

Readings on Social Movements

Origins, Dynamics and Outcomes

SECOND EDITION

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is able to find that when the resistance at one district was strong and a large number of guardsmen in that district was recruited from another district (implying more ties with the people in another district), then the resistance of the other district would also tend to be strong, even if these two districts were spatially remote.

25. Scholars generally agree that the mobilizing structures of a social movement are primarily shaped by the nature of

a state and state-society relations (Kriesi 1996; Rucht 1996; Tarrow 1994).

26. I exclude the Red Guard movement during the 1960s because it was mainly a state-sponsored mobilization.

27. For example, during the 1980s many students preferred to go abroad, to work in better paid foreign and joint venture companies, than to work in the state-controlled public sector.

12.

Black Southern Student Sit-in Movement: An Analysis of Internal Organization

ALDON MORRIS

Scholars of the Civil Rights movement (Zinn, 1964; Oppenheimer, 1964; Matthews and Prothro, 1966; Meier and Rudwick, 1973; Oberschall, 1973; McAdam, 1979) and Civil Rights activists agree that the black Southern student sit-in movement of 1960 was a crucial development. The sit-ins pumped new life into the Civil Rights movement and enabled it to win unprecedented victories. Moreover, the sit-ins exercised a profound tactical and strategic influence over the entire course of social and political upheavals of the 1960s.

Apart from having a jarring impact on race relations, the sit-ins signaled the possibility of militant action at both Northern and Southern white campuses (Haber, 1966; Obear, 1970; Sale, 1973). A critical mass of the early leaders of the white student movement acquired much of their training, organizing skills, and tactics from the black activists of the student sit-in movement (Sale, 1973; Westby, 1976). Thus, the beginning of the white student movement as well as the quickened pace of Civil Rights activity can be traced to the black student sit-in movement.

The sit-ins were important because their rapid spread across the South crystalized the conflict of the period and pulled many people directly into the movement. How is such a "burst" of collective action to be explained? A standard account of the sit-ins has emerged which maintains that the sit-ins were the product of an independent black student movement which represented a radical break from previous civil rights activities, organizations, and leadership of the Black community (e.g. Lomax, 1962; Zinn, 1964; Oppenheimer, 1964; Matthews and Prothro, 1966; Meier and Rudwick, 1973; Oberschall, 1973; Piven and Cloward, 1977).

In the standard account, various factors are argued to be the driving force behind the sit-ins, including impatience of the young, mass media coverage, outside resources made available by the liberal white community of the North, and support from the Federal Government. Although these writers differ over the proximate causes of the sit-ins, they nevertheless concur that the sit-ins broke from the organizational and institutional framework of the emerging Civil Rights movement. The data for the present study do not fit this standard account and suggest that a different account and interpretation of the sit-ins is warranted. The purpose of this paper is to present new data on the Southern student sit-in movement of 1960, and to provide a framework that will theoretically order the empirical findings.

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Theoretical Context and Propositions

Classical collective behavior theory and the recently formulated resource mobilization theory are the major sociological frameworks that attempt to provide explanations of the origins, development, and outcomes of social movements. Classical collective behavior theory (e.g. Blumer, 1946; Turner and Killian, 1957; Lang and Lang, 1961; and Smelser, 1963) maintains that social movements differ substantially from institutionalized behavior. Social movements are theorized to be relatively spontaneous and unstructured. Movement participants are often portrayed as nonrational actors functioning outside of normative constraints and propelled by high levels of strain.

Classical collective behavior theorists do not deny that organizations and institutional processes play a role in collective behavior. Rather, organizations and institutional processes emerge in the course of movements and become important in their later stages. The standard account of the sit-ins fits the collective behavior imagery. Indeed, it can be argued that the diverse proponents of the "standard account" have been unduly influenced by classical collective behavior theory; their account largely ignores the organizational and institutional framework out of which the sit-ins emerged and spread.

The resource mobilization explanation (e.g. Oberschall, 1973; Gamson, 1975; Tilly, 1978; McCarthy and Zald, 1973) of social movements differs markedly from classical collective behavior theory. In this view, social movements have no distinct inner logic and are not fundamentally different from institutionalized behavior. Organizations, institutions, pre-existing communication networks, and rational actors are all seen as important resources playing crucial roles in the emergence and outcome of collective action. In contrast to classical collective behavior theory, organizational and institutional structures are argued to be central throughout the entire process of collective action.

In its present formulation, resource mobilization theory is unclear about the type of organization and resources that are crucial for the initiation and spread of collective action. Some theorists (Oberschall, 1973; McCarthy and Zald, 1973; Jenkins and Perrow, 1977) argue that resources and

organizations outside the protest group are crucial in determining the scope and outcomes of collective action. External groups and resources are argued to be especially critical for movements of the poor. In other formulations of this approach (e.g. Gamson, 1975; Tilly, 1978), emphasis is placed on the important role that internal organization plays in collective action. However, internal organization is but one of several variables (e.g. repression, bureaucracy, opportunity) that are investigated. In my view such an approach fails to capture the degree to which collective action is dependent on internal organization.

This paper focuses on the central function that internal organization played in the emergence and development of the sit-in movement. My analysis suggests that one-sided emphases on spontaneous processes or outside resources can lead to unwarranted neglect of internal structure. A case will be made that the diffusion of the 1960 sit-ins cannot be understood without treating internal organization as a central variable. The analysis will be guided by three propositions.

Proposition 1. Pre-existing social structures provide the resources and organizations that are crucial to the initiation and spread of collective action. Following Tilly (1978), collective action is defined here as joint action by protest groups in pursuit of common ends. This proposition maintains that collective action is rooted in organizational structure and carried out by rational actors attempting to realize their ends. This proposition is central to resource-mobilization theory and has received considerable support from a number of empirical studies (Oberschall, 1973; Gamson, 1975; Tilly, 1975).

Proposition 2. The extent and distribution of internal social organization will determine the extent to which innovations in collective strategy and tactics are adopted, spread, and sustained. This proposition directs attention to a protest group's internal organization—its "local movement centers." A local movement center is that component of social structure within a local community that organizes and coordinates collective action. A local movement center has two major properties. First, it includes all protest organizations and leaders of a specific community that are actively engaged in

organizing and producing collective action. During the sit-ins, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Youth Councils of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and "direct action" churches existed in numerous Southern black communities. A local center within the Civil Rights movement included all these organizations and leaders. Second, a local movement center contains a unit that coordinates protest activities within the local movement and between the local center and other institutions of the larger community. During the Civil Rights movement, a particular church usually served as the local coordinating unit. Through this unit the protest activities of the church community, college community, activist organizations, and their leaders were mobilized and coordinated. Thus, movement centers provide the organization and coordination capable of sustaining and spreading collective action.

Proposition 3. There is an interaction between the type of pre-existing internal organization and the type of innovations in strategy and tactics that can be rapidly adopted and spread by a protest group. This proposition addresses the issue of why a protest group adopts a particular tactical innovation rather than another.¹ Whereas Proposition II maintains that diffusion of an innovation in strategy is a function of the development and spread of internal social organization, Proposition III specifies that certain types of organization are more conducive than others to the diffusion and adoption of certain types of tactical innovation.

In short, the framework for the analysis of the 1960 sit-ins consists of three interrelated propositions. One, collective action is initiated through pre-existing structures. Two, tactical innovation within a movement is a function of well-developed and widespread internal organization. Three, the type of innovation in strategy and tactics which can be rapidly disseminated and sustained is largely determined by the characteristic internal organization of a protest group.

Data

This study of the sit-ins is part of a larger study on the origins of the Civil Rights movement (Morris,

forthcoming). A substantial part of the data were collected from primary sources—archives and interviews with Civil Rights participants. The archival research was conducted at various sites between May and September of 1978.² Thousands of original documents (i.e. memoranda, letters, field reports, organizational histories and directives, interorganizational correspondences, etc.) generated by movement participants were examined. These data contained a wealth of information pertaining to key variables—organization, mobilization, finance, rationality, spontaneity—relevant to the study of movements.

Interviews with participants of the movement constituted the second source of data. Detailed interviews with over 50 Civil Rights leaders were conducted. Interviews made it possible to follow-up on many issues raised by the archival data; and, since these interviews were semi-open-ended, they revealed unexpected insights into the movement. Whenever statements were heard that seemed novel or promising, interviewees were given freedom to speak their piece.

Methods

The strategy for the archival research was straightforward. The researcher examined every document possible within the time allocated for a particular site.³ The main objective was to examine the roles played in the sit-ins by variables associated with Weberian theory and theories of collective behavior and resource mobilization. Following collective behavior theory, I was concerned with the extent to which the sit-ins were spontaneous and discontinuous with established social structure. From Weberian theory I was interested in whether a charismatic attraction between a leader and followers was sufficient to produce the heavy volume of collective action in the 1960 sit-ins. Finally, several issues addressed by resource mobilization theory were of interest. I examined archival sources to ascertain the role of social organization and resources in the sit-ins. Also, I was concerned with whether the leadership, money, and skills behind the sit-ins were supplied by outsiders or by the indigenous Southern black community.

Three strategies were employed in the interview process. First, the researcher attempted to learn as much as possible about the movement from extensive library and archival sources before conducting interviews. This prior knowledge enabled the interviewer to ask specific questions and to assist interviewees in rooting their memories in the social, temporal, and geographical context of their actions twenty years earlier. Prior knowledge enabled the interviewer to gain the respect of interviewees and increased the likelihood that they would approach the interview in a serious manner.

Second, the interviews were semistructured, usually lasting two or three hours. An extended list of questions structured around the variables used in the archival research were formulated beforehand. The interviewees were instructed to feel free to deviate from the questions and to discuss what they thought to be important. Their "diversions" produced new information.

Third, the interview sample was assembled in two ways. While examining the archival material, the names of leaders associated with various activities turned up constantly. These were the initial individuals contacted for interviews. Once the interview process was underway, interviewees would invariably remark, often in response to queries, "you know, you really should speak to [so-and-so] regarding that matter." Subsequent interviews were arranged with many of these individuals. Thus, the snowball effect was central to the sampling process. Although the activists interviewed came from numerous organizations and represented different, if not conflicting, viewpoints, to our surprise they agreed on many basic issues.

Given that the sit-in movement occurred twenty years ago, it is reasonable to wonder whether interview accounts are reliable and valid. Moreover, there is the suspicion that participants might have vested interests in presenting the "facts" in such a way as to enhance their own status. Such problems of recall and vested interest have been minimized in this research because the analysis is not based on any one source. Rather, it is built on an array of published material, archival sources, and accounts of individuals who participated in and were eyewitnesses to the same events. Furthermore, cross

references were made throughout the data collection process. Follow-up phone calls were made to clarify ambiguity and to obtain a comprehensive view of the sit-in movement. It appears that neither of these potential trouble spots produced fundamental defects in the data.

Early Sit-ins: Forerunners

The first myth regarding the sit-in movement is that it started in Greensboro, North Carolina, on February 1, 1960. This research documents that Civil Rights activists conducted sit-ins between 1957 and 1960 in at least fifteen cities: St. Louis, Missouri; Wichita and Kansas City, Kansas; Oklahoma City, Enid, Tulsa, and Stillwater, Oklahoma; Lexington and Louisville, Kentucky; Miami, Florida; Charleston, West Virginia; Sumter, South Carolina; East St. Louis, Illinois; Nashville, Tennessee; and Durham, North Carolina.⁴ The Greensboro sit-ins are important because they represent a unique link in a long chain of sit-ins. Although this paper concentrates on the uniqueness of the Greensboro link, there were important similarities in the entire chain. While other studies (Southern Regional Council, 1960; Oppenheimer, 1964; Matthews and Prothro, 1966; Meier and Rudwick, 1973) have not totally overlooked these earlier sit-ins, they fail to reveal their scope, connections, and extensive organizational base.

The early sit-ins were initiated by direct-action organizations. From interviews with participants in the early sit-ins (Moore, 1978; McCain, 1978; Lawson, 1978; Smith, 1978; McKissick, 1978, 1979; Luper, 1981; Randolph, 1981; Lewis, 1981) and published works (Southern Regional Council, 1960; Meier and Rudwick, 1973), I found that Civil Rights organizations initiated sit-ins in fourteen of the fifteen cities I have identified. The NAACP, primarily its Youth Councils, either initiated or co-initiated sit-ins in nine of the fifteen cities. CORE, usually working with the NAACP, played an important initiating role in seven of the fifteen cities. The SCLC initiated one case and was involved in another. Finally, the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs, working with the NAACP, initiated sit-ins in that city. From this data, we can conclude that these early sit-ins were a result of a multi-faceted organizational effort.

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These sit-ins received substantial backing from their respective communities. The black church served as the major institutional force behind the sit-ins. Over two decades ago, E. Franklin Frazier argued that "for the Negro masses, in their social and moral isolation in American society, the Negro church community has been a nation within a nation" (Frazier, 1963:49). He argued that the church functioned as the central political arena in black society. Nearly all of the direct-action organizations that initiated these early sit-ins were closely associated with the church. The church supplied these organizations not only with an established communication network, but also leaders and organized masses, finances, and a safe environment in which to hold political meetings. Direct-action organizations clung to the church because their survival depended on it.

Not all black churches supported the sit-ins. The many that did often supported sit-ins in a critical but "invisible" manner. Thus, Mrs. Clara Luper, the organizer of the 1958 Oklahoma City sit-ins, wrote that the black church did not want to get involved, but church leaders told organizers, "we could meet in their churches. They would take up a collection for us and make announcements concerning our worthwhile activities" (Luper, 1979:3). This "covert" role was central. Interviewed activists revealed that clusters of churches were usually directly involved with the sit-ins. In addition to community support generated through the churches, these activists also received support from parents whose children were participating in demonstrations.

These sit-ins were organized by established leaders of the black community. The leaders did not spontaneously emerge in response to a crisis, but were organizational actors in the full sense of the word. Some sit-in leaders were also church leaders, taught school, and headed up the local direct-action organization; their extensive organizational linkages provided blocks of individuals to serve as demonstrators. Clara Luper wrote, "The fact that I was teaching American History at Dungee High School in Spencer, Oklahoma and was a member of the First Street Baptist Church furnished me with an ample number of young people who would become the nucleus of the Youth Council" (Luper,

1979:1). Mrs. Luper's case is not isolated; leaders of the early sit-ins were enmeshed in organizational networks and were integral members of the black community.

Rational planning was evident in this early wave of sit-ins. During the late fifties, the Revs. James Lawson and Kelly Miller Smith, both leaders of a direct-action organization—Nashville Christian Leadership Council—formed what they called a "nonviolent workshop." In these workshops, Lawson meticulously taught local college students the philosophy and tactics of nonviolent protest (D. Bevel, 1978; Lewis, 1978).⁵ In 1959, these students held "test" sit-ins in two department stores. Earlier, in 1957, members of the Oklahoma City NAACP Youth Council created what they called their "project," whose aim was to eliminate segregation in public accommodations (Luper, 1979:3). The project consisted of various committees and groups who planned sit-in strategies. After a year of planning, this group walked into the local Katz Drug Store and initiated their sit-in. In St. Louis in 1955, William Clay organized an NAACP Youth Council. Through careful planning and twelve months of demonstrations, members of this organization were able to desegregate dining facilities at department stores (Meier and Rudwick, 1973:93). In Durham, North Carolina in 1958, black activists of the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs conducted a survey of 5-and-10-cent stores in Durham (Southern Regional Council, 1960). The survey revealed that these stores were heavily dependent on black trade. Clearly, the sit-ins initiated by this group were based on rational planning. A similar picture emerges in Sumter, South Carolina and for all the early sit-ins.

Finally, these early sit-ins were sponsored by indigenous resources of the black community; the leadership was black, the bulk of the demonstrators were black, the strategies and tactics were formulated by blacks, and the finances came out of the pockets of blacks, while their serene spirituals echoed through the churches.⁶

Most of the organizers of the early sit-ins knew each other and were well aware of each other's strategies of confrontation. Many of these activists were part of the militant wing of the NAACP. Following

the Montgomery bus boycott, this group began to reorganize NAACP Youth Councils with the explicit purpose of initiating direct-action projects. This group of activists (e.g., Floyd McKissick, Daisy Bates, Ronald Walters, Hosea Williams, Barbara Posey, Clara Luper, etc.) viewed themselves as a distinct group, because the national NAACP usually did not approve of their direct-action approach or took a very ambivalent stance.

These militants of the NAACP built networks that detoured the conservative channels and organizational positions of their superiors. At NAACP meetings and conferences, they selected situations where they could present freely their plans and desires to engage in confrontational politics. At these gatherings, information regarding strategies was exchanged. Once acquainted, the activists remained in touch by phone and mail.

Thus, it is no accident that the early sit-ins occurred between 1957 and 1960. Other instances of 'direct action' also occurred during this period. For example, Mrs. Daisy Bates led black students affiliated with her NAACP Youth Council into the all-white Little Rock Central High School and forced President Eisenhower to send in National Guards. CORE, beginning to gain a foothold in the South, had the explicit goal of initiating direct-action projects. We have already noted that CORE activists were in close contact with other activists of the period. Though these early sit-ins and related activities were not part of a grandiose scheme, their joint occurrences, timing, and approaches were connected via organizational and personal networks.

Sit-in Cluster

Organizational and personal networks produced the first cluster of sit-ins in Oklahoma in 1958. By tracing these networks, we can arrive at a basic understanding of this cluster and a clue to understanding the entire sit-in movement.

In August of 1958, the NAACP Youth Council of Wichita, Kansas, headed by Ronald Walters, initiated sit-ins at the lunch counters of a local drug store (Lewis, 1981). At the same time, Clara Luper and the young people in her NAACP Youth Council were training to conduct sit-ins in Oklahoma City. The

adult leaders of these two groups knew each other; in addition to working for the same organization, several members of the two groups were personal friends. Following the initial sit-ins in Wichita, members of the two groups made numerous phone calls, exchanged information, and discussed mutual support. This direct contact was important because the local press refused to cover the sit-ins. In less than a week, Clara Luper's group in Oklahoma City initiated their planned sit-ins.

Shortly thereafter, sit-ins were conducted in Tulsa, Enid, and Stillwater, Oklahoma. Working through CORE and the local NAACP Youth Council, Clara Luper's personal friend, Mrs. Shirley Scaggins, organized the sit-ins in Tulsa (Luper, 1981). Mrs. Scaggins had recently lived in Oklahoma City and knew the details of Mrs. Luper's sit-in project. The two leaders worked in concert. At the same time, the NAACP Youth Council in Enid began to conduct sit-ins. A Mr. Mitchell who led that group (Luper, 1981) knew Mrs. Luper well. He had visited the Oklahoma Youth Council at the outset of their sit-in and discussed with them sit-in tactics and mutual support. The Stillwater sit-ins appear to have been conducted independently by black college students.

A process similar to that in Oklahoma occurred in East St. Louis, Illinois. Homer Randolph, who in late 1958 organized the East St. Louis sit-ins, had previously lived in Oklahoma City, knew Mrs. Luper well, and had young relatives who participated in the Oklahoma City sit-ins.

In short, the first sit-in cluster occurred in Oklahoma in 1958 and spread to cities within a hundred-mile radius via established organizational and personal networks. The majority of these early sit-ins were (1) connected rather than isolated, (2) initiated through organizations and personal ties, (3) rationally planned and led by established leaders, and (4) supported by indigenous resources. Thus, the Greensboro sit-ins did not mark the movement's beginning, but were links in the chain. But the Greensboro sit-ins were a unique link which triggered sit-ins across the South at an incredible pace. What happened in the black community between the late 1950s and early 1960s to produce such a movement?

Emergence

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Emergence of Internal Organization

During the mid-fifties the extensive internal organization of the Civil Rights movement began to crystalize in communities across the South. During this period "direct action" organizations were being built by local activists. Community institutions—especially the black church—were becoming political. The "mass meeting" with political oratory and protest music became institutionalized. During the same period, CORE entered the South with intentions of initiating protest, and NAACP Youth Councils were reorganized by young militant adults who desired to engage in confrontational politics.

However, neither CORE nor the NAACP Youth Councils were capable of mobilizing wide-scale protest such as the sit-ins of 1960, because neither had a mass base in the black community. CORE was small, Northern-based, and white-led, largely unknown to Southern blacks. Historically, the NAACP had been unable to persuade more than 2% of the black population to become members. Furthermore, the national NAACP was oriented to legal strategies, not sit-ins. Following the 1954 school desegregation decision, the NAACP was further weakened by a severe attack by local white power structures. Members of the Southern white power structures attempted to drive local branches of NAACP out of existence by labeling them subversive and demanding they make their membership public. NAACP officials usually refused to comply with this demand because their members might suffer physical and economic reprisals if identified. NAACP's opponents argued in the local courts that this noncompliance confirmed their suspicion that NAACP was subversive, and the courts responded by issuing injunctions which prevented NAACP from operating in a number of Southern states. For example the NAACP was outlawed in the state of Alabama from 1956 to 1965 (Morris, 1980). This repression forced the NAACP to become defensively-oriented and to commit its resources to court battles designed to save itself. Thus, neither CORE nor NAACP Youth Councils were able to provide the political base required to launch the massive sit-ins of 1960.

Nevertheless, between 1955 and 1960 new organizational and protest efforts were stirring in Southern

black communities. The efforts attracted CORE southward and inspired the direct-action groups in the NAACP to reorganize its Youth Councils. The Montgomery bus boycott was the watershed. The importance of that boycott was that it revealed to the black community that mass protests could be successfully organized and initiated through indigenous resources and institutions.

The Montgomery bus boycott gave rise to both the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The MIA was organized in December 1955 to coordinate the activities of the mass bus boycott against segregated buses and to serve as the boycott's official decision-making body. The MIA was a local church-based Southern organization. Its leadership was dominated by local ministers of Montgomery, with the Rev. Martin Luther King serving as its first president. The dramatic Montgomery boycott triggered similar boycotts in a number of Southern cities. As in Montgomery, these boycotts were organized through the churches, with a local minister typically becoming the official leader. SCLC was organized in 1957 by activist clergymen from across the South to coordinate and consolidate the various local movements. SCLC's leadership was dominated by black ministers with King elected as its first president, and the major organizational posts were filled by ministers who led local movements. Thus, SCLC was organized to accomplish across the South what the MIA had in Montgomery. The emergence of MIA and SCLC reflected the dominant role that churches began to play in confrontational politics by the late 1950s.

The Montgomery bus boycott demonstrated the political potential of the black church and church-related direct-action organizations. By 1955 the massive migration of blacks from rural to urban areas was well underway, and many Southern cities had substantial black populations. The black urban churches that emerged in these cities were quite different from their rural counterparts. The urban churches were larger, more numerous, and better financed, and were presided over by ministers who were better educated and whose sole occupation was the ministry (Mays and Nicholson, 1933; McAdam, 1979; Morris, 1980). Moreover, urban churches were

owned, operated, and controlled by the black community.

These churches functioned as the institutional base of the Montgomery bus boycott. They supplied the movement with money, organized masses, leaders, highly developed communications, and relatively safe environments where mass meetings could be held to plan confrontations. This institutional base was in place prior to the boycott. Movement leaders transformed the churches into political resources and committed them to the ends of the movement. The new duty of the church finance committee was to collect money for the movement. The minister's new role was to use the pulpit to articulate the political responsibilities of the church community. The new role of the choir was to weave political messages into the serene spirituals. Regular church meetings were transformed into the "mass meeting" where blacks joined committees to guide protests, offered up collections to the movement, and acquired reliable information of the movement, which local radio and television stations refused to broadcast. The resources necessary to initiate a black movement were present in Montgomery and other communities. They were transformed into political resources and used to launch the first highly visible mass protest of the modern Civil Rights movement.

The important role of the MIA in the emergence of the modern Civil Rights movement is seldom grasped. As a non-bureaucratic, church-based organization, MIA's organizational affairs were conducted like church services rather than by rigid bureaucratic rules, as in the case of the NAACP. Ministers presided over the MIA the way they presided over their congregations. Ultimate authority inhered in the president, Dr. King. Decisions pertaining to local matters could be reached immediately. Diverse organizational tasks were delegated to the rank-and-file on the spot. Rules and procedures emerged by trial and error and could be altered when they inhibited direct action. Oratory, music, and charismatic personalities energized MIA's organizational affairs. The structure of the organization was designed to allow masses to participate directly in protest activities. The MIA proved to be appropriate for confrontational politics because it

was mass-based, nonbureaucratic, Southern-led, and able to transform pre-existing church resources into political power.

Southern blacks took notice of the Montgomery movement. Activists from across the South visited Montgomery to observe the political roles of the church and the MIA. For example, when Hosea Williams (at the time, an activist associated with the NAACP in Savannah, Georgia) visited the Montgomery movement, he marvelled at its dynamics:

You had had NAACP lawsuits, you'd had NAACP chapters, who had much less than 5% participation anyplace. But here's a place [Montgomery] where they got masses of blacks—they couldn't get a church big enough where they could hold mass rallies. And then, none of them [masses] were riding the buses. I was interested in these strategies and their implementation and in learning how to mobilize the masses to move in concert. [Williams, 1978]

Williams, like countless others, did more than marvel. In his words, "I went back to Savannah and organized the Youth Council and nonviolent movement." Thus, another direct-action organization emerged.

Black ministers were in the best position to organize church-related direct-action organizations in the South. Even while the Montgomery movement was in progress, ministers in other cities (e.g., Steele in Tallahassee, Shuttlesworth in Birmingham, and Davis in New Orleans) began to build mass-based movements patterned after the Montgomery movement: These ministers were not only in a position to organize and commit church resources to protest efforts, they were also linked to each other and the larger community via ministerial alliances. In short, between 1955 and 1960 a profound change in Southern black communities had begun. Confrontational politics were thrust to the foreground through new direct-action organizations closely allied with the church.

SCLC and Movement Centers

The creation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957 marked a critical organizational shift for the Civil Rights movement. The

ministers who organized SCLC were the historic and central institution of the church in black society. The church nurtured and produced spiritual leaders, raised finances, as well as being a major force in black culture. By 1957 these ministers were leading movements in many communities, consciously and explicitly. The church was capable of functioning as a political and institutional vanguard of a mass movement. Hence, they organized SCLC as a church-based protest organization.

Prior to SCLC, the major organization—NAACP—had been a secular organization. Yet, before SCLC was founded, and not the church, functioned as the vehicle through which protest was initiated. In the emergence of SCLC, the critical role was the church itself, rather than the NAACP. To it, began to function as a vehicle of protest.

In 1957 the organizers of SCLC turned to fellow clergymen of the various congregations and communities for support. The remarks of Rev. J. Edgar Hoover, who criticized the action of protest-

After the meeting [SCLC] after the discussion that we had, it became clear to me that we had become a part of the NAACP. So I decided to go on and add some people together and the Nashville Christian I decided to address the same way as we would be addressing. [SCLC]

Hundreds of ministers and churches participated in similar action.

From this collective effort, the SCLC can be conceptualized as local, national, and international. Civil Rights movement, with its following seven characteristics:

1. A cadre of social-conscious leaders and their congregations would become the local, national, and his church would be a unit.

ministers who organized SCLC clearly understood the historic and central institutional importance of the church in black society. They knew that the church nurtured and produced most of the indigenous leaders, raised finances, and organized masses, as well as being a major force in other aspects of black culture. By 1957 these ministers, many of whom were leading movements in their local communities, consciously and explicitly concluded that the church was capable of functioning as the institutional vanguard of a mass-based black movement. Hence, they organized SCLC to be a Southern-wide, church-based protest organization.

Prior to SCLC, the major black protest organization—NAACP—had been closely linked with the church. Yet, before SCLC was created, the NAACP, and not the church, functioned as the organization through which protest was initiated. With the emergence of SCLC, the critical shift occurred whereby the church itself, rather than groups closely linked to it, began to function as the institutional center of protest.

In 1957 the organizers of SCLC sent out a call to fellow clergymen of the South to organize their congregations and communities for collective protest. The remarks of Rev. Smith of Nashville typified the action of protest-oriented ministers:

After the meeting [SCLC organizing meeting] and after the discussion that we had and all that, it became clear to me that we needed something in addition to NAACP. So I came back and I called some people together and formed what we named the Nashville Christian Leadership Council in order to address the same kind of issues that SCLC would be addressing. [Smith, 1978]

Hundreds of ministers across the South took similar action.

From this collective effort resulted what can best be conceptualized as local movement centers of the Civil Rights movement, which usually had the following seven characteristics:

1. A cadre of social-change-oriented ministers and their congregations. Often one minister would become the local leader of a given center and his church would serve as the coordinating unit.

2. Direct action organizations of varied complexity. In many cities local churches served as quasi-direct-action organizations, while in others ministers built complex, church-related organizations (e.g., United Defense League of Baton Rouge, Montgomery Improvement Association, Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights of Birmingham, Petersburg Improvement Association). NAACP Youth Councils and CORE affiliates also were components of the local centers.
3. Indigenous financing coordinated through the church.
4. Weekly mass meetings, which served as forums and where local residents were informed of relevant information and strategies regarding the movement. These meetings also built solidarity among the participants.
5. Dissemination of nonviolent tactics and strategies. The leaders articulated to the black community the message that social change would occur only through non-violent direct action carried out by masses.
6. Adaptation of a rich church culture to political purposes. The black spirituals, sermons, and prayers were used to deepen the participants' commitment to the struggle.
7. A mass-based orientation, rooted in the black community, through the church.

See Figure 1 for a schematic diagram of a typical local movement center.

Most scholars of the movement are silent about the period between the Montgomery bus boycott and the 1960 sit-ins. My analysis emphasizes that the organizational foundation of the Civil Rights movement was built during this period and active local movement centers were created in numerous Southern black communities. For instance, between 1957 and 1960 many local centers emerged in Virginia. Ministers such as Reverends Milton Reid, L. C. Johnson, Virgil Wood, Curtis Harris, and Wyatt Walker operated out of centers in Hopewell, Lynchburg, Portsmouth, and Petersburg. The direct action organizations of these cities were named Improvement Associations and were

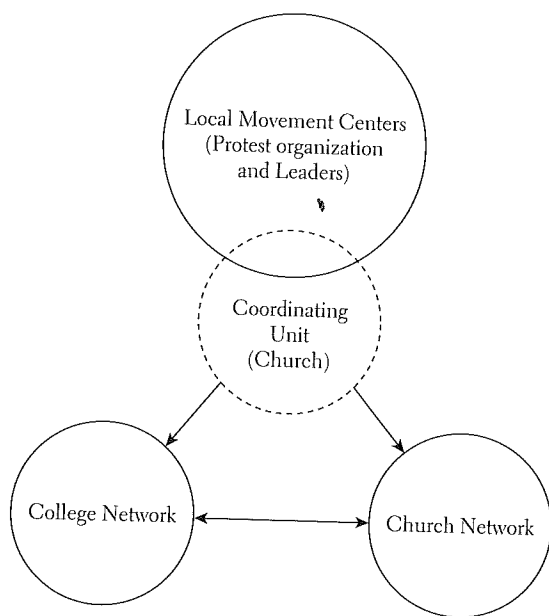


Figure 12.1 Structure of a Typical Local Movement Center

patterned after the original MIA. South Carolina also had its movement centers. For example, in 1955–1956, after whites began exerting economic pressure against blacks desiring school integration, the black community of Orangeburg initiated an economic boycott against twenty-three local firms. This extended boycott resulted in a vibrant movement center led by the Reverends Matthew McCollom, William Sample, and Alfred Issac and their congregations. Movement centers emerged in other South Carolina cities, such as Sumter, Columbia, and Florence, organized by James McCain of CORE and activist clergymen.

In Durham, North Carolina, churches that made up the movement center were Union Baptist, pastored by Rev. Grady Davis; Ashbury Temple, pastored by Rev. Douglas Moore; Mount Zion, pastored by Rev. Fuller; St. Marks, pastored by Rev. Speaks; and St. Josephs, pastored by Rev. Swann. Movement centers were also to be found in cities of the deep South such as Montgomery and Birmingham, Alabama; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Tallahassee, Florida.

So prevalent were these centers throughout the South that when Gordon Carey, a CORE field investigator, surveyed the situation in 1959, he reported:

In some Southern cities such as Montgomery, Orangeburg, Tallahassee, and Birmingham nonviolent movements have been and are being carried on. But most of the South, with its near total segregation, has not been touched. Many places have *felt* the *spirit* of Martin Luther King, Jr. but too often this spirit has not been turned into positive action. [Carey, 1959, emphasis added]

The “spirit” to which Carey referred was in fact the church-based movement centers he found throughout the South, most of which were affiliated with or patterned after SCLC.

Elsewhere (Morris, 1980), I have analyzed how, in the late 1950s, these centers were perfecting confrontation strategies, building organizations, leading marches, organizing voter drives, and radicalizing members of the community. Scholars (e.g., Oberschall, 1973:223) persistently dismiss these centers as weak, limited, and unwilling to confront the white power structure. Yet the evidence suggests a different interpretation. For example, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth and his mass-based movement center continually confronted Bull Connor and the white power structure of Birmingham throughout the late fifties. As a consequence, Shuttlesworth’s home and church were repeatedly bombed.

In short, between 1955 and 1960 many local movement centers were formed and hardened. These centers, which included NAACP Youth Councils and CORE chapters, constituted the new political reality of Southern black communities on the eve of the 1960 sit-ins. It was these structures that were able to generate and sustain a heavy volume of collective action.

The Greensboro Connection

On February 1, 1960 Ezell Blair Jr., Franklin McCain, Joe McNeil, and David Richmond, all students at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, sat-in at the Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Though most commentators mark this as the first sit-in, the four

protesters led in the state. The state had black attorney member of group of other from Duke Durham.

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protesters knew that they were not the first to sit-in in the state of North Carolina. Sit-in activity in the state had begun in the late fifties, when a young black attorney, Floyd McKissick, and a young Board member of SCLC, Rev. Douglas Moore, and a small group of other young people (including a few whites from Duke University) began conducting sit-ins in Durham.

These early Durham sit-ins were part of the network of sit-ins which occurred between 1957 and 1960. The activists involved in the early sit-ins belonged to the NAACP Youth Division, which McKissick headed, and their own direct-action organization called the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs. During the late fifties, McKissick and Moore's group conducted sit-ins at local bus stations, waiting rooms, parks, hotels, and other places (McKissick, 1978). In 1957, Rev. Moore and others were arrested for sitting-in at a local ice-cream parlor. The subsequent legal case became known as the "Royal Ice Cream Case." McKissick, who also headed the local Boy Scout organization, periodically would take the young "all-American" scouts into segregated restaurants and order food. In short, this Durham group persistently confronted the white power structure in the late fifties.

The four students who sat-in at Greensboro and sparked the widespread sit-in movement had been members of the NAACP Youth Council, headed by McKissick. According to McKissick, he knew them all well and they knew all about the Durham activities. Martin Oppenheimer (1964:398), an early historian of the sit-ins, confirms this: "All of the boys were, or at some time had been members of an NAACP Youth Council." Indeed, the four students had participated in numerous meetings in social-action oriented churches in Durham. Involvement with the NAACP Youth Council meant that they were not only informed about the Durham sit-ins, but also knew about many of the sit-ins conducted prior to 1960. Thus, the myth that four college students got up one day and sat-in at Woolworth's—and sparked the movement—dries up like a "raisin in the sun" when confronted with the evidence.

The National office of the NAACP and many conservative ministers refused to back the Greensboro sit-ins. The NAACP's renowned team of lawyers did

not defend the "Greensboro Four." Nevertheless, on the same day they sat-in, the students contacted a lawyer whom they considered to be their friend, and Floyd McKissick became the lawyer for the "Greensboro Four." The network of college students and adult activists had begun to operate in earnest.

Well-forged networks existed between and among black churches and colleges in North Carolina, facilitated by the large number of colleges concentrated in the state. Indeed, ten black colleges existed within a ten-mile radius of Greensboro (Wolff, 1970:590). Interactions between colleges and churches were both frequent and intense; many colleges were originally founded by the churches. A number of North Carolina churches were referred to as "college churches" because they had large student memberships. These two sets of social organizations were also linked through college seminaries where black ministers received their theological training.

These church-student networks enabled activist-oriented students to become familiar with the emerging Civil Rights movement via local movement centers and made it possible for adult activists to tap the organizational resources of the colleges. Leaders of student governments and other campus groups facilitated student mobilization because they, like the ministers, had organizing skills and access to blocs of people. Moreover, the concentration of colleges in the state provided an extensive network of contacts. Fraternity and sorority chapters linked students within and between campuses, as did dating patterns and joint cultural and athletic events. Finally, intercollegiate kinship and friendship networks were widespread, and student leaders were squarely tied to these networks. Similarly, black communities across North Carolina could be rapidly mobilized through the churches, since churches were linked through ministerial alliances and other networks. By 1960 these diverse and interlocking networks were capable of being politicized and coordinated through existing movement centers, making North Carolina an ideal state for the rapid diffusion of collective action.

Within a week of the Greensboro protest, sit-ins rapidly spread across the South. In an extensive study, the Southern Regional Council (1960) reported that between February 1 and March 31

Table 1 Number of Cities with Sit-ins and Related Protest Activities, February-March 1960, by State

State	Number
North Carolina	18
Florida	11
Virginia	9
South Carolina	7
Texas	5
Tennessee	4
Alabama	4
Georgia	2
West Virginia	2
Louisiana	2
Arkansas	2
Maryland	1
Ohio	1
Kentucky	1
Total	69

Compiled from: Southern Regional Council. "The student protest movement, winter 1960." SRC-13, April 1 1960 (revised)

of 1960, major sit-in demonstrations and related activity had been conducted in at least sixty-nine Southern cities (see Table 1).⁷

Beyond Greensboro

As soon as the sit-ins started in Greensboro, the network of movement centers was activated. In the first week of February, 1960, students continued to sit-in daily at the local Woolworth's, and the protest population began to grow. The original four protesters were joined by hundreds of students from A & T College and several other local black colleges. Black high-school students and a few white college students also joined the protest. Influential local whites decided to close the Woolworth's in

Greensboro, hoping to take the steam out of the developing mass-movement. It was too late.

Floyd McKissick, Rev. Douglas Moore, and others who had conducted previous sit-ins formulated plans to spread the movement across the state. They were joined by CORE's white field secretary, Gordon Carey, whose services had been requested by the local NAACP president. Carey arrived in Durham from New York on February the 7th and went directly to McKissick's home, where the sit-ins were being planned. Carey was a good choice because he had knowledge of nonviolent resistance and because of his earlier contact with movement centers in Southern black communities.

On February 8th—exactly one week after the Greensboro sit-ins—the demonstrations spread to nearby Durham and Winston-Salem. McKissick, Moore, Carey, and others helped organize these sit-ins, bringing students from the local colleges to churches where they were trained to conduct sit-ins. For example, the Durham students were trained at the same churches through which McKissick and Moore had planned direct action in the late 1950s. Following training and strategy sessions, the students went to the local lunch counters and sat-in.

The organizing effort was not limited to these two nearby cities. Within the first week of the Greensboro sit-in, McKissick, Carey, and Rev. Moore made contact with activists in movement centers throughout North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, urging them to train students for sit-ins. They not only phoned these activists, but traveled to various cities to provide assistance. Upon arrival they often found sit-in planning sessions already underway. According to Carey (1978), "when we reached these cities we went directly to the movement oriented churches." When asked why, Carey replied, "Well, that's where the protest activities were being planned and organized." Thus, these sit-ins were largely organized at the movement churches rather than on the campuses. To understand the sit-in movement, one must abandon the assumption that it was a collegiate phenomenon. For different reasons, Rev. Moore attempted to convey this same idea in the early days of the sit-ins: "If Woolworth and other stores think this is just another panty raid, they haven't had their sociologists in the field

recently" (Moore, 1978, p. 100). In the context of organized

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The mover border states and Virginia leader of the center, happe

recently" (Moore, 1960). The sit-ins grew out of a context of organized movement centers.

As anticipated above, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was central to the rise of the 1960 sit-in movement. It is critical to remember that when Rev. Moore and other organizers visited churches in North and South Carolina and Virginia, they discovered that church leaders were already training students for sit-ins. Speaking of the ministers who headed these movement churches, Carey (1978) reported, "All of these ministers were active in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. At least 75% were getting inspiration from King." Additionally, these ministers had contacts with and often were leaders of both CORE and the activist wing of the NAACP.

Since the movement centers were already in place, they served as both receiving and transmitting "antennas" for the sit-ins. As receivers they gathered information of the sit-ins, and as transmitters they rebroadcast information throughout the networks. Because this internal network already existed, information was rapidly channeled to groups prepared to engage in nonviolent collective action.

During the second week of February 1960, plans were formulated to conduct sit-ins in a number of Southern cities. Communication and coordination between the cities was intensified. For example, early in the second week of February, the Rev. B. Elton Cox of High Point, North Carolina, and Rev. C. A. Ivory of Rock Hill, South Carolina, phoned McKissick and other leaders, informing them that their groups were "ready to go" (McKissick, 1978). Cox's group sat-in on February 11th and Ivory's on February 12th. Rev. Ivory organized and directed the Rock Hill sit-ins from his wheelchair. Within the week, sit-ins were being conducted in several cities in Virginia, most of them organized through the dense network of SCLC movement centers in that state (Southern Regional Council, 1960; Walker, 1978).

The movement hot lines reached far beyond the border states of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, an active leader of the Birmingham, Alabama, movement center, happened to be in North Carolina when the

first wave of sit-ins occurred, fulfilling a speaking engagement for the leader of the High Point sit-ins—Rev. Cox. According to Shuttlesworth, "He [Rev. Cox] carried me by where these people were going to sit-in... I called back to Atlanta, and told Ella [Baker] what was going on. I said, 'this is the thing. You must tell Martin [King] that we must get with this, and really this can shake up the world'" (Shuttlesworth, 1978). Baker, the Executive Director of SCLC, immediately began calling her contacts at various colleges, asking them, "What are you all going to do? It is time to move" (Baker, 1978).

Carey and Rev. Moore phoned the movement center in Nashville, Tennessee, and asked Rev. Lawson if they were ready to move. The student and church communities coordinated by the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference answered in the affirmative. According to Lawson,

Of course there was organizing because after the sit-in, the first one in February, people like Doug Moore, Ella Baker, myself, did call around to places that we knew, said, 'Can you start? Are you ready? Can you go? And how can we help you? So there was some of that too that went on. Even there the sit-in movement did not just spread spontaneously. I mean there was a readiness. And then there were, there were phone calls that went out to various communities where we knew people and where we knew student groups and where we knew minister groups, and said, you know, 'this is it, let's go.' [Lawson, 1978]

When asked, "Why did the student sit-in movement occur?" Lawson replied,

Because King and the Montgomery boycott and the whole development of that leadership that clustered around King had emerged and was ready and was preaching and teaching direct action, nonviolent action, and was clearly ready to act, ready to seed any movement that needed sustenance and growth. So there was... in other words, the soil had been prepared. [Lawson, 1978]

These data provide insight into how a political movement can rapidly spread between geographically distant communities. The sit-ins spread across the South in a short period of time because activists, working through local movement centers,

planned, coordinated, and sustained them. They spread despite the swinging billy clubs of policemen, despite Ku Klux Klansmen, white mobs, murderers, tear gas, and economic reprisals (Southern Regional Council, 1960; Matthews and Prothro, 1966; Oberschall, 1973). The pre-existing movement centers provided the resources and organization required to sustain the sit-ins in the face of opposition.

Sit-in Clusters of 1960

The organizational and personal networks that produced the first cluster of sit-ins in Oklahoma in 1958 have already been described. The cluster concept can be applied to the entire set of sit-ins of February and March 1960. Many of the cities where sit-ins occurred can be grouped by geographic and temporal proximity. A cluster is defined as two or more cities within 75 miles of each other where sit-in activity took place within a span of 14 days. In Table 2, forty-one of the sixty-nine cities having sit-ins during this two-month period have been grouped because they meet these criteria. Within this period 59% of the cities that had sit-ins and related activity were part of clusters. The percentage of these cities forming sit-in clusters is even more striking in the first month: during February, 76% of cities having sit-ins were part of clusters, while during March the percentage dropped to 44%.

The clustering differentials between the two months can be explained by taking region into account as shown in Table 3. In the first month (February) 85% of the cities having sit-ins were located in Southeastern and border states. This pattern had been established earlier, when most of the pre-1960 sit-ins occurred in border states. Most of the February sit-ins took place in cities of border states because repression against blacks was not as severe there as in the deep South. This made it possible for activists in border states to build dense networks of movement centers. We have already seen that North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia had numerous social-action churches and direct-action organizations. By the time the sit-ins occurred in Virginia, SCLC had affiliates throughout the state, and Rev. Wyatt

Walker, who was the leader of Virginia's movement centers, was also the state Director of CORE and President of the local NAACP. Similar patterns existed in the other border states. Small wonder that in the month of February, 73% of cities having sit-ins were located in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Similarly, these cities produced 88% of the February clusters. This clustering reflected both the great density of movement centers and a system of domination less stringent than that of the deep South.

Table 3 reveals that in March a major change took place: the majority of the sit-ins occurred in cities of the deep South. With a few exceptions, the sit-ins in the deep South did not occur in clusters. They occurred almost exclusively in Southern cities where movement centers were already established: Montgomery and Birmingham, Alabama; Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana; Tallahassee, Florida; Nashville and Memphis, Tennessee; and Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia. Repression would have been too great on student protesters operating outside of the protection of such centers in the deep South. Thus, the decrease in clustering in the deep South reflected both the high level of repression and the absence of dense networks of movement centers. Focusing on the internal movement centers enables us to explain both the clustering phenomenon and its absence.

Given the large proportion of sit-ins occurring in clusters, we can say that they did not spread randomly. The clusters represented the social and temporal space in which sit-ins were organized, coordinated, spread, and financed by the black community.⁸ Within these clusters, cars filled with organizers from SCLC, NAACP, and CORE raced between sit-in points relaying valuable information. Telephone lines and the community "grapevine" sent forth protest instructions and plans. These clusters were the sites of numerous midday and late night meetings where the black community assembled in the churches, filled the collection plates, and vowed to mortgage their homes to raise the necessary bail-bond money in case the protesting students were jailed. Black lawyers pledged their legal services to the movement and black physicians made their services available to injured

Table 2 Clusters

Cluster
Fayetteville, Raleigh
Tampa, St. Petersburg
Montgomery, Tuscaloosa
Columbia, Florence
Austin, San Antonio
Salisbury, Shelby
Wilmington, New York
Charlotte, N.C.
Durham, Winston-Salem
Chapel Hill, Herndon
Jacksonville, St. Augustine
Charleston, Orangeburg
Daytona Beach, Gainesville
Houston, Galveston
Richmond, Petersburg
Hampton, Norfolk
Newport News

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Table 2 Clusters of Cities with Sit-ins and Related Activities, February–March 1960

Cluster	Number of days between first sit-ins within cluster	Maximum number of miles between farthest two cities within cluster
Fayetteville, Raleigh, N.C. (2/9/60–2/10/60)	1	50
Tampa, St. Petersburg, Sarasota, Fla. (2/29/60–3/2/60)	2	50
Montgomery, Tuskegee, Ala. (2/25/60–2/27/60)	2	25
Columbia, Florence, Sumter, S.C. (3/2/60–3/4/60)	2	70
Austin, San Antonio, Tx. (3/11/60–3/13/60)	2	75
Salisbury, Shelby, N.C. (2/16/60–2/18/60)	2	60
Wilmington, New Bern, N.C. (3/17/60–3/19/60)	2	75
Charlotte, N.C., Concord, Rock Hill, S.C. (2/9/60–2/12/60)	3	50
Durham, Winston-Salem, High Point, N.C. (2/8/60–2/11/60)	3	75
Chapel Hill, Henderson, N.C. (2/25/60–2/28/60)	3	50
Jacksonville, St. Augustine, Fla. (3/12/60–3/15/60)	3	40
Charleston, Orangeburg, Denmark, S.C. (2/25/60–2/29/60)	4	70
Daytona Beach, Sanford, Orlando, Fla. (3/2/60–3/7/60)	5	54
Houston, Galveston, Tx. (3/5/60–3/11/60)	6	65
Richmond, Petersburg, Va. (2/20/60–2/27/60)	7	30
Hampton, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Newport News (2/11/60–2/22/60)	11	35

Compiled from: Southern Regional Council. "The student protest movement, winter 1960." SRC-13, April 1 1960

demonstrators. Amidst these exciting scenes, black spirituals that had grown out of slavery calmed and deepened the participants' commitment. A detailed view of the Nashville sit-ins provides an example of these dynamics, because the Nashville movement epitomized the sit-ins whether they occurred singularly or in clusters.

The Nashville Sit-in Movement

A well-developed, church-based movement center headed by Rev. Kelly Miller Smith was organized in Nashville during the late 1950s. The center, an affiliate of SCLC, was called the Nashville Christian

Leadership Council (NCLC). Rev. James Lawson, an expert tactician of nonviolent protest, was in charge of NCLC's directaction committee. Lawson received a call from Rev. Douglas Moore about two days after the Greensboro sit-ins began. The Nashville group was ready to act because a cadre of students had already received training in non-violent direct action. They had conducted "test sit-ins" in two large department stores in downtown Nashville prior to the 1959 Christmas holidays. Moreover, the group had already made plans in late 1959 to begin continuous sit-ins in 1960 with the explicit intention of desegregating Nashville (Smith,

Table 3 Cities with Sit-ins and Related Activities, February–March 1960, by Geographic Region

	Deep South	Southeastern and Border States	Non-South	All States
February–March 1960				
Number of cities with sit-ins, 2-month total	26	42	1	69
Region's % of 2-month total	38	61	1	100
February 1960				
Number of cities with sit-ins	5	28	0	33
Region's % of Feb. total	15	85	0	100
% of 2-month total occurring in Feb.	19	67	0	48
March 1960				
Number of cities with sit-ins	21	14	1	36
Region's % of March total	58	39	3	100
% of 2-month total occurring in March	81	33	100	52

Compiled from: Southern Regional Council. "The student protest movement, winter 1960." SRC-13, April 1 1960

Note: Deep South states are Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Southeastern and Border states are South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Maryland, Kentucky, and West Virginia. The non-South state is Ohio.

1978; D. Bevel, 1978). Thus, Greensboro provided the impetus for the Nashville group to carry out its pre-existing strategy.

Rev. Smith's First Baptist Church became the coordinating unit of the Nashville sit-in movement. A decision to sit-in at local lunch counters on Saturday, February 13 1960, was arrived at after much debate. The adults (mostly ministers) of the NCLC met with the students at movement headquarters and tried to convince them to postpone the demonstrations for a couple of days until money could be raised. According to Rev. Smith (1978), "NCLC had \$87.50 in the treasury. We had no lawyers, and we felt kind of a parental responsibility for those college kids. And we knew they were gonna be put in jail, and we didn't know what else would happen. And so some of us said, 'we need to wait until we get a lawyer, until we raise some funds.'"

NCLC leaders told the students that they could collect the money through the churches within a week. Then, according to Rev. Smith:

James Bevel, then a student at American Baptist Theological Seminary, said that, 'I'm sick and tired of waiting,' which was a strange thing to come from a kid who was only about nineteen years old. You see, the rest of us were older... [Bevel said] 'If you asked us to wait until next week, then next week something would come up and you'd say wait until the next week and maybe we never will get our freedom.' He said this, 'I believe that something will happen in the situation that will make for the solution to some of these problems we're talking about.' So we decided to go on. [Smith, 1978]

The proximity of four black colleges in Nashville—Fisk University, Tennessee State College, American Baptist Theological Seminary, and Meharry Medical School—facilitated the mobilization of large

numbers of students and state of North Carolina. James Bevel, a major sit-in leader, was there by Rev. Smith's student leaders:

John Lewis, a participant in the top student movement at the time, was a member of the editors of the yearbook in our school.

Thus the student movement organized by other students in 1971; McAdams' college network was explained by the tension between the student movement center and Bevel's recall of Baptist people in Tennessee. The members of the students' movement were:

On the one hand, the students gathered at the local churches. NCLC was the student movement's major organizing church, while the local churches were the local movement's paces. College students' college co-ops were less difficult to study, especially the student movement of close contacts and a

numbers of students. In its extensive ties between students and churches, Nashville resembled the state of North Carolina. Indeed, John Lewis, James Bevel, and Bernard Lafayette, who became major sit-in leaders, were students at the American Baptist Theological Seminary and were taught there by Rev. Smith. Furthermore, they were student leaders:

John Lewis, Bernard and myself were the major participants in the seminary. All of us were like the top student leaders in our schools. I think John at the time was the president of the Student Council. I was a member of the Student Council. I was one of the editors of the yearbook. Bernard was an editor of the yearbook. So all of us were like the top leaders in our school. [J. Bevel, 1978]

Thus the student leaders could rapidly mobilize other students because they already had access to organized groups. Other writers (Von Eschen et al., 1971; McAdam, 1979) have pointed out that these college networks played a key role in sit-in mobilization. However, the sit-in movement cannot be explained without also noting the crucial interaction between black college students and local movement centers. Speaking of Rev. Smith and his church, Bevel recalled, "the First Baptist basically had the Baptist people who went to Fisk and Meharry and Tennessee State, and the Seminary were basically members of his church" (J. Bevel, 1978). These students had been introduced to the Civil Rights movement while they attended church.

On the first day of the sit-ins in Nashville, students gathered in front of their respective campuses. NCLC sent cars to each college to transport the students to Rev. Smith's church. Again, the major organizational tasks were performed in the church which served as the coordinating unit of the local movement center, rather than on the campuses. Coordination of sit-in activity between the college community and the churches was made less difficult because many of the students (especially student leaders) were immersed in the local movement centers prior to the sit-ins. The pattern of close connection between student demonstrators and adult leaders had already existed in places

such as Greensboro and even Oklahoma City in 1958; indeed, this pattern undergirded the entire movement. Rev. Jemison's (1978) remark that the Baton Rouge sit-in demonstrators "were schooled right over there at our church; they were sent out from here to go to the lunch counters" typifies the relationship between the students and the local movement centers.⁹ Jemison continued, "The student leaders attended church here. We had close ties because they were worshipping with us while we were working together."

Once the Nashville students arrived at movement headquarters, they participated in workshops where they learned the strategies of nonviolent confrontation from experts like Rev. Lawson, Rev. Metz Rollins, Rev. C. T. Vivian, and the core group of students that Lawson had already trained. This pool of trained leaders was a pre-existing resource housed by NCLC. After the workshops, the students were organized into groups with specific protest responsibilities, each having a spokesperson who had been trained by Lawson during the late 1950s. They then marched off to confront Nashville's segregated lunch counters and agents of social control.

The adult black community immediately mobilized to support the students. Shortly after the demonstrations began, large numbers of students were arrested. According to Rev. Smith,

We just launched out on something that looked perfectly crazy and scores of people were being arrested, and paddy wagons were full and the people out in downtown couldn't understand what was going on, people just welcoming being arrested, that ran against everything they had ever seen.... I've forgotten how much we needed that day, and we got everything we needed. [That particular day?] Yes, sir. About \$40,000. We needed something like \$40,000 in fives. And we had all the money. Not in fives, but in bail. Every bit of it came up. You know—property and this kind of thing... and there were fourteen black lawyers in this town. Every black lawyer made himself available to us. [Smith, 1978]

Thus, basic, pre-existing resources in the dominated community were used to accomplish political goals. It was suggested to Rev. Smith that a massive

movement such as that in Nashville would need outside resources. He replied,

Now let me quickly say to you that in early 1960, when we were really out there on the line, the community stood up. We stood together. This community had proven that this stereotyped notion of black folk can't work together is just false. We worked together a lot better than the white organizations. So those people fell in line. [Smith, 1978]

Rev. Smith's comments are applicable beyond Nashville. For example, in Orangeburg, after hundreds of students were arrested and brutalized, the adult black community came solidly to their aid. Bond was set at \$200 per student, and 388 students were arrested. Over \$75,000 was needed, and adults came forth to put up their homes and property in order to get students out of jail. Rev. McCollom, the leader of the Orangeburg movement center, remarked that, "there was no schism between the student community and the adult community in Orangeburg" (McCollom, 1978). Jim McCain (1978) of CORE, who played a central role in organizing sit-ins across South Carolina and in Florida, reported that community support was widespread. According to Julian Bond (1980), a student leader of Atlanta's sit-ins, "black property owners put up bond which probably amounted to \$100,000" to get sit-in demonstrators released from jail.

These patterns were repeated across the South. This community support should not be surprising, considering the number of ministers and congregations involved before and during the movement. Yet, Zinn, an eyewitness to many of these events, wrote, "Spontaneity and self-sufficiency were the hallmarks of the sit-ins; without adult advice or consent, the students planned and carried them through" (1964:29). This myopia illustrates the inadequacies of analyses that neglect or ignore the internal structure of oppressed communities and protest movements.

The continuing development of the Nashville sit-ins sheds further light on the interdependence of the movement and the black community. A formal structure called the Nashville Nonviolent Movement was developed to direct sit-in activities. Its two substructures, the Student Central Committee and the Nashville Christian Leadership Council, worked closely together and had overlapping membership

(Reverends Lawson and Vivian were members of both groups). The Central Committee usually consisted of 25 to 30 students drawn from all the local colleges. NCLC represented adult ministers and the black community. The two groups established committees to accomplish specific tasks, including a finance committee, a telephone, publicity, and news committee, and a work committee. The work committee had subgroups responsible for painting protest signs and providing food and transportation. The city's black lawyers became the movement's defense team, students from Meharry Medical School were the medical team.

This intricate structure propelled and guided the sit-in movement of Nashville. A clear-cut division of labor developed between the Central Committee and the NCLC. The Central Committee's major responsibilities were to train, organize, and coordinate the demonstration. The NCLC developed the movement's financial structure and coordinated relations between the community and the student movement. Diane Nash Bevel, a major student leader of the Nashville sit-ins, was asked why the students did not take care of their own finances and build their own relationships with the larger community. She replied,

We didn't want to be bothered keeping track of money that was collected at the rallies and stuff. We were just pleased that NCLC would do that, and would handle the book-keeping and all that trouble that went along with having money.... Besides, we were much too busy sitting-in and going to jail and that kind of thing. There wasn't really the stability of a bookkeeper, for instance. We didn't want to be bothered with developing that kind of stability.... We were very pleased to form this alliance with NCLC who would sponsor the rallies and coordinate the community support among the adults and keep track of the money, while we sat-in and... well, it took all our time, and we were really totally immersed in it. My day would sometimes start... well we'd have meetings in the morning at six o'clock, before classes, and work steady to extremely late at night, organizing the sit-ins, getting publicity out to the students that we were having a sit-in, and where and what time we would meet. Convincing people, and talking to people, calming people's fears, going to class, at the same time. It was a really busy, busy time for all of the

people on the Central Committee. We were trying to teach nonviolence, maintain order among a large, large number of people. That was about all we could handle. [D. Bevel, 1978]

Students are ideal participants in protest activities. Usually they do not have families to support, employer's rules and dictates to follow, and crystallized ideas as to what is "impossible" and "unrealistic." Students have free time and boundless energy to pursue causes they consider worthwhile and imperative (Lipset and Wolin, 1965:3; McCarthy and Zald, 1973:10). McPhail's (1971:1069) finding that young, single, unemployed males were ideal participants in civil disorders and McPhail and Millers (1973:726) discussion of availability for participation in the assembly process parallels this notion that students are ideal participants in protest activities. Nevertheless, although black students were able to engage in protest activities continuously because of their student status, a one-sided focus on them diverts attention from the larger community, which had undergone considerable radicalization. Speaking of the adults, James Bevel (1978), a student organizer of the Nashville sit-ins, remarked, "But when you talk to each individual, they talked just like we talked—the students. They had jobs and they were adults. But basically, their position would be just like ours. They played different roles because they were in different—they had to relate based on where they were in the community" (J. Bevel, 1978).

The adults of the NCLC organized the black community to support the militant student sit-in movement. Once the movement began, NCLC instituted weekly and sometimes daily mass meetings in the churches. Rev. Smith (1978) recalled,

Sometimes we had them more than once a week if we needed to. When things were really hot we called a meeting at eight o'clock in the morning. We'd call one for twelve that day, twelve noon, and the place would be full. We had what we called our wire service. People got on telephones, that was our wire service, and they would fill that building. They'd fill that building in just a matter of relatively short time."

At these mass meetings, ministers from across the city turned over the money that their respective

churches had donated to the movement. Thousands of dollars were collected at the mass meetings while black adults, ministers, and students sang such lyrics as "Before I'd be a slave, I'd rather be buried in my grave." Then too, bundles of leaflets were given to adults at mass meetings who then distributed them throughout the black community. This shows how the movement built communication channels through which vital information, strategies, and plans were disseminated.

During the Nashville sit-ins, word went out to the black community not to shop downtown.

We didn't organize the boycott. We did not organize the boycott. The boycott came about. We don't know how it happened. I tell you there are a lot of little mystical elements in there, little spots that defy rational explanation.... Now, we promoted it. We adopted it. But we did not sit down one day and organize a boycott... ninety-nine percent of the black people in this community stayed away from downtown during the boycott. It was a fantastic thing—successful. It was fantastically successful. [Smith, 1978]

Yet the boycott was largely organized by NCLC. According to Bevel, Dr. Vivian Henderson, who was head of Fisk University's economic department and a member of NCLC, played a key role in the boycott, because

Vivian Henderson was basically responsible for calling the boycott. He got up at a mass meeting and said, 'at least what we could do to support students, if we've got any decency, we can just stop paying bills and just don't shop until this thing is resolved.' A very indignant type of speech he made. It just caught on. All the bourgeois women would come to the meeting, and they just got on the phone and called up everybody, all the doctors' wives and things. They just got on the phone and called 300 or 400 people and told them don't shop downtown. Finally there was just a total boycott downtown. There would be no black people downtown at all. [J. Bevel, 1978]

Activists were stationed downtown to insure that blacks knew not to shop. According to Rev. Smith, shortly after the boycott was initiated, merchants began coming to his home wanting to talk. Diane Nash Bevel attributed the boycott's effectiveness to

reduced profits during the Easter shopping season. It also changed the merchant's attitude toward the sit-ins.

It was interesting the difference that [the boycott] made in terms of how the managers were willing to talk with us, because see we had talked with the managers of the stores. We had a meeting at the very beginning and they had kind of listened to us politely, and said, 'well, we just can't do it. We can't desegregate the counters because we will lose money and that's the end of it.' So, after the economic withdrawal, they were eager to talk with us, and try to work up some solution. [D. Bevel, 1978]

In early 1960 the white power structure of Nashville was forced to desegregate a number of private establishments and public transportation facilities. SNCC's *Student Voice* reported that in Nashville, "A long series of negotiations followed the demonstrations, and on May 10, 6 downtown stores integrated their lunch counters. Since this time others have followed suit, and some stores have hired Negroes in positions other than those of menial workers for the first time" (*Student Voice*, August, 1960). Daily demonstrations by hundred of students refusing to accept bond so that they could be released from jail, coupled with the boycott, gave blacks the upper hand in the conflict situation. Careful organization and planning was the hallmark of the Nashville sit-in movement.

Discussion and Conclusions

Consistent with Proposition 1, I have presented evidence that pre-existing social structures played a central role in the 1960 sit-in movement. Pre-existing activist groups, formal movement organizations, colleges, and overlapping personal networks provided the framework through which the sit-ins emerged and spread. Previous writings on the sit-ins (e.g., Lomax, 1962; Zinn, 1964; Matthews and Prothro, 1966; Killian, 1968; Meier and Rudwick, 1973; Piven and Cloward, 1977) have persistently portrayed pre-existing organization as an after-the-fact accretion on student spontaneity. The dominant view is that SCLC, CORE, NAACP, and community leaders rushed into a dynamic campus movement after it was well underway, while my data provide

evidence that those organizational and community forces were at the core of the sit-in movement from its beginning. Thus, preexisting organizations provided the sit-ins with the resources and communication networks needed for their emergence and development.

Prior to 1960 the sit-in was far from being the dominant tactic of the Civil Rights movement, yet in early 1960, sit-in demonstrations swept through thirteen states and hundreds of communities within two months. Almost instantly sit-ins became the major tactic and focus of the movement. A tactical innovation had occurred.

Consistent with Proposition 2, the data strongly suggest that the 1960 Greensboro sit-in occurred at the time when the necessary and sufficient condition for the rapid diffusion of sit-ins was present. That condition was the existence of well-developed and widespread internal organization. Because this internal organization was already firmly in place prior to 1960, activist groups across the South were in a position to quickly initiate sit-ins. The rapidity with which sit-ins were organized gave the appearance that they were spontaneous. This appearance was accentuated because most demonstrators were students rather than veteran Civil Rights activists.

Yet the data show that the student organizers of the sit-ins were closely tied to the internal organization of the emerging Civil Rights movement. Prior student/activist ties had been formed through church affiliations and youth wings of Civil Rights organizations. In short, students and seasoned activists were able to rapidly coordinate the sit-ins because both were anchored to the same organization.

Innovations in political movements arise in the context of an active opposition. The organization of the Civil Rights movement provided the resources that sustained diffusion of the sit-ins in the face of attack. This vast internal organization consisted of local movement centers, experienced activists who had amassed organizing skills, direct-action organizations, communication systems between centers, pre-existing strategies for dealing with the opposition, workshops and training procedures, fund-raising techniques, and community mobilization techniques.

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The pre-existing internal organization enabled organizers to quickly disseminate the "sit-in" idea to groups already favorably disposed toward direct action. In the innovation/diffusion literature (e.g., Coleman et al., 1957; Lionberger, 1960; Rogers, 1962) a positive decision by numerous actors to adopt a new item is treated as a central problem. In the case of the sit-ins, the adoption problem was largely solved by the pre-existing organization. Since that organization housed groups that had already identified with "confrontational politics," little time was lost on debates as to whether sit-ins should be adopted. Thus, the diffusion process did not become bogged down at the adoption stage.

Repression might have prevented the diffusion process. The authorities and white extremist groups attempted to prevent the spread of the sit-ins by immediately arresting the demonstrators, employing brutal force, and refusing to report the sit-ins in the local press. The organizational efficiency of the movement centers prevailed against the opposition. Existing recruiting and training procedures made it possible for jailed demonstrators to be instantly replaced. When heavy fines were leveled against the movement, activists were able generally to raise large sums of money through their pre-existing community contacts. The pre-existing communication networks easily overcame the problems imposed by news blackouts. Moreover, skilled activists were able to weaken the stance of the opposition by rapidly organizing economic boycotts. Because the internal organization was widespread, these effective counter measures were employed in Black communities across the South. Thus, it was well-developed and wide-spread internal organization that enabled the 1960 sit-ins to rapidly diffuse into a major tactical innovation of the Civil Rights movement.

Proposition 3 maintains that pre-existing internal organization establishes the types of innovations that can occur within movements. The internal organization that gave rise to the sit-ins specialized in what was called nonviolent direct action. This approach consisted of a battery of tactics that were disruptive but peaceful. The nonviolent approach readily fitted into the ideological and organizational framework of the black church, and provided ministers, students, and ordinary working people

with a method for entering directly into the political process.

The movement centers that emerged following the Montgomery bus boycott were developed around nonviolent approaches to social change. Indeed, the primary goal of these centers was to build nonviolent movements. Yet, nonviolent confrontations as a disciplined form of collective action was relatively new to the black masses of the South. The activists within the movement centers systematically introduced blacks to the non-violent approach. They organized non-violent workshops and conducted them on a routine basis in the churches and protest organizations. Literature from organizations (e.g., Fellowship of Reconciliation and CORE) that specialized in the non-violent approach was made available through the centers. Skilled nonviolent strategists (e.g., Bayard Rustin, James Lawson, and Glenn Smiley) travelled between centers training leaders how to conduct nonviolent campaigns. The varied tactics—mass marches, negotiations, boycotts, sit-ins—associated with direct action became common knowledge to activists in the centers. Moreover, in the late fifties activists began experimenting with these tactics and urging the community to become involved with non-violent confrontations. Meier and Rudwick (1976) have shown that sit-ins at segregated facilities were conducted by black activists in the nineteen forties and late fifties. But this tactic remained relatively isolated and sporadic and did not diffuse throughout the larger community. Meier and Rudwick (1976:384) conclude that diffusion did not occur before 1960 because the white mass-media failed to cover sit-ins. My analysis suggests another explanation: sit-ins prior to 1960 did not spread because the internal organization required for such a spread did not exist. In short, without viable internal social organization, innovations will remain sporadic and isolated. With organization, innovations can spread and be sustained. By 1960 the internal organization of the Civil Rights movement had amassed resources and organization specifically designed to execute nonviolent confrontations.

The sit-in tactic was well suited to the existing internal organization of the Civil Rights movement. It did not conflict with the procedures, ideology, or

resources of the movement centers. Indeed, because the sit-in method was a legitimate tactic of the direct-action approach, it was quickly embraced by activists situated in the movement centers. Because these activists were already attempting to build nonviolent movements, they instantly realized that massive sit-ins could have a wide impact. Furthermore, they were well aware that they were in command of precisely the kinds of resources through which the sit-ins could be rapidly diffused. This is why they phoned activist groups and said, "This is it, let's go!" That is, the sit-ins became a tactical innovation within the movement because they fit into the framework of the existing internal organization.

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to demonstrate the important role that internal organization played in the sit-in movement. It is becoming commonplace for writers (e.g., Hubbard, 1968; Lipsky, 1968; Marx and Useem, 1971; McCarthy and Zald, 1973; Oberschall, 1973) to assert that the Civil Rights movement was dependent on outside resources: elites, courts, Northern white liberals, mass media, and the Federal Government. The present analysis suggests that this assertion may be premature, especially when the role of internal organization is ignored. Future research on collective action that treats internal organization as a topic in its own right will further increase our knowledge of the dynamics of social movements.

NOTES

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1 Why, for example, did the "teach-ins" spread rapidly between college campuses during the mid-sixties? This

proposition suggests that the teach-in tactic was especially suited to the university-based internal organization of the white student movement. In its essentials the teach-in innovation was academically oriented and could be implemented by academic types who were entrenched in the "movement centers" of the various universities involved in the movement. Lecture halls, libraries, film clips, study groups, seminar notes, etc. were the pre-existing indigenous resources used by agents of the movement via the teach-ins.

2 King papers at Boston University; SCLC papers at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference headquartered in Atlanta: Rev. Kelly Miller Smith's papers housed at First Baptist Church of Nashville.

3 All of the King papers at Boston University and all of SCLC's files in Atlanta were examined, as well as the portion of Rev. Smith's papers dealing with the sit-ins.

4 I suspect that further research will reveal that sit-ins occurred in more than these fifteen cities between 1957 and 1960.

5 Actual names of movement participants are used in this study rather than pseudonyms. I decided to use actual names because my study focuses on real places, movements, and activists. This approach will assist other researchers in evaluating the interview data, since they will know who said what and can conduct further interviews if the need arises. In addition, the respondents had a story to convey and expressed no desires to remain anonymous.

6 It could legitimately be argued that outside resources were central to these early sit-ins, given that in some cases CORE was involved. However, it seems that the emerging black direct-action organizations of the late 1950s and the church served as a resource base for CORE. Thus, CORE, which was very small at the time, "piggybacked" on indigenous resources of the black community. Elsewhere (1980) I have presented supporting data for this argument. Meier and Rudwick's account of early CORE suggests a similar conclusion.

7 To appreciate the volume of protest activity engendered by the sit-ins, it is necessary to note that the total number of cities (69) is not a count of actual day-to-day demonstrations, which during these first two months ran into the hundreds if not thousands.

8 Cities identified as part of a particular cluster may actually be part of another cluster(s). I assume that the probability of shared organization and coordination of sit-ins is high if two or more cities within a 75-mile radius had sit-ins within a two-week period. My data and analysis generally confirm this assumption.

9 For further evidence of the centrality of student-church ties in other cities that had sit-ins see Morris, forthcoming.

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