

The Dynamics of Opportunity and Insurgent Practice: How Black Anti-colonialists Compelled Truman to Advocate Civil Rights

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Abstract

Political opportunity theory has proven extremely generative, highlighting the importance of macro-structural shifts in making established authorities vulnerable to insurgent challenge. But as critics point out, political opportunity theory flattens both culture and agency, and has fared poorly in explaining the timing of insurgency. Re-theorizing opportunity as leveraged by particular practices, rather than independently conferring to groups, redresses these limits, revealing the proximate causes of mobilization and influence. For a strategic test, this article revisits the forging ground of opportunity theory. Why did President Harry S. Truman, initially an apologist for the slow pace of racial reform in 1945–46, suddenly become an avid advocate of civil rights? Opportunity scholars argue that macro-structural forces caused Truman to advocate civil rights, generating the opportunity for insurgency by blacks as a group. But event structure analysis reveals how Black Anti-colonialist practices leveraged opportunities afforded by the earlier Progressive Challenge to compel Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy. Civil rights advocacy, in turn, allowed Truman to repress Black Anti-colonialist practices, even while setting the stage for the Civil Rights Movement to come. Different forms of insurgent practice leveraged opportunities created by different institutional cleavages; the same opportunities did not advantage all insurgency by a social group.

Keywords

social movements, political opportunity, insurgency, event structure analysis, historical methodology

People “make history, but in conditions not of their own choosing.” — Karl Marx (1978:595)

Scholars have long debated what kinds of social process cause people to rebel, and how conditions affect insurgents’ influence. Following the Civil Rights Movement, social movement scholars broke with strain theories of irrational collective behavior to recast movement actors as social agents advancing

their political interests in accord with contextual opportunities (Meyer 2004; Walker 2012). Political opportunity theorists proposed that insurgency is caused, in large part, by

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macro-structural processes that destabilize the political order, generating the opportunity for insurgent mobilization and influence by a marginalized group (McAdam 1982; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). This proposition has proved among the most influential in the social movements field over the past three decades (Goodwin 2012; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Meyer 2004).

But as founders, proponents, and critics alike point out, political opportunity theory flattens both culture and agency, and it cannot explain the timing of insurgency (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Goodwin and Jasper 2004, 2012; McAdam et al. 2001). Classic political opportunity theory does not adequately account for the fundamental interaction of social practice and structure (see Bourdieu 1990; Isaac 2008; Joas 1996; Sewell 1992; Swidler 1986).

Context effects are interactive, determining the effects of particular practices rather than causing insurgency by a group (Bloom and Martin 2013; Evans and Kay 2008; Jansen 2011, 2013; Taylor et al. 2009). Building on classic political sociology (Calhoun 1982; Paige 1975; Schwartz 1976; Tilly 1964) and recent social movement theory that emphasizes the multi-institutional configurations of power and the correlation of targets and tactics (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Walker, Martin, and McCarthy 2008), I re-theorize opportunity to account for the fundamental interaction with practice. I contest classic political opportunity theory on three fronts: first, conditions affect the influence of particular forms of practice, rather than advantaging a social group; second, insurgent influence varies with contextual shifts at the meso-institutional rather than macro-structural level; and third, context effects are interactive rather than direct.

For an insurgency to spread requires a set of insurgent practices—a cultural routine of historically particular forms of action and rhetoric that challenge an authority—capable of thriving in a widely institutionalized social context. I propose that insurgents garner influence by developing practices that leverage broad institutional cleavages. Insurgents

seize the opportunity afforded by an institutional cleavage when they advance a practice that challenges authorities on one side while drawing support from the other side. This kind of insurgent practice constitutes a cultural resource in the tool kit, or repertoire (see Swidler 1986; Tilly 2008), of people facing similar social situations, providing a means of influence while the cleavages persist.

As a strategic test, I revisit the historical ground on which the political opportunity thesis was forged: the black freedom struggle. Viewed in relation to the Civil Rights Movement, sociologists have seen federal civil rights advocacy, inaugurated by President Harry S. Truman, as preceding black insurgency. Federal opposition to southern authorities on race policy was crucial to the Civil Rights Movement. From the classic political opportunity perspective, so long as the federal government supported segregationist racial policy, there was little room for any form of black insurgent mobilization or influence. The opportunity did not yet exist. Sociological studies foundational to the political opportunity perspective, and some defending it, have thus explained black insurgency as dependent on the macro-structural shifts that enabled federal advocacy of civil rights (Jenkins, Jacobs, and Agnone 2003; McAdam 1982; Oberschall 1973; Piven and Cloward 1977).

Truman's adoption of civil rights advocacy is attributed to macro-structural processes—especially emergent Cold War foreign policy pressures (Dudziak 2000; Layton 2000; McAdam 1982, 1999; Plummer 1996). Fligstein and McAdam (2012:125) explain: “Locked into an intense political/ideological struggle with the Soviet Union for influence around the globe, U.S. foreign policy makers quickly realized what a significant liability Jim Crow was to its critical foreign policy aims. This prompted calls—first from the diplomatic corps and State Department—for civil rights reforms to counter Soviet efforts to exploit American racism for its obvious propaganda value. Truman's civil rights initiatives were one response to these pleas.”

Truman's adoption of civil rights advocacy is seen as a key turning point, marking the

opening of opportunity for insurgent politics by blacks. McAdam (1999:86), for example, writes that federal racial policy “symbolized, even as it contributed to, a dramatic shift in the balance of forces in American race relations.” When “Truman inaugurated a period of active executive advocacy of civil rights” against the interests of southern white political leaders, he “dramatically changed the interpretive context of U.S. racial politics,” signaling the opportunity for black insurgent mobilization and influence (McAdam 1999:xx–xxi).

In short, theorizing that opportunities confer to social groups and recognizing the importance of federal advocacy of civil rights for the Civil Rights Movement, opportunity scholars assume that Truman’s civil rights advocacy preceded and advantaged *all* forms of insurgency by blacks, and that Truman’s actions were prompted by macro-structural processes independent of black insurgents’ actions.

The problem is that several powerful waves of black insurgency preceded Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy—the purported opportunity for insurgency by blacks as a group. In this article, I focus on one wave: Black Anti-colonialism.¹ The Black Anti-colonialist insurgency of the 1940s was quite distinct from the Civil Rights insurgency of the 1950s and the 1960s. Black Anti-colonialists mobilized anti-lynching protests, third-party efforts, and United Nations petitions, equating U.S. racial policy with fascism and colonialism. As Anderson (2003:2) explains, they believed that “only human rights could repair the damage that more than three centuries of slavery, Jim Crow, and racism had done. . . . Civil rights, no matter how noble, could only maintain the gap.” Rather than championing Americanism, Black Anti-colonialists challenged federal complicity in colonialism around the globe. Black Anti-colonialist practices differed from Civil Rights practices in terms of tactics, targets, rhetoric, and allies. In recent years, scholars have excavated a long history of the twentieth-century black freedom struggle, covering a broad temporal and geographic range (see Hall 2005). Many of the key movements defy the premises of “conventional civil rights narratives” (Joseph

2009:751). As Bloom and Martin (2013:395) write, the earlier historiography “fails to analyze these mobilizations on their own terms, instead seeking to assimilate these black insurgencies to a civil rights perspective” to which they do not fit (see also Bloom 2014).

An extensive literature demonstrates that federal advocacy of civil rights, inaugurated by Truman, was crucial to the Civil Rights insurgency of 1955 to 1965. But classic sociological accounts, viewing opportunity as generated by macro-structural processes, and as conferring advantage for insurgency on a social group, view federal civil rights advocacy as temporally and analytically prior to the black insurgency as a whole. From this perspective, the earlier wave of Black Anti-colonialist insurgency poses an anomaly—this form of black insurgency preceded the purported opportunity for insurgency by blacks as a group.

This anomaly can be accounted for by considering the relationship between Black Anti-colonialism and Truman’s civil rights advocacy from an “opportunity for practice” perspective. Instead of viewing opportunity as conferring advantage to blacks as a group generally, different forms of insurgent practice are seen to take advantage of different institutionalized conflicts. Guided by this theoretical perspective, I argue that Black Anti-colonialist practices seized an opportunity that preceded Truman’s civil rights advocacy, namely the Progressive Challenge to Truman. Dovetailing their insurgency with the Progressive Challenge, Black Anti-colonialists garnered tremendous influence, compelling Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy as part of broader concessions to progressives. Truman’s civil rights advocacy, in turn, allowed him to consolidate moderate black support, as part of a Cold War liberal alliance, and readily repress the Black Anti-colonialist threat. Truman’s civil rights advocacy thus closed the opportunity for one form of insurgent practice by blacks, even as it helped create the opportunity for the Civil Rights Movement to come.

This explanation of Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy, and the classic one,

instantiate rival theories of political opportunity. Did different forms of black insurgent practice seize opportunities offered by different institutional cleavages, as I propose? Or did macro-structural shifts independently cause Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy, in turn advantaging all forms of insurgency by black people as classically theorized? I formally test these rival explanations of Truman's adoption of civil rights advocacy using documentary and archival evidence in a theoretically guided application of event structure analysis (Griffin 1993; Heise 1989; see the online supplement [<http://asr.sagepub.com/supplemental>]).

OPPORTUNITY THEORY

Among the most influential propositions in the social movements field (Goodwin 2012; McAdam et al. 2001; Meyer 2004), the classic political opportunity thesis advances a historical logic in which changes in the level of insurgency over time can be explained by changes in the political context: "The opportunities for a challenger to engage in successful collective action . . . vary greatly over time. And it is these variations that are held to be related to the ebb and flow of movement activity" (McAdam 1982:40–41). Opportunities are theorized to "elevate the group in question to a position of increased political strength" (McAdam 1982:42), conferring advantage for insurgency on a social group as a whole (see Figure 1).

Scholarly use of the term "political opportunity" has grown exponentially, averaging fewer than 60 texts per year in the 1980s and growing to more than 300 per year in the 1990s, and more than 1,200 texts per year in the 2000s.² These studies show that many movements depend on macro-structural processes that make political arrangements vulnerable.

Practices Not Groups

Despite this influence and extensive consideration (e.g., Amenta and Halfmann 2012; Broer and Duyvendak 2012; Goldstone 2004, 2012; McAdam et al. 1996; Meyer 2004;



Figure 1. Political Opportunity Thesis

Meyer and Minkoff 2004), founders, proponents, and critics agree that fundamental limitations persist (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Goodwin and Jasper 2004, 2012; McAdam et al. 2001). Ironically, theorizing opportunity for groups obscures the agency of insurgents. It assumes that context effects on insurgency are independent of what insurgents actually do.³ Furthermore, theorizing opportunity for groups assumes that conditions for mobilization are either propitious or not—that in times of quiescence, insurgency is futile. This approach encourages tautology, with opportunity often “defined backwards through the observation of political mobilization” (Meyer 2004:135). Moreover, efforts to predict insurgency based on theorizations of independent opportunity effects have fared poorly (Goodwin 2012; Meyer 2004).

One variant of opportunity theory, the “political opportunity structures” approach, does account for what insurgents do; it uses a comparative logic to analyze why different forms of insurgent practice thrive in different contexts. The most influential work in this vein, Kitschelt (1986:84), compares anti-nuclear movements in France, Sweden, the United States, and West Germany and concludes that “mobilization strategies and impacts of social movements can, to a significant degree, be explained by the general characteristics of domestic [state-level] political opportunity structures.” This work is akin to the classical political sociology of social movements that sought to explain forms of mobilization with respect to structural context (Calhoun 1982; Huntington 1968; Paige 1975; Schwartz 1976; see also Walder 2009).

Tilly (1977, 1986, 1995, 2006, 2008) went furthest in theorizing the match between political opportunity structures and practices. He conceived of forms of insurgent practice as historically specific and consequential

“cultural creations” that “emerge from struggle,” “routines that are learned, shared, and acted out” (Tilly 1995:41–42). Insurgent practices make relational claims and apply to specific “claimant-object pairs: bosses and workers, peasants and landlords, rival nationalist factions” (Tilly 2008:14).

Movement actors’ adaptation to contextual opportunity increases influence (McCammon 2012). So explaining context effects on insurgent timing and influence requires attention to what insurgents actually do, that is, insurgent practices. Building on Tilly, I conceptualize insurgent practices as cultural routines: historically particular forms of action and rhetoric that promise transcendence of specified oppressive conditions by challenging an institutionalized authority. Insurgent practices are thus broader than tactics, consisting of ideational claims and targets. Insurgent practices differ from strategies in that they are a form of cultural technology, performed and gradually adapted by many people over time, rather than a singular plan of action, consciously constructed by an individual or small group for use in a specific moment.

Meso Not Macro

One limitation of the political opportunity structures approach, including Tilly’s, is that it is too macro to provide much explanatory purchase on the timing and extent of specific social movements. Tilly (1977, 1986, 1995) theorizes relatively stable “repertoires of contention,” that is, the collection of insurgent practices culturally available in any given time and place. He explains changes in repertoires of contention over centuries with the development of capitalism and the consolidation of state and military power in France and Britain. And he argues that repertoires of contention vary with respect to the capacity and democracy of regimes generally (Tilly 2006). But grouping all forms of insurgent practice into generalized repertoires, and considering context at the structural level, provides little explanatory power with regard to the timing and influence of particular insurgencies.

In recent years, scholars have extended the opportunity structures approach to more nuanced meso-level comparisons at a smaller institutional scale than the state. Armstrong and Bernstein (2008:86) argue that the field of social movement scholarship as a whole is moving beyond the premise of state as context and toward a more nuanced multi-institutional conception of power, in which a variety of state and non-state institutions and cultural processes constitute authority, and movement strategies “vary by target.” Comparing the varied regional deployment of identity within the lesbian and gay movement, Bernstein (1997) argues that access to the polity is a key determinant of whether movement activists will emphasize sameness or difference. Coding a large dataset of late-twentieth-century U.S. movement events, Walker and colleagues (2008) argue that the institutional settings in which movements take action—state, corporate, or educational—largely determine protest repertoires.

Research shows that different movement practices work in different local contexts (Amenta 2006), and practices that fit local policy contexts are more influential (Martin 2010). Even the efficacy of broadly influential insurgent practices can be expected to vary in accord with temporal and regional context differences. Meso-level institutional cleavages serve as opportunities for insurgent practices, mediating any macro-structural effects. In this sense, political opportunity is an institutional cleavage, that is, an institutionalized conflict or sustained antagonism between routinized interests of influential social groupings or authorities.

Interaction Effects

But even at this more nuanced meso-institutional scale, the explanatory power of theorizing context effects on repertoire is limited. Social actors try out particular forms of practice for a range of contingent reasons, cultural as well as instrumental (Clemens 1993), and frequently innovate. While modest probabilistic correlations between context and

repertoire can be found in large datasets, thus far the most sophisticated of these studies illuminate little of the specific dynamics of insurgency, capturing only the most general tendencies. Divergent practices can flourish in a single context, and innovations are by nature unpredictable.

Even more important for my purposes here, taking form of practice as the outcome to be explained, these approaches cannot explain the timing or influence of insurgency. To more fully analyze context effects on insurgency, a theoretical framework is needed that explains the timing and influence of insurgency with reference to the dynamic interaction between opportunity and practice. The ideational claims and tactics movement actors advance are crucial to attaining allied support (Bloom 2010; McAdam 1996; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010). Institutional cleavages abound, but insurgents rarely develop practices that take advantage of the opportunities they offer. The main influence of context on insurgency is to determine the effects of particular forms of practice.

The Dynamics of Opportunity and Insurgent Practice

Rather than macro-structural conditions conferring advantage for insurgency to a social group, I propose that insurgents garner influence by developing *practices* that leverage institutional cleavages (see Figure 2). As described earlier, this proposition entails three revisions to the classic political opportunity thesis. First, conditions do not independently favor insurgency by a group. Analyzing context effects requires taking insurgent practices into account. Second, macro-structural effects on insurgency are mediated by meso-level institutional cleavages. Considering opportunities at the meso level allows much more precise explanation of the timing and influence of specific insurgencies. Third, context effects are interactive rather than independent. Opportunities determine the effects of insurgent practice rather than causing insurgency directly. When insurgents advance a

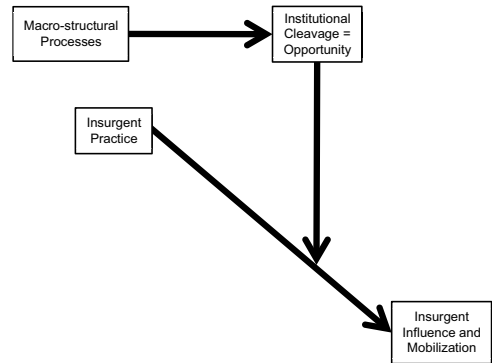


Figure 2. Opportunities for Practices

practice that challenges the authority on one side of an institutionalized conflict while drawing allied support from the other side, they seize the opportunity provided by that cleavage to garner influence and following. Allies drawn to support an insurgency in this way not only provide crucial resources for mobilization, they can also resist repression of the insurgent movement by the targeted authorities, making it easier for insurgents to sustain their challenge. One key implication here is that authorities often undercut influential insurgencies by making concessions to more moderate movement allies, suturing the institutional cleavage on which an insurgent movement depends (Haines [1988:2] calls this the “radical flank effect”).

In foundational political opportunity scholarship, sociologists explain Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy as indicative of opening macro-structural opportunities for blacks and a necessary precursor to their insurgent mobilization. But earlier Black Anti-colonialist mobilization poses an anomaly. Re-theorizing opportunities for practices suggests a different explanation: Black Anti-colonialist practices seized the opportunity offered by the Progressive Challenge (i.e., the concerted opposition to President Truman’s leadership by New Dealers, labor, and other progressives, mostly from within his own Democratic Party) to garner influence and compel Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy.

WHY DID TRUMAN ADOPT CIVIL RIGHTS ADVOCACY IN 1946?

The empirical crux of this article is to explain a momentous transformation in federal race policy in 1946—Truman's adoption of civil rights advocacy. As president, Harry S. Truman, the pragmatic politician from Missouri, expressed racial attitudes in private that would make vehement white supremacists proud. Truman's sister noted that "Harry is no more for nigger equality than any of us" (McCullough 1992:588). But in the second half of his first term, in a dramatic departure from earlier policies, Truman adopted strong measures of civil rights advocacy. He met with anti-lynching activists in September 1946 and created the President's Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR) in December. He became the first president to address the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the first to give a speech to Congress strongly endorsing civil rights. His PCCR released the first-ever high-level government report extensively documenting oppression of blacks and recommending civil rights reform. Drawing on the PCCR recommendations, he introduced amicus curiae briefs to the Supreme Court in support of desegregation, proposed legislation to abolish the poll tax and end lynching, and issued executive orders to create racial equality in federal hiring and desegregate the military. While liberal congressmen advocated civil rights before this time, and measures such as anti-lynching legislation generally earned wide support in opinion polls, previous presidents, including Truman's progressive and charismatic predecessor Franklin Delano Roosevelt, never forcefully supported civil rights.⁴ Why did Truman, initially an apologist for the slow pace of racial reform in 1945 to 1946, suddenly become an avid advocate of civil rights?

An "opportunities for practices" perspective suggests the following reading of the historical record: the Democratic Party

cobbled together by FDR was, in the words of Truman advisor Clark Clifford, "an unhappy alliance of Southern conservatives, Western progressives and Big City labor."⁵ In 1944, FDR selected Truman, from the border state Missouri, to replace progressive vice-president Henry A. Wallace. This was intended to appease conservative southern Democrats but not too greatly offend Democratic Party liberals. After FDR died in April 1945, Truman inherited the presidency and quickly embraced the conservatives. His conservative appointments replaced Roosevelt's progressives, alienating many members of the New Deal coalition. Truman talked strong on social programs, but his actions disappointed.

On September 12, 1946, the divisions within the Democratic Party came to a head when Wallace gave a foreign policy speech challenging Truman's emergent Cold War foreign policy. Truman responded scathingly, and Wallace resigned as Secretary of Commerce. Many progressives saw Wallace as the true heir of FDR and believed his departure from the Truman administration made a third-party effort in 1948 inevitable (Clifford 1991; Hamby 1973; MacDougall 1965; McCullough 1992). As an "insider activist" (Banaszak 2010:3), Wallace helped crystallize the Progressive Challenge, generating the opportunity for Black Anti-colonialist insurgency.

Black Anti-colonialist practices in the mid-1940s powerfully linked the domestic black freedom struggle to the Progressive Challenge. Black Anti-colonialists argued that Truman's emergent Cold War foreign policies, alongside his silence on lynching, abandoned FDR's anti-colonialist position. (On the prevalence of lynching during this period and some of the gruesome details, see Anderson [2003], McCoy and Ruetten [1973], and Zangrando [1980].) Black political leaders such as Walter White, executive director of the NAACP, framed their struggle in internationalist terms: "World War II has given to the Negro a sense of kinship with other colored—and also oppressed—peoples of the world . . . the struggle of the Negro in the United States is part and parcel of the struggle

against imperialism and exploitation in India, China, Burma, Africa, the Philippines, Malaya, the West Indies, and South America” (White 1945). The black press denounced colonialism and the Truman administration’s support of France and Britain, often making the analogy between European colonialism, Nazi Fascism, and the subjugation of blacks in the United States. Black Anti-colonialist protests, widely reported by the news media, charged Truman with hypocrisy, calling attention to racial injustice at home as the United States asserted world leadership. The Council on African Affairs (CAA) brought together anti-colonial leaders such as Nehru, Nkrumah, and Kenyatta with black leaders from the United States to plan common strategy. Both the NAACP and the National Negro Congress (NNC) petitioned the United Nations for international military intervention to stop lynching in the United States.

Black Anti-colonialist practices differed sharply—in authority challenged, ideational claims, and tactical repertoire—from the insurgent Civil Rights practices that would prevail in the early 1960s. Civil Rights insurgent practices bodily violated particular racial caste institutions and challenged the authorities who upheld them, making moral claims on U.S. democracy for full participation in citizenship rights. Conversely, Black Anti-colonialist practices challenged the presidency—petitioning the United Nations for international intervention, rallying for a federal response to lynching, and attempting to split the Democratic Party—while denouncing U.S. foreign and racial policy as analogous to colonialism and fascism. Black Anti-colonialist practices proliferated in 1946, but few activists, if any, participated in insurgent Civil Rights practices that year. And for good reason: bodily violation of Jim Crow in 1946 was likely to result in death, or at best incarceration with little hope of support.

Truman initially ignored all demands by Black Anti-colonialists to take action on lynching, standing strong with the southern Democrats. But the Progressive Challenge gained momentum, threatening to rend the Democratic Party and destroy Truman’s

chance for reelection. The Black Anti-colonialists effectively linked race policy to the Progressive Challenge, compelling Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy as part of broader concessions to progressives. Alongside advocating national health insurance and promising to repeal the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act, Truman introduced anti-lynching legislation to Congress and issued an executive order to desegregate the military. Having remade himself as a liberal and the first president to advocate civil rights, Truman then worked with mainstream black political leaders to crush the remaining Black Anti-colonialist insurgency.

If this historical argument is correct, then different forms of black insurgent practices took advantage of distinct meso-level opportunities. Black Anti-colonialist practices seized the opportunity created by the Progressive Challenge, leveraging the conflict between Truman and progressives to compel Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy. Truman’s civil rights advocacy, in turn, helped constitute the political opportunity for the Civil Rights Movement to come, while eliminating the opportunity for sustained Black Anti-colonialism.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

To arbitrate between competing explanations of Truman’s adoption of civil rights advocacy requires a method of analysis that can account for the full range of historical evidence and is systematic and explicit in its causal attribution. A theoretically guided application of event structure analysis (ESA) (Griffin 1993; Heise 1989) provides the ideal tool. In event structure analysis (e.g., Brown 2000; Brueggemann and Boswell 1998; Dixon 2008; Eder and Enke 1991; Griffin and Korstad 1995; Isaac, Street, and Knapp 1994; Trumpy 2008; Uehara 2001), the analyst decomposes a narrative or hypothetical explanation into its component actions. The causal effect of each action on each subsequent action constitutes a separate hypothesis (Griffin 1993; Heise 1989). Each hypothesis thus poses an “objectively possible” counterfactual question—would the subsequent action have occurred if not for the preceding action?

In the tradition of Weber ([1905] 1949), the analyst must critically and explicitly interrogate the counterfactual to make a plausible causal attribution. A much more stringent criterion than correlation, counterfactual methods of attributing causality have become standard in sociology and a variety of social science disciplines in recent decades (Fearon 1991; Hall 2004; Heckman 2000; Lebow 2010; Manski 1995; Morgan and Winship 2007; Pearl 2000; Rubin 2005). The ETHNO computer program facilitates organization and systematic consideration of this dense web of hypotheses, as well as explicit presentation of the results of analysis (Griffin 1993; Heise 1989). I also consider interaction effects proposed by general theory. Theoretically guided application of ESA constitutes a formal method of theory testing through historical case study. For an extended methodological discussion, see the online supplement.

Data

The black press, especially the *Chicago Defender*, provides the most comprehensive coverage of the public actions and statements of Black Anti-colonialists. The NAACP's archives provide details for the largest and most influential black political organization of the period; they contain countless memos, meeting notes, and correspondence with other black political organizations and the Truman administration. I also gathered valuable insights on Black Anti-colonialist actions from the organizational newsletters *New Africa* and *Crisis*, including transcribed speeches and interviews. Memoirs from Truman, Clark Clifford, Walter White, W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Eleanor Roosevelt provided some insight as well, although retrospective accounts must be handled cautiously.

The *New York Times* provides extensive detailed coverage of most of the public actions of the Truman administration, but it rarely specifies the intentions underlying these actions. Extensive documentation of the internal deliberations of the Truman administration is available, however, from the Harry

S. Truman Library. These documents illuminate the deliberations that consumed the administration outside of public view and are invaluable in analyzing the reasoning and competing pressures behind specific administration actions.

Hypotheses Specification

To probe rival explanations of Truman's adoption of civil rights advocacy using a theoretically guided application of ESA, the next step is to specify hypotheses for testing by decomposing each explanation into its component actions. Table 1 identifies eight key Black Anti-colonialist actions (BAC₁₋₈) and eight key Truman administration actions (T₁₋₈) for 1946, the year Truman adopted civil rights advocacy.

First, I identified actions by Truman in 1946 that constituted unprecedented measures of civil rights advocacy.⁶ Second, I identified key actions of Black Anti-colonialist insurgency in 1946. These include all large public protests against lynching (i.e., more than 50 people) framed in foreign policy terms, all efforts to institutionalize Black Anti-colonialism as part of a third political party, and all reported meetings between Black Anti-colonialists and the Truman administration. The analysis includes the full population of observed actions of the types specified here.

To compile these observations for analysis, I combed two primary sources, the *Chicago Defender* and the *New York Times*, as well as the secondary literature (i.e., Anderson 2003; Berman 1970; Borstelmann 2001; Dudziak 2000; Gardner 2003; Lauren 1988; Lawson 1976; Layton 2000; McCoy and Ruetten 1973; McCullough 1992; Plummer 1996; Von Eschen 1997). The rival explanations of Truman's civil rights advocacy attribute different roles to emergent Cold War pressures and the Progressive Challenge, so I include those in the event structure analysis as well.

Having identified the key actions for analysis, I input the label for each into ETHNO

Table 1. Specification of Actions for Analysis

Black Anti-colonial Actions: Key Instances of BAC Practice 1946	Truman Actions: Key Steps on Civil Rights in 1946
BAC ₁ . NAACP public response to Columbia killings, March 1.	T ₁ . Truman instruction to Clark to handle public response to Columbia killings.
BAC ₂ . CAA third-party efforts, April and June.	T ₂ . Clark press conference and federal investigation of Monroe lynchings, July 30.
BAC ₃ . National Education Committee for a New Party convenes, May.	T ₃ . Truman meets with White delegation, September 19.
BAC ₄ . NAACP public challenges to Democratic Party, June and September.	T ₄ . Truman proposes PCCR to White, September 19.
BAC ₅ . Anti-lynching protests following Monroe lynchings, late July.	T ₅ . Truman meets with Robeson delegation, September 23.
BAC ₆ . National Emergency Mobilization Against Mob Violence convention and protests in New York and Washington, DC, September.	T ₆ . Truman okays Monday Night Club, November.
BAC ₇ . American Crusade Against Lynching rallies and protests, September.	T ₇ . Truman prepares PCCR with White, September to December.
BAC ₈ . White and Robeson delegations meet with Truman, September.	T ₈ . Truman creates PCCR, December 5.

and temporally ordered them. I then analyzed each hypothesis in turn as prompted by ETHNO. See the online supplement for further discussion and details.

FINDINGS

Truman did not suddenly create the President's Committee on Civil Rights (hereafter PCCR). My analysis shows the Truman administration's increasing involvement in public civil rights advocacy, leading up to the creation of the PCCR on December 5, 1946 (see Table 2). I found four significant developments in administration actions over the course of 1946. First, in March, in a departure from the administration's previous silence, Truman instructed Attorney General Tom Clark to handle inquiries and reassure the public about lynchings (T₁). Second, in July, Truman told Clark to hold a press conference denouncing lynching and to initiate investigations into killings in Columbia, Tennessee (T₂). Third, in September, Truman met with

two anti-lynching delegations, one led by Paul Robeson and the other by Walter White, and proposed creation of the PCCR (T₃, T₄, T₅). Fourth, Truman took active steps to create the PCCR in December (T₆, T₇, T₈). For purposes of presentation, I group results of the counterfactual analysis by these four developments.

Truman's Instructions to Attorney General Clark, March 1946 (T₁)

On February 26, 1946, a black woman and her son got into an argument with a white radio repairman in Columbia, Tennessee, sparking a sequence that led to mobilization of the Tennessee National Guard and the arrest of 70 black people. Once imprisoned, police machine-gunned two of the captives to death (McCoy and Ruetten 1973; Zangrando 1980).

The NAACP mobilized a political response. They sent lawyers to Columbia to investigate the killing. Walter White wired President

Table 2. Explaining Truman's Civil Rights Advocacy, Results of the Event Structure Analysis

	PC	BAC ₁	T ₁	BAC ₂	BAC ₃	BAC ₄	BAC ₅	T ₂	BAC ₆	BAC ₇	BAC ₈	T ₃	T ₄	T ₅	T ₆	T ₇	T ₈
CW	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PC	.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
BAC ₁	.	.	1(x)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T ₁	.	.	.	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BAC ₂	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1(a)	1(a)	1(a)	0	1(a)	1(a)
BAC ₃	0	1	0	0	0	0	1(a)	1(a)	1(a)	0	1(a)	1(a)
BAC ₄	1	0	0	0	0	1(a)	1(a)	1(a)	0	1(a)	1(a)
BAC ₅	1(a)	1	1	0	1(a)	1(a)	1(a)	0	1(a)	1(a)
T ₂	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
BAC ₆	0	1	1(a)	1(a)	0	0	1(a)	1(a)
BAC ₇	1	0	0	1(a)	0	1(a)	1(a)
BAC ₈	1(a)	.	0	1(a)	1(a)
T ₃	0	1	1
T ₄	0	0	1
T ₅	0	0	0
T ₆	1	1
T ₇	1

Note: The Black Anti-colonialist actions and Truman's actions are labeled according to Table 1. The emergent Cold War is labeled CW; the Progressive Challenge is labeled PC. Contents of cells display findings on direct effects and hypothesized interaction effects.

. = Row action did not precede column action.

0 = No direct evidence that row action was necessary to column action.

1 = Row action was necessary to subsequent column action.

(a) = Interaction effect: Progressive Challenge was necessary for influence of BAC action on Truman's subsequent action.

(x) = No evidence of hypothesized interaction effect.

Truman about the incident and called Attorney General Tom Clark. Thurgood Marshall, special counsel for the NAACP and future Supreme Court justice, compared lynching to fascism and told the press that the police killing of two blacks in jail was like “the action of the German storm troopers” (*New York Times* 1946a). Truman responded by assigning Clark to handle the matter, referring all inquiries to him. A Truman aide wrote Clark, instructing him to assure the public “that the federal government is doing all it can in order to protect civil rights.”⁷

Were Truman’s public assurances of federal efforts on civil rights simply a response to emerging Cold War pressures? Or were Black Anti-colonialist actions necessary? Would Truman have ordered Clark to assure the public (T_1) if the NAACP had not mobilized to condemn U.S. racial policy and assert federal responsibility for redress (BAC_1)?

The NAACP had their lawyers investigate the killings locally, publicly sent formal petitions to President Truman and Attorney General Clark, framed the police killing of two blacks in jail as “worthy of Nazis,” and made calls and sent press releases to their media contacts. The results were stark, as can be seen in the *New York Times*’ changing coverage of the incident. On February 27, the *Times* reported the incident as a public disorder and street fight, involving both whites and blacks, many inebriated (*New York Times* 1946b). But on March 2, the *Times* reported the NAACP’s protest, putting the organization’s frame as the subhead: “NAACP Tells Truman Shooting of 2 by Tennessee Troopers in Jail was Worthy of Nazis” (*New York Times* 1946a). Without the NAACP’s actions, there is reason to believe the *Times* would not have reported the police killing: 56 blacks were lynched between June 1945 and September 1946 in the United States (Duberman 1988:305), but this was the first lynching reported by the *Times* during that period. Furthermore, Truman’s instructions specifically responded to NAACP charges, seeking to reassure the public.

Truman’s actions in response to the killings hardly constituted full-blown civil rights

advocacy; rather, it demonstrated a mild preliminary indication of some movement on the issue by the presidency. Nonetheless, we can reasonably conclude that if the NAACP had not investigated, framed, and publicized the killing (BAC_1), Truman would not have responded as he did.

Clark’s Public Statements and Federal Investigation in July, 1946 (T_2)

Roger Malcolm was arrested after stabbing Barney Hester, his white employer. He was bailed out on July 25 by a white farmer who said he wanted Malcolm to work his fields. Malcolm, his wife Dorothy, his friend George Dorsey—recently returned to Georgia after five years in the army—and George’s wife Mae all got in the farmer’s car to take the job. Dorothy was seven months pregnant. According to the farmer, a mob surrounded the car at a wooden bridge over the Apalachee River. He said the white mob did not originally plan to harm the women, but one of the passengers recognized a member of the mob. The farmer said he did not recognize anyone. The sheriff found the four mutilated bodies by the river later that day (Dudziak 2000; *New York Times* 1946c).

Hundreds of members of the National Association of Colored Women from across the country set up a week-long picket in front of the White House. Their protest pressured Truman to take a stand, couching lynching as antithetical to democracy. Max Yergan, Director of the Council on African Affairs, led a march of more than 1,000 protestors from the Washington Union Terminal to the White House and criticized Truman’s lack of action. The black National Newspaper Publishers Association called on Truman to enact anti-lynching legislation. Organized labor supported the protests. James Carey, Secretary-Treasurer of the CIO, wrote Truman requesting federal action on lynching. Labor Party representative Vito Marcantonio of New York, an ally of Wallace and an important progressive, publicly asked President Truman to intervene. The Negro Publishers’ Association telegraphed

Truman requesting a federal anti-lynching law. The American Council on Race Relations, the Civil Rights Congress, and the NAACP each offered rewards for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the killers (McCoy and Ruetten 1973; *New York Times* 1946d).

Attorney General Clark announced that the president was horrified and he was launching a federal investigation. The Truman administration's public condemnation and investigation of the lynching had political costs, given widespread defense of Jim Crow and states' rights by southern Democrats, Truman's core constituency in 1946. Why would Truman turn against those interests? Was he motivated simply by mounting macro-structural pressures? Or did Black Anti-colonialist actions influence him?

More specifically, would Clark have held a press conference denouncing the lynchings, announced that the president was horrified, and launched an investigation (T_2) if each of five preceding BAC actions had not occurred? For the first four actions, there is reason to suspect cumulative influence, but I could find no evidence that the NAACP's action on lynching in March, or third-party efforts by black political leaders, had a direct effect. The one BAC action that does appear directly causal is the widespread mobilization protesting the lynchings in late July (BAC_5).

Attorney General Clark attributed the public character of the administration's response to the protest pressure. He reported that, due to the overwhelming outcry from labor, veterans, religious, civic, and black political organizations, "I am therefore making public" the federal investigation (*New York Times* 1946d). Furthermore, Clark's statement to the press echoed the protestors' theme that the lynching was a national disgrace and "an affront to decent Americanism." If black insurgents had not targeted Truman in widespread protests (BAC_5), it is hard to imagine the Truman administration breaking with presidential precedent and constituent interests to publicly condemn the lynching and launch a federal investigation.

The evidence also provides some support for the interaction hypothesis, that is, the

Progressive Challenge generated the political opportunity crucial to this effect. Most of the important political leaders who vocally supported the July protests, such as Carey and Marcantonio, were progressives involved in preliminary exploration of a third-party split in 1948. For 14 years, the Democratic Party had dominated national politics. Democrats had won the presidency and congressional majorities in the House and Senate in every national election since 1932. As late as February 1946, 55 percent of those polled said they would vote Democratic. But as the Progressive Challenge mounted in 1946, the Democratic coalition began to unravel. As early as May 1946, 24 percent of registered Democrats said they supported Wallace for president in 1948 over Democratic incumbent Truman (*Public Opinion Quarterly* 1946a). That month a whopping 91 percent of registered black Democratic voters supported Wallace over Truman for president in 1948 (*Negro Digest* 1946). By July 1946, public opinion showed support for Democrats slipping generally, with the majority saying they would favor a Republican (*Public Opinion Quarterly* 1946b). In this context, the Black Anti-colonialist actions in July linking lynching to the Progressive Challenge threatened Truman's Democratic coalition.

Truman Meets with White and Robeson Delegations (T_3, T_4, T_5)

In 1946, Black Anti-colonialists mobilized in various alliances to promote an anti-colonial and anti-racist third party. These activities threatened Truman's fragile grasp on the black vote and secured racial reform as a central plank of the broader Progressive Challenge.

Paul Robeson, the most acclaimed black actor in the United States and President of the Council on African Affairs (CAA), was a key leader in this effort. In the spring, Robeson was elected co-chair of the Win-the-Peace organization; working with prominent liberals and labor leaders, he convened a national conference in April 1946. Following Truman's sponsorship of Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech in March 1946, Robeson

denounced “Anglo-American imperialism” (Duberman 1988), and the conference condemned Truman’s move toward Cold War policy as a desertion of both the New Deal and FDR’s foreign policy. Building on the momentum, Robeson and the CAA organized a rally at Madison Square Garden on June 6; 19,000 people came to protest Truman’s foreign policy (Von Eschen 1997) (BAC₂).

In May 1946, with an eye toward the 1946 midterm elections, the preeminent black labor leader A. Philip Randolph organized a broad coalition of liberals and labor into the National Education Committee for a New Party. He intended to build public support to explore a break from the Democratic Party and creation of a third party. The committee called on the United States to support “the liberal democratic rights of people anywhere in the world” (Hamby 1973:138–39) and linked economic and racial justice at home to anti-colonialism abroad. Randolph publicly decried the perils “of continuing the worn-out tradition of a two-party system in which neither party serves the interest of the people” (MacDougall 1965:46) (BAC₃).

In September, Walter White was a featured speaker at the Conference of Progressives, called by the CIO and leading liberal organizations to coordinate progressive activity in the upcoming midterm elections. The conferees urged crossing party lines to advance their platform; they linked extension of the New Deal and progressive domestic policy to anti-colonialist foreign policy in the tradition of Roosevelt (BAC₄).

Unsatisfied by Truman’s public response to lynching in July, black political organizations drew on the emerging progressive networks to continue mobilizing pressure. In August, the NAACP convened 40 civil rights, labor, and other progressive organizations as the National Emergency Committee Against Mob Violence. They mobilized more than 15,000 people to protest in New York and Washington, DC (McCoy and Ruetten 1973). Robeson and Du Bois joined with various black organizations and influential liberals to launch the American Crusade Against Lynching, linking lynching to foreign affairs and the

plight of domestic labor. Robeson spoke at the fateful⁸ liberal-labor rally on September 12, featuring Henry Wallace. Robeson declared: “The leaders of this country can call out the Army and Navy to stop the railroad workers, and to stop the maritime workers—why can’t they stop the lynchers?” (quoted in Duberman 1988:30).

Following a protest on September 23, 1946, Robeson led a delegation to the White House for a scheduled⁹ meeting with the president (T₃). Robeson read a formal declaration to Truman, asking for passage of federal anti-lynching legislation. Truman interrupted and said that now was not an opportune time to propose such legislation. Harper Sibley, president of the United Council of Church Women, said that the U.S. government’s refusal to punish lynchers was inconsistent with the Nuremberg principles. Truman responded that the United States and Great Britain were “the last refuge of freedom in the world.” Robeson disagreed and said the British Empire was “one of the greatest enslavers of human beings” (quoted in Duberman 1988:307). Robeson asserted that if the United States could not stop the lynchings, then foreign intervention would be appropriate. Truman abruptly ended the meeting. The black press, including papers such as the *Journal and Guide* and the *Amsterdam News*, widely reported Truman’s reception of Robeson and the American Crusade as disgraceful. The *Chicago Defender* ran a cartoon called “Pointing Out the Resemblance” that depicted Robeson instructing a defensive Truman on the similarities between southern lynch law and Nazi fascism (Jackson 1946; *New York Times* 1946e).

Four days earlier, Truman met with another anti-lynching delegation led by Walter White (T₃). That delegation—which included influential representatives of the labor-liberal coalition of which White was a part, such as CIO secretary James Carey and Boris Shiskin of the AFL, and had a telegram of support from Eleanor Roosevelt who could not attend in person—held a very different meeting with Truman. The statement presented to Truman by this delegation also connected lynching to

foreign relations, but in a different way: "Unchecked mob violence can do more to injure our country at home and abroad than any other single evil," and is "threatening to engulf all America" (*New York Times* 1946f). This meeting was different from Robeson's meeting with Truman in two important respects. First, White brought influential allies to the meeting from the labor-liberal coalition that was challenging Truman's leadership. Second, White's delegation avoided discussion of colonialism and was careful not to imply any challenge to Truman on foreign policy concerning support of the British or the escalating polarization with the Soviets. Instead of denouncing U.S. policy, the White delegation suggested that lynching was an embarrassment to the United States internationally and ought to be addressed (McCoy and Ruetten 1973).

At the meeting, Truman proposed creation of the PCCR (T_4), and White eagerly supported the idea. On September 26, the press reported a leaked story that Truman was considering formation of a commission to investigate lynching (Pearson 1946; see also McCoy and Ruetten 1973). In October, White reported to the NAACP board of directors that he was in discussion with the president about the matter and that Truman had promised the commission would be authorized by October 10. Yet by the midterm elections in November, nothing had been done (McCoy and Ruetten 1973).

The three outcomes under consideration in this section are Truman's personal meetings with the anti-lynching delegations (T_3 , T_5) and Truman's proposal of the PCCR to White (T_4). Why did Truman break presidential precedent to engage national race policy?

The anti-lynching mobilizations were clearly necessary. If not for the anti-lynching campaigns led by Robeson and White in September (BAC_6 , BAC_7), Truman would have had no reason to invite delegations from those campaigns to meet (T_3 , T_5). The high-profile anti-lynching mobilizations in late July (BAC_5) helped forge the September coalitions, so it is safe to say these were also necessary. And if not for Truman's meeting with

the White delegation, he would never have proposed the PCCR to White (T_4).

The effects of the black third-party efforts, and the interaction effects with the Progressive Challenge, are more complex. Following his rupture with Wallace, Truman was deeply concerned about the Progressive Challenge. On September 20, 1946, Truman wrote his mother and sister explaining: "I had to fire Henry today," and the progressives "are having conniption fits" (Truman 1955a:560). Top Truman advisor Clark Clifford explained that Truman's conflict with and firing of Wallace cemented Wallace as a progressive challenger "which almost cost Truman the election" (Clifford 1991:122). Truman later recalled, "I realized that the Progressives would cost me votes" (Truman 1955b:185). Truman's rupture with Wallace days before receiving the delegations heightened the pressure on him to address progressive concerns. Beyond threatening loss of the black vote, Black Anticolonialist practices made it necessary for Truman to redress domestic race policy to quell the Progressive Challenge.

Two aspects of Truman's behavior in the September meetings suggest this is exactly what he hoped to accomplish. First, the two delegations with which Truman scheduled meetings were representative of the two major alliance efforts by black political leaders at the time. Truman could have easily met with organizational delegations from the NAACP or the CAA, but the fact that he scheduled meetings with broad progressive delegations instead suggests he was concerned with reconsolidating the Democratic coalition. Second, Truman's differential treatment of the delegations was also instructive. The composition of the delegations may have been important here. Robeson, although he had close ties with a number of progressive organizations, brought mostly representatives of black political organizations to the meeting. This may have been, in part, because Robeson's non-black political allies were further to the left than White's, and most already strongly opposed Truman. In contrast, White's delegation, while critical of Truman's policies, were truly on the fence, and could be

persuaded to support the Democratic Party in the midterm elections and Truman in 1948. The Conference of Progressives that White helped organize was called by the CIO, and in the end actively avoided direct advocacy of a third party.

Truman's differential treatment was likely also a response to the different kind of proposals the two delegations advanced. The Robeson delegation explicitly linked lynching to colonialism and condemned Britain. Truman, despite any earlier doubts, in pushing Wallace out of the cabinet in September explicitly broke from FDR's foreign policy, embracing an Anglo-American alliance against the Soviets. So Robeson, by taking a strong anti-British stand similar to the speech that Wallace made on September 12, was not offering Truman any means to heal the rift with progressives. The fact that Truman rudely dismissed the delegation shortly before the midterm election, despite Robeson's unparalleled fame and stature among blacks, suggests Truman had not acted principally out of immediate interest in appealing to blacks. In almost all of the black press, coverage of the Robeson meeting was extremely critical of Truman.

Conversely, Truman's reception of the White delegation demonstrates his interest in reconsolidating long-term political support in the face of the Progressive Challenge. White's decision to avoid discussion of colonialism was strategic. The previous year, White had condemned U.S. support of the British and French position on colonialism at the UN (*New York Times* 1945; Zangrando 1980). But in September 1946, White's delegation presented lynching as a threat to the United States, and its redress as a boon, one which he was eager to work with Truman to address: "Unchecked mob violence can do more to injure our country at home and abroad than any other single evil" (*New York Times* 1946f). This was the kind of political message Truman was looking for. It would allow him to reconsolidate the Democratic coalition and redress the anti-lynching mobilizations, while advancing his broader policy agenda.

In all instances of BAC influence found here, the interaction effect of the Progressive

Challenge is evident. Black Anti-colonialist mobilization was so threatening to Truman because it seized the opportunity created by the Progressive Challenge, making racial policy central to the general crisis his administration faced. By targeting Truman, mobilizing for a third party, and linking domestic race policy to progressive foreign policy aims, Black Anti-colonial practices made common cause with progressives. Without the broader Progressive Challenge, Black Anti-colonial efforts to organize a third party would have appeared laughable. And without broad progressive support, Truman likely would have ignored the September anti-lynching mobilizations, as presidents had ignored so many anti-lynching protests before. As Berman (1970) suggests, if Wallace had not fallen out with Truman a few days earlier, it seems quite likely Truman would not have proposed the PCCR to White.

So how do these events bear on the hypothesis that Truman's adoption of civil rights advocacy was caused by macro-structural changes, especially emergent Cold War foreign policy pressures? In an indirect way, the conflict over Truman's emergent Cold War policy was an important background factor in these events. The Cold War helped set up the contours of the Progressive Challenge generally, with Truman's foreign policy becoming a major point of contention. But direct support for civil rights at this time did not come through the State Department, which was led by white supremacist Secretary of State Byrnes. Cold War effects on Truman's proposal of the PCCR were mediated by the Progressive Challenge and its interaction with Black Anti-colonialist mobilization. I could find no direct effect.

Midterm Election, Monday Night Club, and Truman Forms the PCCR (T₆, T₇, T₈)

On November 5, 1946, the Democratic Party lost both the House and Senate to the Republicans for the first time since before the Great Depression. Republicans called on Truman to step down as a lame duck president (Morris

1946). Truman saw that he could not retain the presidency in 1948 by continuing to cater to conservatives. According to top Truman aide Clark Clifford (1991:82), “The turning point in the battle between the liberals and the conservatives for President Truman’s heart and mind came unexpectedly; as it often occurs in politics, a major disaster led to the turnaround. It was the first postwar, post-Roosevelt election, the Congressional elections of 1946.”

By the 1946 midterm election, Truman had replaced most of the New Dealers in the cabinet with conservatives. Immediately after the Republican victory, Truman gave the go ahead to a group of liberal sub-cabinet members to form a secret Monday Night Group, to consider crafting a new approach to policy.¹⁰ On December 5, 1946, President Truman issued Executive Order 9808, creating the President’s Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR).

Would Truman have formed the PCCR if not for Black Anti-colonialist actions? Black Anti-colonialist influence is clearly evident in Truman’s appointments to the committee. Of 15 committee members Truman appointed, eight were close allies of Walter White and the NAACP: three were members of the delegation White led to discuss lynching with Truman on September 19th; two more were NAACP activists; and another three were recommended for appointment by White. Once Truman formed the PCCR, he hired White as a consultant to it (Zangrando 1980). This is not to suggest that only the actions of White and his allies were of concern to Truman. To the contrary, those of Robeson, Randolph, and other groups may have been of greater concern. But White represented the part of the black insurgent challenge—and was tied to the branch of the progressive threat—that Truman could work with. And he did.

How important was the interaction effect of the Progressive Challenge to this influence of Black Anti-colonialists on Truman’s formation of the PCCR? Here, the timing is revealing. While Truman discussed forming a PCCR with White at their meeting in September and promised to create it by early October, he did not make good on the promise.

Instead, he waited until after the midterm defeat. If the election had gone differently and the Democrats had won handily, Truman might not have followed through with forming the PCCR at all. Or he might have made a less concerted effort to support it. Clark Clifford’s candid accounts of the dynamics inside the administration, evidence that Truman approved formation of a liberal strategy team—the Monday Night Club—in the wake of the election, and the far-reaching change in his support of liberal policies, all suggest that Truman’s formation and support of the PCCR was not an isolated action, but part of a concerted policy shift toward not only civil rights, but liberalism generally.

It is conceivable that without any Black Anti-colonialist mobilization, in the wake of the midterm elections, Truman might have approved the Monday Night Club and turned toward liberalism. But this does not mean the Progressive Challenge would have independently yielded the PCCR. Most southern Democrats, Truman’s core constituency, vehemently opposed civil rights. If Black Anti-colonialists had not embarrassed Truman on lynching, and threatened to split the Democratic Party, there is every reason to believe Truman would have marginalized consideration of civil rights for blacks, as had FDR and previous presidents.

In summary, this counterfactual analysis finds no evidence that any BAC actions were crucial to Truman’s approval of the Monday Night Club (T_6). Black insurgents may have been a consideration for Truman, but it is not clear that had black insurgents failed to take any particular action or group of actions, he would not have approved the Monday Night Club. I also found no evidence of the direct importance of the March anti-lynching protests (BAC_1) for Truman’s work with White (T_7) or creation of the PCCR in December (T_8). If that early campaign had not happened, it is still possible the subsequent events would have occurred. The remaining counterfactuals all yield a common conclusion. While it is impossible to truly separate out the exact effects of one anti-lynching campaign or another third-party effort, it is clear that the

cumulative effect of the anti-lynching campaigns (BAC₅, BAC₆, BAC₇) and third-party efforts by black insurgents in 1946 (BAC₂, BAC₃, BAC₄) were decisive in compelling Truman to work with White and create the PCCR in December. If insurgents had not enacted these Black Anti-colonialist practices, Truman would not have created the PCCR.

Similarly, the analysis confirms the overarching importance of the Progressive Challenge as a political opportunity for this insurgent influence. As described earlier, it appears that the conflict over Truman's emergent Cold War policy was important as a background factor that, in part, delineated the contours of the Progressive Challenge. But I found no evidence that Cold War pressure was more directly crucial to Truman's creation of the PCCR. In other words, the influence of Cold War macro-structural pressures was mediated by domestic political cleavages, and the Black Anti-colonialist practices that leveraged them, to compel Truman to create the PCCR.

The End of Black Anti-colonialism

Rather than fostering black insurgency, as Truman adopted civil rights advocacy and created strong alliances with Walter White, A. Philip Randolph, Max Yergan, and other key black leaders, the president and his new allies effectively repressed and destroyed Black Anti-colonialism.

When Du Bois vocally supported Wallace's progressive third-party campaign in 1948 on anti-colonial grounds, White, now working closely with Truman, expelled Du Bois from the NAACP. Max Yergan, the director of the BAC Council on African Affairs (CAA), of which Robeson was president, also made an alliance with Truman and attempted to take over the CAA. The battle over control of the CAA raged from February to September of 1948.

Once Truman consolidated the Cold War liberal alliance and beat back the Progressive Challenge in the 1948 elections, his administration repressed the remaining BAC

leadership. The federal government seized Robeson's and Du Bois's passports and forbade them from traveling internationally. The CAA was charged under the Foreign Registration Act as a foreign agent for its relationship with the South African, Kenyan, and Nigerian independence movements. Alphaeus Hunton, executive director of the CAA and a dedicated anti-colonialist, was imprisoned, and eventually the CAA was crushed, unable to keep up with court costs. Du Bois was indicted in 1950 and prosecuted for his work with the Peace Information Center opposing the Korean War.

Important Black Anti-colonialist organizations, such as the CAA, collapsed, but those that remained, such as the NAACP, deserted both their anti-colonial ideas and their insurgent political practices. The black press followed, and for the next eight years there was little progress on civil rights.

DISCUSSION

Truman (1955b:180) retrospectively explained his creation of the President's Committee on Civil Rights as the honorable response to lynching. But despite widespread lynching and steady political jockeying, as Fligstein and McAdam (2012) point out, presidential tolerance of racial caste subordination prevailed in the United States from the end of Reconstruction until Truman adopted civil rights advocacy in 1946. Neither individual heroism nor normal electoral political calculation is sufficient to explain Truman's break from his own racist past and all presidential precedent. Black Anti-colonialist insurgency was essential.

By threatening Truman's efforts to hold together FDR's Democratic Party coalition and by challenging his budding Cold War policy in alliance with the progressives, Black Anti-colonialists compelled Truman to adopt civil rights advocacy. Figure 3 summarizes the ESA analysis.

As Figure 3 shows, at almost every juncture in 1946, when Truman took steps toward breaking the long-standing presidential silence on civil rights, he did so in direct

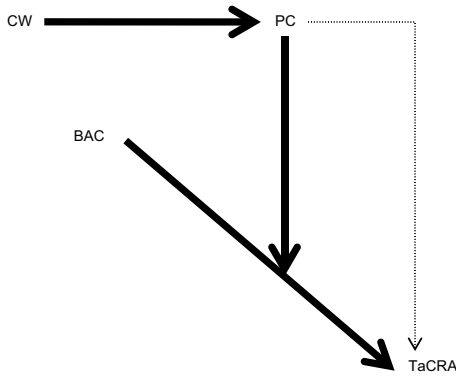


Figure 3. Summary of ESA Analysis

Note: Results of the ESA collapsed by theoretical category. See the online supplement for technical details of the heuristic by which Figure 3 was derived from Table 2. CW indicates Cold War, PC indicates Progressive Challenge, BAC indicates Black Anti-colonialist practice, and TaCRA indicates Truman's adoption of civil rights advocacy. Thick arrows indicate attribution of strong effect. Dotted arrow indicates weak support for causal attribution. No arrow indicates the absence of support for direct causal attribution.

response to Black Anti-colonialist practice. Furthermore, overwhelming evidence reveals that the opportunity provided by the Progressive Challenge was crucial to this effect. The one exception, Truman's approval of the Monday Night Club, helps clarify the general tendency. Truman may well have approved the Monday Night Club in response to the Progressive Challenge and the disastrous 1946 midterm elections without any Black Anti-colonialist pressure. But in that case, the Monday Night Club would not have emphasized civil rights, risking the break with southern Democrats. Truman might have championed Cold War liberalism generally, as a response to the Progressive Challenge without any black insurgent pressure. But he would not have made civil rights advocacy a central plank if not for the Black Anti-colonialist insurgency.

Prevailing analyses view Truman's civil rights advocacy as determined by macro-structural, and especially Cold War, pressures (Dudziak 2000; Fligstein and McAdam 2012;

Layton 2000; McAdam 1982, 1999; Plummer 1996). Cold War pressures did constitute important background factors. But, as Figure 3 shows, Cold War effects on Truman's race policy in 1946 were indirect, mediated by the Progressive Challenge.¹¹ At every juncture, progressive and Cold War forces proved insufficient to explain Truman's adoption of civil rights advocacy. Despite Cold War pressures generally and the opportunity afforded by the Progressive Challenge specifically, without Black Anti-colonialist insurgent practice, Truman would not have advocated civil rights.

CONCLUSIONS

Eager to explain the upsurge of the Civil Rights Movement, sociological studies foundational to and defending the political opportunity perspective explain black insurgency as dependent on macro-structural shifts (Jenkins et al. 2003; McAdam 1982; Oberschall 1973; Piven and Cloward 1977). These accounts lump various forms of black insurgency together and assume that opportunities for insurgency opened to black people as a group. Federal civil rights advocacy, inaugurated by Truman, is thus seen as conferring advantage on all forms of insurgency by blacks (see, e.g., McAdam 1999:xx–xxi, 86). This view is not supported by the evidence. Alongside other liberal concessions that undermined the broader Progressive Challenge, civil rights advocacy allowed Truman to consolidate moderate black support as part of a Cold War liberal alliance and readily repress the Black Anti-colonialist threat. Truman's civil rights advocacy responded to and vitiated one form of black insurgent mobilization, Black Anti-colonialism, even as it helped create the opportunity for the Civil Rights Movement that would follow.

What do these findings reveal about how conditions affect the influence and timing of insurgency? In this case, as proposed at the outset (see Figure 2), the crucial macro-structural processes—namely the Cold War—had no discernable direct effect on insurgent

influence. Instead, macro-structural effects were mediated by a meso-level institutional cleavage or opportunity, namely the Progressive Challenge. But the effects of this crucial institutional cleavage on insurgency were also indirect. Rather than independently generating influence or following for insurgency by blacks as a social group, the Progressive Challenge had a powerful interaction effect on the influence of a particular form of black insurgent practice, namely Black Anti-colonialism. I found no direct effect from opportunity to influence.

These findings demonstrate the limitations of classic political opportunity theory and the explanatory power of theorizing opportunities for practices in three ways. First, conditions do not independently favor insurgency by a group. At stake is the question of the fundamental relationship between practice and structure (see Bourdieu 1990; Isaac 2008; Joas 1996; Sewell 1992; Swidler 1986). The classic political opportunity thesis assumes that contextual advantages for insurgency confer on a social group regardless of the form of insurgent practice (McAdam 1982). That perspective cannot explain why federal civil rights advocacy undercut one form of black insurgency while facilitating another. Analyzing context effects requires taking insurgent practices into account.

Second, meso-level institutional cleavages mediate macro-structural effects on insurgency, allowing much more precise explanation of the timing and influence of specific insurgencies. In a wide range of previous empirical tests, classic macro-structural conceptualizations of opportunity poorly predicted the timing of insurgent mobilization and influence (Goodwin 2012; Meyer 2004). Of course, macro-structural conditions may loosely facilitate or constrain insurgency, and macro-structural shifts may help destabilize institutionalized social roles. That the Cold War spans the period encompassing Black Anti-colonialist influence as well as the Civil Rights Movement lends credibility to the classic hypothesis that the Cold War helped create the opportunity for black insurgency. But closer analysis shows that the Progressive

Challenge was necessary for Black Anti-colonialist influence on Truman: for eight years after the Progressive Challenge was defeated, during the height of the Cold War from 1948 to 1955, there was little black insurgency. Hypothesized macro-structural processes do not temporally correlate with these variations in the influence and extent of insurgency by blacks, let alone directly explain them.

For similar reasons, the political opportunity structures approach (Kitschelt 1986; Tilly 1977, 1986, 1995, 2006) cannot explain these findings. Both Black Anti-colonialist insurgency, and the very different Civil Rights insurgency, thrived in the same political regime—the mid-twentieth-century United States. Macro-structural regime-type differences cannot explain the variation in practice.

As this analysis demonstrates, the influence of Black Anti-colonialist insurgency depended specifically on the Progressive Challenge. Conceptualizing opportunity as an institutional cleavage allows much more precise explanation of the timing of insurgent influence than does the classic opportunity thesis. In this sense, “opportunity for practices” constitutes a sort of proximate mechanism, extending classical opportunity theory to provide a more granular and testable explanation of context effects. Macro-structural shifts, like the Cold War, can destabilize established social roles. But the effects on insurgency are mediated by meso-level institutional cleavages, like the Progressive Challenge.

Third, recognizing that leveraging opportunities requires specific practices is not just a matter of granularity or unpacking proximate mechanisms. Context effects are interactive rather than independent—opportunities determine the effects of insurgent practice rather than causing insurgency directly. By theorizing conditions as an independent cause of the form of practice, the classic political opportunity structures approach treats context as independently determinant and obscures the creative role of insurgents. Movements adopt forms of practice for cultural as well as instrumental reasons (Clemens 1993), and insurgent practices may take advantage of institutional cleavages in unpredictable ways.

It was not clear *a priori* that the Progressive Challenge would constitute a key opportunity for black insurgent influence; this did not become evident until Black Anti-colonialists forged a practical alliance with progressives. Other forms of black insurgent practice might have been effective in the same moment, had insurgents figured out how to leverage different institutional cleavages.

In this case, theorizing opportunities for practices, and hypothesizing the importance of a specific cleavage-practice match, much more precisely specifies the timing of insurgent influence than does the classic opportunity thesis. Black Anti-colonialist practices garnered influence by leveraging the Progressive Challenge. At the end of World War II, black political organizations had only modest capacity to shape policy directly. But powerful U.S. political institutions, including much of organized labor and the New Dealers, vehemently opposed Truman's conservative turn. By joining the black freedom struggle to one side of that institutional cleavage—the Progressive Challenge—Black Anti-colonialist practices garnered influence. Once Truman abated the Progressive Challenge, he readily repressed Black Anti-colonialist practices.

Discovering the scope of cases to which these conclusions apply will require further studies. But given the explanatory contribution of the black freedom struggle, the central case on which opportunity theory was formulated, there is reason to suspect they apply widely. At the level of a specific insurgency, looking at context alone will never deliver good predictions of movement emergence, form, or influence. Such aims are chimera. Conversely, I expect that every insurgency sustains influence by advancing practices that draw support from one side of a broad institutional cleavage. If this theory is correct, then the ebbs and flows of any given historical insurgency should predictably follow the fortunes of a specifiable cleavage-practice relationship.

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Notes

1. Indeed, innumerable forms of organizing and insurgent mobilization by blacks against racial oppression—going back to slave revolts—preceded and lay the foundation for Black Anti-colonialist mobilization in the mid-1940s. These include the NAACP's grassroots legal campaigns, A. Phillip Randolph's March on Washington Movement, the Double V campaigns during World War II, Garveyism, black labor organizing in the Congress of Industrial Organizations and Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and numerous anti-lynching mobilizations. I use the term "Black Anti-colonialism" because of the broader anti-colonial view that motivated these insurgents, and for consistency with the substantive literature (especially Von Eschen 1997). But as my findings demonstrate, much of the insurgent rhetoric in crucial actions in 1946 was more properly internationalist, denouncing Truman's policies as analogous to fascism, rather than narrowly anti-colonialist.
2. Google Scholar reports 586 texts published in the 1980s containing the term "political opportunity," 3,080 texts in the 1990s, and 12,200 texts in the 2000s. Compare the flat use of the term "political" over the same period (based on a June 12, 2013 search).
3. McAdam (1982) stands out from many classic opportunity accounts by theorizing the necessity of "cognitive liberation," a process in which social actors must perceive opportunity to take advantage of it. McAdam (1983) emphasizes the importance of tactical innovation for explaining the timing of insurgency. McAdam and colleagues (1996) bundle the opportunity thesis with other causal processes, such as framing. But like other classic opportunity scholarship, these studies

- still theorize opportunity effects as conferring on a group independent of practice.
4. Truman's civil rights advocacy broke with past presidential precedent. In response to the threatened march on Washington in 1941 that would have called attention to the hypocrisy of exclusion of blacks from good defense industry jobs and segregation in a military "fighting fascism" abroad, FDR did create a temporary Fair Employment Practice Committee to expand defense industry and federal hiring of blacks. FDR also occasionally, in moments of political expediency, gave lip service to support of anti-lynching legislation and repeal of the poll tax. But FDR avoided strong advocacy for civil rights that might threaten his support from the southern Democrats in Congress (Hamby 1973; McAdam 1999; McCoy and Ruetten 1973).
 5. Clark M. Clifford to President Truman, "Memorandum for the President," November 19, 1947:1, Harry S. Truman Library.
 6. Over the course of his presidency, Truman's civil rights advocacy exceeded that of any president since Reconstruction. In 1946, the Truman administration switched course from general quiescence on civil rights to adoption of a strong pro-civil rights stance culminating with creation of the PCCR. The measures of civil rights advocacy identified here are unprecedented in the sense that they exceeded previous civil rights advocacy by the Truman administration as it changed course in the crucial year of 1946. Truman's strongest measures of civil rights advocacy overall came later.
 7. D. K. Niles to Tom Clark, March 6, 1946; Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
 8. I believe I am the first to note that this Robeson speech was at the same event where Wallace gave the speech that led to his rupture with Truman. The association illustrates the threat Robeson posed to Truman in 1946, well before his highly publicized campaigning for Wallace, and helps us understand Truman's response to Robeson at their September 23 meeting.
 9. While some (e.g., Duberman 1988) claim that Robeson took the delegation to the White House unscheduled, this claim is contradicted by news reports (*New York Times* 1946g). See also McCoy and Ruetten (1973:48 note 53) citing a letter from Robeson to Truman aide David Niles arranging the meeting the previous week.
 10. Clark M. Clifford interview with Jerry N. Hess, May 10, 1971, Harry S. Truman Library (see also Clifford 1991:84–86).
 11. This finding is consistent with Tarrow's (1998:192) argument.
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