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“WE WILL SHOOT BACK”

The Natchez Model and Paramilitary Organization in the Mississippi Freedom Movement

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Between 1965 and 1979, economic boycotts were a principal form of insurgency for Black activists in Mississippi. After 1964, in several communities, the boycott of White-owned commerce became the primary tactic utilized by human rights forces to disrupt the system of segregation. These boycotts relied upon paramilitary organization to protect the activities and leadership of the Mississippi freedom movement and the Black community in general and to sanction anyone in the Black community who wished to violate the boycott. This paradigm of economic boycotts supported by paramilitary organization was first utilized in 1965 in Natchez. Natchez is a commercial center in southwest Mississippi. The combination of economic boycott with armed resistance posed an effective coercive campaign to pressure the local White power structure for concessions demanded by the movement. The insurgent model of Natchez was replicated throughout the state, particularly in Black communities of southwest Mississippi.

Between 1965 and 1979, economic boycotts were a principal form of insurgency for Black activists in Mississippi. In that period, dozens of economic boycotts occurred in municipalities throughout the state coercing local White power structures to acquiesce to the demands of activists in the Black community. The economic boycott was a decisive maneuver to achieve concessions in Mississippi communities that were not possible to achieve through nonviolent action. In fact, after 1964, Mississippi boycotts were comple-

mented by paramilitary organizations that were critical to the success of the boycotts.

The years following the Freedom Summer of 1964 represent a significant shift in the tactics of the civil rights movement in Mississippi. After 1964, in several communities, the boycott of White-owned commerce became the primary tactic used by human rights forces to disrupt the system of segregation. These boycotts relied on paramilitary organization to protect the activities and leadership of the movement and the Black community in general. Paramilitary forces were also organized to sanction anyone in the Black community who wished to violate the boycott. In contrast to earlier stages in the Mississippi movement, confrontational and inflammatory rhetoric and the open threat of a violent response were commonplace in human rights campaigns.

This paradigm of economic boycotts supported by paramilitary organization was first used in 1965 in Natchez. Natchez is a major commercial center in southwest Mississippi. Prior to 1964, the civil rights movement through the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was active in Natchez with limited success. The combination of an economic boycott with armed resistance posed an effective, coercive campaign to pressure the local White power structure for concessions demanded by the movement. The insurgent model of Natchez was replicated throughout the state, particularly in Black communities of southwest Mississippi.

The focus of this article is to identify the development of the boycott strategy with its emphasis on armed resistance in the Natchez movement. I will examine the origins and elements of the Natchez model and trace its development in other communities in Mississippi. This study relies on oral testimony and media accounts to reconstruct the development of insurgency in local communities.

A BACKGROUND TO THE NATCHEZ MOVEMENT IN 1965

Natchez is an important center in the history of Mississippi. Located in the southwest corner of the state of Mississippi, on the banks of the Mississippi River, Natchez is the county seat of Adams County. In the antebellum period, the Natchez elite were significant players in state politics. Natchez was the heart of the antebellum plantation economy of Mississippi. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, the Natchez elite's power and influence in the state diminished due to several factors. The Natchez elite's wealth and power declined due to natural calamities including floods and the boll weevil, depletion of the soil from repeated cotton crops, and the development of the delta as a center of wealth and privilege (Loewen & Sallis, 1974).

By the early 1960s, Natchez had developed a manufacturing base with industries such as Armstrong Tire and Rubber, International Paper Company, and John-Manville Corporation located in this "New South" city. The development of an industrial economy did not eliminate the institutionalized racism, which had its roots in slavery and peonage. In 1965, Adams County had a population of 37,730, and the city of Natchez had nearly 24,000 residents. People of African descent were 50% of Adams County's population. In Adams County, the median income for Whites was \$5,600 per year and for African descendants \$1,994. The large gap in median family income in the county between the White and Black communities clearly demonstrates the continuity of White supremacy in "New South" Natchez (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Research, 1965).

COFO, a network of human rights groups active in Mississippi, attempted to establish a voter registration campaign in Adams County in 1963 but experienced little success. Natchez was considered a Ku Klux Klan stronghold. The Klan in Natchez was among the most violent and organized in the state. By intimidating local Blacks, the Natchez Klan played a role in COFO's lack of success.

In spite of the terrorist intimidation of the Klan, COFO remained and attempted to build the local campaign to register voters. The local police seemed to offer no significant protection from the Klan. Natchez Police Chief J.T. Robinson was also a vocal advocate of White supremacy and had no problems using force to uphold the system of segregation. Although Natchez Mayor John Nosser called for racial tolerance, he had no effective control over the Natchez police or Chief Robinson ("Cops, Race," 1964; James Young, personal communication, July 28, 1994).

After Freedom Summer and the failure of the challenge to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, the COFO coalition was unable to maintain its momentum in terms of providing statewide direction and coordination for the Mississippi freedom movement. COFO, particularly the Congress of Racial Equality and the SNCC, went through a crisis of direction after the major campaigns of 1964. As the COFO alliance took a back seat in terms of statewide coordination, the NAACP under the leadership of Charles Evers began to assert itself as the pacesetter for the Mississippi movement. Under Evers's leadership, the local NAACP chapters in various parts of the state began to mobilize and organize local Mississippi Black communities to challenge segregationist power structures throughout the state. This new momentum followed a different posture than that of COFO. To gain the demands of the movement, the boycott of White, particularly segregationist, enterprises was the primary tactic.

As in the past, armed self-defense would serve as a vehicle to protect the movement and its leaders and institutions. The nature of the armed resistance at this stage would take on a different character than that of the previous stage. Previously, Mississippi movement activists and supporters functioned as a civilian militia, participating in armed defense on an ad hoc basis in times of emergency or when information was provided concerning a particular threat. In the years following Freedom Summer, the function of armed defense was often placed in the hands of a paramilitary group whose role in the movement was the protection of movement leaders, demonstrations, and the Black community in general. In addition, with the elevation of the boycott strategy, there was a

development of a coercive force in the movement that could harass or punish violators of the boycott and Blacks who collaborated with the White power structure. The ascendance of the leadership of Evers, the boycott organizing of NAACP activist Rudy Shields, and the development of the Deacons for Defense were closely related to the development of the Natchez model.

CHARLES EVERS AND THE NATCHEZ BOYCOTT

Evers became a major leader in the Mississippi movement after the assassination of his brother Medgar on June 11, 1963, by White supremacist Byron de la Beckwith. Unlike previous Mississippi movement spokespersons, Charles Evers, in his new position, would openly advocate armed resistance. During a 1964 NAACP fund raiser in Nashville, Evers proclaimed, "I have the greatest respect for Mr. Martin Luther King, but non-violence won't work in Mississippi We made up our minds . . . that if a white man shoots at a Negro in Mississippi, we will shoot back" ("If White Man Shoots," 1964, p. 1).

Evers's involvement in the Natchez movement meant a more visible defense presence to counter the violent terror of the local Klan. According to NAACP activist Milton Cooper, a security team had developed around him, which complemented the presence of Evers. In the spring of 1965, Evers led a campaign to desegregate the hotels of Natchez. During this campaign, White hostility grew to the point where Evers's security team had to position snipers at the Holiday Inn where the NAACP leader was residing in Adams County. Later that same summer, an incident occurred that sparked an acceleration of activity in Natchez (Milton Cooper, personal communication, July 23, 1994; Evers, 1976).

On August 27, 1965, NAACP leader George Metcalf was seriously injured when a bomb hidden beneath the hood of his car exploded after he turned on the ignition. Although Metcalf was fortunate enough to survive the blast, he had to be hospitalized, suffering from facial lacerations, a broken arm and leg, and other assorted

cuts and burns. The explosion of Metcalf's vehicle occurred in the parking lot of the local Armstrong Tire plant. Metcalf had just finished a shift at Armstrong. The explosive was so potent that it completely demolished Metcalf's vehicle and damaged several other cars nearby. Because Metcalf was asked to work overtime the evening of the bombing, some local Blacks believed his supervisors had collaborated with the perpetrators of the bombing. The attack on Metcalf occurred 8 days after the NAACP submitted a petition on behalf of Metcalf and 11 other Natchez Blacks to the local school board to desegregate Natchez public schools on the basis of the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. Metcalf had also recently contacted the Adams County chancery clerk to seek compliance with federal voter registration legislation ("Desegregation Petition," 1965; Dittmer, 1994; Horowitz, 1965; "Natchez Mayor," 1965; James Young, personal communication, July 28, 1994).

The terrorist attack on Metcalf was part of a series of attacks, including house bombings and church bombings, initiated since the arrival of COFO in Adams County. On several occasions between 1963 and 1965, COFO workers and Black residents of Natchez were harassed and beaten by White vigilantes and hooded members of the Klan. On one Saturday evening in September of 1964, two explosions jarred the home of Natchez Mayor John Nossier and Black contractor Willie Washington. Nossier, an American of Lebanese origin, believed his home was bombed because he attempted to serve as a peacemaker during the racial hostilities of Freedom Summer. In January of 1965, Metcalf's home was also sprayed with gunfire from nightriders. Leading up to the bombing of his car, the NAACP leader was the target of several acts of harassment and intimidation at his home and his place of employment ("Leader Claims," 1964; "Natchez Bombing," 1964; "Police Push," 1964; "Two More Burned," 1965).

After the bombing attack on Metcalf, Evers assumed control of NAACP activity in Natchez and seized the leadership of the local movement. Evers did not take a nonviolent posture in asserting himself into the leadership of the Natchez movement. On the day of the bombing, Evers was quoted as saying, "There is going to be

trouble, no question about that The Negroes have armed themselves” (“Natchez Mayor,” 1965, p. 1). On the same day, Evers spoke to a rally in Natchez. While cautioning Natchez Blacks not to initiate violence against Whites, Evers stated, “If they do it any more, we’re going to get those responsible. We’re armed, every last one of us, and we are not going to take it” (“Natchez Mayor,” 1965, p. 1).

NATCHEZ AND THE MISSISSIPPI DEACONS FOR DEFENSE AND JUSTICE

Weeks prior to the bomb attack on Metcalf, a small group of Black men met secretly in Natchez to form a paramilitary organization. According to Natchez movement activist James Stokes, the Natchez paramilitary group was formed due to the perception among local movement activists and supporters that they could not rely on the police for protection. Most of the men were Black workers who had grown up in Adams County and had known each other most of their lives. These men were also either members or supporters of the local NAACP. The Natchez paramilitary group began to protect Metcalf, his family members, and his home prior to the bombing (James Stokes, personal communication, August 1, 1994).

The activity and the size of the Natchez group accelerated after the attack on Metcalf. On August 28, one day after the bombing attack on Metcalf, James Jackson, a local barber and one of the leaders of the Natchez paramilitary group, publicly announced that a chapter of the Deacons for Defense and Justice had formed in Natchez. The Natchez group had heard of the success of the paramilitary Deacons for Defense and Justice in Louisiana. The Louisiana Deacons had received national attention by neutralizing White terrorists in Bogalusa and Jonesboro, Louisiana (“Deacons and Their Impact,” 1965; Reed, 1965). According to Bogalusa leader Robert Hicks, Evers requested that some of the Louisiana Deacons come to Natchez and help the establishment of the organization there. The day following Jackson’s announcement, Charles Sims, the spokesperson for the Bogalusa Deacons, arrived in Natchez to

discuss the formation of the Deacons for Defense in Adams County ("Bombing Angers," 1965; James Stokes, personal communication, August 1, 1994).

According to Natchez Deacons James Stokes and James Young, the Natchez paramilitary group decided not to affiliate with the Louisiana Deacons. Although Sims offered advice on how to set up a paramilitary organization, the Natchez group that felt they had little to gain from a formal affiliation with the Deacons. Stokes remembered Sims offering no significant material aid to the Natchez paramilitary group other than the use of the name Deacons for Defense and Justice. Sims stated that to use the Deacons name, the Natchez group had to pay a percentage of their dues to the Louisiana Deacons. The Natchez group rejected Sims's offer (James Stokes, personal communication, August 1, 1994; James Young, personal communication, July 28, 1994).

Although the Natchez paramilitary group decided not to officially affiliate with the Louisiana Deacons, they had no problem using their name. The Natchez group was known throughout the movement and the state, to friend and foe, as the Natchez Deacons for Defense and Justice. As they began to assist the establishment of other paramilitary affiliates across the state, the Natchez group helped form the Mississippi Deacons for Defense and Justice. By early October 1965, a little more than a month since the attack on Metcalf, the Natchez Deacons were visible on the streets of Natchez providing security at marches and demonstrations. Visible members of the Natchez Deacons wore overalls and a white shirt while conducting the organization's business of protecting the movement and the Black community (Horowitz, 1965).

As did the Deacons in Louisiana, the Natchez Deacons never revealed the size of their membership. This kept the Klan, local police, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) confused about the actual size and capability of the group. Organized much like a secret society, the Deacons realized that the less their enemies knew about them the better. Young, who joined shortly after the attack on Metcalf, revealed that the Natchez Deacons's actual size was about 10 to 12 men. As in Jonesboro and Bogalusa, a few central leaders were identified to represent the Deacons to the public.

Stokes was appointed spokesman. Jackson was the first president of the Natchez Deacons. Young was selected secretary and was responsible for the development of the bylaws and the charter for the Mississippi Deacons. According to Stokes, "The strongest thing we had going for ourselves is that nobody knew, not even some of our members, how many men there were in the organization" (James Stokes, personal communication, August 1, 1994). The Deacons's concealing their size served as a weapon to instill doubt and concern in White supremacists because they really did not know what to expect from the Natchez paramilitary group (James Stokes, personal communication, August 1, 1994; James Young, personal communication, July 28, 1994). Movement folks outside of the Deacons were not privy to the identities of the entire Deacon membership (Hollis Watkins, personal communication, July 13, 1994).

Because secrecy was essential for the mission of the Deacons, it was important that the organization selectively recruit its members and that its membership did not reveal its secrets. Because trust was an important factor for recruitment, the initial group only recruited men they had grown up with because they knew their backgrounds and characters. "Everybody we had, we knew," said Young. A Deacon recruit had to be sponsored by someone already in the group. Anyone with a history of abusing alcohol or a criminal past was not allowed to join. The Deacons did not want to have a member who could be easily compromised by police pressure (James Stokes, personal communication, August 1, 1994; James Young, personal communication, July 28, 1994). Before induction into the organization, a member was informed of the seriousness of joining the Deacons. The Deacons informed their recruits that revealing organizational secrets could result in death for the informant (Pincus, 1965; James Stokes, personal communication, August 1, 1994). The Deacons's internal security methods were apparently effective and prevented the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, the FBI, local police, and the Klan from receiving an adequate assessment of their size and capability. Also, to maintain security, a small group within the membership would make all of the plans. Individual members would know their assignments but not the entire secu-

rity plan. This also prevented information from leaking to the opposition.

As earlier stated, there was a proliferation of arms in the Black community of Natchez in response to a White supremacist reign of terror, which heightened in Adams County around 1963. The Natchez Deacons believed that it was important for them to be well armed to meet the demands of protecting the Black community and the leadership and workers of the movement. One unidentified source in the Natchez Deacons revealed that the organization possessed "hand grenades, machine guns, whatever we needed." According to this source, only one store in Natchez would sell ammunition to the Deacons. If White supremacists knew the Deacons had a limited supply of ammunition, the Deacons's efforts would have been compromised. To counter this, the Natchez Deacons received ammunition from external sources (Evers, 1976; James Young, personal communication, July 28, 1994).

Mississippi law allowed civilians to openly carry loaded weapons in public. Citizens could also carry a loaded firearm in their vehicle as long as it was not concealed. This allowed the Deacons to openly carry guns to protect demonstrations, mass meetings, and community institutions. The public display of weapons by Black freedom fighters served to prevent attacks from White supremacists. The Deacons openly carried their weapons on marched demonstrations to protect movement activists and supporters from attack (James Stokes, personal communication, August 1, 1994).

On September 4, 1967, in Centerville, a small town in the southwest Mississippi county of Wilkerson, the Natchez Deacons, aligned with the Wilkerson County chapter of the Deacons for Defense, scattered a mob of White supremacists. After a member of the racist mob trained his weapon at participants in a demonstration for Black voting rights, 25 armed Deacons responded to prevent the demonstrators from harm (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1967). Deacon Young describing the situation that day stated, "We pulled in there and started unloading all of this heavy artillery and they loaded up and left" (James Young, personal communication, July 28, 1994). SNCC activist Hollis Watkins, also there that day, remembered the leader of the Deacons stating, "We represent the Deacons

for Defense, if you come in here with that you're going to be in trouble" (Hollis Watkins, personal communication, July 13, 1994). According to Watkins, to a racist mob, hearing the name *Deacons of Defense* invoked was almost as effective in scattering the mob as guns (Hollis Watkins, personal communication, July 13, 1994).

The Deacons were not hesitant about using their weapons also. According to Stokes, Young, and Jefferson County NAACP activists Lillie Brown and Ed Cole, one evening in the late 1960s, the Natchez Deacons were asked to provide security in Jefferson County, just north of Adams, at a mass meeting in a rural church. An armed watch was placed on the perimeter of the church. Any White person coming after dark was considered suspicious, so White allies of the movement were asked to come to the meeting early. After the meeting started, a car approached the scene of the meeting. The security observed some Whites in the automobile coming down the road leading to the church with the vehicle lights out. One of the Whites in the vehicle was observed preparing to throw a Molotov cocktail. A Deacons security team, armed with a dozen shotguns, bombarded the vehicle, preventing the firebomb from even being propelled from the vehicle (Ed Cole, personal communication, July 24, 1994; Lillie Brown, personal communication, July 1994; James Stokes, personal communication, August 1, 1994; James Young, personal communication, July 28, 1994). The armed presence and preparedness of the Deacons prevented the movement in Natchez and in southwest Mississippi in general from being terrorized and intimidated. White supremacist terrorists also were on alert that any foray into the Black community or into the vicinity of movement activity was not without consequence.

Mississippi state officials opposed to the movement wished to find means to disarm the Deacons. FBI documents reveal that, on September 3, 1967, a proposal was forwarded, by an unnamed source, to the Governor of Mississippi to make it illegal for members of the Deacons for Defense in the state to possess firearms. On September 4, 1967, the same day as the confrontation between the Deacons and the White mob in Centreville, three members of the Deacons were arrested for illegal possession of firearms. The state district attorney for the southwestern district of Mississippi gave

the Mississippi State Highway Patrol the “authority to disarm all members of the Deacons for Defense and Justice” (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1966, p. 8). Mississippi and other southern states made it illegal for anyone to transport rifles and shotguns in the cab of a car. These laws required rifles and shotguns to be carried on a rack on the back of a vehicle.

Although the Deacons experienced repression concerning their possession of firearms, being armed as an organized force served as an asset to the organization and the movement. The armed organized presence of the Deacons and their preparedness for combat, and the uncertainty on the part of Whites about the Deacons’s capabilities, gave the movement a serious bartering chip. The presence of the Deacons combined with effective boycotts gave Evers and local leaders a position of strength from which to negotiate (James Stokes, personal communication, August 1, 1994; Ed Cole, personal communication, July 24, 1994).

The Natchez Deacons became an essential ingredient in the Natchez and the Mississippi movements. The Deacons provided the movement with an instrument to neutralize the violence of the Klan and other White supremacist civilians. The potential of the Deacons for defense and retaliation also gave Evers and other leaders more potency in their negotiating position with the White power structure and more boldness in their public statements. Without a doubt, the Deacons made the Natchez and Mississippi movements more effective.

NATCHEZ, THE BOYCOTT, AND ENFORCING THE MOVEMENT

The day after the attack on Metcalf, on August 28, 1965, Evers and local leaders of the Black community presented “A Declaration of the Negro Citizens of Natchez” to Mayor Nosser and the Natchez city government. The declaration was a list of 12 demands for civil and human rights for local Blacks. The 12 demands included the desegregation of local schools, a denunciation by city

officials of the Ku Klux Klan and other White supremacist groups, expanded employment opportunities for Blacks (particularly store clerks and police officers), police escort for Black funerals, and that local police and civil servants address Black adults as Mr., Mrs., or Miss as opposed to boy, girl, or auntie. The Black delegation gave Nosser and the city government until September 1, 4 days, to respond to their demands before the Natchez Black community would apply coercive action. According to journalist accounts of the meeting, one Black participant in the meeting threatened that “violence might ensue unless City government acted favorably on matters contained in the declaration” (“Board Rejects,” 1965, p. 1; see also, “Board Meets,” 1965; “Natchez Officials,” 1965).

On September 1, 1965, the Natchez Board of Aldermen rejected the demands of the Black leaders (“Board Rejects,” 1965). To ensure that no uprising occurred in the Black community, the Natchez government imposed a curfew from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. to restrict activity in the city during the evening and early morning hours. All alcohol sales were also banned during this time. Stating that Natchez was in “imminent danger of a riot,” Governor Paul Johnson ordered 650 armed National Guardsmen to the city (“Curfew Set,” 1965).

On hearing the decision of the Board of Aldermen and the restrictions imposed by state and local government, debate ensued within the Natchez movement on how to respond to the challenge. COFO and Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party forces wanted immediately to challenge the curfew with marches and demonstrations. There had been nightly mass meetings from the time of the bombing attack on Metcalf until the evening after the city government rendered its rejection of the Black leaders’ demands. At each of the mass meetings, the consensus was that a demonstration would take place if the demands were not met. Evers, who announced a boycott of all White businesses on the evening of August 28, wanted to place emphasis on the boycott rather than demonstrate. Evers believed that the presence of the National Guard and the potential for violence created an unfavorable environment for demonstrations. Evers told those assembled that evening, “There is too much chance of bloodshed to ask you to walk

down the streets of Natchez” (“National Guardsmen,” 1965, p. 1). Evers won the debate and was able in the coming weeks to cement himself as the leader of the Natchez movement. When the National Guard left Natchez the following weekend, Evers approved demonstrations in Natchez, even in opposition to court order. By October 6, 1965, the Natchez Deacons secured these marches (Dittmer, 1994).

Although demonstrations were an important aspect of the Natchez movement, local NAACP leaders would credit the economic boycott as the decisive element of the Natchez campaign. The NAACP-organized boycott was very successful. Movement leaders claimed that the Black community’s boycott of White businesses was nearly 100% effective. Names of Blacks who violated the NAACP boycott were announced at mass meetings (Dittmer, 1994; Evers, 1976). Violators of the boycott were not only isolated but also harassed by the enforcer squad that was organized by Rudy Shields. Shields, a Korean War veteran, had moved to Mississippi from Chicago at the request of Evers (Morris, 1971). Evers called Shields to Natchez from Belzoni, Mississippi, where he was working with the local NAACP. Shields’s primary responsibility was to make the boycott successful. As one movement participant stated, “Rudy was mostly a boycott man . . . Whenever you had a boycott, he was right up front” (James Young, personal communication, August 1, 1994).

Just as it was the Deacons’s role to protect the movement and the community from external enemies, it was the responsibility of Shields and his squad to deal with internal enemies. The Natchez movement resorted to terror within the Black community to enforce its decisions. For those in the Black community who did not take seriously the edict of the NAACP and the Natchez movement, Shields and his squad provided coercive violence as an incentive. Movement activist Ed Cole offered, “Folks go shop, break the boycott, they didn’t get home with the damn groceries . . . cause somebody was waiting for them when they got there” (Ed Cole, personal communication, July 24, 1994).

The movement considered breaking the boycott a serious offense, and the violators had to be disciplined. With the sanction of the movement's leadership, Shields and his team were committed to punishing the violators. As Evers stated, "We didn't go around bragging about it, but we were ready to enforce those boycotts, to die if necessary" (Evers, 1976, p. 134).

State and local officials and law enforcement and local press often stated that the Deacons were responsible for the enforcement of boycotts. But, there seems to be a division of labor between the Deacons, who were solely responsible for the defense of the Black community and the movement from external enemies, and Shields's enforcer squad, which was particularly responsible for harassing and terrorizing Black people who violated the boycott. When asked if the Deacons enforced boycotts, Natchez Deacon Young responded, "We had another team out there. If you went in there [a White owned business] this time, after they [the enforcer squad] got through with you, you weren't hardly going back any more" (James Young, personal communication, July 28, 1994). According to Forrest County activist James Nix, after the boycott campaign in Hattiesburg in 1966, the enforcer squad was called "Da Spirit" ("An Oral History With James Nix," 2000; James Nix, personal communication, September 20, 1994).

The Deacons and the enforcer squad recruited different types of people for each respective organization. The Deacons tended to be adult males older than 30 who were considered disciplined, stable, and respected in the community. The enforcer squad tended to use working class males in their late teens to early 20s. As opposed to the older Deacons, the recruits of the enforcer squad tended to be considered less stable and from the more volatile elements of the community (Ed Cole, personal communication, July 24, 1994).

Although women were not recruited into the Deacons, females did play a significant role in enforcing sanctions on internal enemies. Women, young or old, were not included in Shields's boycott enforcers but were involved in punishing suspected female informers. The movement suspected that certain Black domestics were

providing, either voluntarily or through coercion, information to the White power structure. A team of NAACP women was organized to physically discipline the suspected informants (James Stokes, personal communication, August 1, 1994).

The vigilance of enforcer groups certainly aided the Natchez movement in maintaining an effective boycott. On October 12, 1965, an NAACP delegation met with Natchez city officials. The NAACP delegation came from the meeting claiming victory, announcing that the mayor and the Board of Aldermen had agreed to most of their demands. Two days later, Natchez city officials denied agreeing to the NAACP's proposals. The boycott and marches continued. Within a 2-month period, 6 White-owned enterprises went out of business. Concerned that the boycott would effect the Christmas season, a significant number of White merchants gave their consent to the White power structure to negotiate with the NAACP. On November 29, 1965, the NAACP and the White power structure came to an agreement. The NAACP agreed to lift the boycott on 23 White-owned businesses in Natchez. In turn, the city of Natchez hired six Black policemen, desegregated municipal public facilities, and agreed to appoint a "qualified Negro" to the school board. The 23 White businesses conceded to hire or promote Black workers to the position of clerk. Although some in the local movement, particularly COFO and Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party forces, did not believe the agreement went far enough, the settlement was hailed nationally. The Natchez boycott strategy would be replicated in communities throughout southwest Mississippi.

Although not as visible as Evers, the Deacons, or the NAACP, the work of the enforcer squads, both that of Shields's squad and the NAACP women, was essential to the movement. The enforcer groups ensured accountability and respect for the decisions of the Natchez movement. If the boycott was almost 100% effective, recognition must be given to the work of the enforcer groups. Although this has escaped most accounts of the Mississippi movement, the participants in the movement, particularly those active in southwest Mississippi, recognize the significance of Shields and the enforcer groups he organized.

THE NATCHEZ PARADIGM AND THE MISSISSIPPI MOVEMENT

The formula developed in Natchez to combat the local White power structure and win concessions toward human and civil rights was used throughout the state, particularly in southwest Mississippi communities. Other local communities observing the success of the Natchez boycott, under the leadership of Evers and Shields, began to organize boycotts using the model developed in Natchez. The Natchez model had proven the necessity of using the threat of a coercive response to defeat external and internal enemies of the Mississippi freedom movement. Chapters of the Deacons for Defense and Justice and the enforcer squad, Da Spirit, were established in other local movements.

When Evers and Shields became involved in boycott campaigns in Jefferson and Wilkerson counties, the Natchez Deacons became directly involved in these local campaigns. Because Jefferson County (north) and Wilkerson County (south) were contiguous to Adams County, the Natchez Deacons could take up a major responsibility in these counties. According to Deacon Samuel Harden, Wilkerson County activists established their own chapter of the Deacons for Defense and Justice. Although they had their own chapter of the Mississippi Deacons of Defense and Justice, the Wilkerson Deacons received personnel and support from, and virtually came under the chain of command of, the Natchez Deacons. In both of these communities, Shields organized teams to enforce the boycott (James Stokes, personal communication, August 1, 1994; Lillie Brown, personal communication, July 29, 1994; Samuel Harden, personal communication, October 30, 1994).

In Claiborne and Copiah counties, local communities established local Deacon chapters that were autonomous from the Natchez group. When NAACP-led boycotts developed in Claiborne County and in the towns of Hazelhurst and Crystal Springs in Copiah County, these respective communities organized local chapters of the Mississippi Deacons of Defense and Justice. In all of these communities, the Deacons and enforcer squads were organized as part of boycott campaigns to pressure the White power

structures to concede to demands similar to those presented by Black leaders in Natchez.

The Claiborne County Deacons for Defense and Justice was among the best organized and effective paramilitary organizations in the state. In 1960, Claiborne County had a population of 11,000, with 8,239 (76%) of its residents of African descent. During the same year, Claiborne's county seat, Port Gibson, had a population of 2,816. The population of Port Gibson was almost evenly divided between African descendants and Whites. There were no Black elected or appointed officials in the county. In 1966, prior to the initiation of the NAACP boycott of White merchants in Port Gibson, there were only seven Black registered voters in the whole county. Claiborne County is also the home of Alcorn A&M, Mississippi's first public Black college (Crosby, 1995, pp. 16-17; Devoual & Miller, n.d., p. 5).

The Deacons for Defense and the enforcer squads, now known as Da Spirit, were organized in Claiborne County after the Black community under the leadership of Evers and the local NAACP called a boycott on April 1, 1966 (Crosby, 1995, pp. 230-231; George Walker, personal communication, September 29, 1994). The Claiborne County Deacons were popularly known as the Black Hats. Friend and foe alike in Claiborne County called the local Deacon chapter the Black Hats because Claiborne Deacons wore a black helmet while on duty. Khaki pants were also part of their uniform. The Black Hats first appeared in public on April 1, 1966, the day the boycott was initiated in Port Gibson. The Deacons came out to protect the NAACP picket of White merchants in downtown Port Gibson. The pickets and the Black Hats remained visible in the Port Gibson streets for the next 3 years. The Deacons also patrolled the Black community during the evening, monitoring the activity of the local police, the Klan, and other White supremacists' forces. According to Deacon George Walker, the Deacons for Defense and Justice were committed that "another Neshoba County [where civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Mickey Schwerner were murdered]" did not happen in Claiborne County (George Walker, personal communication, September 29, 1994).

The boycott of White-owned enterprises in Port Gibson lasted more than 3 years, driving several White merchants out of business. The boycott of White businesses in Port Gibson was definitely made more effective by the leadership of Shields and the activity of the enforcer squads. Shields organized a network of youth in neighborhoods throughout the county to harass violators of the boycott in their community.

Due to the solidarity of the Black community and the enforcement of the boycott, by 1969, several White merchants acquiesced and consented to hire Black workers. By this point, tensions had calmed, and the local movement decided to demobilize the Deacons. In April of 1969, the shooting of a Black man by White police sparked a near uprising by the Black community and the resumption of a full-fledged boycott. After the second boycott was called, the local movement leaders did not see the need to mobilize the paramilitary Deacons. By 1969, local Blacks had won several concessions from the White power structure and were beginning to participate in local government. Although the organized defense wing of the first boycott was no longer seen as necessary after 1969, the organization of the Deacons in Claiborne County is partially responsible for Black political gains in the county (George Walker, personal communication, September 29, 1994).

In a few cases, the Bogalusa Deacons were active in local Mississippi campaigns. In 1965, the Bogalusa group unsuccessfully attempted to establish Mississippi chapters of the original Louisiana Deacons for Defense and Justice in Natchez and in Jackson (James Stokes, personal communication, August 1, 1994; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1965). The Louisiana Deacons were not active in Mississippi until 1966. In the early months of 1966, Bogalusa Deacon leader Sims and other Louisiana Deacons became active in a community campaign in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The campaign was sparked by the murder of NAACP leader Vernon Dahmer, on January 10, 1966, by night-riding Klansmen ("Black Community Leader Killed," 1993; Ellie Dahmer, personal communication, July 27, 1994; "Malice Toward," 1966; "Nightriders Kill," 1966).

In response to this brutal slaying, Evers urged an economic boycott to achieve the basic rights to which Dahmer had committed his life. Citing Natchez as an example, Evers stated, "The only thing the white man understands is the ballot and the dollar We're going to get both of them" ("Nightriders Kill," 1966, p. 10). Weeks later local leaders presented Hattiesburg and Forrest County officials with a list of demands, including employment opportunities in the public sector, the desegregation of public facilities, and implementation of federal civil rights and voting legislation.

The Bogalusa Deacons established a chapter of the paramilitary organization in Hattiesburg. Like Deacons groups in other southern towns, their basic responsibility was the protection of movement leaders, activists, and the Black community in general. Through contacts in the Deacons group in Hattiesburg, the Bogalusa paramilitary organization was able to establish a Deacons chapter in Laurel, Mississippi. In Laurel, the Deacons supported voter registration efforts and became the basis of the paramilitary organization of a labor movement (Hopkins, 1966).

Although the Deacons were initiated from Louisiana, like other communities implementing the Natchez model, Shields was involved in organizing the boycott enforcer squad in Hattiesburg. By the summer of 1967, Mississippi law enforcement surveillance revealed that the Black economic boycott in Hattiesburg was 100% effective. As previously stated, it was in Hattiesburg that Da Spirit received its name. James Nix, Hattiesburg organizer of Da Spirit, stated, "A spirit is something that you don't see. This is the reason for it We would harass people And this was our job" ("An Oral History With James Nix," 2000). In Hattiesburg, Da Spirit also aided in providing covert security for local movement leaders. The pressure of the boycott gradually won concessions from the Hattiesburg White power structure. As in other Mississippi communities, White merchants in Hattiesburg pressured political elites to negotiate with NAACP leaders to end the economic boycott ("Black Community Leader Killed," 1993; "An Oral History With James Nix," 2000). The Natchez model was applied throughout the state, particularly in southwest Mississippi. Whether organized by the Mississippi or the Louisiana Deacons, Black Mississippians

organized paramilitary organizations to protect movement leaders and activists and the Black community during economic boycotts designed to win basic civil and human rights. Also, local leaders recognized, based in the Natchez experience, the necessity of a paramilitary enforcer squad, generally separate from the defense organization, to ensure accountability and solidarity in the boycott effort. The armed aspect of the Natchez model was essential for gaining basic rights in communities throughout the state.

THE IMPACT OF THE NATCHEZ MODEL ON THE MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM MOVEMENT

The development of paramilitary organizations in the Mississippi movement signaled a new day in Black communities throughout the state. The capacity of the movement to protect itself and the Black community and to retaliate against White supremacist terrorists gave Evers and other Black leaders more leverage in negotiating with local White power structures. The ability of movement leaders to effect economic boycotts through solidarity and intimidation gave the NAACP even more negotiating strength. The Natchez model, combining economic boycotts with paramilitary defense and the potential for retaliation, proved more effective in winning concessions and social and cultural change on the local level than nonviolent direct action or voter registration campaigns depending on federal protection. The Natchez model served as the major paradigm for Black resistance in the state of Mississippi until the end of the decade. After Shields left Claiborne County, he helped organize economic boycotts in several Mississippi communities including Yazoo County, Belzoni, West Point, and Indianola. In each of these communities, Shields applied the Natchez model (Herman Leach, personal communication, July 30, 1994; Johnston, 1990, pp. 292-297). In the late 1970s, the United League of Mississippi in several communities in northern Mississippi, including Holly Springs, Okolona, Tupelo, and Byhalia, organized economic boycotts. The United League continued the armed tradition of the Natchez model in the economic boycott it had organized in

northern Mississippi. The leaders of the United League openly declared the right of Black people to protect themselves and their movement. Members of the United League carried weapons to protect demonstrators from the Klan and other White supremacists, and in some cases they engaged in gun battles with racist Whites (Marx & Tuthill, 1980).

The insurgent movement in Mississippi demonstrates that the freedom movement could survive and grow only through reliance on economic coercion and armed resistance. Disenchanted with federal promises and expectations for external support and intervention, the Natchez model clearly demonstrates how local communities initiated social change primarily using their own resources. The Natchez model proved to be an effective disruptive campaign that forced White elites to negotiate with segregated Black communities. Along with other vehicles of collective action, students of the civil rights movement must study the Natchez boycott strategy to understand the elimination of de jure segregation in the South.

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