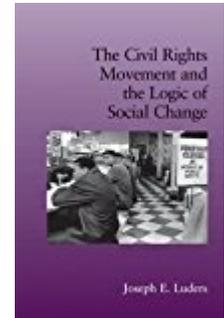


Joseph E. Luders. *The Civil Rights Movement and the Logic of Social Change.*
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In *The Civil Rights Movement and the Logic of Social Change*, Yeshiva University political scientist Joseph E. Luders seeks to further complicate our understanding of social movement outcomes by asking why social movements succeed or fail, or more precisely, under what conditions are movements capable of extracting desired concessions from their targets. He notes that theorists have previously tried to answer these questions by focusing overwhelmingly on movement formation and development; movement participation; and movement goals, tactics, and strategies, with mixed, often contradictory, results. To bring greater clarity to this discussion, Luders argues that more attention should be paid to the complex considerations made by the *targets* of social movement activity and to the impact of *third parties* on movement-target interactions in order to gain “a fuller account of the interactions that determine movement outcomes” (p. 3).

In the past, social scientists have claimed that targets respond to movement demands based on their exposure to the “disruption costs” that

movements and their third-party allies impose on them. By “disruption costs,” theorists usually mean the degree to which movements and their third-party allies are able to disrupt the everyday political or economic activity of a target. While accepting the important role of disruption costs, Luders sees another critical set of costs, what he calls “concession costs,” that play an equally significant part in target responses (and, thus, movement outcomes), but which are often overlooked, ignored, or considered only in a cursory manner. By “concession costs,” Luders refers to the actual or anticipated losses targets think will result from acceding to movement demands. For instance, political figures targeted by movements must consider the response of their main voting constituencies, or their major funders, if they yield to movement demands. Similarly, business owners facing disruption costs from social movement activism need to weigh how customers and financiers will respond if they concede. In this formulation, third parties become very important not only because they can place *complimentary*

pressure on targets in league with movements, but also because they can level *countervailing* pressure on targets to resist concessions to movement demands. Before giving in, then, targets must decide whether these concession costs outweigh disruption costs. In general, when disruption costs are high and concession costs low, it is more likely that targets will yield to movement demands. Conversely, when disruption costs are low and concession costs high, it is less likely that targets will give in to those demands. And there is a complicated spectrum of possibility in between when there is a mixture of disruption and concession costs on movement targets. Luders notes that if we only consider the disruption costs movements bring to bear on targets, we still might not be able to predict movement outcomes because concession costs may be stronger than those disruption costs.

After laying out this refined theoretical framework in the initial chapter of the book, Luders heads into the laboratory of history to test his ideas within the context of the southern civil rights struggle. Chapter 2 focuses on the “reactive countermobilization” of southern whites, particularly members of the White Citizens’ Councils and the Ku Klux Klan, against the demands the black freedom movement placed on political and economic targets. He notes that these organizations “represented elements of the white populations most vulnerable to civil rights gains and relatively insulated from the costs of movement disruptions” (p. 53). Rather than merely attacking movement activists and their allies, these reactionary forces also sought to deter targets from making concessions and other third parties from intervening on behalf of the movement. Where these reactive countermobilizations by third parties were strongest, notably in the black belt region, targets were more likely to vacillate or resist capitulation to movement demands, supporting Luders’s contention that heightened concession

costs are a key dynamic in determining movement outcomes.

In chapter 3, the author takes a closer look at political and economic targets caught between movement demands and the reactive countermobilizations of third parties. Political actors who faced strong movement opposition from a majority of their voting constituency, as well as the organized demands of massive resisters, were most likely to put forth a host of measures to reinforce the Jim Crow system and turn back movement activism. Where those third-party concession costs were lower, political figures were more likely to compromise with movement leaders. Similarly, economic agents in the white community who were vulnerable to the disruption costs created by movement activists and their allies, or who faced financial liabilities associated with racial turmoil, more generally, had a strong incentive to negotiate compromise with civil rights leaders in order to protect their interests. Yet this tendency toward concession also pit these economic actors against other whites who did not face the same disruption costs and thus took a more hard-line defense of segregation. Luders concludes that white response to movement demands was variegated, determined by a complex and competitive struggle among movement activists, political and economic targets, and a diverse range of third parties.

Next, Luders attempts to bring together the separate elements he explores in the previous chapters through a series of local case studies--Greensboro, North Carolina; New Orleans, Louisiana; Atlanta and Albany, Georgia; Birmingham and Selma, Alabama; and Greenwood, Mississippi--to better understand the precise ways targets assess the array of pressures bearing down on them. Each of these case studies is used to bear out particular aspects of Luders’s theoretical framework. Taken together, Luders argues, “they depict how target selection and vulnerabilities, movement tactics, and the mobilization of third parties defined the disruption and concession

costs that shaped the responses of diverse economic and political interests” (p. 111). More specifically, these cases “indicate that the sustained movement agitation to desegregate public accommodations often met with success, but voter registration drives in hostile Deep South settings had a negligible impact. Outcomes for public school desegregation fell somewhere in between with success severely circumscribed within the confines of tokenism” (pp. 111-112).

Following this localized analysis, Luders then steps back to look at regional patterns of movement outcomes in three major areas: public school integration, voter registration, and desegregation of public accommodations. Southern elected officials were the primary targets in both school desegregation and voter registration campaigns. On the one one hand, political targets, Luders argues, were concerned with the disruption costs of movements and their third-party allies to the degree to which those interests controlled or could sway blocks of voters or other electorally useful resources, as well as their ability to draw public attentiveness to the issue and affect mass opinion in their favor. In assessing concession costs, on the other hand, southern politicians had to discern the degree to which they would face electoral reprisals from white constituencies for yielding to movement demands. In this way, “differing cost calculations determined divergent target responses in the domains of voter registration and school desegregation” (p. 116). In general, Luders argues that with the exception of those areas where black electoral empowerment would bring a decisive advantage to African Americans, white voters usually perceived school desegregation as a more immediate and costly threat than voter registration. This led to highly variable outcomes across the region in terms of voter registration, but fairly consistent token integration in public schools. By contrast, movement disruption costs fell overwhelmingly on local economic interests in campaigns aimed at desegregating public accommodations. As such, southern

elected officials had little incentive to intercede in these struggles, unless pressured by electorally meaningful economic interests to do so. This meant that “public officials provided local businesses with wide latitude in responding to civil rights demonstrations” (p. 117). Faced with often significant disruption costs associated with sit-ins and boycotts, merchants and other business interests had to determine the degree to which yielding to movement demands might cost them valuable economic support among whites. Because individual operators who bowed to movement pressure unilaterally opened themselves up to targeted white reprisals that could be even more devastating than the disruption costs levied by civil rights activists, merchants often sought to “unite the business community behind broader desegregation plans and thereby diffuse the blame for bringing about unwanted changes as well as to make the task of punishing these firms more daunting for civil rights opponents” (p. 136). This helps explain, in part, the reason why business compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 throughout the South was generally “swift and widespread” (p. 137).

Yet, as we know, federal intervention in the South was critical to bringing meaningful racial change in public schools, voter registration, and public accommodations. The pervasive disfranchisement of African Americans throughout the region meant it was often difficult for civil rights activists to bring to bear significant disruption costs on local politicians. Consequently, it was essential that the movement mobilize third parties to aid in their cause, most often in the form of reluctant federal power and localized economic interests concerned about the financial costs of racial tumult. In the final chapter of the book, Luders takes a closer look at federal responses to civil rights mobilizations. Most conventional narratives of the movement emphasize the important role of protests and dramatic moments of violence as the critical catalytic prompting passage of national civil rights legislation in 1964, 1965, and

1968. But Luders argues that there is a much richer political story to tell about the interplay of disruption and concession costs in the shaping of national civil rights legislation. He agrees that dramatic public episodes of violence, like those in Birmingham in 1963 or Selma in 1965, were essential in bringing widespread national attention to key civil rights issues, but he also asserts that more “mundane participation by movement supporters in conventional politics,” particularly the growing involvement of churches, liberal organizations, labor, and organized civil rights groups in lobbying efforts and constituent mobilization, was equally significant in producing disruption costs that compelled a growing number of legislators to respond to movement demands (p. 188). Moreover, the relative “weakness of business opposition and the lack of a coherent conservative movement at the grassroots to counterbalance movement demands meant that nonsouthern legislators operated in a political setting nearly devoid of concession costs” until the early 1970s, paving the way for landmark legislation on not only race, but also gender, the environment, and a host of other issues. Moreover, a consideration of concession costs at the federal level leads to a better appreciation of the “crucial role of pivotal legislators in passing legislation” (p. 189). To obtain the support of these key swing politicians, civil rights supporters often had to compromise during negotiations, accepting weaker enforcement mechanisms and other watered-down provisions in the final bill. According to Luders, highlighting this complex interplay of disruption and concession costs at the federal level brings to the fore a richer, more nuanced explanation for the responses of political targets in Washington, as well as a better understanding of the resulting legislative outcomes.

Luders concludes the book by summarizing some of the implications of his new theoretical framework on future research. Of course, first and foremost, his approach forcefully asserts the need for greater attention to movement targets

and “the inclusion of a fuller ensemble of factors affecting their responses,” particularly concession costs associated with reactive third parties. He also encourages scholars to “think more carefully about what exactly movement activists and their supporters are doing to disrupt the interests of their targets,” moving beyond tallies of protest events to a more nuanced analysis of the “type of action, overall scale, or other factors that might elucidate the magnitude of the disruption” created by specific campaigns and the impact of those disruptions on reactive third parties, and thus, on the concession cost calculus of targets (p. 211). Along the same line and to his credit, Luders reminds us that the overemphasis on protest politics by many academics often obscures more traditional forms of electoral mobilization, which play an equally important role in determining the disruptive capacity of movements. Furthermore, because movements are not “unitary entities” and usually encompass multiple goals, Luders states that “explanations for outcomes must be sensitive to the different cost configurations associated with different ambitions” (pp. 193, 212). To do this, “it is critical to maintain the distinctions among discrete movement demands in order to discern the particular costs associated with them for targets and others,” but it is equally important to consider how “the actions of movement opponents affect target responses.” Lastly, Luders argues that greater attentiveness to “sectoral variations in the vulnerabilities of economic actors to both disruption and concession costs” will strengthen the predictive capacity of social movement scholars” (p. 213). Simply put, some businesses, like downtown retail establishments, were more exposed to the disruption costs of sit-ins and boycotts, as well as to the concession costs associated with desegregation, than others and this played an important role in determining the response of particular economic actors.

Luders’s study underscores that social movements are exceedingly complicated, that there is no single path to victory, and that there is an in-

credible degree of variability and complexity in terms of the many factors involved in determining the responses of movement targets and the ultimate outcome of specific campaigns. In this way, the book provides a welcome reminder that the targets of social movements often face the powerful crosscurrents of competing disruption costs and reactive concession costs. It encourages social scientists and activists to probe with more nuance the complicated calculations targets make as they assess not only the costs levied on them by movement activists and their third-party allies, but also the potential impact they might encounter from reactive third parties if they concede to movement demands. As such, Luders's analysis sheds considerable light on both the successes and failures of the southern civil rights movement and more effectively explains the broad variation in southern white responses to movement demands. In general, the book is well written and lucid, particularly for a theoretical work, and, overall, it is a welcome addition to the long list of scholarship on social movement theory.

That written, the book is not without a few shortcomings worth noting. First, in his analysis of political actors, Luders asserts that their primary consideration is reelection. While there is certainly a great degree of truth in that premise, it is also true that part of their calculus focuses on the impact of their actions on the prospects of passing other legislation that they have prioritized. A good example of this can be found in a succession of Democratic presidents in the mid-twentieth century who feared inflaming southern segregationists not only because they needed them for their reelection campaigns, but also because they needed their votes to secure passage of other priority legislation. This insight does not fundamentally alter the core theoretical framework Luders has articulated about the importance of concession costs on targets, but it adds another degree of complexity to the analysis of those costs and how targets calculate them. Second, by limiting his analysis of the southern black freedom movement to voting

rights, school integration, and the desegregation of public accommodations, rather than considering the broader array of what Hasan Kwame Jeffries calls "freedom rights" advocated by southern African Americans, Luders conveniently sidesteps other aspects of the movement that might complicate his analysis. In the process, the study reaffirms the tidy, but mythic, popular conception that the movement was strictly limited to "civil rights," rather than a much broader struggle for liberation and freedom, encompassing economic justice, cultural self-definition, transformations in consciousness, etc., throughout the era, not merely after the emergence of Black Power in the mid-1960s. Part of the problem here is that despite the rich array of empirical evidence on the southern movement included in the book, Luders does not appear, at least from his footnotes and bibliography, to be fully versed in the latest wave of movement scholarship, which has highlighted precisely the kinds of complexity and nuance his study encourages, but which also makes clear that movement actors, targets, and third parties often acted in inconsistent, or even contradictory, ways, muddying the waters quite a bit for anyone hoping for a singular explanatory theory of social movement behavior and outcomes. Readers familiar with this more recent historiography will most likely not find Luders's refined theoretical framework as revelatory as he claims, though they will still find value in the book. It would have been beneficial for him to confront this new scholarship and explore the implications for his work. And, finally, what about the importance of psychology, ideology, and affect in human behavior, all largely missing from this analysis? Luders retains a strong belief that behaviors are ultimately rational, and thus understandable and predictable, within a matrix of contending economic and political forces--thus, the "logic" of social change in the title of his book. But the historical record makes clear that individuals, both those in movements and outside of them, sometimes act outside of these rational choices from emotion,

personal rivalries, sexual passions, faith, or deeply entrenched racist ideology, for example. Personal trauma, biology, and psychological experience can all prompt human beings to do strange and seemingly irrational things. Is it possible to create a theoretical framework to account for these and other wild cards? Perhaps, but I am doubtful. What I am suggesting is that scholars and activists should maintain a healthy respect for the limits of social movement theory, even the most compelling and fine-tuned models, like the one Luders has put forth here.

Be that as it may, these critiques are not meant to undo the strong praise I have for this work overall. Rather, they are offered mainly to suggest that there is even more work to be done, more refinement and more complexity involved in better understanding social movements and their outcomes, and that no theory is a panacea. To be sure, Luders has done us all a great service with this book and it deserves a wide audience among scholars and activists interested in not only the African American freedom movement, but also a host of other political struggles.

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