

**Who Joined the Sit-ins and Why:  
Southern Black Students in the early 1960s\***

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*The wave of sit-ins that swept the American South in 1960 has become a crucial episode in the literature on social movements. To investigate who joined the sit-ins and why, this article analyzes a sample survey of 255 students in Southern black colleges in 1962. The survey includes measures of integration into preexisting social networks. Most surprisingly, students who attended church frequently were less likely to join the sit-ins, though the presence of activist ministers made protest more likely. The survey also includes measures of beliefs and sentiments. Protesters were motivated by strong grievances, for they had an especially negative evaluation of race relations. Yet they were also motivated by optimism about the prospects of success, for they believed—incorrectly—that there was no white majority for strict segregation. The analysis underscores the importance of beliefs and sentiments, which cannot easily be reduced to objective measures of social location.*

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**Who Joined the Sit-ins and Why:  
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A wave of sit-ins swept the American South in the spring of 1960. Eating places and other facilities that refused to serve blacks were physically occupied and picketed, predominantly by black college students. This protest wave was a pivotal episode in the struggle for racial equality in the United States; it also foreshadowed the student protests that became emblematic of the 1960s, throughout the Western world. The sit-ins have become a crucial episode in the literature on social movements. Qualitative studies describe the development of protest campaigns in various cities, using contemporary accounts and retrospective interviews (sociological examples include Killian 1984; Laue 1989; Morris 1981, 1984; Oberschall 1989; Oppenheimer 1963; Polletta 1998).<sup>1</sup> A limitation of these studies is selection on the dependent variable: they focus only on people who joined the sit-ins. Because they overlook the majority of people who did not participate, no comparison is possible. By contrast, time series and event history analyses allow comparisons from year to year and among cities (Jenkins, Jacobs, and Agnone 2003; Andrews and Biggs 2006). But this kind of aggregate approach is far removed from the decisions of individuals. It cannot answer the questions: who joined the sit-ins and why?

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<sup>1</sup> The historical literature is voluminous; there are significant recent studies on sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina (Chafe 1981, ch. 3), Nashville (Halberstam 1998, book 1), and Atlanta (Fort 1989).

A sample survey allows us to answer these questions. Although survey data lack the richness of interview testimony, they have a compensating advantage: they permit comparison between participants and non-participants. The sit-ins were apparently the first episode of protest ever to be investigated with sample surveys (see Wehr 1960; Searles and Williams 1962). Most notably, Matthews and Prothro (1966, 1975) surveyed black college students in the South at the beginning of 1962. Their findings are cited sparsely in the literature on the sit-ins. This survey deserves renewed attention. We can now use multivariate logistic regression, whereas Matthews and Prothro (1966) were inevitably limited to cross-tabulation (see also Orbell 1967). Moreover, while they investigated only a handful of variables from their extensive questionnaire, we can explore other variables which have emerged as important in recent theories of participation in social movements.

This paper concentrates on two kinds of explanations. One is the individual's social integration into preexisting social networks. The argument that social integration (rather than disintegration) fosters participation is one of the most salient in recent literature; the movement against racial oppression in the 1950s and 1960s has provided a crucial empirical case (e.g., McAdam 1982; McAdam and Paulsen 1993; Morris 1981, 1984). Here we can test whether individuals who lived in a dormitory or frequently attended church were more likely to be drawn into the movement. The effect of movement organizations can also be estimated. A second kind of explanation involves the individual's beliefs and sentiments. Several components have been identified in recent literature using survey data, including collective identity, subjective grievances, and optimism about success (e.g., Finkel and Muller 1998; Klandermans 2002). All these can be tested here.

My analysis of social integration reveals an unexpected effect for church attendance: students who attended frequently were *less* likely to join the sit-ins than those who seldom attended. At the same time, the presence of activist ministers in the Southern Christian

Leadership Conference (SCLC) made protest more likely. There were also significant differences between denominations. Together, these findings provide a more complex portrait of the role played by churches in the early phase of the movement. In addition, my analysis reveals the crucial importance of beliefs and sentiments. Protesters were motivated by strong grievances, for they had an especially negative evaluation of race relations. Conversely, they were also motivated by optimism about the prospects of success, for they believed—incorrectly—that there was no white majority for strict segregation. Although the survey cannot identify the processes constructing individual beliefs and sentiments, it provides compelling evidence for the importance of such processes.

The paper begins by developing hypotheses to explain individual participation, and then explicates data and method. Results are presented for sit-in protest, along with a subsidiary analysis of NAACP membership. There follows a discussion of the main findings. The conclusion indicates areas for future research.

### EXPLANATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION

What sort of people are most likely to take part in a social movement and why? I will emphasize participation in collective protest, but the same explanations should apply to membership in movement organizations. My review will focus on explanations pertaining to individuals' beliefs and sentiments and their integration into social networks, for such micro-level explanations are particularly appropriate for testing with survey data.

Explanations that refer to the wider ecological context (college, city, or county) will also be considered. There is no implication that these are rival or mutually exclusive 'theories.' Any theory will combine several of these explanatory factors.

The term 'beliefs and sentiments,' like McAdam's (1982) 'cognitive liberation,' is deliberately broad. It covers distinct (though compatible) explanations that have been developed in the traditions of rational choice (Finkel and Muller 1998; Finkel and Opp

1989; Opp, Voss, and Gern 1995) and social psychology (Klandermans 2002; Klandermans, Sabucedo, Rodriguez, and de Weerd 2002). Within the rational choice tradition, broadly defined, Finkel and Muller (1998) delineate three components of ‘collective interest’: extent of grievances, sense of personal contribution, and optimism about the prospects for successful collective action. They show that all three factors explain protest by West Germans in the late 1980s. Matthews and Prothro (1966) did not ask any question which could be used to measure the individual’s sense of personal contribution, as this concept was formulated subsequently by social scientists grappling with the free-rider problem. The other two components can, however, be tested.

*Hypothesis 1: students who had an especially negative evaluation of race relations were more likely to protest.*

*Hypothesis 2: students who were optimistic about the prospects for achieving racial equality were more likely to protest.*

Collective identity is emphasized by social psychology. Klandermans et al. (2002) demonstrate that Spanish and Dutch farmers who felt commitment to other farmers were more likely to take part in protest. Similarly, in McAdam and Paulsen’s (1993) analysis of white volunteers for Freedom Summer, subjective identification with a particular identity was an important complement to organizational affiliation.

*Hypothesis 3: students who had an especially strong identification with their race were more likely to protest.*

One of the most familiar themes in the literature on social movements is that participation depends on social integration (e.g., Wilson and Orum 1976). Evidence pertaining to African Americans in the 1950s and 1960s played a significant role in establishing this proposition. Thus McAdam states that “participants are distinguished from non-participants on the basis of their greater integration into the established

organizational networks of the minority community” (1982: 126). There are compelling theoretical reasons to believe that an individual is more likely to participate if he or she has strong personal connections with other potential participants (Chong 1991; Gould 2003). There is also comprehensive evidence on the importance of social networks for recruitment (e.g., Snow, Zurcher, and Eklund Olson 1980), though this is not uncontested (Jasper and Poulsen 1995). More recently, McAdam (1999: xxiii) emphasizes the “appropriation of existing organizational space” for the movement. “It is not prior networks or group structures that enable protest, but rather the interactive conversations that occur there” (McAdam 2003: 130).

For the movement against racial oppression, churches and colleges have been identified as sites with dense social networks. Among college students, social ties can be measured indirectly by an individual’s involvement in extracurricular activities or campus organizations (Searles and Williams 1962; Orum 1972). Such information was not gathered by Matthew and Prothro (1966), but they did record whether the student lived in a dormitory. In a similar fashion, analyses at the level of the college use residence halls as a proxy for social density (Orum 1972; Van Dyke 1998). Zhao (1998) shows how the concentration of students in dormitories can facilitate rapid mobilization.

*Hypothesis 4a: students who lived in dormitories were more likely to protest.*

The role of the church as a crucible of mobilization has been advocated vigorously by McAdam (1982) and Morris (1981, 1984). Despite some dissent (Piven and Cloward 1992), the orthodox view is that “activism was linked with—normatively required of—churchgoers” (Polletta 1998: 143). McAdam (1999: xxv) recently qualifies this view by emphasizing the cultural work required to ‘appropriate’ churches for the movement. Given that this process of appropriation is traced back to the mid 1950s, one would expect an association between church and participation by the 1960s. Such an association has yet to

be established by systematic evidence. In a survey of black adults from 1964, Marx (1967a, 1967b) finds that those who attended church regularly or expressed strong Christian convictions were less likely to express militant sentiments on racial inequality. In a multivariate reanalysis of the same survey, Hunt and Hunt (1977, following Nelsen, Madron, and Yokley 1975) suggest that only a ‘sectlike’—as opposed to ‘churchlike’—orientation is negatively associated with militancy. Curiously, their measure of the latter includes involvement in *non*-religious associations. The one existing analysis of protest rather than attitudes or voting, from the Harris-*Newsweek* survey of black adults in 1966, finds that those who described themselves as deeply religious were actually less likely to protest (Harris 1999: 63).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the hypothesis will be formulated in the orthodox direction. The debate over Marx’s findings and the recent emphasis on cultural work also suggests exploring differences among denominations, though it is not obvious *a priori* which traditions would be most conducive to protest.

*Hypothesis 4b: students who frequently attended church were more likely to protest.*

When explaining participation in protest, movement organizations are often lumped together with preexisting forms of social integration. They are worth separating for two reasons. Theoretically, social integration can be treated as exogenous by scholars of social movements, whereas movement organizations also require explanation. Methodologically, organization and protest are usually closely intertwined, requiring care to disentangle causal order. Two very different organizations are relevant for the sit-ins. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was a venerable

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<sup>2</sup> The effect of church attendance is not statistically significant at the .05 level. Note that this survey asked the question in a peculiar form: whether the respondent *or any other member of her or his family* had taken part in protest.

membership organization, based in the North, which enrolled students in College Chapters as well as ordinary branches. SCLC was a recently established network of local “movement centers” (Morris 1981, 1984), rooted in activist churches. According to Morris (1981, 1984), these churches played a crucial role in organizing the sit-ins. The hypotheses about organization have to be formulated at the ecological level, as the survey questions do not provide suitable information on the individual’s organizational involvement.

*Hypothesis 5a: students in colleges with an NAACP College Chapter were more likely to protest.*

*Hypothesis 5b: students in cities where SCLC was present were more likely to protest.*

Political opportunities, like social integration, has become a ubiquitous explanation in the literature on social movements. For students in the early 1960s, political opportunities can be identified on two levels. For students, the college was a polity in miniature: the administration could punish and ultimately expel those who violated its rules. Accounts of the sit-ins suggest that the administration was more repressive when the institution relied on state funding; a notorious example was Louisiana’s Southern University, which expelled sixteen students in May 1960. Privately funded colleges, by contrast, could afford greater tolerance. Beyond the college, there were variations in the degree to which local elites used political and economic repression to enforce racial subordination. This likewise would affect the anticipated costs of protesting.

*Hypothesis 6a: students attending private colleges were more likely to protest.*

*Hypothesis 6b: students in counties where racial repression was less severe were more likely to protest.*

Another explanation is peculiar to students as a social group. Studies of student mobilization and protest persistently find a positive association with the academic ‘quality’

of the institution (Lipset 1971; Soule 1997; van Dyke 1998). Lipset (1971) suggests that intellectually oriented students are more likely to protest, but does not specify any causal mechanism. While Matthews and Prothro (1966) emphasize the quality of education, McAdam (1982: 128-9, 131) argues that their results confound education with social integration. This dispute can be resolved by multivariate analysis.

*Hypothesis 7: students with a more academic education were more likely to protest.*

Finally, the individual's family background is relevant to explanation. As Piven and Cloward point out, "hierarchical bonds usually constrain collective protest" (1992: 312). Racial oppression was worst in rural areas. In cities, whites were not able to exercise the same degree of oppressive social control (McAdam 1982). Students who had grown up in the countryside might have been imbued with more accommodating attitudes. Alternatively, like the students interviewed by Gurin and Epps (1975), they might have feared reprisals against their parents, especially if tenant farmers. The same considerations pertain to the family's economic position, as indicated by income. Students from poor families might have been less willing to risk the costs of protest.

*Hypothesis 8a: students from cities were more likely to protest.*

*Hypothesis 8b: students from families with higher income were more likely to protest.*

## DATA AND METHOD

Matthews and Prothro (1966: 496) sampled "Negro students from southern homes working towards degrees at accredited, predominantly Negro institutions of higher learning in the 11 states of the former Confederacy." They selected 340 students in random clusters from a combined list of all degree candidates. Black interviewers, trained by the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center, conducted the interviews beginning in January 1962. This yielded 264 interviews at 30 institutions. The response rate—over three quarters—is remarkably high, given comparable rates of half or less (e.g., Orum 1972; Opp et al. 1995).

This survey has two major advantages (shared also by Opp et al. 1995). First, it provides information on a historically significant episode of protest. It includes students who had been in college when the wave of sit-ins began in the spring semester of 1960 (as well as students who entered afterwards). Two comparable surveys of black students conducted in 1964 (Orum and Orum 1968; Orum 1972; Gurin and Epps 1975) missed this crucial cohort.

Second, this survey provides a measure of actual protest rather than favorable attitudes or declared willingness to protest. The dichotomous dependent variable is coded from the question “Have you taken part in the sit-in demonstrations?” One quarter of the students answered affirmatively. Just over half of them had physically occupied facilities and one quarter had undertaken picketing, one-sixth had joined mass demonstrations, and a few said they had organized or led protest. These actions involved considerable risk: one in three were insulted, threatened, or assaulted, while one in six suffered arrest.<sup>3</sup> As this indicates, the dependent variable measures significant protest action.<sup>4</sup> The high proportion of protesters might raise suspicions. But a survey of students in North Carolina (Wehr 1960: 103) found that half took part in sit-down demonstrations, and historical evidence supports an exceptionally high level of participation among black college students (e.g., Polletta 1998). Most reassuring is the fact that in response to a parallel question about participation in freedom rides, only 2% of the students answered affirmatively.

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<sup>3</sup> None of those counted as arrested were also counted as insulted, threatened, or assaulted, which suggests that only the most severe punishment was coded.

<sup>4</sup> Some surveys include less significant actions as protest, such as wearing a button (Finkel and Muller 1998).

The survey does have one significant limitation, which it shares with other cross-sectional surveys—and indeed with retrospective interviews. Beliefs and sentiments expressed at the time of questioning may be a consequence (rather than a cause) of participation in protest; likewise, affiliation with movement organizations may be a consequence of protest. To overcome this limitation, sophisticated recent surveys utilize panel data (e.g., Finkel and Muller 1998; Klandermans et al. 2002). Variables measured at time  $t_1$  are then used to explain the individual's participation in protest between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ , controlling for protest prior to  $t_1$ . Equivalently, McAdam and Paulsen (1993) recover original information submitted by potential volunteers, before they actually took the decision to participate. The limitation of Matthew and Prothro's cross-sectional survey can be partially overcome by using other sources to construct variables for the presence of movement organizations *before* the wave of sit-ins. For beliefs and sentiments, however, causal attribution must be tentative in the absence of before-and-after data. This limitation will be considered again following presentation of the results.

Grievances (Hypothesis 1) are measured by the student's evaluation of race relations in the South, five years earlier. The respondent was asked to place race relations on a ten-point scale from the worst imaginable (1) to the best imaginable (10). Optimism about success (Hypothesis 2) is proxied by the student's assessment of the proportion of Southern whites "in favor of strict segregation of the races." This is coded as a fraction from .25 ("less than half") to 1 ("all"). The rationale for this proxy is that the success of collective action depends in part on the strength of opposition; someone who believed that all whites supported segregation would be less optimistic about the prospects of achieving desegregation, compared to someone who believed that segregation had the support of only

a minority.<sup>5</sup> Collective identification (Hypothesis 3) is measured by combining the responses to two questions, asking whether the respondent felt close to and took an interest in “other Negroes.” Adding the pair of three-point scales yields a variable ranging from 2 to 6.

Two aspects of social integration (Hypothesis 4) can be measured. Dormitory residence is coded as a dichotomous variable. Most students lived in dormitories, while almost all the remainder lived with their own family or in some other private residence. For church attendance, respondents were asked whether they attended church services “regularly, often, seldom or never?” (No one admitted the latter.) As there is no statistically significant difference between the first two categories, they are combined to form a dichotomous variable, labeled frequent attendance. To explore differences among Christian traditions, dichotomous variables are coded for the three largest groupings: Baptist (62%), Methodist (20%), and Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist (9%), grouped together as predominantly white denominations (following Marx 1967a; 1967b). This procedure allows us to make comparisons between these three groups, though it does not make sense to compare each one to the reference category, which is simply a residual.

The effect of movement organizations (Hypothesis 5) cannot be ascertained from the survey itself. A quarter of the students belonged to NAACP, but membership could have followed protest rather than preceded it. Indeed, that is suggested by aggregate

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<sup>5</sup> The respondent was also asked to assess what proportion of blacks favored integration. This is positively correlated with black identity, but uncorrelated with the proportion of whites believed to favor segregation. It is not included in the results discussed below, because it has no discernible effect on participation.

membership figures: in the South East, NAACP College Chapters lost 17% of their members in 1959, but then grew by 108% in 1960.<sup>6</sup> NAACP membership at the time of the survey will be treated as a dependent variable in a parallel analysis. It is possible to construct two dichotomous independent variables for organization predating the sit-ins. One variable is coded for the presence of an NAACP College Chapter in 1959. This is a very good predictor of subsequent individual membership: where there had been a Chapter in 1959, 51% of students in the survey belonged to NAACP, compared to only 9% elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> Another variable is coded for the presence of SCLC at the beginning of 1960: whether someone (almost invariably a minister) from the city belonged to SCLC's Executive Board or whether an organization (usually a church) from the city was formally affiliated.<sup>8</sup>

Political opportunities (Hypothesis 6) are measured at three levels. Whether the college was under state control is coded as a dichotomous variable. Repression at the local political level is proxied by the percentage of blacks in the county; white elites threatened by a high proportion of blacks had greater need to resort to repression (Matthews and Prothro 1963). To allow curvilinearity, a squared term is entered as an orthogonal

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<sup>6</sup> This region encompassed Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee (NAACP 1960b, 1961).

<sup>7</sup> The presence of a College Chapter, coded as a dichotomous variable, is a better predictor of subsequent individual membership than the Chapter's total membership in 1959 divided by the number of students in the college.

<sup>8</sup> My thanks are due to Kenneth Andrews for providing the sources and definition for this variable.

polynomial (which eliminates the problem of collinearity).<sup>9</sup> To capture the extraordinary degree of repression in the Deep South, a dichotomous variable is coded for colleges located there. Academic education (Hypothesis 7) is measured at two levels. The quality of the college is measured by the faculty to student ratio, translated into a dichotomous variable for colleges above the median.<sup>10</sup> At the individual level, a dichotomous variable is coded for students pursuing an academic major rather than a vocational major, like education or business.

Family background (Hypothesis 8) has two aspects. Whether the student was raised in a city, rather than in a small town or on a farm, is coded as a dichotomous variable. Social class is measured by family income (see Appendix B).<sup>11</sup> A squared term, entered as an orthogonal polynomial, allows for curvilinearity. There are control variables for sex and skin color. Autobiographies (e.g., Moody 1968), ethnographies (e.g., Dollard 1949), and experiments (Marks 1943) reveal the social significance of color differences among African Americans at the time. Skin color was classified by the interviewer on a scale of 1 to 10.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> An orthogonal squared term is the residual from regressing  $X^2$  on  $X$ .

<sup>10</sup> Alternative ways of coding this variable—e.g., colleges where the student-faculty ratio exceeded the upper quartile—were also attempted.

<sup>11</sup> An alternative is to code father's or mother's occupation in terms of vertical autonomy (following Salamon and Van Evera 1973; Beyerlein and Andrews 2004). This is inevitably arbitrary, and after some experimentation I concluded that income was the best single measure.

<sup>12</sup> Because all the interviewers were African American, this measure avoids the problem of inconsistencies between white and African American interviewers (Hill 2002).

The survey includes students who were in college during the upsurge in the spring of 1960, as well as those who entered later. The participation rate for juniors and seniors was 40%, compared to 16% for freshmen and sophomores. This is surely a cohort rather than life-cycle effect; freshmen and sophomores had not entered college until after the summer of 1960. (Some of them might have even taken part in protest while at high school.) To capture the cohort effect, a dichotomous variable is entered for those students already in college in the spring of 1960. The timing of sit-in protest also varied across space. By the fall of 1960, many protest campaigns outside the Deep South had resulted in negotiations or even desegregation. In the Deep South, by contrast, protest continued (or was initiated) long after this. Therefore an interaction term is entered for cohort and region.

Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, the method of analysis is logistic regression. Standard errors are adjusted for sample clustering.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the results for sit-in protest as the dependent variable. (Missing data reduce the number of cases to 255.) The odds ratio indicates how much a unit change in the independent variable multiplies the odds of protest; where the odds ratio is less than 1, the variable *reduces* the odds (the coefficient is negative). Model 1 begins with individual characteristics and ecological contexts. Hypothesis 4 receives no support. Dormitory residence is not significant. Unexpectedly, frequent attendance at church made students less likely to participate in protest.<sup>13</sup> Adherents of predominantly white denominations were more likely than Baptists to protest (the hypothesis that the coefficients are equal is

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<sup>13</sup> The result is not a weird artifact of the other independent variables incorporated in the analysis: the zero-order association is also negative.

rejected at the .05 level).<sup>14</sup> Hypothesis 5 is supported. The presence of SCLC greatly increased the probability of protest, but NAACP did not. The apparent contradiction between the positive effect of SCLC and the negative effect of frequent church attendance will be addressed in the discussion. Hypothesis 6 is supported. Students in state-controlled institutions were less likely to protest, as were students in counties where racial repression was more severe (the probability of protest declined with an increasing percentage of blacks in the county). Hypothesis 7 is also supported, insofar as students pursuing an academic subject were more likely to protest. As for Hypothesis 8, the effect of family income appears non-monotonic (increasing with income, then falling sharply for the highest income bracket), but neither term is statistically significant. The interaction of region and cohort shows that students who entered college outside the Deep South after the summer of 1960 rarely took part in protest, presumably because local sit-in campaigns had by then run their course.

*[Table 1 about here]*

Model 2 adds variables for beliefs and sentiments. The previous results are barely altered. Grievances were an important motivation: students who had an especially low evaluation of race relations were more likely to protest. This did not imply, however, hostility towards whites. Protesters were disproportionately optimistic about success, tending to believe that fewer whites favored strict segregation. (Note that the variables used for ‘grievances’ and ‘optimism’ are inverted: students with a high evaluation of race relations are *less* aggrieved; students believing that a high proportion of whites favored

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<sup>14</sup> The small size of the sample makes it difficult to test whether the effect of church attendance varied with denomination. An interaction term for frequent church attendance and Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or Congregationalist has an odds ratio close to one.

segregation are *less* optimistic.) Hypotheses 1 and 2 are thus strongly supported, unlike Hypothesis 3. Identification with blacks as a collectivity had no positive association with protest.

To assess the magnitude of the impact of these variables, we can estimate the probability of protest for a ‘typical’ student who was already in college by the spring of 1960 (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000). This entails fixing all the variables at the median (for dichotomous variables, the mode) for this subset of students, except for the variable under consideration. Lowering the student’s evaluation of race relations from 5 (midway on the scale) to 1 (worst) doubles the estimated probability of protest, from .26 to .52. Shifting the student’s assessment of white support for strict segregation from “most” to “less than half” raises the probability of protest from .35 to .55. The same procedure can be used to quantify the unexpected findings for church attendance. The probability of protest is .45 for a Baptist who frequently attended church. By comparison, the probability is .74 for an Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or Congregationalist, and .73 for someone who seldom attended church. A student in a city networked by SCLC was almost twice as likely to protest as a student elsewhere (.45 compared to .24).

The association of grievances and optimism with protest could, conceivably, reflect causation in the other direction. Nevertheless, we can be cautiously confident in attributing causal significance to beliefs and sentiments. For grievances, the question explicitly referred to the situation five years’ ago, before the sit-ins. Another question asked about the present situation. On average, students thought that race relations had improved by almost two points on the ten-point scale. What is reassuring is that the degree of improvement is not significantly associated with participation in protest, but is negatively associated with the evaluation of race relations in the late 1950s. In other words, those students who had been most aggrieved also discerned the most improvement in race

relations—whether or not they had actually taken part in protest. For optimism, the question did not refer to the past. But it seems implausible for participation in the sit-ins to have led students to lower their estimation of white opposition. While protest introduced participants to a few sympathetic whites (usually college students), it also exposed them to numerous hostile and often violent whites.

The results for these two variables can be compared with panel data on protest in West Germany in the late 1980s (Finkel and Muller 1998), which allows the direction of causation to be untangled. Although optimism was enhanced by previous protest, it also had a genuinely positive effect on subsequent protest. Grievances were not affected by previous protest, and had a positive effect on subsequent protest. These convergent findings, albeit from a different social context, reinforce our confidence in attributing causal significance to the same beliefs and sentiments in the case of sit-ins.

Table 2 turns to analyze membership in NAACP as a dependent variable. Model 3 simply asks what factors predict membership at the time of the survey. Model 4 enables us to estimate the effects of participation in the sit-ins and of prior movement organizations. There are some similarities between protest and membership: majoring in an academic subject and attending a public college had the same effect on each. The differences, however, are more salient. Curiously, students raised in a city were less likely to join NAACP. Grievances and optimism had no significant explanatory power, nor did church attendance or denomination. The county's racial composition appears to have had a non-monotonic effect (though only one term is statistically significant), with membership most likely where blacks comprised about 40% of the county. Model 4 shows that students who took part in protest were far more likely to join the NAACP, even controlling for the prior presence of campus organization. The presence of SCLC also encouraged membership in NAACP.

[Table 2 about here]

## DISCUSSION

Some results confirm what we already know. Students were more likely to protest where there were political opportunities at the level of the college and the county (Hypothesis 6). These findings complement studies that locate political opportunities beyond the South, at the Federal level (McAdam 1982; Jenkins et al. 2003).

One result challenges the orthodox view. Students who frequently attended church were *less* likely to protest (Hypothesis 4b). Yet the presence of SCLC's network of activist churches made students *more* likely to protest (Hypothesis 5b). The latter is an ecological variable; it is impossible to know whether any individual had direct contact with these churches. Nevertheless, the analysis provides evidence to support Morris' (1981, 1984) argument for the importance of activist churches as catalysts for protest. At the same time, the negative result for church attendance warns against assuming that most (let alone all) churches mobilized protest.<sup>15</sup> This negative result accords with recent qualitative research on the movement in the early 1960s. For Mississippi, Dittmer (1995: 75) finds that "the institutional church did not stand in the forefront of civil rights activity"; Payne (1995: 272) likewise concludes that "the early movement grew despite the opposition of the church." Robnett (1997) makes a similar point for small cities and rural communities. That such opposition could also be found in major cities is illustrated by Birmingham, Alabama. SCLC's Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and the congregation at the Bethel Baptist Church played a justly famous role in the movement. Less well known is the opposition of

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<sup>15</sup> According to Matthew and Prothro's (1966: 233) parallel survey of black adults in the South, just over a third attended a church where elections were discussed. Unfortunately, this question was not asked of the students.

Reverend J. L. Ware, president of the Baptist Ministers' Association—representing 200 churches in the city—who declared Shuttlesworth's organization “too militant for its own good” (quoted in Eskew 2000: 36; also see Eskew 1997). During the major protest campaign in the city in 1963, SCLC's Executive Director estimated that about one minister in ten supported it (Garrow 1987: 119).

Why would frequent church attendance reduce the probability of protest? One explanation reverses the typical reasoning about social integration. Frequent attendance at church may have reduced a student's 'structural availability' (Snow et al. 1980) for participation in protest. Churches often demand a high level of commitment, while sit-in protest also consumed considerable time and energy for many students. These conflicting demands may have been hard to reconcile, except in a small minority of congregations (like Bethel Baptist Church) that blended worship with protest. By contrast, NAACP membership did not require the same level of commitment. An alternative explanation is cultural. Devout Christians, as indicated by frequent attendance at church, may have looked less favorably on confrontational protest, though not on NAACP membership. To be sure, 'prophetic religion' (Chappell 2004) inspired many protesters (exemplified by the Reverend Shuttlesworth), but we cannot treat their interpretation of Christianity as typical. Certainly some forms of Christianity were less hospitable to this-worldly activism, as is shown by the finding that Baptists were much less likely to protest than Episcopalians, Presbyterians, or Congregationalists (this denominational difference is found also in Marx 1967a, 1967b).

Other results from the analysis suggest new questions. Academic education (Hypothesis 7) was a significant factor shaping protest—even within this highly educated sample. Unlike analyses that take the college as the unit of analysis (Soule 1997; Van Dyke 1998), this survey demonstrates that the institution's academic quality remains

significant even controlling for students' social class. It also reveals a parallel effect for field of study, with students majoring in an academic field being more likely to take part in protest. We know that the 'quantity' of education has a huge effect on all forms of political participation (e.g., Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996). For college students, the 'quality' (or character) of education also matters. What remains unclear is the mechanism(s) that account for the pattern. This is an important puzzle for further research on college students, who are disproportionately prone to protest.

The results for beliefs and sentiments provide new insights into the motivations of students who took part in the sit-ins. Collective identity (Hypothesis 3) was insignificant, presumably because the system of racial repression in the South already imposed an inescapable collective identity on 'Negroes' (cf. Morris and Braine 2001). Moreover, the goal of the sit-in movement was racial integration, implying a lesser salience for racial identity (compared to the later emphasis on Black Pride). Two components of Finkel and Muller's (1998) conception of 'collective interest' were important for motivating protest: grievances (Hypothesis 1) and optimism about success (Hypothesis 2). These findings provides powerful support for the cultural construction of beliefs and sentiments; the survey cannot identify the processes generating such ideas, but it demonstrates their causal efficacy. The question used as a proxy for optimism enables us to compare subjective beliefs against objective reality. Only one in six protesters thought that a majority of whites in the South favored strict segregation; in reality, two-thirds of whites favored it (Matthews and Prothro 1966: 332). "Their personal preference for integration must lead southern Negroes to underestimate the degree of white hostility," concluded Matthews and Prothro (1966: 353), "despite the conspicuous evidence to the contrary." A student from Alabama recalled that he had been "plain optimistic" when he joined the sit-ins:

I thought we'd demonstrate and then they'd fold up before us. But it's been tougher than I ever dreamed. ... I suppose if I'd known that when I first joined I never would have done it. (Quoted in Coles 1964: 313; also see Bond 1976: 10)

## CONCLUSION

Sociology advances by exploring novel theoretical approaches, more sophisticated methods, and fresh empirical cases. We should not forget that it can also advance by reappraising existing knowledge. The 1962 survey provides valuable information on a vital historical episode. Most importantly, it allows us to compare those who joined the sit-in movement with those who did not. Matthews and Prothro's (1966) initial analysis has not been fully exploited. That the data can be reanalyzed to address current questions is a tribute to their original research design, and to their foresight in preserving the data for future use.

The findings have two major implications. One is to urge a more nuanced appreciation of the role of churches in confrontational protest during this early phase of mobilization. Because many ministers and congregations were at the forefront of protest, it is easy to assume that they were typical. Comparison forces us to consider negative cases, churches that remained aloof or even discouraged protest. Only then can we attempt to explain variation among churches. The denominational differences discerned here suggest fruitful directions for future research. In addition, these findings urge attention to the processes by which beliefs and sentiments are constructed. Grievances and optimism were powerful predictors of participation in protest. Sociologists committed to culture are usually skeptical of the survey method, but they should welcome these findings as demonstrating the causal importance of cultural processes. We need to understand *why* some people come to evaluate the social order as intolerably unjust and to believe that they can transform it through collective protest.

Both implications underline a final methodological point. Social scientists inevitably focus on the small minority of people who protest rather than the vast majority who do not. By using the wealth of evidence produced by social movements and news media, one is almost guaranteed to select on the dependent variable: to study people who participated and events that happened. To fully understand why individuals act, and to trace how protest unfolds, this kind of evidence is indispensable. It is problematic only if we forget the implicit comparison. Surveys like Matthews and Prothro's have the advantage of comparing individuals who protested with those who did not. Perhaps in the future an enterprising sociologist will design a rigorous panel survey of potential protesters to accompany a detailed ethnographic investigation of protest as it unfolds.

## APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS AND SOURCES OF VARIABLES

V\_ refers to the variable number in Matthews and Prothro (1975). Q\_ refers to the questionnaire reproduced in Matthews and Prothro (1966: 499-521); Q1-, Q2-, and Q3- denote the first, second, and third parts of the schedule respectively, followed by the question number (column A for the student sample).

*Sit-in protest*: “Have you taken part in the sit-in demonstrations?” 1 = yes; 0 = no (including three respondents who had not heard of the sit-in movement). Q1-33b/V253, Q1-33/V251.

*Evaluation of race relations*: “Where on this ladder would you put the race relations of the South as a whole five years ago?” 1 (very worst) to 10 (very best). Q1-67/V404.

*Fraction of whites believed to favor segregation*: “How many [white people in the South] would you say are in favor of strict segregation of the races?” 0.25 (less than half); 0.5 (about half); 0.75 (most); 1 (all). Q1-59/V375.

*Black identity*: “Would you say you feel pretty close to Negroes in general or that you don’t feel much closer to them than you do to other people?” 3 (feel pretty close), 2 (it depends ...), 1 (not closer than to others). Plus: “How much interest would you say you have in how Negroes as a whole are getting along in this country?” 3 (good deal), 2 (some), 1 (not much at all). Q2-24/V75, Q2-25/V76.

*Frequently attends church*: “Would you say you go to church services regularly, often, seldom, or never?” 1 = regularly or often; 0 = seldom (no one answered with never). Q1-19/V162.

*Religious denominations*: “What is your religious preference?” Lutheran and Unitarian (each with only one respondent) are included with Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Congregationalist. Q1-18/V161.

*Dormitory resident*: 1 = resides in dormitory; 0 = resides with own family, other private residence, student boarding house, or rooming house off campus. Q3-2/V81.

*Academic major*: 1 = major in humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences; 0 = major in education, business, or other vocational subject. Q2-9/V32.

*Deep South*: 1 = institution in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, or South Carolina. V9.

*Raised in city*: 1 = brought up in large or small city; 0 = brought up in town or on farm. Q2-3/V22.

*Family income*: gross family income in 1961. Midpoint of interval is coded, with >\$10,000

coded as \$12,000 (see Appendix B for imputation of missing values). Q2-26/V77.

*Male*: 1 = male; 0 = female. Q3-1/V16.

*Skin color*: 1 (very light) to 10 (very dark). Q3-3/V83.

*Freshman or sophomore*: 1 = freshman, sophomore; 0 = junior, senior, graduate (only three of the latter). Q2-8/V31.

*NAACP member*: 1 = member. Q1-11/V131.

*State-controlled college*: 1 = state control; 0 = private control. *College Blue Book* 1962; American Council on Education 1960.

*Above-average college*: 1 = ratio of faculty / students exceeds the median. Figures for faculty and students are averaged from both sources. *College Blue Book* 1962; American Council on Education 1960.

*Black % of county*: Nonwhite population / total population. U.S. Bureau of the Census 1960, table 87.

*NAACP College Chapter*: 1 = NAACP College Chapter at institution in 1959. Two Chapters that failed to report actual membership figures are assumed to exist, as they reported membership figures in 1958. NAACP 1960a, 1960b, 1960c.

*SCLC presence*: 1 = city represented on SCLC's Executive Board or has local affiliate of SCLC at the beginning of 1960. SCLC 1960a, 1960b.

## APPENDIX B: MISSING VALUES

Besides family income, all other variables have missing values for no more than three observations. These observations (9 in total) are not used in the analysis. Family income, however, is missing for 21 observations (8% of the remainder). These values are imputed using the independent variables in Model 2, with the following additional variables: the occupation of the respondent's head of household (Q2-18/V63), in 33 categories; whether the respondent grew up in the Deep South (Q2-2/V20); and whether the respondent's parents ever voted (Q1-37/V284). Linear regression yields  $R^2 = .43$ . A linear rather than log-linear specification is utilized because the distribution of family income approximates a normal distribution.

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**Table 1: Predicting Participation in Sit-in Protest**

	<i>Model 1</i>			<i>Model 2</i>		
	<i>odds</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>odds</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>p</i>
Evaluation of race relations				.71	.09	.02 *
Fraction of whites believed to favor segregation				.14	.10	.01 *
Black identity				.90	.18	.59
Dormitory resident	1.29	.82	.68	1.06	.69	.93
Frequently attends church	.29	.17	.04 *	.24	.14	.02 *
Baptist	.72	.58	.68	.75	.69	.76
Methodist	1.26	1.02	.78	1.26	1.10	.79
Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Congregationalist	3.99	3.58	.13	3.30	3.10	.21
NAACP College Chapter	.42	.21	.09	.43	.21	.09
SCLC presence	3.03	1.51	.03 *	2.91	1.44	.04 *
State-controlled college	.34	.13	.01 **	.34	.12	.01 *
Black % of county	.95	.02	.00 **	.95	.02	.00 *
Black % of county squared (orthogonal)	1.74	.42	.03 *	1.58	.36	.06
Deep South	.59	.46	.51	.78	.56	.73
Academic major	2.58	1.09	.03 *	2.65	1.06	.02 *
Above-average college	1.95	.96	.18	2.57	1.29	.07
Raised in city	2.14	.89	.08	1.97	.87	.14
Family income	1.09	.08	.23	1.06	.09	.50
Family income squared (orthogonal)	.68	.14	.07	.67	.14	.07
Skin color	1.12	.12	.29	1.14	.14	.30
Male	1.81	.77	.17	1.68	.68	.22
Freshman or sophomore	.03	.03	.00 ***	.04	.04	.00 *
Freshman or sophomore × Deep South	13.59	13.19	.01 *	11.85	12.46	.03 *

N = 255; odds: odds ratio; s.e.: standard error adjusted for sample clustering

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001 (two-tailed tests)

**Table 2: Predicting NAACP Membership**

	<i>Model 3</i>			<i>Model 4</i>				
	<i>odds</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>odds</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>p</i>		
Evaluation of race relations	.92	.11	.47	1.10	.15	.48		
Fraction of whites believed to favor segregation	.73	.52	.66	1.45	1.33	.69		
Black identity	.98	.19	.90	1.09	.22	.69		
Dormitory resident	.72	.24	.33	1.03	.41	.95		
Frequently attends church	.88	.46	.81	2.29	1.90	.33		
Baptist	.56	.38	.40	.42	.29	.21		
Methodist	1.10	.82	.89	.80	.57	.76		
Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Congregationalist	.51	.53	.53	.28	.30	.25		
State-controlled college	.25	.08	.00	***	.31	.11	.00	**
Black % of county	.99	.01	.27	1.01	.01	.58		
Black % of county squared (orthogonal)	.65	.12	.03	*	1.26	.25	.25	
Deep South	.41	.14	.01	*	.25	.14	.02	*
Academic major	5.21	1.90	.00	***	3.11	1.29	.01	*
Above-average college	1.34	.41	.35		.97	.29	.92	
Raised in city	.42	.16	.03	*	.44	.19	.06	
Family income	1.18	.10	.08		1.04	.11	.72	
Family income squared (orthogonal)	.69	.16	.11		.99	.27	.96	
Skin color	.90	.08	.21		.89	.08	.17	
Male	.93	.43	.87		.95	.50	.93	
NAACP College Chapter				4.93	2.20	.00	**	
SCLC presence				4.64	2.56	.01	**	
Sit-in protest				7.49	4.43	.00	**	

N = 255; odds: odds ratio; s.e.: standard error adjusted for sample clustering

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001 (two-tailed tests)