Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency

Doug McAdam

American Sociological Review, Volume 48, Issue 6 (Dec., 1983), 735-754.

Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-1224%28198312%2948%3A6%3C735%3ATIATPO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-%23

TACTICAL INNOVATION AND THE PACE OF INSURGENCY*

DOUG MCADAM
University of Arizona

The pace of black insurgency between 1955 and 1970 is analyzed as a function of an ongoing process of tactical interaction *between movement forces and southern segregationists. Given a political system vulnerable to challenge and strong internal organization the main challenge confronting insurgents is a preeminently tactical one. Lacking institutionalized power, challengers must devise protest techniques that offset their powerlessness. This is referred to as a process of* tactical innovation. *Such innovations, however, only temporarily afford challengers increased bargaining leverage. In chess-like fashion, movement opponents can be expected, through effective* tactical adaptation, *to neutralize the new tactic, thereby reinstituting the power disparity between themselves and the challenger.*

This perspective is applied to the development of the black movement over the period, 1955–1970. Evidence derived from content-coding all relevant story synopses contained in The New York Times Index *for these years is presented showing a strong correspondence between the introduction of new protest techniques and peaks in movement activity. Conversely, lulls in black insurgency reflect the successful efforts of movement opponents to devise effective tactical counters to these innovations.*

Sociological analysis and theory regarding social movements has tended to focus on the causes of insurgency. By comparison, relatively little attention has been devoted to the dynamics of movement development and decline.[1] This article represents a modest attempt to address this "hole" in the movement literature by analyzing the effect of one factor on the ongoing development of a single movement. It studies the relationship between *tactical interaction* and the pace of black insurgency between 1955 and 1970.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TACTICS AND THE PROCESS OF TACTICAL INTERACTION

The significance of tactics to social movements derives from the unenviable position in which excluded or challenging groups find themselves. According to Gamson (1975:140): "the central difference among political actors is captured by the idea of being inside or outside of the polity . . . Those who are outside are challengers. They lack the basic prerogative of members—routine access to decisions that affect them." The key challenge confronting insurgents, then, is to devise some way to overcome the basic powerlessness that has confined them to a position of institutionalized political impotence. The solution to this problem is preeminently tactical. Ordinarily insurgents must bypass routine decision-making channels and seek, through use of noninstitutionalized tactics, to force their opponents to deal with them outside the established arenas within which the latter derive so much of their power. In a phrase, they must create "negative inducements" to bargaining (Wilson, 1961).

Negative inducements involve the creation of a situation that disrupts the normal functioning of society and is antithetical to the interests of the group's opponents. In essence, insurgents seek to disrupt their opponent's realization of interests to such an extent that

* Direct all correspondence to: Doug McAdam, Department of Sociology, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721.

This research was supported in part by NIMH grant No. 5 ROI MH20006 04 SSR. The grant supported a larger study of insurgency in the 1960s directed by Charles Perrow, to whom goes my deep appreciation as well as much of the credit for this work. I would also like to thank Al Bergesen, Neil Fligstein, Lois Horton, Michael Hout, John McCarthy, Victoria Nelson-Rader, Michael Sobel and two anonymous reviewers for their extremely helpful comments on various drafts of this paper.

[1] I am not alone in noting the relative lack of attention paid to the dynamics of movement development and decline in the sociological literature. Gamson (1975), Piven and Cloward (1977), and Snyder and Kelly (1979) have made similar comments in other contexts. The introduction of resource mobilization and other "rationalistic" theories of social movements, however, has helped focus more attention on the ongoing dynamics of movement development. In the work of such theorists as Tilly (1978), McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977), and others, one begins to discern the outlines of a systematic framework for analyzing not just the emergence but subsequent development/decline of social movements.

the cessation of the offending tactic becomes a sufficient inducement to grant concessions.

Findings reported by Gamson (1975:72–88) support the efficacy of negative inducements or disruptive tactics for many challenging groups. In summarizing his findings, he concludes that "unruly groups, those that use violence, strikes, and other constraints, have better than average success" (Gamson, 1975:87). Piven and Cloward's (1979) analysis of several "poor people's movements" supports Gamson's conclusion. As they note, ". . . it is usually when unrest among the lower classes breaks out of the confines of electoral procedures that the poor may have some influence, for the instability and polarization they then threaten to create by their actions in the factories or in the streets may force some response from electoral leaders" (Piven and Cloward, 1979:15).

In most cases, then, the emergence of a social movement attests to at least limited success in the use of disruptive tactics. To survive, however, a movement must be able to sustain the leverage it has achieved through the use of such tactics. To do it must either parlay its initial successes into positions of institutionalized power (as, for instance, the labor movement did) or continue to experiment with noninstitutional forms of protest. Regarding the latter course of action, even the most successful tactic is likely to be effectively countered by movement opponents if relied upon too long. Barring the attainment of significant institutionalized power, then, the pace of insurgency comes to be crucially influenced by (a) the creativity of insurgents in devising new tactical forms, and (b) the ability of opponents to neutralize these moves through effective tactical counters. These processes may be referred to as *tactical innovation* and *tactical adaptation,* respectively. Together they define an ongoing process of *tactical interaction* in which insurgents and opponents seek, in chess-like fashion, to offset the moves of the other. How well each succeeds at this task crucially affects the pace and outcome of insurgency.

As crucial as this interactive dynamic is, it has received scant empirical attention in the social movement literature.[2] Instead research has tended to focus on the characteristics or resources of either opponents or insurgents rather than the dynamic relationship between the two.

POLITICAL PROCESS AS A CONTEXT FOR TACTICAL INNOVATION

As important as the process of tactical innovation is, it derives much of its significance from the larger political/organizational context in which it occurs. That is, the process only takes on significance in the context of the more general factors that make for a viable social movement in the first place.

Elsewhere (McAdam, 1982) is outlined a *political process* model of social movements that stresses the importance of two structural factors in the emergence of widespread insurgency. The first is the level of indigenous organization within the aggrieved population; the second the alignment of groups within the larger political environment. The first can be conceived of as the degree of organizational "readiness" within the minority community and the second, following Eisinger (1973:11), as the "structure of political opportunities" available to insurgent groups. As necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for social insurgency, both factors are crucial prerequisites for the process of tactical innovation. Indigenous organizations furnish the context in which tactical innovations are devised and subsequently carried out. Such organizations serve to mobilize community resources in support of new tactical forms and to supply leaders to direct their use, participants to carry them out, and communication networks to facilitate their use and dissemination to other insurgent groups.[3] This latter point is especially significant. The simple introduction of a new protest technique in a single locale is not likely to have a measureable effect on the pace of movement activity unless its use can be diffused to other insurgent groups operating in other areas. It is the established communication networks characteristic of existing organizations that ordinarily make this crucial process of diffusion possible.[4]

---

[2] Though hardly a major focus of theoretical attention, the dynamic has at least been acknowledged and discussed by a number of movement theorists. Zald and Useem (1982), for example, apply a similar interactive perspective to the study of the ongoing relationship between movements and the countermovements they give rise to. Such a perspective also informs Tilly's (1978) model of social movements. Finally, elements of an interactive conception of movement development are implied in McPhail and Miller's work (1973) on the "assembling process."

[3] In his analysis of the emergence and spread of the sit-in tactic, Morris (1981) offers a richly drawn example of the organizational roots of tactical innovation. In this case it was the indigenous network of southern black churches, colleges and local movement affiliates that supplied the organizational context essential to the successful application and diffusion of the sit-in tactic.

[4] A possible exception to the rule involves the

But the effectiveness of such organizations and the tactical innovations they employ also depend, to a considerable degree, on characteristics of the larger political environment which insurgents confront. Under ordinary circumstances excluded groups or challengers face enormous obstacles in their efforts to advance group interests. They oftentimes face a political establishment united in its opposition to insurgent goals and therefore largely immune to pressure from movement groups. Under such circumstances tactical innovations are apt to be repressed or ignored rather than triggering expanded insurgency. More to the point it is unlikely even that such innovations will be attempted in the face of the widely shared feelings of pessimism and impotence that are likely to prevail under such conditions. Tactical innovations *only* become potent in the context of a political system vulnerable to insurgency. Expanding political opportunities then create a potential for the exercise of political leverage which indigenous organizations seek to exploit. It is the confluence of these two factors that often seems to presage widespread insurgency.

Certainly this was true in the case of the black movement (McAdam, 1982: see especially Chapters 5–7). By mid-century the growing electoral importance of blacks nationwide, the collapse of the southern cotton economy, and the increased salience of third world countries in United States foreign policy had combined to grant blacks a measure of political leverage they had not enjoyed since Reconstruction. Equally significant was the extraordinary pace of institutional expansion within the southern black community in the period of 1930–1960. Triggered in large measure by the decline in cotton farming and the massive rural to urban migration it set in motion, this process left blacks in a stronger position organizationally than they had ever been in before. In particular, three institutions—the black church, black colleges, and the southern wing of the NAACP—grew apace of this general developmental process. Not surprisingly, these three institutions were to dominate the protest infrastructure out of which the movement was to emerge in the period 1955–1960. It is against this backdrop of expanding political opportunities and growing organizational strength, then, that the emergence of the civil rights movement must be seen.

The confluence of indigenous organization and expanding political opportunities, however, only renders widespread insurgency likely, not inevitable. Insurgents must still define the "time as ripe" for such activity and commit indigenous organizational resources to the struggle. Then, too, they must devise methodologies for pressing their demands. It is only at this point that the process of tactical innovation becomes crucial. For if expanding opportunities and established organizations presage movement emergence, it is the skill of insurgents in devising effective protest tactics *and* their opponents' ability to counter such tactics that largely determine the pace and outcome of insurgency. In the remainder of this article attention will center on this dynamic and its effects on the unfolding of black protest activity in this country between 1955 and 1970.

INSTITUTIONALIZED POWERLESSNESS AND THE POLITICS OF PROTEST

By any measure of institutionalized political power blacks were almost totally powerless in the middle decades of this century. Of the nearly eight and three-quarter million voting age blacks in the country in 1950 only an estimated three million were registered to vote (Berger, 1950:26), in contrast to the estimated 81 percent registration rate for whites in 1952 (Danigelis, 1978:762). While no contemporaneous count of black elected officials nationwide is available, the number was certainly very small. At the national level, only two Congressman—Dawson (R–IL) and Powell (D–NY)—held elective office. Institutionalized political impotence was most extreme for southern blacks. Some ten and a quarter million blacks still resided in the South in 1950, with barely 900,000 of them registered to vote (Bullock, 1971:227; Hamilton, 1964:275). No blacks held major elective office in the region and none had served in Congress since 1901 (Ploski and Marr, 1976). Moreover, with blatantly discriminatory electoral practices still commonplace throughout the region—especially in the Deep South—the prospects for changing this state of affairs were bleak. Yet a scant twenty years later significant change had come to the South. An entire system of Jim Crow caste restrictions had been dismantled. Black voter registration rates had risen from less than 20 percent in 1950 to 65 percent in 1970 (Lawson, 1976:331). The number of black elected officials in the region climbed to nearly 1,900 after the 1970 elections (Brooks, 1974:293). And with the election of

urban riots of the mid to late 1960s. In the case of these loosely organized, more diffuse forms of protest, it is likely that the media—particularly television—served as the principal vehicle of diffusion linking rioters in different cities. Within the same city, however, several authors have noted the importance of indigenous associational networks in the spread of the riot (cf. Feagin and Hann, 1973:48–49; Wilson and Orum, 1976:198).

Andrew Young and Barbara Jordan, black southerners were represented in Congress for the first time since 1901.

The pressure for these changes came from an indigenous movement organized and led primarily by southern blacks. In the face of the institutional political powerlessness of this population it is important to ask how this pressure was generated and sustained. The answer to this question is, of course, complex. However, any complete account of how blacks were able to mount such a successful insurgent campaign must focus squarely on their willingness to bypass "proper channels" in favor of noninstitutionalized forms of protest. Having "humbly petitioned" the South's white power structure for decades with little results, insurgents logically turned to the only option left open to them: the "politics of protest." It was the potential for disruption inherent in their use of noninstitutionalized forms of political action that was to prove decisive.

METHODS

To measure the pace of black insurgency over this period all relevant story synopses contained in the annual *New York Times Index* (for the years, 1955–70) under the two headings, "Negroes–U.S.–General," and "Education–U.S.–Social Integration," were read and content-coded along a variety of dimensions. The decision to restrict coding to these headings was based on a careful examination of the classification system employed in the *Index,* which indicated that the overwhelming majority of events relevant to the topic were listed under these two headings.

To be coded, a story had to satisfy four criteria. It first had to be relevant to the general topic of black civil rights. As a result, a good many other topics were excluded from the analysis, for example, stories reporting the achievements of black athletes or entertainers. Besides this general criterion of relevance, to be coded, synopses also had to be judged unambiguous as to (1) the nature of the event being reported (e.g. riot, sit-in, court decision); (2) the individual(s) or group(s) responsible for its initiation; and (3) geographic location of the event. The former two variables, "type of action" and "initiating unit," figure prominently in the analysis to be reported later.

In all better than 12,000 synopses were coded from a total of about 29,000 read. Coding was carried out by the author and a single research assistant. By way of conventional assurances, intercoder reliability coefficients exceeded .90 for all but one variable. For all variables employed in this article, however, reliability ratings exceeded .95.[5]

BLACK INSURGENCY AND THE PROCESS OF TACTICAL INNOVATION

To assess the effect of tactical innovation on the pace of black insurgency between 1955 and 1970 requires that we be able to measure both insurgent pace and innovation. Two code categories noted in the previous section enable us to do so. The variable, "initiating unit," provides us with frequency counts of all civil rights-related actions for all parties to the conflict (e.g., federal government, Martin Luther King, Jr., etc.). One major category of initiating unit employed in the study was that of "movement group or actor." The combined total of all actions attributed to movement groups or actors provides a rough measure of the pace of movement-initiated activity over time. Figure 1 shows the frequency of such activity between October 1955 and January 1971.

What relationship, if any, is there between tactical innovation and the ebb and flow of movement activity? By coding the "type of action" involved in each reported event, we can compare the frequency with which various tactics were used to the overall pace of insurgency shown in Figure 1. Figures 2 and 3 show the specific activity frequencies for five novel tactical forms utilized by insurgents during the course of the movement.

As these figures show, peaks in movement activity tend to correspond to the introduction and spread of new protest techniques.[6] The pattern is a consistent one. The pace of insurgency jumps sharply following the introduction of a new tactical form, remains high for

[5] For a more complete discussion of the coding procedures employed in this analysis the reader is referred to McAdam, 1982:235–50.

[6] In most cases the protest techniques were not really new. Indeed, most had been employed by insurgents previously. What distinguished their use from previous applications was the adoption of the tactic by other insurgent groups. The extensiveness of the adoption is largely attributable to the dense network of communication ties that had developed between insurgents by 1960. Morris (1981) provides a detailed illustration of the crucial importance of formal and informal ties in the process of tactical diffusion in his analysis of the spread of the sit-in tactic. His analysis merely underscores a fundamental point made earlier: the significance of the process of tactical innovation depends heavily on the organizational resources available to insurgent groups. A well-developed communication network linking insurgents together is perhaps the most critical of these resources.

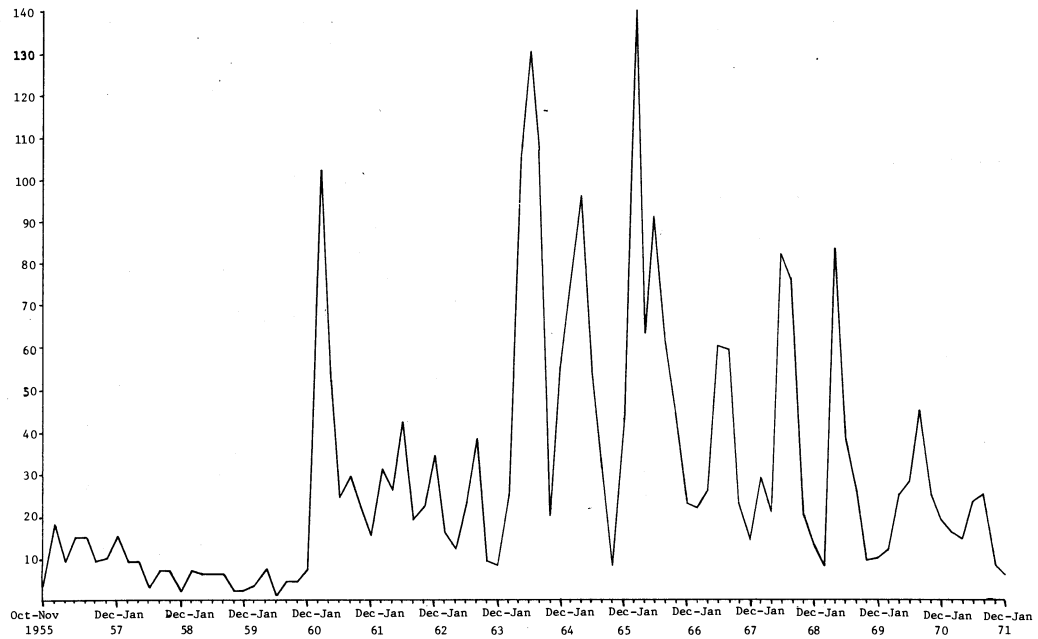

Figure 1. Movement-Initiated Actions, Oct–Nov 1955 through Dec–Jan 1971

Source: *Annual Index* of the *New York Times*, 1955–1971

a period of time, and then begins to decline until another tactical innovation sets the pattern in motion again. A more systematic view of this dynamic is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 reports the use of five specific tactics as a proportion of all movement-initiated actions during each of the first twelve months following the introduction of each technique.

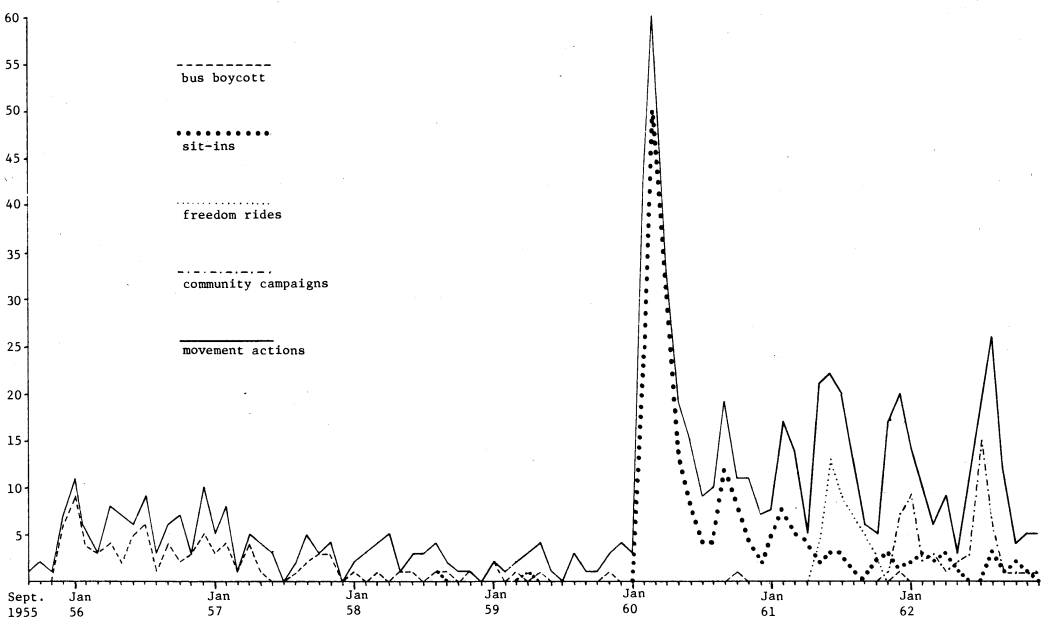

Figure 2. Movement-Initiated Actions, September 1955 through December 1962

Source: *Annual Index* of the *New York Times*, 1955–1962.

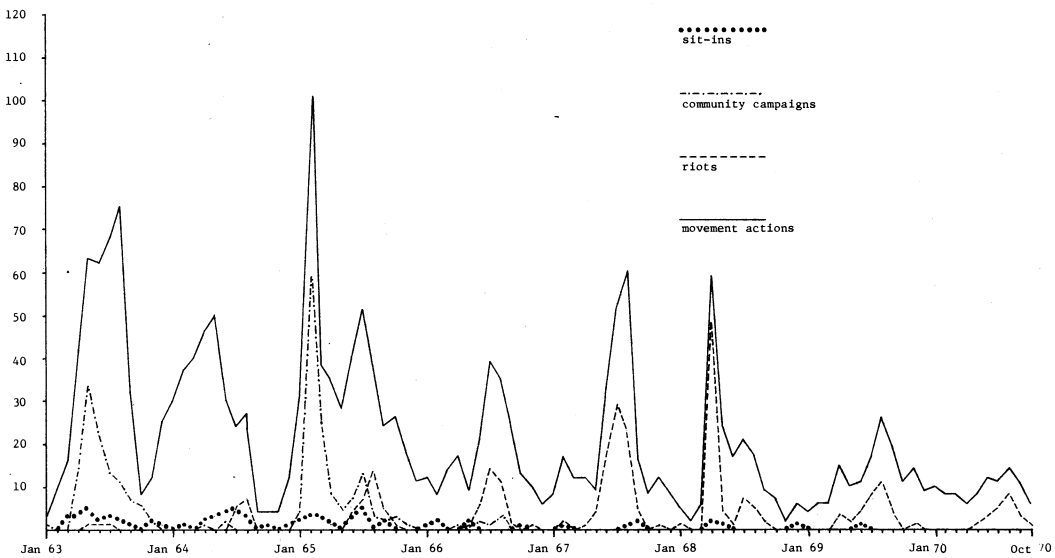

Figure 3. Movement-Initiated Actions, January 1963 through October 1970

Source: *Annual Index* of the *New York Times*, 1963–1970.

As the "Total" column makes clear, the sheer number of actions is highest immediately following the introduction of a new protest form, as is the proportion of all actions attributed to the new technique. Thus, tactical innovation appears to trigger a period of heightened protest activity dominated by the recently introduced protest technique. This is not to suggest that the older tactical forms are rendered obsolete by the introduction of the new technique. Table 1 shows clearly that this is not the case. In only 22 of the 60 months represented in the table did the new tactical form account for better than 50 percent of all movement-initiated actions. On the contrary, tactical innovation seems to stimulate the renewed usage of *all* tactical forms. Thus, for example, the economic boycott, largely abandoned after the bus boycotts, was often revived in the wake of sit-in demonstrations as a means of intensifying the pressure generated by the latter technique (Southern Regional Council, 1961). Then, too, during the community-wide campaign all manner of protest techniques—sit-ins, boycotts,

Table 1. Tactical Innovations as a Proportion of a Month's Activity by Months Since First Use of Tactical Form

Month Since First Use[a]	Bus Boycott	Sit-in	Freedom Ride	Community Campaign	Riot	Total
0	.86 (6/7)	.57 (24/42)	.19 (4/21)	.06 (1/17)	.14 (7/51)	.30 (42/138)
1	.82 (9/11)	.83 (50/60)	.59 (13/22)	.35 (7/20)	.38 (14/37	.62 (93/150)
2	.67 (4/6)	.91 (30/33)	.45 (9/20)	.64 (9/14)	.21 (5/24)	.59 (57/97)
3	1.00 (5/5)	.74 (14/19)	.54 (7/13)	.20 (2/10)	.04 (1/26)	.40 (29/73)
4	.50 (4/8)	.53 (8/15)	.83 (5/6)	.50 (3/6)	.00 (0/18)	.38 (20/53)
5	.29 (2/7)	.44 (4/9)	.60 (3/5)	.11 (1/9)	.00 (0/11)	.24 (10/41)
6	.83 (5/6)	.40 (4/10)	.00 (0/17)	***	.00 (0/12)	.23 (11/48)
7	.67 (6/9)	.63 (12/19)	.05 (1/20)	***	.00 (0/8)	.37 (22/60)
8	***	.73 (8/11)	.00 (0/14)	.79 (15/19)	.00 (0/14)	.39 (24/61)
9	.67 (4/6)	.36 (4/11)	.00 (0/10)	.23 (6/26)	.00 (0/17)	.20 (14/70)
10	.29 (2/7)	.29 (2/7)	.00 (0/6)	.08 (1/12)	.11 (1/9)	.15 (6/41)
11	***	.62 (5/8)	.00 (0/9)	***	.29 (6/21)	.33 (15/45)

[a] Listed below are the months of first use for the five tactical forms shown in the table:

Bus Boycott:	December, 1955
Sit-in:	February, 1960
Freedom Ride:	May, 1961
Community Campaign:	December, 1961
Riot:	August, 1965

*** Fewer than 5 movement-initiated actions.

etc.—were employed as part of a varied tactical assault on Jim Crow. This resurgence of the older tactical forms seems to underscore the importance of the process of tactical innovation. The presumption is that in the absence of the heightened movement activity triggered by tactical innovation the older protest forms would not have reappeared. Their use, then, is dependent on the altered protest context created by the introduction of the new technique.

What of the "valleys" in movement activity shown in Figures 2 and 3? A closer analysis suggests that the lulls in insurgency reflect the successful efforts of movement opponents to devise effective tactical counters to the new protest forms. For a fuller understanding of this interactive dynamic, we now turn to a more detailed qualitative examination of the processes of tactical innovation and adaptation surrounding the protest techniques listed in Table 1.

Bus Boycott

The first such technique was the bus boycott. Certainly the most famous and successful of these boycotts was the one organized in Montgomery, Alabama, (1955–56) by the church-based Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) led by Martin Luther King, Jr. The technique, however, was not original to Montgomery. In 1953 a similar boycott had been organized by the Rev. Theodore Jemison in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

If not the first, the Montgomery campaign was unique in the measure of success it achieved and the encouragement it afforded others to organize similar efforts elsewhere. In a very real sense the introduction of this technique marks the beginning of what is popularly called the "civil rights movement." From extremely low levels of activism in the early 1950s, the pace of black protest rose sharply in 1956 and 1957.

Consistent with the theme of this article, it is appropriate that we date the beginnings of the movement with a particular tactical, rather than substantive, innovation. After all, the specific issue of discriminatory bus seating had been a source of discontent in the black community for years. Repeated efforts to change such practices had always met with failure until the Montgomery boycott was launched. Why did this tactic succeed where all others had failed? The answer to this question lies in the contrast between the institutional powerlessness of southern blacks at this time and the leverage they were able to mobilize outside "proper channels" by means of the boycott. Outside those channels blacks were able to take advantage of their sizeable numbers to create a significant "negative inducement" to bargaining. That inducement was nothing less than the economic solvency of the bus lines, which depended heavily—70–75% in Montgomery—on their black ridership (Brooks, 1974:110). Such leverage was telling in Montgomery and elsewhere.

The U.S. Supreme Court, on November 13, 1956, declared Montgomery's bus segregation laws unconstitutional. Five weeks later, on December 21, the city's buses were formally desegregated, thereby ending the black community's year-long boycott of the buses. During the boycott an estimated 90–95 percent of the city's black passengers refrained from riding the buses (Walton, 1956).

A similar boycott begun on May 28, 1956, in Tallahassee, Florida, did not result in as clear-cut a victory for insurgents as did the Montgomery campaign. Nonetheless, the boycott once again demonstrated the power of widespread insurgent action by blacks. With blacks comprising 60–70 percent of its total ridership, the city bus company quickly felt the effect of the boycott. Barely five weeks after the start of the campaign, the bus company was forced to suspend service. With revenues cut by an estimated 60 percent, it simply was no longer feasible to maintain bus service (Smith and Killian, 1958). Several months later bus service was resumed, thanks to several forms of public subsidy devised by city officials. Still the boycott held. Finally, following the Supreme Court's ruling in the Montgomery case, organized efforts to desegregate Tallahassee's buses were instituted. Despite continued harassment, legal desegregation had come to Tallahassee. Finally, the impact of the Tallahassee and Montgomery boycotts (as well as those organized elsewhere) was felt in other locales. Apparently fearing similar disruptive boycotts in their communities, at least a dozen other southern cities quietly desegregated their bus lines during the course of the Tallahassee and Montgomery campaigns.

As effective as the boycott proved to be, it was in time effectively countered by southern segregationists. The adaptation to this tactic took two forms: legal obstruction and extralegal harassment. The latter consisted of violence or various forms of physical and economic intimidation aimed at members of the black community, especially those prominent in the boycott campaigns. In Montgomery,

> buses were fired upon by white snipers; a teenage girl was beaten by four or five white rowdies as she got off the bus. Four Negro churches were bombed at an estimated damage of $70,000, the homes of Ralph Aber-

> nathy and Robert Graetz were dynamited . . . and someone fired a shotgun blast into the front door of . . . Martin Luther King's home. (Brooks, 1974:119)

Similar responses were forthcoming in Tallahassee and in other boycott cities (Smith and Killian, 1958:13). These incidents had the effect of increasing the risks of participation in insurgent activity to a level that may well have reduced the likelihood of generating such campaigns elsewhere.

These extra-legal responses were supplemented by various "legal" maneuvers on the part of local officials which were designed to neutralize the effectiveness of the bus boycott as an insurgent tactic. Several examples drawn from the Tallahassee conflict illustrate the type of counter moves that were instituted in many southern communities at this time.[7]

- City police initiated a concerted campaign of harassment and intimidation against car pool participants that included arrests for minor violations and the detention of drivers for questioning in lieu of formal charges.

- The executive committee of the I.C.C., the organization coordinating the boycott, was arrested, tried, and found guilty of operating a transportation system without a license. Each member of the committee received a 60-day jail term and a $500 fine, a sentence that was suspended on condition the defendants engaged in no further illegal activity.

- Following the Supreme Court's desegregation ruling in the Montgomery case, the Tallahassee City Commission met and rescinded the city's bus segregation ordinance replacing it with one directing bus drivers to assign seats on the basis of the "maximum safety" of their passengers. Segregation, of course, was deemed necessary to insure the "maximum safety" of passengers.

Though unable to stem desegregation in the long run, these countermeasures (in combination with the extra-legal techniques reviewed earlier) were initially effective as tactical responses to the bus boycotts.

It wasn't just the short-run effectiveness of these tactical responses, however, that led to the declining pace of black insurgency in the late 1950s (see Figure 2). In point of fact, the bus boycott was a tactic of limited applicability. Its effectiveness was restricted to urban areas with a black population large enough to jeopardize the financial well-being of a municipal bus system. It was also a tactic dependent upon a *well-organized* black community *willing* to break with the unspoken rule against noninstitutionalized forms of political action. This point serves once again to underscore the importance of organization and opportunity in the generation and sustenance of protest activity. Given the necessity for coordinating the actions of large numbers of people over a relatively long period of time, the bus boycott tactic made extensive organization and strong community consensus a prerequisite for successful implementation. Tactical innovation may have triggered the boycott, but once again it was the confluence of existing organization and system vulnerability—in the form of municipal bus lines dependent on black patrons—that provided the context for successful insurgency. Not surprisingly, these conditions were fairly rare in the South of the mid '50s. Therefore, truly mass protest activity had to await the introduction of a protest tactic available to smaller groups of people. That tactic was the sit-in.

The Sit-in

According to Morris (1981), blacks had initiated sit-ins in at least fifteen cities between 1957 and February 1, 1960. The logical question is why did these sit-ins not set in motion the dramatic expansion in protest activity triggered by the February 1 episode in Greensboro, North Carolina? The answer helps once again to illustrate the importance of organization and opportunity as necessary prerequisites for the dynamic under study here. First, as Morris's analysis reveals, the earlier sit-ins occurred at a time when the diffusion network linking various insurgent groups had not yet developed sufficiently for the tactic to spread beyond its localized origins. Indeed, within a narrow geographical area the expected escalation in protest activity *did* occur. For example, in August, 1958, the local NAACP Youth Council used sit-ins to desegregate a lunch counter in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Following this success, the tactic quickly spread, by means of organizational and personal contacts, to groups in the neighboring towns of Enid, Tulsa and Stillwater, Oklahoma, and Kansas City, Kansas, where it was used with varying degrees of success (McAdam, 1982:269; Morris, 1981:750; Oppenheimer, 1963:52).

Secondly, the "structure of political opportunities" confronting southern blacks was hardly as favorable in 1957–58 as it was in 1960. Every one of the pre-Greensboro sit-ins

[7] All of the examples are taken from Smith and Killian's (1958) account of the bus boycott in Tallahassee, Florida, and the conflict that stemmed from it.

occurred in "progressive" border states (e.g., Missouri, Oklahoma, Kansas). This is hardly surprising in light of the strong supremacist counter-movement that was then sweeping the South (Bartley, 1969; McAdam, 1982). Between 1954 and 1958 southern segregationists mobilized and grew increasingly more active in resisting school desegregation and the organized beginnings of the civil rights movement. White Citizen Councils sprang up throughout the region and came to exercise a powerful influence in both state and local politics (McMillen, 1971). As part of a general regional "flood" of segregationist legislation, several states outlawed the NAACP, forcing the state organization underground and seriously hampering its operation. But the resistance movement was to peak in 1957–58. Total Citizen Council membership rose steadily until 1958, then fell off sharply thereafter. The volume of state segregation legislation followed a similar pattern, peaking in 1956–57 and declining rapidly during the remainder of the decade. By 1960 a noticeable "thaw" was evident in all regions except the "deep South."

Faced, then, with a more conducive political environment and the dense network of organizational ties that make for rapid and extensive diffusion, it is not surprising that the tactic spread as rapidly as it did in the spring of 1960. The events surrounding the Greensboro sit-in are, by now, well known. There on February 1, 1960, four students from North Carolina A and T occupied seats at the local Woolworth's lunch counter. In response, the store's management closed the counter and the students returned to campus without incident. After that, events progressed rapidly. Within a week similar demonstrations had taken place in two other towns in the state. By February 15, the movement had spread to a total of nine cities in North Carolina as well as the neighboring states of Tennessee, Virginia, and South Carolina (McAdam, 1982). By the end of May, 78 southern communities had experienced sit-in demonstrations in which at least 2,000 had been arrested (Meier and Rudwick, 1973:102).

The effect of this tactical innovation on the overall pace of black insurgency is apparent in Figure 2. From low levels of movement activity in the late 1950s, the pace of insurgency increased sharply following the first sit-in in February and remained at fairly high levels throughout the spring of that year. This dramatic rise in movement activity was almost exclusively a function of the introduction and spread of the sit-in as a new tactical form. Not only did local movement groups rush to apply the tactic throughout the South, but these various campaigns soon stimulated supportive forms of movement activity elsewhere. Sympathy demonstrations and the picketing of national chain stores began in the North. At the same time, the existing civil rights organizations rushed to capitalize on the momentum generated by the students by initiating actions of their own (Meier and Rudwick, 1973: 101–104; Zinn, 1965:29).

Why did the introduction of this tactic have the effect it did? Two factors seem to be crucial here. The first is the "accessibility" of the tactic. Even a small group of persons could employ it, as indeed was the case in the initial Greensboro sit-in. Nor was the tactic reserved only for use in large urban areas, as was the case with the bus boycott. In the South nearly all towns of any size had segregated lunch counters, thereby broadening the geographic base of insurgency.

The second factor accounting for the popularity of the tactic was simply that it worked. By late 1961, facilities in 93 cities in ten southern states had been desegregated as a *direct* result of sit-in demonstrations (Bullock, 1970:274). In at least 45 other locales the desire to avoid disruptive sit-ins was enough to occasion the integration of some facilities (Oppenheimer, 1963:273). These figures raise another important question: *why* was the tactic so successful? At first blush the underlying logic of the sit-ins is not immediately apparent. Certainly the logic of the boycott does not apply in the case of segregated facilities. Given that blacks were barred from patronizing such facilities in the first place, they could not very well withdraw their patronage as a means of pressing for change. Instead they sought to create a very different inducement to bargaining. By occupying seats at segregated lunch counters, insurgents sought to disrupt the ordinary operation of business to such an extent that the effected stores would feel compelled to change their racial policies.

The hoped-for disruption of business was only partly a function of the routine closing of the lunch counter that normally accompanied sit-in demonstrations. Obviously, the revenues generated by the lunch counter were only a small fraction of the store's total income and insufficient in themselves to induce the store to negotiate with insurgents. For the tactic to work there had to occur a more generalized store-wide disruption of business. This, in turn, depended upon the emergence, within the community, of a general "crisis definition of the situation." When this occurred, the store became the focal point for racial tensions and violence of sufficient intensity to deter would-be shoppers from patronizing the store. An example will help to illustrate this point. It is drawn from an eye-witness account of the

violence that accompanied a 1960 sit-in in Jacksonville, Florida. The account reads:

> Near noon on that day the demonstrators arrived at Grant's store . . . Grant's then closed its counters after demonstrators sat-in for about five minutes. The sitters then left. As they proceeded toward other stores, a group of about 350 armed white men and boys began running down the street toward the store. Some Negroes broke and ran. The majority, however, proceeded in good order, until four or five members of the Youth Council also panicked and ran. At this point the mob caught up to the demonstrators. A girl was hit with an axe handle. Fighting then began as the demonstrators retreated toward the Negro section of town . . . A boy was pushed and hit by an automobile . . . By 12:50 only an hour after the first sit-in that day, Police Inspector Bates reported the downtown situation completely out of hand. A series of individual incidents of mobs catching Negroes and beating them took place at this time. (Oppenheimer, 1963:216)

Clearly, under conditions such as these, shoppers are not likely to patronize the target store let alone venture downtown. The result is a marked slowdown in retail activity amidst a generalized crisis atmosphere. This state of affairs represents a two-fold tactical advance over that evident during a bus boycott. First, the crisis engendered by a boycott affected fewer people directly and took longer to develop than did a sit-in crisis. Second, as Oberschall (1973:268) notes, "the cost of the boycott fell heavily upon the boycott participants, many of whom walked to work over long distances. Only after months had passed did the loss of income from bus fares create a financial situation worrisome to the municipal administration." By contrast, the financial cost of the sit-in campaign was felt immediately by the segregationists themselves, making it a much more direct and successful tactic than the boycott.[8]

As is the case with all tactics, however, the impact of the sit-in was relatively short lived. As Figure 2 shows, following the peak in movement activity during the spring of 1960, the pace of insurgency declined sharply in the summer and fall of the year. Part of this decline can, of course, be attributed to the effectiveness of the tactic. Having desegregated facilities in so many cities, there were simply fewer targets left to attack. However, far more important than this in accounting for the diminished use of the tactic was the process of tactical adaptation discussed earlier. Having never encountered the tactic before, segregationists were initially caught off guard and reacted tentatively toward it. Over time, however, they devised tactical counters that proved reasonably effective.

In his thorough analysis of the sit-in movement, Oppenheimer (1963) makes reference to this two-stage phenomenon. He distinguishes between several phases in the development of the typical sit-in. The initial or "incipient state" of the conflict is characterized by "the relatively unplanned reaction to the movement of the police in terms of arrests, by the managers of the stores in terms of unstructured and varying counter-tactics which may vary from day to day . . ." (Oppenheimer, 1963:168). However, through this process of trial and error, movement opponents were able to devise consistently effective responses to the sit-in tactic (and share them with one another) during what Oppenheimer calls the "reactive phase" of the conflict. These responses included mass arrests by the police, the passage of state or local anti-trespassing ordinances, the permanent closure of the lunch counters, and the establishment of various biracial negotiating bodies to contain or routinize the conflict. The latter adaptation proved especially effective. By defusing the crisis definition of the situation, the

[8] Nor was the cost of the sit-ins for the segregationists merely financial. The symbolic consequences were enormous as well. For southern blacks and whites alike the sit-ins served to shatter certain myths that had served for decades to sustain the racial status quo. Southern blacks who had long felt powerless to effect basic changes in "their" way of life were galvanized by the realization that they were in fact doing just that. For their part many segregationists found it increasingly difficult to maintain their long-held invidious moral distinction between blacks and whites as a result of the glaring symbolic contrast evident in the sit-ins. The dilemma is nicely captured by an editorial that appeared in the prosegregationist *Richmond News Leader* on February 22, 1960, in the wake of sit-ins in that city. In part the editorial read:

> Many a Virginian must have felt a tinge of wry regret at the state of things as they are, in reading of Saturday's "sit-downs" by Negro students in Richmond stores. Here were the colored students, in coats, white shirts, ties, and one of them was reading Goethe and one was taking notes from a biology text. And here on the sidewalk outside, was a gang of white boys come to heckle, a ragtail rabble, slack-jawed, black-jacketed, grinning fit to kill, and some of them, God save the mark, were waving the proud and honored flag of the Southern States in the last war fought by gentlemen. Ehew! It gives one pause. (quoted in Zinn, 1965:27)

In accounting for the sit-ins, then, one must consider the symbolic consequences of the demonstrations, no less than the financial cost to the segregationists.

disruptive potential of the sit-in was greatly reduced, resulting in a significant decline in the leverage exercised by the insurgents. Indeed, this must be seen as a general aspect of the process of tactical adaptation regardless of the protest technique involved. All protest tactics depend for their effectiveness on the generation of a crisis situation. Yet prolonged use of the tactic necessarily undercuts any definition of crisis that may have obtained initially. James Laue (1971) has termed this process the "neutralization of crisis." He explains: "crisis tolerances change as communities learn to combat direct action and other forms of challenges. In most cities in the early 1960's, sit-ins were enough to stimulate a crisis-definition, but today they are dealt with as a matter of course and are generally ineffective as a change technique" (Laue, 1971:259). And so it was in the South after the initial wave of sit-ins. As a result, the pace of insurgency dropped sharply and civil rights activists resumed their search for potent new tactical forms.

The Freedom Rides

The tactic that revived the movement was the freedom ride. First used by the Fellowship of Reconciliation in 1947 to test compliance with a Supreme Court decision (Morgan *v.* Virginia, 1946) outlawing segregated seating on vehicles engaged in interstate transportation, the tactic was reintroduced by CORE in May 1961. Prompting its reintroduction was another Supreme Court decision—Boynton *v.* Virginia—extending the ban against segregation in interstate travel to terminal facilities as well as the means of transportation themselves. To test compliance with the ruling two CORE-organized interracial groups left Washington, D.C., on May 4, bound, by bus, for New Orleans. The buses never reached their destination. Following the burning of one bus near Anniston, Alabama, and a savage mob attack in Birmingham, the riders had to fly to New Orleans to complete their journey. Nevertheless, the ride had more than accomplished its original purpose. Not only had it dramatized continued southern defiance of the Supreme Court's ruling, but it also served, in the words of a contemporary analyst, "as a shot in the arm to civil rights groups just when interest on the part of Southern Negro students seemed to be flagging . . ." Oppenheimer, 1963:277).

Figure 2 supports Oppenheimer's assessment. Following the initial wave of sit-ins during the spring of 1960, the pace of movement activity foundered badly. Except for a brief flurry of activity in February–March, 1961, (stimulated, once again, by the introduction of a minor protest technique, the jail-in) the pace of insurgency had dropped to pre–sit-in levels. The initial CORE-sponsored ride changed all this. Inspired by that effort, *and* anxious to capitalize on the momentum it had generated, SNCC activists initiated a second Freedom Ride, which departed from Nashville on May 17. After surviving a mob attack three days later in Montgomery, the second group of riders pressed on to Jackson, Mississippi, where they were arrested and jailed on May 24, on charges of trespassing. Thereafter, the tactic was picked up by groups all over the country. From May to August, separate groups of riders poured into Jackson at the rate of nearly one group a day. By summer's end better than 360 persons had been arrested in connection with the rides (Meier and Rudwick, 1973:140).

In accounting for the impact of the freedom rides one must again point to the ability of insurgents to create a crisis situation of formidable proportions. In this they were helped immeasurably by local segregationists, who responded to the "threat" posed by the rides with a series of highly publicized, violent disruptions of public order. These responses, in turn, prompted a reluctant federal government to intervene in support of the riders. The Justice Department asked a federal district court in Montgomery to enjoin various segregationist groups from interfering with interstate travel; Robert Kennedy ordered 600 marshals to Montgomery to protect the riders; and under administration pressure on September 22, 1961, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued an order barring segregation in interstate travel. Indeed, it seems as if federal intervention had been the goal of insurgents all along. James Farmer, CORE director and chief architect of the rides, described the strategy underlying the campaign: "our intention was to provoke the Southern authorities into arresting us and thereby prod the Justice Department into enforcing the law of the land" (Farmer, 1965:69).

Thus, like the earlier tactics, the rides were used to create a crisis situation. The nature of this crisis, however, was very different from those generated by either the bus boycotts or the sit-ins. In marked the movement's initial use of a protest dynamic whose recognition and conscious exploitation would fuel the heightened pace of insurgency during the period widely regarded as the heyday of the movement. That period begins with the inauguration of John Kennedy as president in January of 1961 and ends with the close of the Selma campaign in May 1965 and the movement's consequent shift to the urban north as a locus of protest activity.

The dynamic in question can be described simply. Impatient with the slow pace of social

change achieved through confrontation at the local level, insurgents sought to broaden the conflict by inducing segregationists to disrupt public order to the point where supportive federal intervention was required. This dynamic again emphasizes the crucial importance of political opportunities in setting the context within which the process of tactical innovation operates. With Kennedy's election, the vulnerability of the federal government to this type of pressure increased enormously. Whereas Eisenhower had owed little political debt to black voters or the Democratic South, Kennedy owed much to both groups. The "black vote," in particular, had been widely credited with playing the decisive role in Kennedy's narrow electoral victory over Richard Nixon the previous fall (c.f. Lawson, 1976:256). Kennedy thus came to office with a need to hold his fractious political coalition together and to retain the support of an increasingly important black constituency. This rendered his administration vulnerable to the "politics of protest" in a way Eisenhower's had never been. Recognition of this vulnerability is reflected in the evolution of the movement's tactics. Whereas the earlier tactics had sought to mobilize leverage at the local level through the disruption of commercial activities, the tactics of the next four years aimed instead to provoke segregationist violence as a stimulus to favorable government action. During this period it was the insurgent's skillful manipulation of this dynamic that shaped the unfolding conflict process and keyed the extent and timing of federal involvement and white opposition. Data presented in Figure 4 supports this contention.

The figure clearly reflects the determinant role of movement forces in shaping the unfolding conflict during the early '60s. In their respective patterns of activity, both segregationist forces and the federal government betray a consistent reactive relationship vis-a-vis the movement. With regard to the first of these groups, the pattern of movement

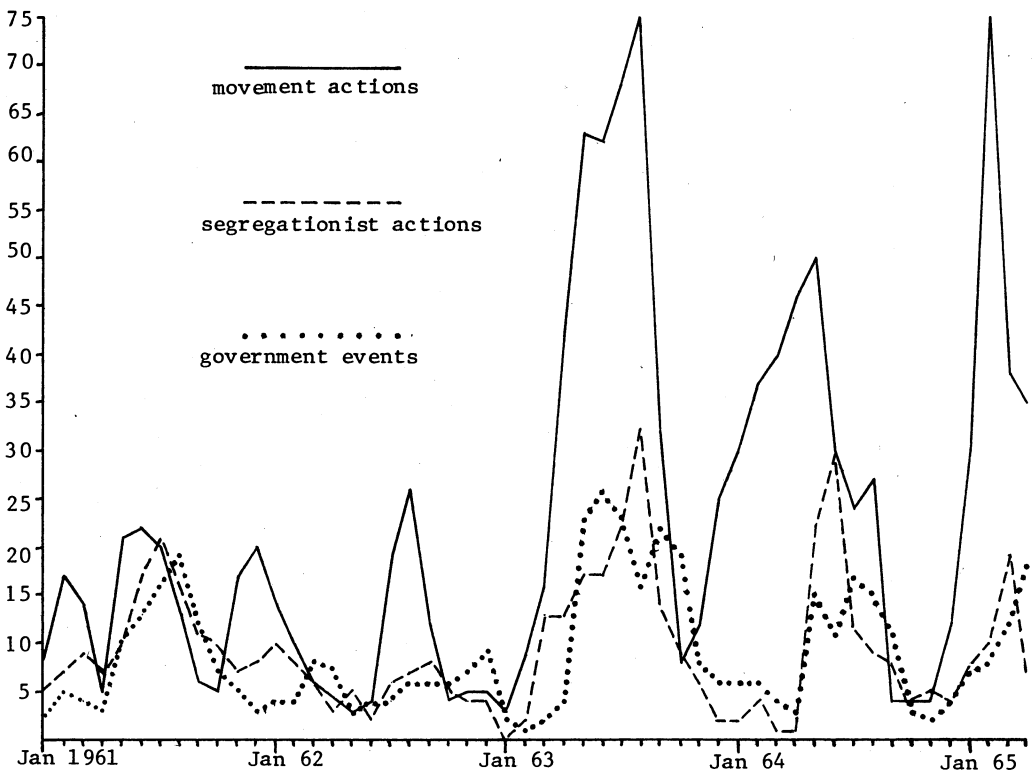

Figure 4. Movement Actions, Segregationist Actions and Federal Government Events, January 1961 through April 1965*

Source: *Annual Index* of the *New York Times*, 1961–1965

*The final eight months of 1965 have been excluded from this figure because they mark the termination of the dynamic under analysis here. In large measure this is due to the shifting northern locus of movement activity.

stimulus/segregationist response noted earlier is quite evident. In Figure 4 peaks in segregationist activity are clearly shown to follow similar peaks in black insurgency.

The relationship between the federal government and the movement is a bit more complex. Government activity is still responsive to the pace of black insurgency, but as expected, much of this responsiveness derives from the ability of the movement to provoke disruptive segregationist activity. This can be seen more clearly through a logit regression analysis intended to assess the effect of a variety of independent variables on the odds of a federal civil rights-related action.[9] The odds were computed separately for each of six tactical forms—bus boycotts, sit-ins, freedom rides, and three community-wide protest campaigns in Albany, Birmingham and Selma. For each of the first seven weeks following the initial use of the tactic (or beginning of the campaign), the number of movement *actions* that were followed the very next week by federal *events* in the same state was recorded.[10] Likewise the number of movement actions that were *not* followed the next week by government events was also noted. The log odds of a movement action being followed by a federal event constitutes the dependent variable in the analysis.

Nine independent variables were utilized in the analysis. Each of the six "tactics" listed above were treated as independent variables. Five dummy variables were created, with "sit-in" employed as the left-out category. Use of sit-in as the omitted category reflects the fact that it had the least effect of any of the tactics on the dependent variable. In addition to these six tactics, three other independent variables were also entered into the analysis. The first was the number of weeks, ranging from 0–6, since the initial use of the tactic. The second was the total number of movement actions during any given week. The final independent variable was the presence or absence of a segregationist *action* during the week following and in the same state as the initial movement action.

As reported in Table 2, the results of the logit regression analysis show clearly that not all of the six tactical forms were equally productive of federal action. Indeed, only three of the tactics showed a significant positive relationship with the dependent variable. Not surprisingly, all of these tactics were employed during the Kennedy presidency rather than the "Eisenhower years." As noted earlier, the tactical forms of the "Kennedy years" were designed to prompt favorable federal action by inducing disruptive segregationist violence. Table 2 reflects the operation of this characteristic dynamic.

Both the pace of movement action and the presence or absence of a segregationist response to movement action are significantly related to the odds of federal action. It is the relationship between segregationist action and the odds of a federal response, however, that is the stronger of the two. Federal activity, then, is still responsive to the overall pace of black insurgency, but as expected, much of this responsiveness appears to derive from the ability of the movement to provoke disruptive segregationist activity. More accurately, then,

---

[9] My use of logit regression was motivated primarily by a concern for the likely heteroskedasticity of my data. For an excellent introduction to the technique and its possible uses see Swafford (1980). The unit of analysis in the logit regression was the first seven weeks following the introduction of each protest tactic. The analysis was based on a total of 84 observations.

[10] In coding story synopses a distinction was made between two general types of movement-related activity. *Statements* referred to any written or oral pronouncements related to the topic of civil rights that were issued by a party to the conflict. *Actions* represented a broad category consisting of all other types of activity *except* for statements. The term *event* was used to designate the total of all statements and actions attributed to a particular initiating unit.

This analysis is based on all *events* initiated by the federal government but only the *actions* attributed to movement and segregationist forces. This convention reflects my conception of the dominant conflict dynamic operative during the early 1960s. Movement and segregationist forces tended to engage in a chess-like exchange of strategic *actions* (e.g., marches, court orders, arrests, sit-ins, beatings) within a localized conflict arena. Much of this local maneuvering, however, was played out for the benefit of federal officials, whose *actions* and *statements* came, in turn, to exert a crucial influence over the course of local events.

A second methodological convention should also be clarified at this point. The decision to lag movement actions one month behind both segregationist actions and government events was made *before* the completion of data collection and was based on my reading of many impressionistic accounts of specific movement campaigns. Those accounts invariably stressed the *delayed reaction* of segregationists to movement activity in their community. Thus, for example, we are told that "Birmingham residents of both races were surprised at the restraint of [Bull] Connor's [Birmingham's notorious chief of police] men at the beginning of the campaign" (King, 1963:69). Once mobilized, however, local segregationists could generally be counted on to respond with the flagrant examples of public violence that made a virtually *instantaneous* federal response necessary.

Table 2. Summary of Logit Regression Analysis of Odds of Federal Action in Relation to Various Independent Variables

Tactic	b	β	F
Bus Boycott	−.344	.132	.681
Freedom Rides	.838**	.155	29.084
Community Campaigns			
Albany	.225	.151	2.206
Birmingham	.806**	.113	50.604
Selma	.854**	.102	69.994
Number of Weeks			
Since First Use	−.744**	.187	15.789
Number of Movement			
Actions	.416*	.150	7.654
Segregationist Response	.593**	.752	62.226
Constant	−1.308	.111	138.401
R^2 .67			

* Significant at the .10 level.
** Significant at the .01 level.

much of the strength of the relationship between federal and movement activity is indirect, with the stimulus to government involvement supplied by the intervening pattern of segregationist activity.

Returning to Figure 4, we can identify four periods that, in varying degrees, reflect this characteristic three-way dynamic linking black protest activity to federal intervention by way of an intermediate pattern of white resistance. The first of these periods, as noted earlier, occurred between May–August, 1961, during the peak of activity associated with the freedom rides.

However, even this tactic was not able to sustain high levels of insurgency indefinitely. By August the pace of the rides, and movement activity in general, had declined dramatically. In this decline we can once again see the process of tactical adaptation at work. Following the two violence-marred rides through Alabama, and the federal intervention they precipitated, law enforcement officials in Mississippi worked hard to prevent any reoccurrence of violence in their state. In effect, they had learned to shortcircuit the dynamic discussed above by failing to respond violently to the demonstrators' tactics. Over time the arrival and arrest of a new group of riders in Jackson took on a fairly routine character. The "crisis atmosphere" that had pervaded the initial rides had again been "neutralized." Fortunately, for insurgents the effectiveness of these counter-maneuvers was negated by the ICC's desegregation order on September 22. The issue of segregation in interstate transportation was dead. Then too, so was the freedom ride tactic and the momentum it had afforded the movement.

Community-wide Protest Campaigns

With the cessation of the freedom rides there again followed a period of diminished movement activity as insurgents groped to develop new protest tactics. The next breakthrough occurred in December 1961 in Albany, Georgia, with the initiation of the first of what might be called the "community-wide protest campaigns." Such campaigns represented a significant tactical escalation over all previous forms of protest. Instead of focusing on a particular lunch counter, bus terminal, etc., insurgents sought to mobilize the local community for a concerted attack on all manifestations of segregation in the target locale. This escalation was a logical response to the routinization of the other protest methodologies discussed previously. Quite simply, the "crisis tolerance" of local segregationists had increased to the point where bus boycotts, sit-ins or freedom rides were no longer sufficient in themselves to generate the leverage required by insurgents. Nothing short of a community-wide crisis would suffice to precipitate the sort of disruption that would grant insurgents increased leverage to press their demands. Indeed, in Albany not even this escalation in tactics was able to achieve significant progress. Yet, over the next three years this tactic was to be refined through a process of trial and error to the point where it was responsible for the most dramatic campaigns of the entire movement.

The Albany campaign took place during the final two months of 1961 and the summer of the following year. Figure 2 again mirrors a rise in movement activity during these two periods. What was absent during the campaign was the pattern of reactive segregationist violence and subsequent federal intervention evident in the freedom rides. Consistent with this view, Table 2 shows only a weak positive relationship between that campaign and subsequent government action. Accounts of the Albany campaign stress the firm control exercised by Police Chief Laurie Pritchett over events there (Watters, 1971:141–229; Zinn, 1962). While systematically denying demonstrators their rights, Pritchett nonetheless did so in such a way as to prevent the type of major disruption that would have prompted federal intervention. To quote Howard Hubbard (1968:5), "the reason . . . [the movement] failed in Albany was that Chief Pritchett used force rather than violence in controlling the situation, that is, he effectively reciprocated the demonstrator's tactics." Even in "defeat," then, the dynamic is evident. Failing to provoke the public violence necessary to prompt federal intervention, insurgents lacked sufficient leverage themselves to

achieve anything more than an inconclusive stand-off with the local segregationist forces in Albany.

The experience of Albany was not without value, however, as the following remarkable passage by Martin Luther King, Jr., attests:

> There were weaknesses in Albany, and a share of the responsibility belongs to each of us who participated. However, none of us was so immodest as to feel himself master of the new theory. Each of us expected that setbacks would be a part of the ongoing effort. There is no tactical theory so neat that a revolutionary struggle for a share of power can be won merely by pressing a row of buttons. Human beings with all their faults and strengths constitute the mechanism of a social movement. They must make mistakes and learn from them, make more mistakes and learn anew. They must taste defeat as well as success, and discover how to live with each. Time and action are the teachers.
>
> When we planned our strategy for Birmingham months later, we spent many hours assessing Albany and trying to learn from its errors. (King, 1963:34–35)

The implication of King's statement is that a fuller understanding of the dynamic under discussion here was born of events in Albany. No doubt a part of this fuller understanding was a growing awareness of the importance of white violence as a stimulus to federal action. As Hubbard (1968) argues, this awareness appears to have influenced the choice of Birmingham as the next major protest site. "King's Birmingham innovation was preeminently strategic. Its essence was not merely more refined tactics, but the selection of a target city which had as its Commissioner of Public Safety, 'Bull' Connor, a notorious racist and hothead who could be depended on not to respond nonviolently" (Hubbard, 1968:5).

The view that King's choice of Birmingham was a conscious strategic one is supported by the fact that Connor was a lame-duck official, having been defeated by a moderate in a run-off election in early April, 1963. Had SCLC waited to launch the protest campaign until after the moderate took office, there likely would have been considerably less violence *and* less leverage with which to press for federal involvement. "The supposition has to be that . . . SCLC, in a shrewd . . . strategem, knew a good enemy when they saw him . . . one that could be counted on in stupidity and natural viciousness to play into their hands, for full exploitation in the press as archfiend and villain" (Watters, 1971:266).

The results of this choice of protest site are well known and clearly visible in Figure 4 and Table 2. The Birmingham campaign of April–May 1963 triggered considerable white resistance in the form of extreme police brutality and numerous instances of segregationist violence. In turn, the federal government was again forced to assume a more supportive stance vis-a-vis the movement. The ultimate result of this shifting posture was administration sponsorship of a civil rights bill that, even in much weaker form, it had earlier described as politically inopportune (Brooks, 1974). Under pressure by insurgents, the bill was ultimately signed into law a year later as the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Finally there was Selma, the last of the massive community-wide campaigns. It was in this campaign that the characteristic protest dynamic under discussion was most fully realized. To quote Garrow (1978:227):

> . . . it is clear that by January 1965 King and the SCLC consciously had decided to attempt to elicit violent behavior from their immediate opponents. Such an intent governed the choice of Selma and Jim Clark [Selma's notoriously racist sheriff], and such an intent governed all of the tactical choices that the SCLC leadership made throughout the campaign. . . .

These choices achieved the desired result. Initiated in January 1965, the campaign reached its peak in February and March, triggering the typical reactive patterns of white resistance and federal involvement (see Figure 4 and Table 2). As regards segregationist violence, the campaign provoked no shortage of celebrated atrocities. On March 9, state troopers attacked and brutally beat some 525 marchers attempting to begin a protest march to Montgomery. Later that same day, the Reverend James Reeb, a march participant, was beaten to death by a group of whites. Finally, on March 25, following the triumphal completion of the twice interrupted Selma-to-Montgomery march, a white volunteer, Mrs. Viola Liuzzo, was shot and killed while transporting marchers back to Selma from the state capital. In response to this consistent breakdown of public order, the federal government was once again pressured to intervene in support of black interests. On March 15, President Johnson addressed a joint session of Congress to deliver his famous "We Shall Overcome" speech. Two days later he submitted to Congress a tough Voting Rights Bill containing several provisions that movement leaders had earlier been told were politically too unpopular to be incorporated into legislative proposals. The bill passed by overwhelm-

ing margins in both the Senate and House and was signed into law August 6 of the same year.

However, for all the drama associated with Selma it was to represent the last time insurgents were able successfully to orchestrate a coordinated community-wide protest campaign. Part of the reason for this failure was the growing dissension within the movement. As the earlier consensus regarding goals and tactics gradually collapsed around mid-decade, so too did the ability of insurgents to mount broad-based community campaigns. "The movement—in the special sense of organizations and leaders working together toward agreed goals . . . fell apart after Selma" (Watters, 1971:330).

But growing internal problems were only part of the reason for the movement's diminished use of this tactic. As was the case with earlier innovations, movement opponents learned to counter the specific tactic and in so doing short-circuit the more general protest dynamic under discussion here. The key to both outcomes lay in the opponents' ability to control the violent excesses of the most rabid segregationists. Through the process of tactical interaction they learned to do exactly that. Von Eschen et al. (1969:229–30) explain:

> The response of the movement's opponents was bound to become less extreme. For one thing, a movement is a school in which both the movement and its opponents learn by trial and error the most appropriate moves. Thus, much of the success of the movement had depended on the untutored, emotional responses of the southern police. In time, however, authorities learned that such responses were counter-productive. In some areas, authorities learned responses sufficiently appropriate to deny the movement its instrument of disorder and to totally disorganize its leadership. In Maryland, for instance, Mayor McKeldin responded to CORE's announcement that Baltimore was to become CORE's target city with a warm welcome and an offer of aid, and the temporary chief of police, Gelston, used highly sophisticated tactics to defuse CORE's strategies.

Finally, the increasing northern locus of movement activity made use of the tactic and the characteristic three-way dynamic on which it depended virtually impossible to sustain. The reason centers on the very different form that white resistance took in the North as opposed to the South.

> One of the functional characteristics of the southern segregationists was that they could be counted on, when sufficiently provoked, to create the violent disruptions of public order needed to produce federal intervention. No such convenient foil was available to the movement outside the south . . . Without the dramatic instances of overt white oppression, the movement was deprived of both the visible manifestations of racism so valuable as organizing devices and the leverage needed to force supportive government involvement. Having developed an effective mode of tactical interaction vis-a-vis one opponent, insurgents were unable to devise a similarly suitable response to the changed pattern of northern resistance. (McAdam, 1982:214–15)

Urban Rioting

The last of the major tactical innovations of the period was the urban riot of the mid to late 1960s. Though by no means the first use of the tactic, the Watts riot of 1965 seemed to inaugurate an era of unprecedented urban unrest (see Downes, 1970:352). In the three years following the Watts riot "urban disorders" increased steadily. The peaks in riot activity shown in Figure 3 for the summers of 1966–68 reflect the spread of rioting during this period.

That there were differences between the riots and the tactical forms discussed earlier should be obvious. Most importantly, no evidence has ever been produced to indicate that the riots were deliberately planned or carried out by specific insurgent groups, as were the other tactics. There is little question, however, that the riots came to be *used* rhetorically by black leaders as a tactic and widely interpreted as a form of political protest within the black community (Fogelson, 1971:17). Then, too, the often noted selectivity of riot targets suggests that at the very least the rioters were animated, in part, by a limited political definition of their own actions.

In addition to their political use and interpretation, the riots share two other similarities with the other protest techniques discussed above. First, all occasioned a significant breakdown in public order. And, except for the bus boycotts and sit-ins, all served to stimulate directly supportive federal action.[11] Evidence to support this latter contention is drawn from a number of sources. For example, Button (1978) documents a strong (though by

[11] This is not to suggest that the bus boycott and sit-ins were unsuccessful. It must be remembered that, unlike the later tactics, the goal of the boycott and sit-ins was not so much to stimulate federal intervention as to mobilize leverage *at the local level* through the creation of negative financial inducements. In this they were largely successful.

no means consistent) pattern of increased federal expenditure for programs benefiting blacks (and poor whites) in 40 American cities following urban riots in those locales. Consistent with the general thrust of Button's work are the data on school desegregation (U.S. Commission of Civil Rights, 1977:18). They suggest a close connection between disruptive insurgency and the pace of federally sponsored school desegregation efforts. Finally, the work of Isaac and Kelly (1981), and Schram and Turbett (1983), among others, argues for a close connection between the riots and the expansion in welfare benefits in the late 1960s.

With use, however, all new tactical forms become less effective, and so it was with the urban riot. After 1965—and especially after 1967—the ameliorative federal response to the riots was increasingly supplanted by a massive control response at all levels of government which was designed to counter the continued threat posed by the disorders. That these efforts had a measurable effect on the actual handling of the riots is suggested by a comparison of data on the 1967 and April 1968 disorders, the latter occurring in the wake of Martin Luther King's assassination.

The first finding of note involves a comparison of the number of law enforcement personnel used in quelling these two sets of disturbances. As shown in Table 3, the force levels used in the 1968 disorders were on the average 50 percent greater than those used the previous year. As Skolnick (1969:173) notes:

> . . .1968 represented a new level in the massiveness of the official response to racial disorder. In April alone . . . more National Guard troops were called than in all of 1967 . . . and more federal troops as well . . . *Never* before in this country has such a massive military response been mounted against racial disorder.

The presence of increased numbers of enforcement personnel facilitated the more thoroughgoing containment efforts desired by those charged with controlling the disorders. As the data in Table 3 indicate, all major indices of official repression, save one, showed increases between 1967 and April 1968. The average number of injuries per disorder in 1968 was nearly 40 percent higher than in 1967. Even more dramatic was the nearly two-fold increase in the average number of arrests between the two years.

In the face of this massive control response, it is hardly surprising that the intensity and pace of movement activity dropped sharply in the final two years of the period under study (Feagin and Hahn, 1973:193–94; Skolnick, 1969:173). Confronted by government forces increasingly willing and able to suppress ghetto disorders with force, and painfully aware of the costs incurred in the earlier rioting, insurgents gradually abandoned the tactic. In effect, the government's massive control efforts had proven an effective tactical adaptation to the riots. Though no doubt sensible, the abandonment of rioting as a form of protest deprived insurgents of the last major tactical innovation of the era. And with the abandonment of the tactic, insurgency once again declined sharply (see Figure 1).

The failure of the insurgents to devise new tactical forms must ultimately be seen as a

Table 3. Comparative Statistics on Racial Disorders During 1967 and April, 1968[a]

	Year 1967	April 1968	Totals
Number of Disorders	217	167	384
Cities	160	138	298
States	34 (+Wash., D.C.)	36 (+Wash., D.C.)	70 (+Wash., D.C.)
Arrests	18,800	27,000	45,800
Avg. No. of Arrests Per Disorder	87	162	119
Injured	3,400	3,500	6,900
Avg. No. Injured Per Disorder	16	22	18
Killed	82	43	125
Property Damage[b]	$69,000,000	$58,000,000	$127,000,000
National Guard			
Times Used	18	22	40
Number Used	27,700	34,900	62,600
Federal Troops			
Times Used	1	3	4
Number Used	4,800	23,700	28,500

Source: Adapted from Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence, "April Aftermath of the King Assassination," Riot Data Review, Number 2 (August 1968), Brandeis University, p. 60. (Mimeographed).

[a] Excluded from the totals reported in this chart are "equivocal" disorders, so termed by the authors of the study because of sketchy information on the racial aspects of the event.

[b] Property damage refers to physical damage to property or loss of stock (usually through looting), estimated in dollars.

response to the shifting political and organizational realities of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Just as the earlier innovations had depended upon the confluence of internal organization and external opportunity, the cessation of innovation can be seen, in part, as a function of a certain deterioration in these two factors. Organizationally the movement grew progressively weaker as the '60s wore on. In the face of the collapse of the strong consensus on issues and tactics that had prevailed within the movement during its heyday, insurgents found it increasingly difficult to organize the strong, focused campaigns characteristic of the early 1960s. Instead, by 1970, insurgent activity had taken on a more diffuse quality with a veritable profusion of small groups addressing a wide range of issues by means of an equally wide range of tactics. Unfortunately, the diversity inherent in this approach was all too often offset by a political impotence born of the absence of the strong protest vehicles that had earlier dominated the movement.

Second, reversing a trend begun during the 1930s, the "structure of political opportunities" available to blacks contracted in the late 1960s in response to a variety of emergent pressures. Chief among these was the mobilization of a strong conservative "backlash" in this country fueled both by the turbulence of the era and the conscious exploitation of "law and order" rhetoric by public officials. When combined with the emergence of other competing issues and the declining salience of the black vote, this "backlash" served to diminish the overall political leverage exercised by insurgents and therefore the prospects for successful insurgency.

SUMMARY

The pace of black insurgency between 1955 and 1970 has been analyzed as a function of an ongoing process of *tactical interaction* between insurgents and their opponents. Even in the face of a conducive political environment and the presence of strong movement organizations, insurgents face a stern tactical challenge. Lacking institutional power, challengers must devise protest techniques that offset their powerlessness. This has been referred to as a process of *tactical innovation*. Such innovations, however, only temporarily afford challengers increased bargaining leverage. In chesslike fashion, movement opponents can be expected, through effective *tactical adaptation*, to neutralize the new tactic, thereby reinstituting the original power disparity between themselves and the challenger. To succeed over time, then, a challenger must continue its search for new and effective tactical forms.

In the specific case of the black movement, insurgents succeeded in doing just that. Between 1955 and 1965 they developed and applied a series of highly effective new tactical forms that, in succession, breathed new life into the movement. For each new innovation, however, movement opponents were eventually able to devise the effective tactical counters that temporarily slowed the momentum generated by the introduction of the technique. With the abandonment of the riots in the late 1960s, insurgents were left without the tactical vehicles needed to sustain the movement. Reflecting the collapse of the movement's centralized organizational core and the general decline in the political system's vulnerability to black insurgency, by decades end the movement had not so much died as been rendered tactically impotent.

REFERENCES

Bartley, Numan
1969 The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Berger, Morroe
1950 Equality by Statute. New York: Columbia University Press.

Brooks, Thomas R.
1974 Walls Come Tumbling Down: A History of the Civil Rights Movement, 1940–1970. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bullock, Henry Allen
1970 "Education: parallel inequality." Pp. 269–79 in Allen Weinstein and Frank Otto Gatell (eds.), The Segregation Era 1863–1954. New York: Oxford University Press.
1971 "Urbanism and Race Relations." Pp. 207–229 in Rupert B. Vance and Nicholas J. Demerath (eds.), The Urban South. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press.

Button, James W.
1978 Black Violence. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Danigelis, Nicholas L.
1978 "Black political participation in the United States: some recent evidence." American Sociological Review 43:756–71.

Downes, Bryan T.
1970 "A critical reexamination of social and political characteristics of riot cities." Social Science Quarterly 51:349–60.

Eisinger, Peter K.
1973 "The conditions of protest behavior in American cities." American Political Science Review 76:11–28.

Farmer, James
1965 Freedom—When? New York: Random House.

Feagin, Joe R. and Harlan Hahn
1973 Ghetto Revolts, The Politics of Violence in American Cities. New York: MacMillan.
Fogelson, Robert M.
1971 Violence as Protest. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
Gamson, William A.
1975 The Strategy of Social Protest. Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press.
Garrow, David J.
1978 Protest at Selma. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Hamilton, C. Horace
1964 "The Negro leaves the South." Demography. 1:273–95.
Hubbard, Howard
1968 "Five long hot summers and how they grew." Public Interest 12 (Summer):3–24.
Isaac, Larry and William R. Kelly
1981 "Racial insurgency, the state, and welfare expansion: local and national level evidence from the postwar United States." American Journal of Sociology. 86:1348–86.
King, Martin Luther, Jr.
1963 Why We Can't Wait. New York: Harper & Row.
Laue, James H.
1971 "A model for civil rights change through conflict." Pp. 256–62 in Gary T. Marx (ed.), Racial Conflict. Boston: Little, Brown.
Lawson, Steven F.
1976 Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944–1969. New York: Columbia University Press.
Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence
1968 "April aftermath of the King Assassination." Riot Data Review 2 (August). Waltham, MA: Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence, Brandeis University.
McAdam, Doug
1982 Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
McCarthy, John D. and Mayer N. Zald
1973 The Trend of Social Movements in America: Professionalization and Resource Mobilization. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.
1977 "Resource mobilization and social movements: a partial theory." American Journal of Sociology 82:1212–41.
McMillen, Neil R.
1971 The Citizens' Council, Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954–1964. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
McPhail, Clark and David Miller
1973 "The assembling process: a theoretical and empirical examination." American Sociological Review 38:721–35.
Meier, August and Elliott Rudwick
1973 CORE, A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942–1968. New York: Oxford University Press.
Morris, Aldon
1981 "Black southern student sit-in movement: an analysis of internal organization." American Sociological Review 46:744–67.
New York Times
1955– The New York Times Index. New York:
1971 New York Times.
Oberschall, Anthony
1973 Social Conflict and Social Movements. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
Oppenheimer, Martin
1963 The Genesis of the Southern Negro Student Movement (Sit-In Movement): A Study in Contemporary Negro Protest. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. University of Pennsylvania.
Piven, Frances Fox and Richard A. Cloward
1979 Poor People's Movements. New York: Vintage Books.
Ploski, Harry A. and Warren Marr II (eds.)
1976 The Afro American. New York: Bellwether.
Schram, Sanford F. and J. Patrick Turbett
1983 "Civil disorder and the welfare explosion." American Sociological Review 48:408–414.
Skolnick, Jerome H.
1969 The Politics of Protest. New York: Simon & Schuster.
Smith, Charles V. and Lewis M. Killian
1958 The Tallahassee Bus Protest. New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.
Snyder, David and William R. Kelly
1979 "Strategies for investigating violence and social change: illustrations from analyses of racial disorders and implications for mobilization research." Pp. 212–37 in Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy (eds.), The Dynamics of Social Movements. Cambridge, MA: Winthrop.
Southern Regional Council
1961 The Student Protest Movement: A Recapitulation. Atlanta: Southern Regional Council.
Swafford, Michael
1980 "Three parametric techniques for contingency table analysis: a nontechnical commentary." American Sociological Review 45:664–90.
Tilly, Charles
1978 From Mobilization to Revolution. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
1977 Reviewing a Decade of School Desegregation 1966–1975. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
Von Eschen, Donald, Jerome Kirk and Maurice Pinard
1969 "The disintegration of the Negro nonviolent movement." Journal of Peace Research 3:216–34.
Walton, Norman W.
1956 "The walking city, a history of the Montgomery boycott." The Negro History Bulletin 20 (October, November):17–20.
Watters, Pat
1971 Down to Now: Reflections on the Southern Civil Rights Movement. New York: Pantheon.
Wilson, James Q.
1961 "The strategy of protest: problems of Negro

civil action." Journal of Conflict Resolution 5:291–303.

Wilson, Kenneth L. and Anthony M. Orum
1976 "Mobilizing people for collective political action." Journal of Political and Military Sociology 4:187–202.

Zald, Mayer N. and Bert Useem
1982 "Movement and countermovement: loosely coupled interaction." Paper presented at Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, CA, September 8, 1982.

Zinn, Howard
1962 "Albany, a study in national responsibility." Atlanta: Southern Regional Council.
1965 SNCC, The New Abolitionists. Boston: Beacon Press.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE, REVITALIZATION MOVEMENTS AND STATE BUILDING: SOCIAL CHANGE IN FOUR NATIVE AMERICAN SOCIETIES*

DUANE CHAMPAGNE
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

This paper discusses two models of social change and several historical conditions and social structural variables in an effort to isolate common factors that underly both the rise of revitalization movements and state building. Data were gathered from state building and revitalization movements in four Native American societies during the 1795–1860 period. The findings indicate that given the conditions of economic and/or political deprivation that led to widespread perceptions of social deprivation, less structurally differentiated societies responded with revitalization movements, while more structurally differentiated societies responded with increased differentiation in sub-macro political and economic institutions. This finding suggests that the Wallace and Parsons-Smelser deprivation models of social change can be synthesized by specification of level of macrostructural differentiation as a precondition that influences type of societal change. State building could not be explained by deprivation and social structural arguments alone; markets that encourage economic class formation were critical to the state-building argument.

The literature on revitalization movements and that on state building are almost mutually exclusive. Here it is suggested that there are some common historical and social structural factors that underly both the rise of revitalization movements and state building. An opportunity to compare revitalization movements and state building presents itself among four indigenous North American societies during the 1795–1860 period. In response to American state expansion and changing market relations, the Cherokee and Choctaw developed state political organizations and agrarian class structures, while social change among the Delaware and Iroquois was strongly influenced by revitalization movements.

Theories of revitalization movements often emphasize conditions of absolute and social deprivation (Thornton, 1981; Carroll, 1975; Barbar, 1941). Political subordination and/or severe economic deprivation may result in social deprivation, a wide-spread dissatisfaction with existing socio-cultural institutions, which are perceived as inadequate to provide ordinary satisfactions of life (Barbar, 1941:664). Social deprivation plays a central role in both the Wallace (1970:191) and Parsons-Smelser (1956:260; Smelser, 1959:15) models of social change. While both models premise that external pressures (i.e., social subordination, wars, etc.) can lead to social deprivation, the predicted outcomes of the two models are quite different. The Parsons-Smelser model predicts increasing structural differentiation if such a change is acceptable to the existing value system (Smelser, 1959:16). Wallace's model predicts social disintegration, or splintering into

* Direct all correspondence to: Duane Champagne, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Box 413, Milwaukee, WI 53201.

I would like to thank Theda Skocpol, Steve Cornell, Lauri Perman, James Ito-Adler and three anonymous readers for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. I would also like to acknowledge writing and research support from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Spivack Dissertation Award, and the Ford Foundation.