

## **"Enforcement Networks and Racial Contention in Civil Rights-Era Mississippi"**

**David Cunningham and Peter B. Owens**  
**Department of Sociology, Washington University in St. Louis**

While, as the studies in this volume show, state-mobilized contention operates most clearly and pervasively in authoritarian contexts, the phenomenon extends to western democracies as well. Emphasizing such practices and their outcomes provides a basis to reassess conventional understandings of well-known historical cases, and here we focus on the civil rights-era U.S. South. Beginning in the 1950s, and sparked by new opportunities stemming from federal pressures to break down regional sectional divisions surrounding legally-enforced racial segregation, a burgeoning Civil Rights Movement successfully sparked the dissolution of the “Jim Crow” system that enabled the state-sanctioned denial of equal access to African Americans. While the movement itself has attained canonical status among scholars – serving as the core case for the development of predominant political process approaches to the study of social movements (see, e.g., McAdam 1988, 1999; Meyer and Minkoff 1996; Morris 1984) – we know considerably less about the forces that civil rights activists confronted. Here, we shift the typical lens on the struggle to examine the configuration of actors that maintained, and later fought to preserve, racial segregation in Mississippi, the Deep South state with the most elaborate, entrenched, and brutal commitment to Jim Crow.

Doing so calls into sharp relief a number of considerations associated with state-mobilized contention. First, the western democratic context inverts the typical dynamic associated with authoritarian regimes, which – as the studies in this volume demonstrate – often center on hierarchical national efforts to build counterrevolutionary or otherwise reactionary infrastructures. As Hamment notes, mobilization in such cases often takes on a top-down “astro-

turf” character, with national state actors working to build collectives – either coalitional or composite in character (Beissinger) – that permeate local and regional politics. Even when decentralized, as in the Nashi (Hemment) and Polish (Ekiert and Kruszezwska) cases considered in this volume, the bottom-up character of reactionary mobilization frequently remains “manufactured” (Ekiert and Kruszezwska), driven by national efforts to suppress the vitality of challenges to the state. Cases like Hong Kong, where the national state has a stronger authoritarian character than local “hybrid” governing bodies (Lee), underscore this overarching top-down dynamic, even in cases where intra-regional variation is pronounced (Cammet and Anderson).

The western democratic setting we explore complicates such understandings, as the state-centered anti-civil rights countermovement arose at the regional level, in response to federal pressures to alter a sectional political apparatus that – as a formal system at least – was confined to the South. As such, the deployment of resources and emergence of rearticulated state bodies to resist civil rights reform centered on state-level officials within Mississippi and other southern states. Such efforts were reproduced, reinforced, and sometimes transformed at the local level, but in all cases such instantiations emerged in oppositional reaction to national state efforts to manufacture and, later, guarantee civil rights protections. As such, the struggle took on a distinctly layered character, with federal bodies viewed largely as threats to “states’ rights” and local sovereignty.

Regional efforts to resist civil rights challenges were thus marshaled against both activists and federal investigators and legislators. The latter were embodied by federal agencies such as the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, which held hearings in Jackson, Mississippi’s capital city, in 1965 that featured testimony and exhibits intended to demonstrate illegal local resistance to

federal civil rights legislation. The adversarial character of the proceedings were underscored, on the one hand, by federal commissioners' direct challenges to local officials' discriminatory treatment of African American attempting to exercise voting rights, and, on the other, by Mississippi Governor Paul B. Johnson, who noted in his opening remarks that "law and order will be maintained in Mississippi by Mississippians," imploring the national audience to "get off of our back and get on our side" (Library of Congress n.d.). More pervasive was the increased presence of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) beginning in 1964. As a result of the killings of three civil rights workers in Mississippi's Neshoba County, perpetrated as part of a conspiracy involving both the vigilantist Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and local police officials, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover – unsympathetic to the civil rights cause but under pressure from Attorney General Robert Kennedy – established a new FBI field office in Jackson, transferring 153 agents to the state to work primarily on the investigation of anti-civil rights crimes (Cunningham 2004). Both efforts were emblematic of federal action to oppose the state-sanctioned maintenance of now-illegal racial segregation in the state.

Second, as this federal dynamic indicates, Mississippi's campaign to maintain segregation had a predominantly reactive character. Both the scope and scale of anti-civil rights mobilization escalated in the 1960s in response to increased dual pressures, posed by civil rights activists operating within local communities and external leverage exerted by the federal government. But, prior to this period of peak escalation, the routine maintenance of Jim Crow required mobilization by state and civil bodies within Mississippi that oriented to infrastructural, pre-emptive, programmatic and signaling ends (Ekiert). Indeed, the uptick in local resistance to civil rights challenges built on an established and durable infrastructure for segregationist resistance. A variety of fiscal, legal, and legislative resources comprised this foundation,

enabling proactive measures centered on the wide discretion provided to both local officials and private citizens for their sanctioning of perceived breaches of racial etiquette (Luckett 2015; McMillen 1989). The mobilization of those resources also furthered programmatic efforts to build and maintain white (supremacist) identities and to transmit related messages to audiences outside of the state and region, via public relations efforts spearheaded by state and civil organizations such as the Citizens' Councils and Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission (MSSC) (Irons 2010; McMillen 1994).

Finally, as these complex regional and local instantiations indicate, state-mobilized contention in civil rights-era Mississippi was characterized by significant local variation. As we note below, both the relevant state actors and the repertoire of tactics employed to suppress challenges to Jim Crow varied significantly across regions and communities within the state. As such, we follow Cammet and Anderson's efforts in this volume to identify and explain intra-regional variation, conceptualizing differing configurations of anti-civil rights actors as *enforcement networks* comprised of both state and civil bodies. We additionally follow Dolenec's invocation of Fishman's (1990) state-regime distinction in her Croatian case, where the transitional character of that nation's post-conflict period ensured that political power resided within formal state networks as well as in civil bodies and party agents possessing the capacity to shape modes of state repression. In Mississippi, as we describe in more detail below, enforcement networks encompassed both state and civil actors, with varying degrees of active and "ambiguous" collaboration. Associated enforcement efforts were catalyzed actively through overt partnerships and more nebulously by state officials' efforts to open spaces for autonomous vigilantist action by civil actors.

In the sections that follow, we focus on these enforcement networks, comprised of state and civil actors invested in ensuring stability around specific social arrangements predicated on unequal access to political, economic, and/or social resources. Focusing on the enforcement of Jim Crow racial segregation in civil rights-era Mississippi, we emphasize: (1) the field of actors that comprised the enforcement network (i.e. those active in maintaining status quo arrangements surrounding racial segregation, and/or mobilizing to counter challenges to those prevailing arrangements); (2) the synergistic (and, in some cases, competitive) dynamics that enabled or prohibited coordination between state and civil actors within the field; and (3) predictable patterns of variation in the composition and organization of these enforcement networks, rooted in large part on localized political economic factors and the contours of challenges posed by local civil rights campaigns. Through a general discussion of the organizations and institutions associated with the enforcement field, we highlight the ways in which the state intersects with, and at times enables, mobilization among civil actors. Then, we present case studies of two Mississippi communities (Clarksdale and McComb), in order to think comparatively about the logic of local variation in enforcement networks.

### **State and civil pillars of Jim Crow segregation in the U.S. South**

As a means of economic, political, and social dominance extending through the Civil Rights era, the system of legalized racial segregation known as “Jim Crow” dominated the southern landscape in the U.S. for decades. Enabled primarily by the disenfranchisement of black citizens in the late nineteenth century, Jim Crow emerged as a coordinated set of laws and customs intended to insulate whites from black residents, to ensure unequal access to social, economic, and political resources and spaces.

Formal segregation was engineered most visibly through institutional separation – via the creation of dual (and unequal) racially exclusive educational, health, commercial, and religious spaces. In other cases, however, racial insulation was maintained through often-elaborate routines associated with particular spaces that provided differential access to both white and black patrons in a manner that precluded interracial contact as “equals.” Many movie theaters across the South, for instance, were outfitted with separate ticket windows and entrances, typically maintaining whites-only lobby and orchestra seating areas while channeling black patrons up an external staircase to segregated balcony seating. Similarly, “whites-only” restaurants might be outfitted with an outside window to serve take-out orders for an exclusively black clientele. Though local patterns varied, segregation within these public spaces was reinforced residually, with “indigenous” black institutions typically forming within neighborhoods restricted to African Americans (McMillen 1989).

Though a colloquialism, “Jim Crow” encompassed both the legal strictures that mandated racial separation and the informal customs through which such insulation was enforced. While most accounts of segregation focus primarily on formal statutes that prohibited many forms of racial contact, the uncoded “rules” associated with Jim Crow were much more pervasive. This was especially true in Mississippi, where entrenched racist practices and cultural routines – and attendant tolerance for violent enforcement of associated breaches of such understandings – rendered many legal mandates redundant (to illustrate this distinction, in 1950 Mississippi had twenty percent fewer Jim Crow laws on its books than North Carolina, the state widely considered the South’s most progressive [see Murray 1950]). Racialized norms pervaded daily routines, ensuring, for instance, that black residents would subserviently step aside on sidewalks to cede space to passing whites, remove hats while in the presence of whites in elevators and

other intimate spaces, and be denied the respect of courtesy titles. In all cases, the aim was to preserve and reinforce a strict racialized hierarchy, which precluded any social interaction predicated on an equal plane (McMillen 1989).

Crucially, economic interdependence undergirded such social distinctions. The organization of Jim Crow enabled the maintenance of a strict dual labor market, defined by white control over black labor. In most areas, jobs were coded as strictly reserved either for white or black workers. As historian Tim Tyson puts it, “to say ‘black maid’ or ‘black janitor’ would have been entirely redundant; there were no other kinds” (Tyson 2004: 17). Larger firms might hire both black and white workers, but reserve particular positions only for one or the other, with whites always maintaining access to valued high-status work. Such divisions would then be maintained within fully segregated common spaces such as cafeterias and restrooms.

As the logic of Jim Crow developed in large part to ensure and accommodate such economic advantage, the system’s contours varied according to local and regional distinctions. In Mississippi, the startlingly flat agricultural Delta region spanned the state’s northwest quadrant and was distinguished by its rich soil and abundantly profitable cotton crops. The region also possessed the nation’s highest concentration of African-American residents. These factors were of course intertwined, with an elite white planter class overseeing a black agricultural labor force. African Americans outnumbered whites overall in many communities across the Delta, giving rise to an elaborate system of social mores that ensured both racial separation and political control by the white minority. Such customs hinged on a strict disenfranchisement of black voters, a condition regulated predominantly via the acute economic vulnerability faced by most black Deltans, whose livelihood was dependent upon landowning employers who often controlled access to both work and shelter. Exploiting such vulnerabilities reduced (but of course

did not eliminate) the need for organized violence as a means of maintaining the racial status quo. As sociologist Charles Payne (1995: 113-114) explains: “social distance between Blacks and whites was so great that no one ever needed to be reminded of it, rendering the Klan less necessary and lynchings less common.” In contrast, other areas of the state, in particular the “piney woods” region stretching across southern Mississippi, employed a racially-mixed labor force in logging and industry. As such, a more stringent admixture of policing and unsanctioned civil violence developed as a means of enforcing perceived transgressions of the Jim Crow system.

Thus, in the absence of a collective, organized civil rights challenge, baseline modes of regulation combined – to regionally-differing degrees – (1) informal control by white employers and landlords; (2) enforcement of Jim Crow statutes by police, who also frequently employed an array of trumped-up accusations to stretch the formal legal means at their disposal to repress any perceived disruptions of racial customs; and (3) intimidation and physical violence by members of the white citizenry, who typically carried out such vigilantist acts with virtual impunity. Beginning in the mid-1950’s, however, the landmark *Brown v. Board* legal decision and the subsequent rise of organized civil rights campaigns intended to challenge racial segregation’s legal and moral foundations provided a trigger for fresh modes of state involvement in efforts to enforce local breaches of Jim Crow. The presence of these dual challenges to the sustained legal and political viability of Jim Crow set the broad terms of state-mobilized contention, centered on efforts by the State of Mississippi and local officials and civil bodies within its borders to maintain a sectionally-distinct system of racial segregation in the face of federal pressures to align with national politics. Such pressures were embodied by the presence of FBI agents and investigators from the U.S. Civil Rights Commission within Mississippi’s borders, but took on a



diffuse character oriented around opposition to any perceived federal infringement “states’ rights.”

The intensified enforcement campaign that resulted emerged through a number of modes, including:

- *Statewide legislation*, expressly designed to restrict the ability of civil rights activists to operate. Such statutes frequently expanded local authorities’ control over public space, by empowering municipal officials to enforce curfews, expand the purview of “breach of peace” violations, and increase sentencing guidelines surrounding virtually any form of public protests. By 1967, with the need for black agricultural labor sharply reduced due to mechanization advances, Delta legislators even sought – but ultimately were not able to pass – a bill proposing a plan to relocate black residents to other states (Dittmer 1995; Hughes 1964).
- *Local ordinances*, enabling officials to exploit their enhanced legislative purview surrounding the suppression of civil rights protest. Common ordinances included prohibitions on the distribution of leaflets, expanded discretion around applying blue laws and other restrictive statutes against civil rights adherents, and severe restrictions on picketing or obstructing public and commercial spaces (Dittmer 1995; McAdam 1988). To demonstrate the clear pattern of abuse of such ordinances against civil rights workers, a U.S. Civil Rights Commission (1965: 486) study found that, in the Delta city of Greenwood, fines levied against activists ranged from two to twenty times as large as those for equivalent offenses against other local citizens.
- *Broadened police capacity and purview*, through an increase in the size of the State Highway Patrol, the deputization of large numbers of county and city auxiliary officers to

assist with civil rights “unrest,” and the purchase of militarized equipment. For instance, in anticipation of the 1964 Freedom Summer campaign, the Jackson police department acquired searchlight trucks, trailers to transport large numbers of protestors to local and state jails, gas masks and other riot gear, and – most infamously – a twenty-three foot armored van, dubbed “Thompson’s tank” after the city’s mayor Allen Thompson (Asch 2011; McAdam 1988; Murphree 2006; Spofford 1988).

- *A dedicated statewide agency*, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission (MSSC). Formed in 1956, the MSSC was primarily an investigative and information-gathering organization, focused on the preservation of Jim Crow in the state through resistance to the supposed “encroachment” by the federal government and civil rights forces (Luckett 2015). Its agents sought to uncover intelligence associated with threats to the segregationist status quo, share information to support the anti-civil rights actions of a range of local officials, and develop public relations campaigns to defend Mississippi’s racial practices (Irons 2010). As such, it served as an official state organ with connections to a range of institutional and civic segregationist interests.

As the MSSC’s actions and orientation indicate, such initiatives not only increased state capacity to address challenges to Jim Crow, but also strengthened the efforts of a range of civil bodies as they worked to hinder the progress of the Civil Rights Movement and federal intervention efforts, in an effort to maintain the segregationist status quo.

A spectrum of civil organizations and initiatives emerged to fill the space created or enabled by these state initiatives, in some cases benefitting from direct government support. Most prominently, the Citizens’ Councils, a network of local associations comprised largely of local business and civic leaders, were organized to exact economic pressure and retribution on those

suspected of civil rights advocacy. Founded by Robert “Tut” Patterson in the Delta town of Indianola shortly following the 1954 *Brown* decision, Council chapters exerted an especially large influence throughout the Delta, exploiting black workers’ significant economic vulnerability. The Council movement also quickly spread across the state – most pronouncedly in counties with significant African-American presence – with local chapters sometimes forming in direct reaction to school desegregation petitions filed by the NAACP and local black families.

Following Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland’s call to expand the Councils’ model nationwide, to fight a range of civil rights organizations and “all the conscienceless pressure groups who are attempting our destruction,” the subtly rebranded Citizens’ Councils of America (CCA) formed as an “association of associations” spanning much of the South (McMillen 1994: 116). Eschewing the early Councils’ penchant for secrecy, the CCA trumpeted its public face, hosting speakers and rallies to accompany its official newspaper, the “The Citizens’ Council” (later shortened to “The Citizen”), which was printed at the organization’s national headquarters in Jackson. The association’s governmental connections were clear as well, with powerful elected officials from Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina gracing the advisory board of the temporary federation that preceded the CCA. By 1956, reporters and other observers increasingly considered the Councils as Mississippi’s de facto government, a point underscored by its cozy relationship with the MSSC and, by the early 1960s, with Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett (Irons 2010; Luckett 2015; McMillen 1994).

Such connections also enabled the organization’s more nefarious underside. Council members emphasized intimidation to suppress any threats to the segregationist status quo, through the active “application of economic pressure” (a phrasing featured prominently in an influential Council recording, intended for recruitment purposes) alongside tacit support for more

aggressive modes of harassment. In 1968, well past the CCA's period of peak influence, an estimated 15 percent of participants in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference-sponsored Poor People's Campaign subsequently were evicted from their homes by white landlords (Wright 2011), demonstrating the broad reach of such Council campaigns. In its effort to form an "impregnable front," the CCA sought also to regulate its own core constituency, ostracizing and often ruining any "disloyal" break from segregationist orthodoxy by members of the white business class (McMillen 1994).

Throughout this period, and tellingly for our purposes, the Councils received support from state bodies for its enforcement efforts. The MSSC funneled resources to the Councils to support some of its activities, and its agents consulted with Council leaders about various aspects of "the racial situation in Mississippi." Similarly, the state's two longstanding U.S. congressmen, James O. Eastland and John Bell Williams, aided Council efforts to produce and distribute its own *Forum* radio and television shows (Irons 2010). Such support peaked in the early 1960s, when – under the watch of Council member and booster Gov. Ross Barnett – nearly \$200,000 of public funds moved into the Councils' coffers (McMillen 1994). Nearly a decade later, with the state facing the prospects of court-enforced school desegregation, the Councils quickly constructed a network of private "seg" academies for white students, in part by illegally securing a range of public educational resources to facilitate the process (Andrews 2002; Crespino 2007).

While the Citizens' Councils formally eschewed violence, all the while spearheading a range of enforcement actions with similar ends, other groups endorsed more active forms of intimidation. The Americans for the Preservation of the White Race (APWR) was formed in Natchez in 1963, and quickly spread to Jackson the following year. Speaking to a *Newsweek* reporter in 1964, APWR President W. Arsene Dick, Sr., an electrician from the state's southwest

piney woods region, characterized the group as “appeal[ing] to the man with hands like mine.” Showing his “gnarled callused palms,” he underscored that the APWR attracts “working-type people who can operate at the grass-roots level,” a euphemism for adherents’ willingness to undertake a range of harassment actions against local targets. While the APWR did not actively promote physical violence, its members sought to pressure local businesses and other community leaders to maintain uncompromising support of segregation. One Mississippi newspaper tellingly referred to the group as a “semi-secret society,” underscoring its role as a sort of bridge between the Citizens’ Councils and the state’s most powerful extremist organ: the Ku Klux Klan (Crespino 2007; Cunningham 2013a; *Delta Democrat Times*, 5/11/64).

The KKK in Mississippi arrived relatively late to the anti-civil rights party, first moving into the state near the end of 1963. By the following year, however, two powerful Klan organizations enjoyed a significant presence throughout the state. The Sam Bowers-led White Knights of the KKK operated as a sort of underground paramilitary outfit, relying on secrecy and strong hierarchical leadership to engineer hundreds of bombings, beatings, and acts of intimidation. Most tragically, a cadre of White Knights collaborated with local police to carry out the 1964 murders of three civil rights workers in Neshoba County, and Bowers was open about his advocacy of violence “when considered necessary” (Cunningham 2013a; Huie 2000).

Soon after the White Knights’ 1963 rise, however, Bowers faced competition for his members’ allegiance. The Alabama-based United Klans of America (UKA), headed by Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton, asserted itself by the mid-1960s as the South’s preeminent KKK organization. Possessing upwards of 25,000 members region-wide, Shelton sought to move into Mississippi to promote his admixture of open public presence – centered on frequent rallies and Klan parades – and underground terror. This approach allowed Shelton to publicly disavow

violence while providing local membership with a longer leash to intimidate and harass under the cover of darkness. This combination appealed both to White Knights members who felt that Bowers' militancy was not matched by his willingness and ability to provide legal support to members implicated in terroristic plots as well as those frustrated by the limits imposed by his elaborate systems of authorization for violent acts (Cunningham 2013a,b). As a result, the UKA attracted an unwieldy mix of Klan adherents who felt that the White Knights were too dangerously violent, and those who felt they were not militant enough.

Mississippi Klan leader E.L. McDaniel epitomized the palpable tension between these two groups and their respective orientations to maintaining white supremacy. Originally a member of the White Knights, McDaniel's move to the UKA followed his secretive campaign to partner with Shelton to siphon members to his outfit. While, distinct from Bowers' approach with the White Knights, McDaniel didn't regularly engineer terror campaigns against civil rights targets, he also did little to discourage rank-and-file members from such actions. This tacit support enabled, among dozens of other acts of violence statewide, UKA members to embark in an extended bombing campaign in McComb (discussed in more detail below) and a similarly gruesome campaign of violence in McDaniel's home base in Natchez.

While understanding the KKK's organizational landscape – and particularly these struggles over Klan turf – is important, an emphasis on intra-KKK competition shouldn't obscure the fact that both the White Knights and the UKA's Mississippi membership engaged in violence to a degree unsurpassed elsewhere in the South during this period. In addition to the large number of tragic bombings and murder plots, excerpts from a surreptitiously-recorded conversation among UKA members in Natchez (Crane and Young 1968) underscores the range of intimidation tactics that Mississippi klansmen employed throughout this period:

“We had a nigger down in Natchez tried to send his boy to a white school. His cornfield kept disappearing on him, stalks and all.”

“That’s right, and then his car caught the Sugar Diabetes – that’s the disease get in the oil.”

“We taught him to sleep in a raincoat, we had so many damn holes in that nigger’s roof that buckshot wouldn’t bounce off no more.”

Klan adherents’ ability to engage in such acts for extended periods also highlights the tacit or active support that the KKK received from law enforcement. In many communities, sheriffs, police chiefs, and rank-and-file officers counted among the Klan’s membership, and – even if not – exhibited sympathy and tolerance for the KKK’s brand of terrorism, enabling klansmen to undertake violence with impunity. At the state level, the Mississippi Highway Patrol was dogged by accusations of Klansmen in their ranks. While the MSSC publicly spoke out against Klan violence, its agents did nothing to prevent KKK mobilization in general or overt alliances between Klansmen and local police officials in particular (Cunningham 2013a,b; Irons 2010; Watson 2010). A 1966 interaction between these parties clearly illustrated these connections. After one particularly notorious Natchez-area Klansman was arrested for the bombing of a local jewelry store in December of that year, Sovereignty Commission investigator L.E. Cole, Jr. arrived at the county jail to find the perpetrator outside of his cell, “telling jokes” with Sheriff Odell Anders, UKA leader E.L. McDaniel, and two other well-known Klan officers. Cole, for his part, seemed less troubled by this apparent miscarriage of justice than by the fact that several of the jokes “made light of the Sovereignty Commission and our work in front of these KKK officials” (MSSC file # 2-36-2-69-1-1-1).

Such close associations were characteristic of the broader anti-civil rights field.

According to federal investigators, despite claims by APWR leaders that “We are not secret. We are not part of the Klan. We are not nightriders. We don't front for no organization,” typical APWR chapters “encompass[ed] all Klansmen in the area, plus a few non-Klansmen,” often disgruntled Citizens’ Council members. Similarly, as UKA leader E.L. McDaniel noted: “You had a lot of people that belonged to the Citizens' Council that was members of the Klan. A lot of Citizen's Council, a lot of them were members of the...Americans for the Preservation of the White Race, and so on.” Police also openly affiliated with their local APWR chapters; describing a typical Jackson chapter meeting, one report noted a city officer – his police department patch displayed openly on his jacket – seated front-and-center among the collection of 75 to 100 APWR adherents present (*Christian Science Monitor*, 3 July 1964; Cunningham 2013a).

In many larger Mississippi communities, a range of more traditional segregationist associations augmented the resistance campaigns mobilized through this collection of militant civil efforts. Groups promoting white supremacy under the guise of “constitutional government” or “religious integrity” abounded, and such mainstream outlets attracted more moderate adherents of the CCA and APWR alongside a broader swath of the white community. This spectrum of organizations remained quite fluid; as one contemporaneous news account put it:

Assorted women’s and youth organizations also exist for the purpose of battling integration and ‘commie agitators’... As civil rights pressures build and these organizations react, it becomes harder and harder to delineate between them. Some people are members of two or more at a time. Other people are known to be shifting from one group to another either because politicians and practices are either too extreme or not extreme enough (*Christian Science Monitor*, 3 July 1964).

Such characterizations of proliferating segregationist efforts lent a strong degree of credibility to civil rights activist Bob Moses’ conclusion that, throughout the mid-1960s, “the full resources of



the state will continue to be at the disposal of local authorities to fight civil rights gains.... The entire white population will continue to be the Klan” (quoted in Dittmer 1995: 198-199).

While such rhetoric spoke to the broader truth of oppression faced by civil rights forces, instances of conflict and competition also at times percolated among segregationist efforts, both locally and statewide. In particular, the KKK’s flouting of law and order was frequently cited as counterproductive to the broader white supremacist cause, and often painted in opposition to the professionalized efforts of police forces. “No officer in this state or anywhere needs the help of the Ku Klux Klan in enforcing the law,” proclaimed Mississippi Attorney General Joe T. Patterson in 1965. “The good people of each community and city should band together to enforce and obey the law and demand assistance from their law officers” (MSSC file # 6-53-0-12-1-1-1). Speaking more generally against vigilantism (but, tellingly, not against segregationist resistance generally), Governor Paul Johnson offered a public appeal to allow police to address civil rights activity, warning that he would “not tolerate anyone taking the law into his own hands” (NARA, HUAC Box 49[23], folder: APWR). Such logics also held within certain communities as segregationist outfits sought to maintain their turf. In Yazoo City, at the boundary of the Delta, the Citizens’ Council issued a statement that obliquely addressed the looming threat posed by the KKK: “your Citizens’ Council was formed to preserve separation of the races, and believes that it can best serve the county where it is the only organization operating in the field” (quoted in Dittmer 1995: 218).

In the sections that follow, we grapple with such distinctions, to focus on the interplay within this segregationist field and in particular the orientation of state bodies to civic efforts such as the Citizens’ Councils, the APWR, and the KKK. To gain leverage over such relationships, we focus on two local communities – McComb in southwest Mississippi and

Clarksdale in the Delta – highlighting in each case local demographic and economic climates, the nature and extent of the civil rights threat, and the organization of local enforcement networks. These two cases are themselves situated within the broader milieu of repressive anti-civil rights mobilization in Mississippi, characterized by state and state-sponsored actors operating within the logic of a collective action field (Fligstein and McAdam 2012). This conceptualization implies that these repressive agents, although working towards nominally shared ends (i.e., the maintenance of *de jure* racial segregation in the state), had differing orientations to the proper means to confront civil rights challenges. Thus, these agents organized their actions relative not only to the contours of perceived challenges and the contextual factors that enabled differing degrees of reactive mobilization, but also to the actions of other enforcement agents who competed for legitimacy within this field.

Within the context of Civil Rights-era Mississippi, we understand the field of state-sponsored segregationist mobilization as broadly organized within three distinct regional logics (Cunningham *et al.* 2015). First, in Clarksdale and the broader Delta region of Northwestern Mississippi, the relatively limited and tentative nature of civil rights insurgent actions and corresponding reactions by segregation enforcers were broadly conditioned by the overwhelming vulnerability of African-Americans to targeted economic sanctioning by white elites. This acute vulnerability increased the viability of “legitimate” segregationist organizations such as the Citizens’ Councils and local police units and auxiliaries, and correspondingly decreased the appeal of vigilante organizations such as the Klan. Second, in the southwest and south-central region of the state around McComb and Natchez, desegregated factories run by northern industrialists enabled the growth of a relatively independent black working class that was less vulnerable to such sanctioning, and thus enabled civil rights insurgents to mobilize more

pronounced challenges to segregation and voter suppression. Because of the more extreme nature of these perceived challenges, state and local law enforcement efforts often competed for legitimacy with various vigilante forces (in particular the KKK), with both engaging in comparatively high levels of violence against insurgents; such actions were comparatively much less frequent in the Delta. Third, for the largely rural counties in the state's Northeast and East-Central regions (which we do not explicitly examine in the following case studies, but include for purposes of broader comparison), relative isolation – in terms of both their inaccessibility by road and rail travel and the lack of attention they received from federal agents and national journalists – enabled local law enforcement to operate with relative impunity in preventing significant civil rights challenges from being organized.

Therefore, by examining local variation in the organization and operation of enforcement networks across community settings, we aim to underscore the baseline point that enforcement unfolded differently across locales, and that such differences were associated with the capacities and orientations of particular state actors. In short, the contours of the segregationist responses to the civil rights struggle in Clarksdale and McComb enable us to elaborate on how the logic of state engagement impacted the progression of mobilization on all sides of the struggle.

## **Clarksdale**

Located in the heart of the Mississippi Delta in the state's northwest region, our interest in Clarksdale relates to its historical rootedness in the cotton planting economy, the resulting disproportionate level of economic and social power that whites accumulated and consolidated over African-American sharecroppers, and the ways in which this accumulation and consolidation made African Americans acutely vulnerable to economic and social sanctions for

perceived infractions against the racial caste system. This vulnerability to economic means of social control created challenges for civil rights organizers in mobilizing change efforts in the region, increased the effectiveness and salience of “legitimate” Jim Crow enforcers (best exemplified through the close interactions among local Citizens Councils, the state-level Sovereignty Commission, and local law enforcement), and correspondingly decreased the perceived need for and appeal of violent vigilante groups such as the KKK relative to other areas of the state.

Organized civil rights challenges to Jim Crow in Clarksdale, the Coahoma County seat, began in 1952 with the founding of the county’s first NAACP chapter. Civil rights organizers faced particular hurdles in trying to organize for social change in the Delta, due to the dispersed nature of black settlement and the specific vulnerability of its black population to economic reprisals from white elites and business owners who felt threatened by local challenges to segregation. NAACP leaders, in noting the specific vulnerability of blacks in the Delta, wrote that “most of the economy of Clarksdale and Coahoma County is built around agriculture with many Negroes humbly abiding on plantations.... Many rigidly deprived Negroes work on the plantations from eight to ten hours per day for a rate of thirty cents per hour. Most of the housing for Negroes is rental housing by White real estate companies and individuals” (quoted in Dirks 2007:77).

The linkage of the Delta’s specific economy of racial domination and the emerging national civil rights struggle, represented locally by the 1952 NAACP chapter founding, drew both from indigenous black organizing and important triggering events that demonstrated the shortcomings of more traditional accommodationist organizations to local residents. First, NAACP regional organizers like Ruby Hurley, dispatched from New York to oversee

recruitment efforts in the Southeast in the 1950s, benefitted from the substantial strength of existing black political organizations in Coahoma and in the Delta more generally: the Regional Council of Negro Leadership (RCNL) and the Mississippi Progressive Voters League (MPVL). The former, founded in 1951, had been focused more squarely on issues of black communal self-help and civic engagement, with some attention to voter registration; the latter, founded in 1946, had focused relatively exclusively on voter registration efforts while acquiescing to poll taxes and other segregationist impediments to black political franchise (Hamlin 2012:17,19).

Such organizations had managed to co-exist relatively well within the particular white power structure of the county, whose residents prided themselves on their “tolerance” as evidenced by the county’s relatively high levels of interracial cooperation in civic affairs (compared to neighboring counties). According to Aaron Henry, a major local organizer and public figure in the Clarksdale freedom movement who acted as something of a “bridge leader” between the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and indigenous organizations such as the RCNL (Robnett 1996), “[whites] held a tight grip, and we knew that our fight for equality would be long and difficult” (Hamlin 2012:25).

Second, the transition – symbolized by the growth of the NAACP – from a local organizing focus on black communal aid and self-help to increasing involvement in challenges to Jim Crow also seems to have been triggered by critical local events in the early 1950s, which encouraged local black residents toward more organized and insurgent resistance. One event began with the rape of two black women, thirty-five year old Leola Tates and twenty-two year old Erline Mills, by a local white truck driver, E.L. Roach, in 1951; the charges were quickly dropped over alleged conflicts in victim testimonies, despite the open admissions of the perpetrator to having done so. The Progressive Voter League protested this outcome, despite its

relative normalcy within Jim Crow legal norms, by collecting money from residents to hire a special counsel, and by pushing for the convening of a grand jury to secure further indictments. A second pivotal event was the 1952 murder by Clarksdale police of Denzill Turner, an epileptic who had experienced a seizure on the street and was shot multiple times by police responding to a “drunk man on the loose,” despite the officers having been informed of Turner’s medical condition by his father. All three officers involved were later exonerated. This exoneration, occurring only months after the Roach verdict, led Aaron Henry to organize local black residents to protest the killing to the mayor (Hamlin 2012:25-27).

These critical events and the subsequent collective actions by local black residents had important effects, in that they “revealed... subtle crack[s] in the Delta’s seemingly impenetrable Jim Crow façade” by demonstrating the collective ability of local residents to resist local enforcement of these norms (Hamlin 2012:26). The MPVL ran a voter registration drive in 1953 that promised to register 1,200 new black voters by 1954; the RCNL began to increasingly adopt the anti-Jim Crow framework of the NAACP; and the NAACP’s regional organizing efforts, coordinated by Ruby Hurley under the slogan “Let’s Do More in ’54 Because We Want to Be Free in ’63”, ran consecutive membership drives throughout the 1950s that increased its ties with RCNL and MPVL. Together, these efforts helped to create an “increasingly, though cautiously, aggressive context” for challenging Jim Crow in the Delta’s seemingly impenetrable web of white economic, political, and legal controls (Hamlin 2012:29).

These increasingly restive efforts also punctured the “selective tolerance” of the white power governance structure of Clarksdale specifically and Coahoma County more generally, leading to increasing reactive efforts by local white elites, officials, and residents to utilize their economic and political leverage against black insurgents. These efforts were largely coordinated

under the auspices of the Citizens' Councils, which endeavored to use economic tactics to stamp out progressive activism. By 1956, in response to local activism and the broader threat of desegregation from the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board* decisions, the Coahoma Citizens' Council had grown to a membership of 1,130, and its efforts were augmented by regular intelligence on the activities of local civil rights proponents provided by the MSSC (Hamlin 2012:29-31). Coahoma police largely acted as the out-front enforcers of these organizations by utilizing physical harassment and intimidation when economic reprisals failed to achieve desired results.

The specific role of the Clarksdale police as official agents of intimidation and violence, alongside the high capacity for economic intimidation, largely obviated the need for extra-legal vigilante groups such as the APWR and KKK (Dirks 2007:78; see also Hill 2004:202). Neither of those groups enjoyed widespread support in Coahoma, despite organizing efforts that extended through late 1965. In November of that year, UKA organizers sought to solidify a membership drive by electing officers, but – according to an FBI informant – could not even attract enough members to the meeting to proceed with the election (FBI Memo from SA James W. Sammon to SAC, Jackson, 13 November 1965). Sporadic vigilante violence, however, did supplement the official violence of the police in the region, though the unorganized nature of such acts meant that they never reached the terroristic proportions that KKK-perpetrated action did in other regions of the state.

By working together in a more or less coordinated fashion, these organizations contributed to a pronounced decline in regional NAACP membership by the end of the 1950s by targeting economically vulnerable black residents who supported civil rights efforts in either name or deed, such as by publishing the names of petition signees in the local newspaper.

However, by the dawn of the 1960s, increasing pressure and harassment also likely contributed to an increasing push for more radical direct-action oriented tactics by younger activists who, spurred by the success of the Greensboro lunch counter protests and other youth-led campaigns, increasingly viewed the pace of legal challenge as insufficient for effectively promoting civil rights in the face of overwhelming white repression (Hamlin 2012:75).

The increasing restiveness in Coahoma's black communities in the 1950s and 1960s was leveraged by local organizers who, as business owners with clienteles not restricted to white residents, were not as directly vulnerable to the powerful mixture of economic and social sanctions that local elites could leverage. Aaron Henry, who bridged membership in both local organizations like the RCNL and MPVL and extra-regional organizations such as the NAACP, SCLC, and the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), owned a drug store in downtown Clarksdale that served as an important meeting and safe space for local activists. Similarly, Vera Pigeo, a central NAACP organizer in Clarksdale from the late 1950s on, owned a beauty salon where local African Americans could discuss local politics openly without fear of reprisal. Focusing on economic impediments to involvement in the movement, local organizers also convened efforts such as clothing and food drives throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s that sought to alleviate the vulnerability of local residents to economic sanctioning. Likely because of this relative independence and their efforts to insulate other residents from local networks of white economic dominance, Henry, Pigeo, and other local leaders faced increasingly intense intimidation and harassment from local police, spearheaded by notorious local Police Chief Ben Collins (Hamlin 2012: 59-70, 134-35).

The relative economic independence of local movement organizers remained central as the regional movement's focus shifted away from the NAACP – whose membership in the Delta



had declined under consistent onslaughts from the Citizens Councils, MSSC, and local law enforcement by the early 1960s – and toward the increasing dynamism of youth activists in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the SCLC. These younger activists focused more closely on direct-action challenges to Jim Crow, as opposed to the more deliberate pace of legal challenges by the NAACP, and thus were able to position themselves as more effectively resisting established Jim Crow social structures (Hamlin 2012:70-71). This increasing direct action focus was best instantiated through the organization of an economic boycott of white businesses in downtown Clarksdale throughout 1961 and 1962, continued voter registration efforts such as the Council of Federated Organizations' (COFO) Freedom Vote campaign in 1963, and the Freedom Summer voter registration and outreach campaigns during the summer of 1964. These efforts, in turn, drew increasingly violent reactions from local police, driven largely by the perception that existing economic and legal structures could no longer be counted on to stymie civil rights agitation.

In sum, in the years leading up to the 1964 campaign, enforcement via a tightly interconnected network of local political figures and economic elites, along with the use of law enforcement to provide legalized intimidation and violence when these backroom tactics failed to quell support for change, civil rights advances in the Mississippi Delta region remained relatively meager, with almost all major public institutions remaining completely segregated. But such limited gains should not obscure the fact that, against huge odds, organizers like Henry and Pigeon, with support from a shifting array of indigenous and extra-local organizations, had politicized and mobilized a highly precarious population of black laborers and sharecroppers. From 1964 onward, their collective displays of courage began to successfully draw attention both from national civil rights organizations and the federal government in addressing the need for

civil rights legislative reforms and social protections (Hamlin 2012:114). In overcoming these fundamental barriers to mobilizing support, and in the growing local movement's focus on direct action in response to the entrenched nature of white political and economic power, the civil rights struggle in Clarksdale and Coahoma County illustrates the ways in which local structures of domination conditioned the emergence of particular forms of civil rights challenges, the types of enforcement networks these challengers faced based on these challenges, and the ways in which interactions between activists and enforcement agents evolved over time in response to local opportunities and hindrances for each side.

### **McComb**

Located in Pike County in the heart of Southwest Mississippi, McComb's strategic location midway between New Orleans and Jackson aided its growth as an early rail center. The community's small-city industrial character intersected with the presence of early sustained organizing campaigns by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to shape the contours of an enforcement network centered on pronounced institutional overlap between local officials and a range of organized militant, and frequently vigilantist, organizations.

In sharp contrast with the Delta, Mississippi's southwestern region lacks a lucrative agricultural base, and thus McComb's economy centered primarily on the railroad, oil, and manufacturing rather than on anything resembling Coahoma County's racially-segmented plantation system. By the early 1960's, more than a dozen industrial firms – the Illinois Central railroad and a lingerie factory the largest among them – employed 5,000 workers in the city and surrounding areas of Pike County, and hundreds of others worked in the many active sawmills around the county. By the 1960s, African Americans comprised approximately a third of

McComb's 13,000 residents, with the railroad tracks that bisected the community strictly separating the white and black sides of town.

McComb's reputation as a rough blue-collar town was cemented early; civil violence as a means of activating and settling conflicts looms large in the community's popular memory. Famed Mississippi journalist Hodding Carter (1965) dates the area's predilection for vigilantism to the early nineteenth century, and throughout the Jim Crow era such acts were frequently directed toward the enforcement of racial norms. Indeed, at the outset of the 1960s more known acts of racial violence had occurred in McComb than in any other Mississippi community (Ward 2016; see also Peterson and Ward 2015). Such vigilantism only intensified when the city became an early beachhead of the Mississippi Movement, sparked by SNCC worker Bob Moses' arrival in the community in 1961.

With the support of longtime local NAACP leader C.C. Bryant and other veteran local NAACP adherents, Moses built a grassroots voter registration drive that extended through the latter half of that summer (Carson 1981). Some of the local young people energized by that work also engaged in a parallel campaign, staging sit-ins at the local Woolworth's and the Greyhound Bus Terminal. Direct action of this sort had long been considered prohibitively dangerous in Mississippi, but more than 100 students at McComb's black high school, Burglund High, upped the ante that fall by staging a mass walkout and march to City Hall in protest of the supposed expulsion of two of the teens participating in the earlier Greyhound sit-in.

Police and School Board officials responded harshly, arresting all of the students involved in the walkout, forcing them to sign a pledge not to participate in further civil rights activity as a condition of their return to school (dozens of students refused to sign, and eventually enrolled in Campbell College in Jackson to complete their high school coursework), and also

engaging in physical retribution against adult SNCC workers. As part of the latter campaign, Bob Moses was badly beaten by a cousin of the Pike County sheriff, with other SNCC adherents facing similar violence at the hands of the registrar and police officers in Pike and nearby Amite County. Violent repression reached a crescendo in late September when Amite County NAACP leader and SNCC ally Herbert Lee was shot and killed in cold blood by state legislator E.H. Hurst, an act that effectively halted SNCC's 1961 McComb campaign (Dittmer 1995; McComb Board of Education 1961).

In the face of such harsh retribution, McComb maintained a large and active NAACP branch; in 1966, local membership still exceeded 150 (Andrews 2004). SNCC's organizational resilience and deep roots in the community also enabled a renewed McComb campaign in 1964, augmented by a group of Freedom Summer project volunteers who arrived that July, to continue voter registration work and open a freedom school. The dynamics of this second campaign were forged by the strong official reaction to the perceived threat posed by this civil rights challenge, once again cementing McComb's status as the most viciously contentious community in the civil rights-era South (Carson 1981; Dittmer 1995).

Indeed, the 1964 drive to suppress civil rights actions was notable for its broad-based reactionary militance, with both official and civil actors playing significant roles in the progression of conflict in the summer of fall of 1964. Prior to the start of the Freedom Summer campaign, an editorial in the local McComb *Enterprise-Journal* noted preparations for a coordinated official response, with "Gov. Paul Johnson at the state level, Sheriff R.R. Warren at the county level and Mayor Gordon Burt and Police Chief George Guy at the city level...all in agreement as to the procedures to pursue." While public pronouncements of those procedures predictably opposed civil rights activity, they also emphasized a measured approach to maintain

order. Police officials stressed that they were prepared to handle any conflicts and, in their efforts to enforce the law, they would “see to it that we ourselves observe the law.” The county circuit clerk added that he would fairly assess any applicants for voter registration: “My responsibility is to apply the law and I will apply it to white and colored people alike and with no distinction because of race” (quotes from Carter 1965: 63). During a mid-July meeting with a representative of the incipient Freedom Summer campaign, arranged by *Enterprise-Journal* editor Oliver Emmerich, Sheriff Warren reiterated similar themes, pledging full police cooperation so long as the civil rights workers conducted voter registration efforts “in an orderly manner” and ensured that any other activities remained “purely educational” (Carter 1965).

In practice, however, officials’ response to the civil rights campaign unfolded quite differently. One of the two black officers hired onto McComb’s 18-person police force in 1964 quit after refusing orders to plant an informant among the cadre of local civil rights activists and initiate a petition to force them to leave McComb (Dittmer 1995). To increase police capacity, Chief Guy augmented his force with auxiliary deputies, including several known (and later indicted) KKK members (Pearson 1964). Such actions aligned with his marked laissez-faire approach to – and thus tacit support for – rising vigilante counter-mobilization.

This counter-mobilization campaign took a variety of intersecting forms. By late 1964, eight separate chapters of the UKA had organized in Pike County, marking the area in and around McComb as the most active Klan region in the South (U.S. House of Representatives 1966, 1967). The APWR also built a sizable local following, with at least some of its members also active in the Klan (Cummings 1964). These groups were joined by the local neighborhood “self-protection” association Help, Inc., which mobilized residents of two of McComb’s most prominent subdivisions under the guise of “protection of one’s family, home and property.”

Employing an elaborate network of officers and block captains, the organization developed a hyperbolic protocol for securing fellow residents against home invasion and assault by encroaching civil rights forces. On at least three occasions, Help, Inc. mobilized car caravans to encircle the house of one resident with supposed ties to civil rights activists (based on his hosting of an impromptu dinner with a minister and Freedom Summer worker), and engineered a subsequent harassment campaign that resulted in more than 350 threatening phone calls and the poisoning of the target's family dog (Carter 1965: 68-71).

Contrary to the claims of goodwill offered by Sheriff Warren, the rise of the KKK, APWR, and Help, Inc. was supported by their close connections to his office and other local and state officials. Help, Inc.'s 1964 coming-out party, a potluck supper for more than 200 residents of its subdivisions, featured an invocation by Warren. When, later that summer, McComb Mayor Gordon Burt agreed to a rather delicate interview with Chicago *Daily News* reporter Nicholas Van Hoffman, he brought along two of Help, Inc.'s Vice Presidents for support (Carter 1965). Likewise, Chief Guy, an avowed APWR member, actively encouraged that group's activities. Sheriff Warren spoke to that group as well, pledging to "recruit" APWR adherents as auxiliary officers to deal with the upcoming "long hot summer" of 1964 (Dittmer 1995). For his part, Mayor Burt served as Pike County chairman of the CCA, though the limited economic vulnerability of the local black population meant that the Councils' strength in Southwestern Mississippi never approached that of their Delta counterparts.

While, through such connections, vigilante forces gained valuable resources and strategic advantage, perhaps the most significant impact of this pattern of official complicity was the opening of space within which they could act with impunity. During the summer and fall of 1964, McComb UKA units embarked on an extensive bombing campaign, selecting targets from

a hat filled with the names of those deemed threatening to the segregationist status quo (Mississippi Bureau of Investigation 1964). With the support of local oil baron J.E. Thornhill – whose success in the industry made him one of McComb’s wealthiest citizens and also provided easy access to dynamite – klansmen perpetrated at least two dozen bombings, along with a handful of arson attempts, beatings, and cross burnings (U.S. House of Representatives 1965). Throughout, as McComb attorney and then-Chamber of Commerce president Robert Brumfield recalled, “a lot of people sat back and enjoyed what was going on” (Dittmer 1995: 267).

Indeed, Chief Guy, Sheriff Warren, and their respective forces seemed befuddled by the wave of terror, claiming not to have any leads and on several occasions accusing movement allies of staging the bombings themselves (McComb *Enterprise-Journal*, 23 September 1964). Police also conducted parallel harassment efforts against local civil rights activists, threatening pretext arrests of campaign workers for violating a new anti-leafleting ordinance and carrying out a midnight raid on the movement’s headquarters, ostensibly to search for illegal whiskey and proof of interracial cohabitation (Carter 1965; Dittmer 1995). The police’s lack of veracity with their bombing investigations soon became evident, as – once under pressure to do so – they would quickly apprehend eleven Klansmen involved in one or more terrorist acts. During the subsequent trial, the plaintiffs put Sheriff Warren on the stand, considering him an adverse (i.e. hostile) witness to the state’s case against the Klan bombers (Gordon 1964a).

The escalating pressure placed on local police to halt the bombing campaign stemmed from increased national scrutiny and criticism of McComb, which produced a looming fear of state and federal intervention to restore order along with mounting anxiety among the business class that vigilantism was doing irreparable harm to the city’s economic prospects. Beginning in late September, *Enterprise-Journal* editor Oliver Emmerich penned a series of editorials that

condemned the bombings and associated acts of terror and harassment, culminating in the full-page “Statement of Principles” published in the newspaper and backed by the signatures of a large swath of local business leaders. Notably, while far from progressive, the statement criticized a full range of official and private efforts to thwart civil rights efforts, calling for an end to harassment arrests, economic threats, and unequal treatment under the law along with vigilante violence (Dittmer 1995).

The KKK bombing trial underscored a similar point about the spectrum of forces mobilized to contest civil rights advances. Following guilty pleas lodged by the defendants, the judge in the case, W.H. Watkins, Jr., controversially handed out astoundingly light punishments. To explain his rationale for ruling that the guilty parties would receive only suspended sentences and parole, he noted how the court “understands and appreciates” that these crimes were to some extent caused by “unnecessary and unwanted...outside influences” whose “presence has provoked a lot of people.” His closing admonition to the Klan defendants clearly underscored the synergistic nature of the enforcement network aligned against civil rights forces:

Now what you have done is to hurt your white friends, your family, and your responsible friends, and it has been to hurt the law. You have placed the law enforcement officers in jeopardy.... You have caused riot, almost riot and civil commotion, and you have caused these officers to go out and expose themselves to dangers where they shouldn't be required to go. Now, *when the law is on your side* there's no use and there is no excuse whatever for you doing anything or any act that's contrary to the law, *you are both working for the same end, for the same goal, you and the law*. But you were not doing it the right way. You should have been cooperating with the law instead of placing your law enforcement officers in jeopardy and in a dangerous situation. We have Civil Defense, we need auxiliary officers to take care of these explosive situations when they arise.... I am sure if this situation gets bad enough the sheriff will need auxiliary deputies. Any number of situations might arise where the law enforcement officers need you. They sure don't need you to be combating them, to be fighting for them, there's no excuse for...” (Gordon 1964b; emphasis added).



### **Configuring enforcement: State-mobilized contention in comparative relief**

Though McComb's configuration of state-civil connections differed from those in Clarksdale, these dual cases underscore both the clear alignment and coordination of actors within enforcement networks and the manner in which state support for civil efforts maps locally onto the contours of the civil rights challenge and perceived vulnerabilities within the black community. Given the pronounced racialized patterns of economic dependence throughout the Delta, segregationist forces in Clarksdale benefited most from support imparted to Citizens' Councils and other economic pressure points to reinforce police action and sporadic violence. Correspondingly, organized vigilantism from the KKK or other militant bodies held less appeal, and were relatively minor players in Clarksdale's enforcement network.

In contrast, support for the KKK, APWR, and residentially-based civil efforts were central to the matrix of enforcement in McComb, with significant overlap between city and county officials and organized vigilantism. Such distinctions reflected both the differing character of local civil rights mobilization – with Aaron Henry and Vera Piguee's bridge roles in Clarksdale enabling a familiar admixture of NAACP negotiation and protest, and SNCC's grassroots organizing campaigns in McComb posing a more acute threat less easily addressed via official channels – and vulnerabilities rooted in localized political economies. Such contrasts underscore both the *constancy* of state efforts to enable and sustain contention rooted in broad counter-mobilization against challenges to Jim Crow, and the logic of pronounced *variation* across local fields of enforcement within a state often treated as unitary in its resistance to civil rights challenges.

As such, these cases speak to the nested character of state-mobilized contention in a democratic context. In the civil rights-era U.S., such contention was reactionary, enacted

regionally and locally in opposition to federal pressures to expand the contours of democracy in the South by more fully incorporating and accommodating African Americans as citizens.

During this period of heightened conflict over the nature of democratic governance, the scope and scale of state-mobilized contention expanded, to incorporate a range of state and civil actors.

While this baseline character has been well-documented, its trajectory often obscures two associated aspects that we highlight here: first, the manner in which the escalation of reactive contention was enabled by earlier state-mobilized efforts with pre-emptive, infrastructural, programmatic, and signaling aims; and second, the pronounced local variation in the composition of enforcement networks.

In this expansive conception, officials located within police departments, school boards, and City Council chambers did not operate equivalently across communities, nor was the presence and predominance of civil bodies such as Citizens' Councils or vigilante KKK outfits given or constant. As the McComb and Clarksdale cases demonstrate, enforcement networks had differing configurations, each possessing an identifiable logic determined in large part by the degree and form of vulnerability associated with local challengers. Our aim here has been to recognize that variation and elucidate these logics, to provide a basis for better understanding how officials maintain and extend their power not only through direct demonstration, but also by engaging governmental and civil sectors to prod the contours of contention toward their own interests and ends.

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