interests, the defeat of the machine candidate, and the installation of a new head of law enforcement, an ostensibly hostile situation appears more ambiguous.

For a time, Dallas County Sheriff Jim Clark resisted the impulse to respond with violence; yet, the Selma campaign will always be remembered for "Bloody

---

31. Thornton, "Municipal Politics," 55.

32. Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

33. Thornton, "Municipal Politics," 57.

34. Thornton, "Municipal Politics," 59.

Sunday." On March 7, 1964, as over 500 civil rights marchers departed the city across the Edmund Pettus Bridge toward the state capital to demonstrate for voting rights, state troopers and Clark's volunteer posse set upon them using tear gas and wielding batons. At the end of the melee, dozens were injured and the nation had once again witnessed the raw brutality of Jim Crow. This event, more than any other, pushed forward the Voting Rights Act of 1965.[35] Only eight days later, in a joint session of Congress, President Johnson condemned the violence in Selma and declared his resolute support for voting rights legislation. Yet, since the city government had shifted toward a more accommodating posture, the ferocity of this anti-rights violence is perhaps puzzling.

Several factors explain the severity of this incident. First, economic organizations were divided. The Dallas County Chamber of Commerce was uncommitted to attracting outside investment, and other economic interests in favor of growth and moderation had not yet gained a sufficient measure of political control to keep Clark in check. At the state level, business organizations were just beginning to argue against anti-rights violence, and only belatedly after numerous disruptions had already taken place and the escalation of federal involvement was imminent. Thus, few political gains went to those speaking on behalf of greater moderation.

Secondly, organized segregationists provided political rewards to those who resisted the civil rights movement with greater fervor, and Sheriff Clark depended on these rewards. A central aspect in the analysis of Selma, then, is the distinction between the relatively moderate city police under Baker compared to the county authorities under Clark. Whereas Smitherman appointed Baker, Clark relied heavily upon the political support of the rural hinterlands. In the 1958 primary election for sheriff, "[t]he balloting revealed a deep distrust between county and city residents; Clark carried fourteen of the sixteen rural boxes while eight of the ten boxes carried by Baker were in the city."[36] Although Clark eventually carried a majority in the city, the lopsided two-to-one majority for Clark in the county suggests that business moderates were politically irrelevant beyond the city limits. Not only were business moderates weak in the county, but organized segregationists in these rural hinterlands furnished Clark with strong incentives for persistent intransigence. With the business community divided, extremist opposition to moderation "provided a potent counterweight to the demands of the blacks."[37]

Thirdly, unlike other states, where authorities checked the excessive violence of local police, Wallace and his Alabama state troopers supported and

35. For the detailed argument for this case, see Garrow, *Protest at Selma.*
36. Thornton, "Municipal Politics," 56.
37. Garrow, P*rotest at Selma*, 122.

participated in the brutal suppression of civil rights marchers. In statewide politics, segregationist organizations wielded sufficient political clout to affect electoral outcomes, and business interests had not organized to urge Wallace to adopt a less aggressive stance toward the civil rights movement. Only after the horrific violence at the Edmund Pettus Bridge did the Alabama State Chamber of Commerce and local Chambers advocate compliance with the Civil Rights Act and support voting rights.[38] Despite sporadic general statements against violence, reticent economic actors offered Wallace no encouragement to retreat from his posture of defiance. Although Wallace resented the negative attention following the assault upon the marchers, he did not discipline or dismiss those responsible, as this might have been seen as an acknowledgement of a mistake, "nor would he have wanted to rupture his ties with constituents who viewed the attack on the marchers as appropriate."[39] After federal intervention compelled Wallace to accept the inevitability of the Selma to Montgomery march, he urged Alabama citizens to eschew violence even as he refused to provide the marchers with protection.

Because Clark has attracted most of the historical attention, some important distinctions are seldom made. In many ways, Baker behaved like Pritchett in that he followed procedures to arrest civil rights demonstrators in a nonviolent manner. Typically overlooked is Baker's connection to urban business interests and Clark's electoral reliance on rural black belt whites who were organized and committed to the preservation of white dominance. Despite Smitherman's victory, ardent segregationists continued to have electoral leverage at the county level and the Dallas County sheriff therefore had no intention of making concessions. Thus, the convergence of insufficient capacity of local business interests to contain violent whites and the strength of organized segregationists—against a backdrop of statewide support for intransigence—produced the political conditions that made possible the shocking events on Bloody Sunday.

Jackson, Mississippi

The scale of civil rights protest activity in Jackson, Mississippi resembled that in Atlanta, but state and local politics were quite different. Within Jackson and across the state, organized segregationists were numerous and economic interests offered no leadership to avert anti-rights violence. The Citizens' Council, the preeminent organization of the massive resistance movement, was born in the Mississippi plantation belt in 1954 and rapidly spread throughout the state. Two

38. Garrow, P*rotest at Selma*, 122.

39. Anne Permaloff and Carl Grafton, *Political Power in Alabama: The More Things Change . . .* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 214.

years after its founding, the organization claimed a statewide membership of 80,000. In contrast to the blue collar Klan, the Council boasted the support of the state's "better citizens" including "legislators, judges, mayors, physicians, lawyers, planters, industrialists, and bankers."[40] In addition to the Council, the Klan in Mississippi revived in the early 1960s with the escalation of civil rights protests. At mid-decade, the Klan had three chapters in Jackson, another unit in the same county, and many more across the state. Thus, organized segregationists wielded considerable clout in Jackson, and Mississippi more generally, until the mid-1960s.

For their part, economic interests were either unwilling to speak out in favor of moderation, or they lent their support to militant segregationists. Without organized support for a soft anti-integration position from business, many candidates sought and won office on the promise that they would resist change more strenuously than their opponent. Indeed, as Black demonstrates, candidates who argued that "a calm approach to the segregation issue might be a more effective strategy to limit desegregation than a posture of unrestrained defiance" were regularly defeated.[41] Political support for a pragmatic "businessman in the statehouse" might be possible in North Carolina and elsewhere, but not in Mississippi. Lacking a counterweight against calls for harsh resistance from Councilors and Klan members, few elected officials or law enforcement officers had any interest in punishing whites for reprisals against civil rights activists or supporters.

The chief exception to this pattern of business support for intransigence came after the 1962 white riot against federal marshals at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) following the registration of James Meredith. The battle between thousands of students, Klansmen, roving hatemongers, and bystanders on the one side, and 320 federal marshals on the other, lasted throughout the evening of October 1. The marshals launched canisters of tear gas and "the mob fought with stones, bricks, clubs, bottles, iron bars, gasoline bombs, and firearms."[42] During the night-time battle, in which President Kennedy dispatched the army to intervene, two onlookers were killed and hundreds injured. Following this event, an insurance and television executive denounced the state's political leadership for failing "to stand up and express themselves as being against violence and for law and order." Another 127 business and professional leaders published a statement against "mob rule."[43] However, no statewide business organization came out in a similar manner and no further action was taken after this brief

40. McMillen, *The Citizens' Council*, 27; also see, McMillen, "Development of Civil Rights 1956–1970" in *A History of Mississippi*, vol. 2, ed. Richard Aubrey McLemore (Jackson: University and College Press of Mississippi, 1973), 154–76.

41. Earl Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights: Racial Segregation as a Campaign Issue in the Second Reconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 211.

42. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow,* 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979 [1955]), 175.

43. McMillen, "Development of Civil Rights," 163–64.

assertion of principle. At the same time, "The Mississippi Junior Chamber of Commerce distributed almost a half-million copies of a 24-page pamphlet entitled: *Oxford: A Warning for Americans*, which put the blame for the insurrection squarely on the shoulders of John and Robert Kennedy."[44] Numerous other civic organizations came out in favor of continued defiance as well. Only amid the bloodshed and violence of the Freedom Summer campaign two years later did business interests take decisive action and demonstrate their capacity to transform the tenor of state politics. However, before 1964, the silence of the city and state's business leadership meant that public officials and office-seekers saw few rewards in reining in extremist elements. This convergence of vociferous organized support for the defense of segregation, as well as the dearth of organized business support for moderation, generated conditions that were especially conducive to anti-rights violence.

Thus, during the peak years of civil rights mobilization, intimidation and violence flourished in Jackson as well as across Mississippi. In 1961, sit-in demonstrators in Jackson were met with taunting and beatings. On separate occasions, police with dogs routed protesters at the courthouse and the county fairground. Due to the intervention of the Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Governor Ross Barnett arranged for the nonviolent arrest of the Freedom Riders in 1961. By the end of the summer, some 328 riders had been arrested in Jackson.[45] In 1963, with the backing of local business, Mayor Allen Thompson rejected the NAACP demands for the integration of public facilities and schools as well as the hiring of blacks in city government.[46] Consequently, protest activities rose thereafter and provoked further beatings and an attempted arson of the home of NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers.[47] Threats against activists were common and, on June 13, 1963, Evers was shot and killed from ambush as he returned home in the evening. In response to the slaying, an offer to suspend the demonstrations, and the personal intervention of President Kennedy and the Attorney General, Mayor Thompson agreed to hire six black police officers and eight black crossing-guards and to promote seven black sanitation workers.[48]

Indeed, the utter lack of leadership from state business elites affected the pattern of contention across Mississippi. During the statewide 1964 Freedom Summer campaign, which involved hundreds of white students from the North descending upon the state to register blacks to vote, educate black children, and

---

44. James W. Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1964), 127.

45. August Meier and Elliot M. Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942–1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975 [1973]), 140.

46. *New York Times*, May 14, 1963.

47. *New York Times*, May 29, 1963 and *New York Times*, May 30, 1963.

48. Charles Sallis and John Quincy Adams, "Desegregation in Jackson, Mississippi," in *Businessmen and Desegregation*, ed. Jacoway and Colburn, 236–56, 241.

to expose the outrageous injustices of the Magnolia State, reprisals and violence were commonplace. The list of statewide casualties included: "1000 arrests, 35 shooting incidents, 30 buildings bombed, 35 churches burned, 80 people beaten, and at least six murdered."[49] In Jackson, on several occasions over that summer, arson damaged buildings, activists were beaten and fired upon, and crosses were burned. The statewide figures for this period are likewise illustrative. A survey of the *New York Times Index* from 1961 (the year in which civil rights agitation in Mississippi escalated) to 1965, indicates that the *Times* published nearly 500 stories of anti-rights activity in the Magnolia State for that period.[50] Almost 160, or about one-third of these events, involved violence by white supremacists and law enforcement, including bombings, arson, sniper fire, beatings, and murder—the most notorious incident being the 1964 triple-murder of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner in Neshoba County. Approximately another 50 stories reported acts of police and citizen intimidation of civil rights activists and supporters, such as cross-burning, threats, and verbal taunts. Together, coverage of anti-rights events in Mississippi alone (1961–1965) amounted to over one-quarter of all stories in the *Index* for all 11 southern states.

Although the major campaigns in Birmingham and Selma generated more concentrated media coverage and elicited more dramatic clashes between nonviolent demonstrators and law enforcement, the continuous flow of stories on violence in Mississippi no doubt reinforced the national opinion that civil rights demanded attention. Beginning with the 1963 campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, polling data in this period indicate a sharp increase in the percentage of the public identifying civil rights as the most urgent issue facing the nation. During the summer of 1964, at which time the Freedom Summer campaign was the principal movement operation, 47 percent of the public identified civil rights as the "most important problem confronting the country."[51] One commentator on the Mississippi movement observed: "The attacks on them [Freedom Summer participants] and the black families sheltering them exposed, as no amount of public debate could have, what the Southern way of life meant in Mississippi."[52]

As the costs of racial violence, civil rights litigation, local boycotts, and threatened national boycotts of Mississippi products grew clearer, state business leaders belatedly came out in favor of impartial law enforcement, compliance with federal legislation, and making the concessions necessary to improve the state's image. After the Civil Rights Act of 1964 became law in July, the Jackson

---

49. Woodward, *Strange Career*, 186.

50. Data collected by the author.

51. George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935–1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 1894.

52. Nicolaus Mills, *Like a Holy Crusade: Mississippi, 1964—The Turning of the Civil Rights Movement in America* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1992), 23.

Chamber of Commerce issued a public statement in favor of obedience to the new law.[53] In response, Mayor Thompson went against the expressed position of the governor, the legislature, and his own prior stance, to endorse the Chamber of Commerce statement. For other economic actors, the argument against continued truculence became persuasive only after further violent disruptions during the summer had confirmed fears of declining profit and investment, and the dire effects of negative publicity. On February 3, 1965, the Mississippi Economic Council (the statewide Chamber of Commerce) came out in favor of "order and respect for the law," fair administration of voting laws, support for public education, and compliance with the newly enacted Civil Rights Act of 1964. Others followed, including the Mississippi Manufacturers Association, the Mississippi Bankers Association, and two dozen local chambers of commerce.[54] This shift toward moderation pitted rearguard defenders of the old order, aligned with the Citizens' Council and Delta plantation interests, against urban industrialists, bankers, and others espousing relatively greater willingness to countenance change.[55] This rupture signaled the beginning of a transformation in the racial politics of Mississippi.

With the outpouring of support for the preservation of public order, Governor Johnson staked out a new position. Whereas in 1963 Lt. Governor Johnson had promised the Jackson Citizens' Council to "stand firm . . . to uphold States' Rights and Racial Integrity," nearly two years later in January 1965, Johnson as governor issued a surprisingly stern warning to extremists. "If they believe they can disregard the laws of the state," he asserted in a speech, "they had better think a second time."[56] Appearing before the United States Civil Rights Commission in February 1965, Johnson affirmed that Mississippi would obey the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and appealed to the nation for patient understanding. In another speech in February, Governor Johnson declared that citizen resistance to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would be confined to the courts and affirmed that "violence against any person or group will not be tolerated." Also, after the bloodshed of Freedom Summer and calls from business interests to contain anti-rights violence, steps were belatedly taken to investigate white supremacist organizations and to remove Klansmen from state law enforcement. Although anti-rights violence was not stamped out overnight and public officials were typically satisfied with the merest appearance of accommodation, state policy had shifted in favor of the suppression of violent white supremacists and away from unvarnished

53. On this shift, see Sallis and Quincy Adams, "Desegregation in Jackson, Mississippi."

54. McMillen, "Development of Civil Rights," 165.

55. Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement*.

56. Speech of Lieutenant Governor Paul B. Johnson to the Jackson Citizens' Council, May 17, 1963, Johnson Family Papers, University of Southern Mississippi, Series II, Sub-Series 4: Speeches; Laurence Stern, "Miss. Governor Hits Racial Extremists," *The Washington Post*, January 31, 1965.

extremism.[57] While other studies credit business mobilization for this critical shift away from extremism, seemingly absent is sufficient appreciation for the political implications of the prior inaction of business.[58] Interestingly, the most astute commentary on the ramifications of the political quiescence of business moderates appears not in secondary sources but in a speech by Lt. Governor Carroll Gartin to an audience of business leaders after Freedom Summer:

> Too often business has remained quiet in hours of crisis and in the midst of controversy. They have too frequently failed to take a position; to speak out; to mold public opinion, or, as some would say to stand up and be counted lest they hurt their business or are criticized and, in their failure to speak up—in their silence—they have permitted the more irresponsible among our citizens, the extremists on any side to become the voice of our entire State—of our total population—and the public generally throughout this nation is led to believe that this small voice speaks for our whole State.[59]

The unwillingness of business moderates to "stand up and be counted" during a time of active segregationist mobilization indirectly created the condition for eruptions of anti-rights violence in Jackson and across the state.[60] It was this combination of factors—organized demands for resistance and no effective clamor for the containment of white extremists—that generated the countless incidents of violence, kept civil rights in the national spotlight and, ultimately, helped to reshape southern politics.

Conclusion

In this study, I reinterpret the success of the civil rights movement in three ways. First, I refine the explanation for the national legislative success of the civil rights movement. By combining the backlash thesis with the political mobiliza-

57. Susan Harding, "Reconstructing Order through Action: Jim Crow and the Southern Civil Rights Movement," in *Statemaking and Social Movements: Essay in History and Theory* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1984), 378–402. Arguing that Mississippi suffered from false impressions and unfair press coverage, Johnson announced a "new image" for Mississippi. New image policies involved talking less about the defiance, pinning the blame for violence upon "a few troublemakers" and making the smallest concessions necessary to appear to be making progress.

58. Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945–1980* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); McMillen, "Development of Civil Rights."

59. Central Mississippi Development District. n.d., "Statements of Policy about the Civil Rights Law: as made by Mississippi's Governmental and Business Leadership" (Jackson, Mississippi).

60. Comparable situations of passivity among key economic actors can be found elsewhere. For New Orleans, see Robert L. Crain, *The Politics of School Desegregation: Comparative Case Studies of Community Structure and Policy-Making* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1968). For St. Augustine, see David Colburn, *Racial Change and Community Crisis: St. Augustine, Florida, 1877–1980* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

tion argument, I reveal the causal chain that connects them. That is, the massive eruptions of anti-rights violence that were critical to the national legislative success of the movement were possible only in those places where organized segregationists were active and business interests were either unwilling or incapable of pushing for the containment of white extremists. Instead of merely assuming the violence of the southern reaction to the movement, this analysis provides a useful supplement to the backlash thesis and a rare conceptual bridge connecting the national and local levels of analysis.

Secondly, I substitute business moderation theory with a political mobilization perspective to recast accounts of local struggles against Jim Crow prior to the enactment of substantive federal legislation. Business moderation theory appears valid only under especially favorable conditions in which economic actors are dominant and are without politically threatening opponents. Although fears of declining profit and investment might have prompted business leaders to take action, the likelihood and effectiveness of their mobilization must be considered within a larger political analysis. In other words, an account of indigenous reformism, which the business moderation theory purports to explain, must necessarily include a consideration of the political efficacy of the opposition—organized segregationists in this case. Additional factors that substantially advantage either side may need to be incorporated into a political analysis as well. In any case, only with the inclusion of the political competition between the organized supporters and opponents of change can the diverse outcomes be satisfactorily investigated. Since the civil rights movement brought about a democratic transition in the South, this revision is rich in comparative implications.[61]

Thirdly, the political mobilization perspective used to explain variation in anti-rights violence helps to revise standard historical accounts of the four cases. Revisiting the Albany Movement, the analysis here indicates that this defeat ought not to be regarded as primarily due to the cleverness of a single individual, but as embedded within a political context that was peculiarly lacking economic interests calling for concessions or organized segregationists demanding obdurate resistance. While repeating Atlanta's image as a bastion of business moderation, this investigation draws attention to the striking political impotence

61. The analysis reaffirms the need to place organized business interests closer to the center of studies of contemporary democratic change and peace processes. On the role of business in these phenomena see Craig Charney, "Civil Society, Political Violence, and Democratic Transitions: Business and the Peace Process in South Africa, 1990 to 1994," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41 (January 1999): 182–206; Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, "Peace and Profits: The Globalization of Israeli Business and the Peace Process," in *The New Israel: Peacemaking and Liberalization*, ed. Shafir and Peled (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 243–64; more generally, see Ian Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

of segregationists in the city and the state. Along with business dominance, the political weakness of segregationists encouraged authorities to suppress violent white supremacists and accept the desegregation of many public facilities prior to 1964. By contrast, the strength of organized segregationists in Selma and especially within the surrounding hinterland, as well as the corresponding weakness of accommodating business interests, provided the civil rights movement with a volatile setting for a major campaign. Prior accounts of the decisive civil rights struggle of Selma concentrate on Jim Clark's intemperate personality instead of considering adequately the political processes that brought men like him into office. Whereas Baker embodied the ascendant interests of relatively moderate urban business elements, Clark and the violence he helped to instigate represent the manifestation of the political clout of organized segregationists in the rural hinterland of the county, coupled with support from state authorities. This analysis thus clarifies how the contrasting political rewards divided city and county law enforcement authorities. Finally, the harsh and unchecked violent repression witnessed in Jackson, and across Mississippi more generally, corresponds not only to the well-known strength of segregationist mobilization, but also to the unwillingness of the business community to advocate for the suppression of white extremists.

Like other explanations for social movement outcome, both the backlash thesis and business moderation theory predict success based upon the effective imposition of costs upon movement targets. At the national and local levels, severe anti-rights violence engendered sufficient costs to prompt action. In national politics, southern brutality against nonviolent demonstrators heightened concerns about domestic electoral competition and the fate of the international struggle against the Soviet Union. Within the South, bombings, arson, beatings, murders, and other horrific incidents reduced profits and these losses compelled business interests to clamor for moderation. Although all movements must find methods to impose costs necessary to win concessions, it is perhaps telling that the success of the movement to achieve greater racial equality demanded that participants invite bodily injury and risk death. Without these violent manifestations of southern racism, white Americans seemed comfortable living with profound racial inequities. In explaining the past successes of the civil rights movement, it is worth pondering not only the depth of resistance to the expansion of African-American civil and voting rights, but also the placid tolerance for the persistence of racial injustice.