

# Protest and Negotiation: A Case Study of Negro Leadership in Atlanta, Georgia

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Since the wave of sit-ins, freedom rides and other demonstrations by Negro college students in 1960 and 1961 there has been considerable speculation, both by journalists and social scientists, that a new, more "militant" type of leadership is emerging among American Negroes. Much attention has been focused on the activities of the students, and on such dramatic "protest leaders" as Martin Luther King, Jr., who, it is asserted, are steadily gaining the allegiance of the Negro masses at the expense of the older, more established community spokesmen.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The literature is voluminous, but among the most interesting journalistic efforts are: Hodding Carter, "The Young Negro is a New Negro," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 1, 1960, p. 11; Helen Fuller, "Southern Students Take Over," *The New Republic*, 142: 14-16, May 2, 1960; Louis Lomax, "The Negro Revolt Against the Negro Leaders," *Harper's Magazine*, June, 1960, p. 41; Kenneth Rexroth, "Students Take Over," *The Nation*, 191: 4-9, July 2, 1960; Dan Wakefield, *Revolt in the South* (New York, Grove Press, 1960); Howard Zinn, "Finishing School for Pickets," *The Nation*, 191:71-73, August 6, 1960. Scholarly contributions are not so numerous, but of special interest are: M. Elaine Burgess, *Negro Leadership in a Southern City* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1962); Tilman Cothran and William Phillips, "Negro Leadership in a Crisis Situation," *Phylon*, Vol. 22 (Summer, 1961), pp. 107-118; Leslie Dunbar, "Reflections on the Latest Reform of the South," *Phylon*, Vol. 22 (Fall, 1961), pp. 249-257; Lewis M. Killian and Charles U. Smith, "Negro Protest Leaders in a Southern Community," *Social Forces* (March, 1960), pp. 253-260.

In this essay certain political attitudes and goals of a group of Negro civic leaders in Atlanta, Georgia, will be described. An inquiry will be made into the motives of the student sit-in demonstrators, and the differences will be explored among Negro leaders of all kinds regarding goals and tactics. Also the socio-economic factors associated with their differing attitudes will be analyzed, and some speculation will be offered, based on the results of this study, about the future development of the leadership of the Negro community in Atlanta.

The description and analysis is based on material gathered during a series of interviews conducted with thirty-six Negro leaders in Atlanta during April and May, 1962.<sup>2</sup> The group selected for interviewing included the Negro leaders who were involved in the controversy over lunch counter segregation which lasted in Atlanta from March, 1960, when the first sit-ins took place, until September, 1961, when the lunch counters, rest rooms and other facilities in the major downtown department and variety stores were opened on a desegregated basis. The list includes all those who either led or helped to organize the sit-in demonstrations, picket lines and economic boycott that took place during the controversy, and all those who figured in attempts, either successful or unsuccessful, to negotiate an agreement to settle the dispute.<sup>3</sup>

The group selected for the study was drawn from almost every segment of Atlanta's Negro middle class, and it includes 10 businessmen, 4 college educators, 4 ministers, 5 lawyers, 4 social workers, 2 physicians, 5 staff members of civil rights groups, 3 student leaders, and 1 housewife. The group does not include, however, any labor leader or government employee, and it does not include a single teacher or administrator in the Atlanta public school system. The first two omissions are understandable since in Atlanta, outside of small segregated locals of the musicians and automobile workers, Negroes do not hold administrative posts in labor unions, and positions above the menial level in either the city, state, or national governments are held by only a tiny handful of Atlanta's Negroes. But the absence of the public school personnel is puzzling. There seems to be some fear among teachers that they might endanger their jobs by becoming involved in controversial public disputes. These apprehensions may or may not be justified. Further investigation suggested, however, that there was nothing about the sit-in controversy in partic-

<sup>2</sup>This research was made possible by the support of the Iowa Citizenship Clearing House and the National Center for Education in Politics. Neither of them, of course, is responsible for any errors of fact or interpretation in this study.

<sup>3</sup>The list was compiled from the record of the controversy found in the files of *The Atlanta Constitution*, *The Atlanta Journal*, *The Atlanta Daily World*, and *The Atlanta Inquirer*. Each of those identified in the newspaper reports as leaders or important participants was asked to look over the list and add the names of anyone who had led the protest demonstrations, or participated in negotiating sessions of any kind during the controversy. Only two names were added to the list in this way that were not found in the newspaper reports.

ular that discouraged participation by the teachers. This group, which includes the largest number of college trained professionals in the Negro community, seems to take little part in political affairs or protest movements of any kind.

This is a study of motives and political tactics; no effort was made to devise a method of identifying the "real" leaders of the community. The group that was interviewed does not include, by any means, all those in the Negro community who might have some legitimate claim to influence or leadership in civic or political affairs. Those who were chosen were the principal actors in the sit-in controversy, which was the most controversial single incident in the history of Atlanta's Negro community since World War Two. It is assumed that by concentrating on this set of dynamic circumstances a significant group of Negro community leaders has been obtained.

## II

The spontaneous series of protest demonstrations by Negro college students that swept across the South in 1960 was a most significant manifestation of a growing impatience among Negroes all over the country with the progress being made to afford them social, economic, and political equality. Young Negroes were demonstrating that they were no longer willing to adjust their aspirations and their behavior to a system in which they were relegated to a second class status. Very little progress had been made through the regular channels of democratic decision-making toward removing racial bars to opportunity, even after the 1954 Supreme Court decision in the Brown case. Negroes were faced with the fact that they were still being denied the right to vote in some parts of the South, that there was continued, even increased, resistance from the segregationist whites, and that in the rest of the white community, all over the country, there seemed to be a general indifference to their plight. When these circumstances were viewed along with what seemed to them to be acquiescence to the status quo on the part of the established Negro leaders, the students became increasingly exasperated and impatient, and they went into the streets to obtain a hearing for their demands. The democratic process, the institutions based on discussion, negotiation and compromise, had proved unable to provide them with relief from the deprivations they suffered.

On February 1, 1960, several Negro students sat down at a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, and refused to leave when told that the store did not serve Negroes. The manager is reported to have said: "They can just sit there. It's nothing to me." But within a week similar groups were sitting down in protest all across the South, and on February 17, 1960, the Georgia legislature responded to the growing movement by passing a special anti-trespass law.

On the campus of Atlanta University students were planning similar demonstrations as early as February 4, but they were persuaded by faculty

members and an apprehensive administration to postpone their action until they had drawn up a statement of their grievances. This statement was quickly completed and printed in the form of a full page advertisement in all local newspapers on March 9, 1960, under the title: "An Appeal for Human Rights." The advertisement caused a sensation and it was commented on by politicians and public figures all over the country. This was followed on March 15 by the first widespread sit-in demonstrations in Atlanta in which 77 students were arrested under the new Georgia trespass law.

While their cases were pending in court the students began to work on several other projects. They mounted picket lines against food stores which had large Negro clientele yet did not hire Negroes above the menial level, they held a series of meetings in Negro churches explaining the student movement and asking for support, they began publishing a weekly news sheet that eventually became a full-fledged weekly newspaper, and on May 17, 1960, they gathered 1400 students together to march on the state capitol in downtown Atlanta to celebrate the Supreme Court's 1954 anti-segregation decision. This march was diverted by Atlanta's Chief of Police to prevent the students from meeting a large, ugly crowd that had gathered at the capitol. When the students left for summer vacation tension was running high in the city.

During the summer the leaders of the student movement remained in Atlanta and continued organizational and propaganda work, and in the autumn, on October 19, 1960, they mounted widespread sit-ins once again, and once again large numbers of the demonstrators were arrested. The students refused to leave the jail on bail, and at this point the Mayor asked for, and was granted, a 30-day truce period in which he promised to try to reach a settlement of the dispute.

The Mayor was unable even to get all the downtown merchants to meet to discuss the issue, and several other informal efforts to negotiate the dispute also failed. In part this was because of disagreements between the Negro leaders and in part because of the refusal of some white merchants to negotiate at all. The students resumed their sit-ins on November 25, 1960, and also organized a full-scale boycott of the downtown shopping area. A stalemate continued through the months of December and January, during which time most of the lunch counters remained closed and the boycott of the downtown stores remained in effect.

On February 1, 1961, the students, along with many adults, staged a march on the downtown area commemorating the anniversary of the beginning of the sit-in movement. Throughout this three-month period the students, equipped with short-wave radios, had been sitting-in at lunch counters all over the city without incident. Either they had been ignored, or the counters had been closed, but on February 7, 1961, one restaurant manager in a federal office building invoked the trespass law and had the demonstrators arrested,

and during the next three days arrests continued daily with the students refusing once again to come out on bail. A protest march and rally was planned to take place in front of the jail on February 19, and there was widespread fear that such a demonstration might result in a riot.

At this tense moment the student leaders themselves turned to one of the oldest, most respected Negro leaders who, by utilizing friendships he had with influential white leaders, was able to get negotiations started which eventually led to a settlement of the controversy. The agreement was announced on March 7, 1961, and after a bitter dispute within the Negro community it was accepted. It called for desegregation of the lunch counters after the school desegregation had been completed during the following fall. The counters were actually desegregated on September 27, 1961.

To some degree, the students staged their protest demonstrations because they no longer felt that they were legitimate participants in the democratic process. During the interviews students frequently expressed mistrust and suspicion of all politicians, both white and Negro, and their attitude seemed to be that, for the most part, the legislative bodies at both the state and national levels were simply institutions which had signs over their doors reading "whites only." The sit-in protests opened a new pathway through which these young Negroes could express their demands for equality. That they seized on this method with such enthusiasm and courage in the face of possible violence was a sign of their feeling of impotence within the established political system, and an indication of the depth of their frustrations.

### III

One aspect of the student protests that was often commented on in the press was the extent to which the student leaders talked, and frequently acted, as if the adult Negro leaders were as much their enemies as the segregationist whites. This attitude among the students suggests the extent of their impatience with the progress made by the established Negro leaders, but it is also in part an indication of their distaste for the very system in which their leaders are participating. Gunnar Myrdal detected a similar attitude among "common Negroes," many of whom felt that their leaders were, "prepared to barter away their own honor and the interests of the group for a job or a handout." He explained this attitude as a displacement of hatred for the whole segregated society on to those who are participating in it, and seem to be profiting from it in certain ways: "The Negro hates the Negro role in American society, and the Negro leader, who acts out this role in public life, becomes a symbol of what the Negro hates."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York; Harper and Brothers, 1944), p. 744.

In Atlanta the initial sit-in demonstrations took place virtually without the prior knowledge of the adult leaders, and several efforts to begin negotiations failed because of mutual suspicions and recriminations among the Negro leaders. In fact, when the final compromise settlement was announced in Atlanta, the first reaction of large numbers of students and adults was anger and rage expressed in claims that they had been "sold out." There were many baseless accusations that leaders (and at this point the students' leaders were included) had been bribed or had otherwise betrayed them. During the interviews much antipathy toward the adults who engaged in this final settlement of the sit-in controversy was encountered, and students frequently described them as "handkerchief heads," "accommodators," or "Uncle Toms."

In Atlanta, however, the adult Negro leaders do not form a monolithic bloc. Within the community there are divergences of opinion and political styles, and there is much disagreement, sometimes rather bitter in tone, over the proper tactics that should be used in gaining equality. Among the Negro leadership, such terms as "liberals" and "conservatives," "militants" and "accommodators," "young turks" and "old guards" are used to describe the groupings within the Negro civic elite. The Negro leaders display considerable awareness that differences of opinion exist and committees or civic groups within the Negro community tend to be dominated by one or the other grouping. One older, very successful Negro businessman who has been very active in the city's politics describes himself as, "a mature conservative; one of the older heads," while a young physician who has become involved in political and civic work only in the last five years announces that, "I am one of your impatient Negroes."

Although those leaders usually labeled conservative by the community, and frequently by themselves as well, now dominate most of the organizations which deal exclusively with elections and political issues, such as the Atlanta Negro Voters League and the Westside Voters League, several other groups have grown up in recent years which are not under their control, such as the local chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Council, a group of younger business and professional men called the Atlanta Committee for Cooperative Action, and a student organization called the Committee on an Appeal for Human Rights. Also, in the last two years, the local branch of the NAACP has shifted into relatively more militant hands.

The conservative group is quite aware that its power is being challenged and just as the students and the more militant adults manifest suspicion of the integrity of the conservative leaders, these men frequently question the motives and the honesty of the more militant group. The conservatives generally reject any suggestion that there are ideological differences within the Negro community, but they acknowledged that their authority is being questioned. Those challenging them are described variously as "immature,"

"unrealistic," "irresponsible," or by one man as: "a bunch of fanatics seeking power for power's sake."

This element of mutual distrust and the widely held impression that there is a contest for power going on showed up quite clearly in the opinions of the Negro leaders interviewed. In answers to the question: "What do you think are the greatest potential dangers to racial progress in the foreseeable future?" only three of the thirty subjects who responded mentioned some development in the white community as a danger. All the rest made reference to some condition in the Negro community. This tendency of Negroes to direct their attention to troubles among themselves rather than to the actions of the segregation forces in assessing the dangers to their continued progress emphasizes the importance of their internal dispute.

The argument seems to revolve around an evaluation of the degree of resistance in the white community to progress toward racial equality, and the stance that ought to be taken by the Negro in fighting this battle. A young physician argued that the drive for the end of racial discrimination was reaching a crucial point:

This thing has begun now and it's like a snowball rolling and picking up speed. This progress will automatically follow *if* we just push hard enough! In the long view, if we just reach out, I think it's impossible to stop. Even the segregation people see this inevitable motion; you can see them beginning to rationalize a lot more than before and to accept defeat much more readily than before.

Seventeen of those responding to the question concerning the dangers they faced held variations on this view. They felt that the greatest danger to racial advancement was the possibility that the Negro community would relax in its drive for equality and be satisfied with only token gains. A lawyer in this group said:

The most important thing by far is stagnation. That is the danger that the Negro will lose his spirit and become satisfied with our present rate of progress; you know, stagnant tokenism.

Ten of the subjects also made reference to a problem within the Negro community, but they identified a different danger. In answer to this question an insurance executive said tersely:

That's simple. The greatest danger is the lack of character in Negro leadership. By that I mean the danger of selfishness and a disregard for the interests of the masses.

Those who shared this opinion were afraid that the wrong kind of leadership would gain control, a leadership not "realistic" enough, and one not dedicated to the interest of the people as they conceive of those interests. A professional social worker, widely known and very influential in politics, identified himself as a "realist above all else. That makes you a conservative in this community." He gave an emphatic answer to this question:

Without a doubt, the greatest danger is that the wrong people would gain control in the Negro community. We must not have people in control who want power for power's sake, or for personal, commercial or material gain. Now it is no sin to be ambitious and it's very hard to determine just when such conduct becomes improper, but you must not try to get anything for yourself out of political power. I have *never* done that! . . . In fact, I have a very religious commitment that a man will destroy himself if he uses his power selfishly. . . . The only real power is in deeply consecrated people striving to promote the common good. Above all, we must not allow selfish leaders to destroy Negro solidarity in this city. The masses of the people in the Negro community are very poor and uneducated, and they are accustomed to strong, unified leadership.

The respondents who argued that there was a danger from the rise of selfish leaders were apparently expressing a fear of continued and greater Negro militancy and aggressiveness. When they were asked to name a Negro leader who posed such a threat they would usually refer to the most liberal and aggressive leaders in the Negro community. The average age of those who feared that irresponsible leaders might gain control was fifty-four, and they were generally labeled conservative by the community and by themselves. Most of those who expressed a fear that the Negroes in Atlanta might lose their militant spirit were generally thought to be liberal. Their average age was forty-one.

There were some exceptions here; one of those who expressed the most militant attitude and was very active in organizing economic boycotts against firms with discriminatory hiring policies shared the fear of selfish and corrupt leaders, and at the same time one of the best established Negro businessmen in the city, who was generally considered conservative, especially by the students, expressed apprehension that, "we will let up, become complacent with what we've got." Although the lines are blurred in these cases, there is generally found in the responses to this question the outline of conflict; conflict between older men who are established in political and social position and consider themselves mature and realistic, and younger men who call themselves liberals and say that they are impatient for change and tired of compromise and evasion from the whites.

During the interviews no one was asked whether he considered himself to be liberal or conservative, but if in the course of the interview the subject referred to another person or group as conservative, liberal, radical, etc., he was immediately asked to define the term as he was using it. In the course of this line of questioning, he was asked to characterize other community leaders who were to be interviewed and sometimes, though less frequently than was expected, the subject would characterize himself. Of the 36 respondents, seven labeled themselves as liberals and eight labeled themselves as conservatives.

The ages of the self-identified liberals ranged from twenty-one to forty-three and their average age was thirty-one. The self-identified conservatives' average age was fifty-nine; the youngest was fifty and the oldest sixty-five. Although these two groupings are sharply divided by age and although it seems generally true that as age increases militancy decreases among Negro leaders in Atlanta, it should be noted that this is not an invariable rule by any means. This study will show that the differences among those who did not voluntarily identify themselves is not nearly so sharp as among those who did. Also during the interviewing a student leader was encountered who displayed attitudes quite similar to the conservative group, and a minister and college teacher, both in their late fifties, displayed very militant attitudes.

#### IV

In an effort to establish the nature of the issues over which the Negro leaders are divided, each subject was asked to fill out two cards which were designed to reveal his position on the proper goals of the Negro's political and civic efforts in the city, and the most effective means available to achieve these goals. The cards were used on the assumption, shared by the most thoughtful participants in Atlanta's public life, both white and colored, that the Negro leaders are not in dispute over the goals toward which Negroes should strive, but only over the most effective tactics that should be used to achieve these goals.

The first card<sup>5</sup> with which the respondents were presented contained the following list of preferences:

- ( ) The chance to purchase homes anywhere in the city without restrictions.
- ( ) The freedom to use all public parks and to swim in the same places with whites.

<sup>5</sup>This first card is a slightly modified version of a card used by Lewis M. Killian and Charles M. Grigg, "Rank Orders of Discrimination of Negroes and Whites in a Southern City," *Social Forces* (March, 1961), pp. 235-239.

- ( ) The chance at equal job opportunities, pay and promotion based on an individual's work and not on his race.
- ( ) The freedom to use all hotels and to eat in the same restaurants with whites.
- ( ) The end of segregation in the public schools.
- ( ) Equal treatment by the police and the courts.

In reference to this card each subject was asked: "If those changes affecting the way of life of the Negro in this city could come about immediately, which one would you like to see first, next, etc.?" The subject was asked to rank these preferences one through six.

There was reluctance to mark this card on the part of six of the subjects. One of the self-identified liberals objected to the implications that the Negro would agree any longer to obtain his rights piecemeal. Another man, who had been involved in many negotiations in the past, said he had developed the habit of asking for everything all at once, and the others argued that some of the alternatives were of equal importance and thus could not be put in rank order. These respondents were encouraged to mark the card anyway and all except one did so. The subject who refused simply wrote on it: "They are interlaced and interwoven."<sup>6</sup>

The results revealed that there was considerable agreement on the relative desirability of the various preferences presented:<sup>7</sup>

Liberals (N—7)	Conservatives (N—8)	Not Identified (N—19)
3	4	3 (Housing)
5	6	5 (Public Parks)
1	1	1 (Job Opportunity)
6	5	6 (Hotels and Restaurants)
2	2	2 (Public Schools)
4	3	4 (Police and Courts)

The most striking thing about the results of this test is the extent to which these groups are in agreement concerning the priority of increased economic

<sup>6</sup>None of the respondents said he had no preference or that he did not care about one of the changes, but there were those who said that one of the alternatives was no longer a problem (usually this was equal treatment by the police and the courts) at least within the Atlanta city limits. These subjects were encouraged to assign a number anyway, but two refused. In those cases the number six was arbitrarily assigned to the category the subject had omitted.

<sup>7</sup>To arrive at a group ranking for this test, the responses of each individual to each of the preferences presented on the card were simply added to the responses of all others in this group. A group ranking was assigned to each preference on the basis of this composite score.

opportunity and school desegregation as the two most important goals toward which the Negroes in Atlanta should strive. This result is somewhat in contrast to the findings of James Q. Wilson in Chicago. Wilson found that the protest or militant leaders tended to choose what he calls "status" ends rather than "welfare" ends when faced with a choice. A status end is one which seeks "the integration of the Negro into all phases of the community on the principle of equality — all Negroes will be granted the opportunity to obtain the services, positions, or material benefits of the community on the basis of principles other than race."<sup>8</sup> On the other hand a welfare end is described as "those which look to the tangible improvement of the community or some individuals in it through the provision of better services, living conditions, or positions."<sup>9</sup> The distinction is a subtle one, but Wilson explains it further by saying:

Welfare and status ends are distinguished by, and defended in terms of, tangible versus intangible benefits, short term versus long-term gains, and specific versus total solutions to the problems of the community. The differences [are] between those who advocate welfare ends, or *things*, and those who urge status ends, or *principles*. . . .<sup>10</sup>

In Atlanta, although the liberals may deal with the problems of the community in moral, absolute terms more frequently than the conservatives, there seems to be a general agreement that welfare type goals are more important than status type goals. Even the liberals agreed that increased employment in city government should be accepted, even if it is placed on a quota basis. Also there was only one respondent who argued that Negroes should refuse to accept increased spending and development of new schools within the Negro community until all the schools were opened on the basis of equality.

There were, however, traces of the preference of status over welfare goals among the liberals. The liberals chose the right to purchase homes anywhere in the city above equal protection by the police which is the third choice of the conservatives. This could be explained by the different historical experience of the two groups. The older men usually talked at length about examples of police brutality and injustice that they had witnessed or experienced in the 1920's or 1930's, and they claim large responsibility for producing the present much more equitable situation through the use of their influence and their management of the political power of the Negro. One of the first breakthroughs they achieved after gaining the right to vote in the

<sup>8</sup>James Q. Wilson, *Negro Politics* (Glencoe: the Free Press, 1960), p. 185.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 186.

Democratic primary in 1946 was the obtaining of Negro policemen in the city in 1948. The younger men agree that the police in the city are remarkably fair and efficient, but they seem to take the situation somewhat for granted.

The younger men are more interested in desegregation of housing and, although they felt hopeless about the prospects, some spoke of getting a city ordinance establishing open occupancy. This attitude could be explained in part by a peculiar development in housing in the city, brought about for the most part by the older men. Atlanta is distinguished from most American cities by having extensive Negro suburbs. Large amounts of property on the West side of the town have been taken up by Negroes so that they are not encircled and bound into the central city by white suburban towns, and there are no man-made obstacles to their outward movement in that direction. But the well-kept sub-divisions that have sprung up on the West side since World War Two are a mark of segregation. They are as comfortable as those in the white neighborhoods, but they are part of a ghetto. The older men, in inaugurating the development of the West side gave up efforts to penetrate the dominant white society, but the younger men, although indicating no intention of moving from the West side, were obviously more eager to erase the stigma of the ghetto and the insult of segregated housing.

But the general preference among those respondents for welfare goals was underlined by the fact that the choices involving desegregation of parks, hotels and restaurants were placed at the bottom of the list by all groups. Moreover, none of the respondents took these things very seriously. This was true even of the student leaders whose names appeared as petitioners on a suit against the city calling for park desegregation that was pending in court at the time the interviews took place. The younger men picked the parks above hotels and restaurants, but in discussing the issue they seemed to be as much interested in gaining more parks for Negro neighborhoods as in desegregating all the city's recreational facilities.

When the respondents who marked the cards are arranged according to age the differences just discussed are reduced, and a broad unity of opinion is revealed:

45 years and Under (N—15)	46 years and Over (N—18)
3	3 (Housing)
5	6 (Public Parks)
1	1 (Job Opportunity)
6	5 (Hotels and Restaurants)
2	2 (Public Schools)
4	4 (Police and Courts)

This test indicates that thoughtful local observers are correct when they suggest that there is little dispute among Negroes in Atlanta concerning the

goals toward which they should be working. It would seem that among the leaders examined here this is true to a remarkable extent. Although the liberals may find the status differentials between whites and Negroes in Atlanta more galling and frustrating than the older conservatives, all the leaders, both young students and older bankers and business leaders, agree that the economic goals — increased employment opportunity and nondiscriminatory advancement policies — should have the highest priority for action.

## V

Once each subject had marked the first card he was presented with a second one on which were listed the following preferences:

- ( ) Private negotiations with influential whites.
- ( ) Economic Boycotts.
- ( ) Efforts to encourage increased voting among Negroes.
- ( ) Demonstrations of protest such as sit-ins and marches.
- ( ) Civil Rights suits in Courts of Law.

In reference to this card each subject was told: "Listed on that card are various kinds of action that can be used to gain the changes in the Negroes' way of life that were listed on the first card. Which of the methods of bringing about change listed on this card do you think is most effective, next, etc.?" Once again the subject was asked to mark the card one through five.

This test was designed on the assumption that debate among Negro leaders in Atlanta had reached such a stage that those most committed to a political style would mark the card immediately, without extensive consideration. This assumption proved largely correct, again testifying to the emotional intensity of the dispute going on within the Negro community. Those who had voluntarily identified themselves as conservatives or liberals tended to mark this card without hesitation, while those who had been reluctant to mark the first card usually objected even more strenuously to this one.

Eight subjects hesitated or objected to marking this card. One of these was a self-identified liberal who argued that voting should not be included along with the other alternatives because increased voting among Negroes had primarily a long range influence and made very little impact on day to day struggles involving particular issues, especially where private businesses or institutions were involved. The rest argued, in one way or another, that no one tactic was necessarily more effective than any other. The relative effectiveness, they asserted, depended entirely on the particular situation and the issues at stake; therefore, any one of the tactics listed on the card might be the most effective, or the least effective, depending on the circumstances

involved. The same gentleman who refused to mark the first card seemed to have this approach to social action, and he refused to mark the second card as well. This time he wrote on it: "All are important and effective."

But the card was marked by most of the subjects without any objections. In fact, several accompanied their marking with such comments as: "This is simple enough," or "Well, I see my first choice right off." The self-identified groups ranked the alternatives in the following way.<sup>11</sup>

<i>Liberals</i> (N—7)	<i>Conservatives</i> (N—8)
5	2 (Negotiation)
1	5 (Boycotts)
2	1 (Voting)
3	4 (Demonstrations)
4	3 (Lawsuits)

The contrasts here are striking and the results of this test offer strong evidence that the dispute between the older, better established group and the younger group is more than simply a struggle for power and prestige. At least among these deeply committed individuals a sharp dispute is in process over the proper tactics that should be used to carry on their fight for equality.

There is not too much disagreement between the two groups over the importance of increasing the number of Negro voters although the more militant group places it second in importance. However, attitudes toward this subject are more divergent than the results of the test reveal. The conservatives usually accompanied their selection of this alternative as their first choice with a lecture on the power of the ballot which was punctuated with stories illustrating how much their situation had changed since the end of the white primary in 1946. One story concerning the mayor's rather contemptuous treatment of their plea for more street lights in the early 1940's which he dismissed with the remark: "Come back to see me when you have 10,000 votes," was frequently repeated.

<sup>11</sup>Among those who did not identify themselves as liberal or conservative there was much disagreement on this card. Some individuals in this group placed lawsuits first in effectiveness, and others put voting at the top of their lists. These leaders are not included in this chart because to lump them together in a composite grouping would give a false picture of unanimity among them.

The average rankings of the self-identified liberals and conservatives are close to the actual rankings made by most of the respondents. The range of choices on each alternative was narrow. Negotiations were ranked between 3 and 5 by the liberal respondents and either 1 or 2 by the conservatives. Boycotts were ranked either 1 or 2 by the liberals and either 4 or 5 by the conservatives. Increased voting was ranked either 1 or 2 by the conservatives and between 1 and 5 by the liberals. Demonstrations were ranked from 2 to 4 by the liberals and either 4 or 5 by the conservatives. Lawsuits were ranked from 2 to 5 by the liberals and from 1 to 3 by the conservatives.

The liberal group, however, seemed very reluctant to place voting high on the list although they acknowledged its importance. One of them said:

Voting is damned important of course . . . but it's over-rated by Negroes, I think. Even with the votes you can't just sit back as some people in this town think. You don't get things without pushing and shoving.

There was a difference of opinion about the efficacy of lawsuits. Both groups thought that lawsuits were important and effective means of gaining civil rights victories, but once again the liberals argue that they are not very useful against privately imposed segregation. One young lawyer, although he was not in the self-identified liberal group, listed lawsuits fourth most effective and stated the objections of the militants quite well by saying:

The Federal courts seem to be slowly expanding their definition of what constitutes a public activity or function, but they aren't in any hurry to do it. That's a hot one you know — very controversial. Anyway, we are out to get segregation now, not just legal segregation.

The kernel of the dispute between the two groups, however, is their contrasting attitudes toward the possibility of working out compromises with the white community, and in general their attitude toward the present system of settling racial disputes. The conservatives believe strongly in the importance of private negotiations with white leaders, while the liberals place this tactic last on their list. The liberals consider economic boycotts the most effective means of getting their way while the conservatives placed it at the bottom of their list. One member of the conservative group stated flatly: "Man, I just don't like this boycotting — I don't care who's doing it — I just don't think it's right!" The two groups have opposite opinions on the so-called "direct action" techniques. Some of the conservatives seem to reject them almost without qualification, but if such means must be used they prefer protest demonstrations over boycotts. However, the liberals are not even as enthusiastic about protest demonstrations as the results of the test might suggest. They believe that their usefulness in Atlanta is decreasing primarily because the white population is becoming accustomed to seeing Negroes picketing and demonstrating and has begun to ignore them. The leaders of the sit-in demonstrations in Atlanta were quite sensitive to coverage of their activities by the press and they were aware that news of demonstrations was taken off the front page and relegated to the more inconspicuous parts of the newspaper as the controversy dragged on.

When the results of this test from all the respondents are examined the differences between the younger and older leaders is moderated somewhat:



## 45 and Under (N—15)

3  
2  
1  
5  
4

## 46 and Over (N—18)

3 (Negotiations)  
4 (Boycotts)  
1 (Voting)  
5 (Demonstrations)  
2 (Lawsuits)

Differences between the two age groups still exist, but the principal one, the younger groups' preference for economic boycotts over private negotiations with the whites and civil rights suits is less sharply defined than previously. Efforts to increase Negro voting is considered the most effective tactic by both groups, and the older leaders now have a lower rating for private negotiations with the whites and find boycotts more effective than demonstrations, though by a small margin.

## VI

Emerging from these interviews is a spectrum of opinion on the effectiveness of various techniques of social action within a significant segment of the leadership of the Atlanta Negro community. There seems to be considerable agreement among these leaders on the goals toward which Atlanta's Negroes ought to strive, but at opposite extremes of the spectrum widely respected leaders exist who disagree very sharply with each other over the tactics to be used in pursuing these goals. These conflicting opinions are a reflection of differences in historical experience between the two groups and also they are a function of their differing positions and occupations within the Negro community.

Of those who identified themselves as conservatives in this study there was one college administrator, one social worker, and six businessmen. These men expressed an aversion for direct action techniques and boycotts and a strong preference for private negotiations with influential whites. They have built up good contacts with the whites over the years, and pride themselves on their ability to speak directly to the top white leaders in the city.

The conservatives feel that their position bars them from taking an active part in protest demonstrations because these public displays of discontent naturally cause bitterness and rancor and tend to destroy the cordial, settled atmosphere which they feel is a necessary pre-condition to effective negotiations. They also have worked hard to build institutions such as the Y.M.C.A., the Urban League and many churches which depend heavily on contributions from influential whites, and during the boycott that accompanied the sit-in affair in Atlanta some of these organizations began to lose white contributors as tension mounted. To some extent the conservatives have each made adjustments to the traditional position of the Negro in Southern society. In varying measures they have given up efforts to penetrate the dominant white society and consequently they have a greater commitment to the institutions of the Negro community.

The businessmen among the conservatives have frequent dealings with influential whites in the city; both the bank and the savings and loan association operated by Negroes in Atlanta have very sizable deposits from white customers. In fact, to a large extent, the power of the conservatives depends on their influence with the white community. They are spokesmen for the Negro community primarily because they have gained white recognition and favor, although their own achievements placed them in a position to be chosen for this role. Because of this process of selection, the liberals regard the conservatives with almost the same hostility they have for the whites, if not more so. They complain that the conservatives' power is based essentially on the Negro's fear of the power of the white man. They think that the established leaders have profited from the injustices of segregation by trading their human dignity for the opportunity to represent the whites within the Negro community.

The younger men are not so directly engaged in activities and institutions that serve the whole community as are the conservatives. Among the group that voluntarily identified themselves as liberals there were two individuals who worked for civil rights or Negro improvement groups, one college teacher, one social worker, one physician, one student leader, and one businessman. These men deal more exclusively with the Negro community than the conservatives, yet at the same time they do not feel as much committed to its maintenance; in fact, they hate all it stands for. Their work brings them into closer contact with the social, economic and political deprivations suffered by the Negro, and they tend to concentrate on these injustices and have fewer reasons to try to protect institutions, both charitable and commercial, that presently exist in the Negro community. They are under less compulsion than the conservatives to act with restraint or to compromise their demands in order to make limited material gains or to promote the fortunes of Negro businessmen. In this sense they stand outside the economic and social life of the established community and they try to keep the dominant leaders, both white and colored, at arm's length, guarding against being too friendly with politicians and certainly never asking them for favors or help of any kind. They try to conduct their affairs strictly on the basis of their moral principles, and for these reasons conservatives frequently regard them as "irresponsible" and find their attitudes toward politics and community leaders "unrealistic" or "hateful." One member of the conservative group, who has a reputation as a good tactician and organizer, acknowledged the importance of the student protests in bringing "more integration in less than two years than we gained in ten," but he argued that "they will never get anything done on their own because they are cut off; they work in a righteous vacuum over there."

The whites also play a large part in selecting the liberal or militant leaders just as they do in choosing the conservative spokesmen. However, it is important to the liberal leaders to become the objects of hostility from the whites, not of their beneficence. At the beginning of the sit-in protests in Atlanta,

when student leaders from several organizations on the Atlanta University campus seemed to be competing for control of the new movement, they began vying with each other in making bold, uncompromising public statements, and when they met privately with a leading white merchant they tried to outdo each other in challenging him and impressing him with their determination. It is important, to the student leaders in particular, to have the badge of at least one jail sentence for breaking a segregation law, and Martin Luther King, Jr. could have asked for nothing better than to have been bitterly attacked by the Governor of Georgia when he decided in 1960 to move from Montgomery, Alabama, to Atlanta. The liberals thrive on the antagonism of the whites, while the conservatives court their good favor.

The rest of the Negro leaders, those not identified with either the conservatives or liberals, are caught in a maze of conflicting influences stemming from their occupations, their age and historical experiences, their functions within the Negro community and their relations with the whites. These men, spread across the spectrum of opinion between the self-identified liberals and conservatives, display several different combinations of attitudes and action.

Several leaders claimed agreement with the liberals' approach to political tactics yet did not identify themselves as members of the liberal group. During the sit-in controversy these men did not actually involve themselves in the public demonstrations or in advising the student leaders. They marked the attitude cards in a way that suggested their liberal views, but they did not endorse these views with action. Typical of this group was a college teacher in his late fifties who expressed strong approval of the sit-in demonstrations and the boycott. He has been involved in voter registration drives ever since the end of the white primary in 1946 and he is a member of many other community organizations, but he also has close relationships and friendships with many of the leading conservatives. He excused himself for not participating more actively in the sit-in controversy by saying: "They always seemed to schedule meetings when I had obligations at school." Another member of this group is a social worker in his middle forties who has very militant attitudes and is a member of several organizations which are dominated by the liberals, but who works for an agency which depends heavily on financial support from the white community and so he maintains a "realistic" alliance with the conservative leaders and did not participate directly in the protest actions.

On the other side of the spectrum are leaders who hold conservative views but who did not criticize the actions of the demonstrators during the sit-ins or make efforts to bring the protests to an end. A lawyer in his early forties fits into this category. He believed strongly that community disputes should be settled through negotiation and felt that the demonstrators frequently acted unrealistically or recklessly during the sit-in dispute. But he did not have a high regard for the established community leaders, and, since he is a relatively

young man who was not born in Atlanta, he does not have a close relationship with the most influential conservatives. He was called on by the students for legal advice at one point during the sit-in controversy, and he gave it, but otherwise he took no part in the dispute.

Standing in the center of the spectrum is a third group of leaders whose attitudes and actions during the sit-in controversy were ambiguous. One such leader is a young, but very successful businessman who has many friends among the liberals, but also has the confidence of several conservatives. He holds high offices in organizations dominated by both sides and a white observer described him as: "the best case of a man over there who has a foot in all camps." This man marked the attitude card concerning tactics three different ways, describing a set of situations that would call for each ranking. Leaders of this sort tended to be least committed to a particular tactical weapon or technique, but not necessarily the less effective in obtaining their goals. When faced with a social or political conflict these men begin thinking of ways to limit the scope of their difficulties and extend the possible alternatives for action. They speak mostly of partial solutions to outstanding disputes and seem to think primarily in terms of the short-run, immediate consequences that might result from their decisions.

This group of leaders in the middle, subject to cross-pressures generated by the ambiguous circumstances in which they find themselves, serve as a balancing force between the more single-minded liberals and conservatives. These men who are not fully committed to either side, through their personal friendships and their memberships in various organizations, tend to moderate the sharp differences of opinion over tactics that exist within the Negro community. Because of their formal and informal efforts, organizational rivalry and bickering is reduced, and the Negro's attack on the institutions of segregation in Atlanta is more unified and effective.

## VII

This study of Negro leadership is confined to the description of circumstances existing in Atlanta, Georgia. But unless case studies generate hypotheses which can be examined and tested in other settings they do not make a significant contribution to the study of political behavior. No effort is made in this study to arrive at generalizations concerning the leadership in all Southern Negro communities. In fact, until more progress is made in developing the comparative study of metropolitan political systems all observations concerning the similarities and differences between various communities will necessarily be vague and purely impressionistic. But, even with these reservations, several conclusions are suggested which could be studied fruitfully in other Negro communities:

(1) Liberal and conservative Negro leaders in the South are in essential agreement on the ranking of goals toward which the Negro community should

strive. Although differences of emphasis exist, there seems to be a general consensus that it is more important at this time to improve the welfare of the Negro community and increase the services available to it than to fight to completely eliminate racial discrimination in all phases of the life of the city. Presently welfare goals are more important than status goals.

(2) The disunity presently existing among Negro leaders in Atlanta is not primarily the result of a clash between two generations holding contrasting political attitudes. Although in this study the average age of the self-identified liberals was lower than the average age of the self-identified conservatives, when the data from the attitude cards were tabulated according to age groupings, broad agreement between younger and older leaders was discovered. Age is not the most important factor distinguishing the antagonists among Negro leaders.

(3) Liberal and conservative leaders disagree primarily over the tactics to be employed in achieving their goals. At least when faced with a sharp, emotional community dispute involving the issue of racial discrimination the Negro leaders divide between those who want to use aggressive, "direct action" techniques and those who wish to negotiate "behind the scenes" with influential whites. Caught between these extremes are leaders who act infrequently and reluctantly, or who seem to be called in only to ratify decisions made by others. Some of these men do not take a vigorous and direct role in such controversies because they are not firmly committed to either tactical approach while others find themselves enmeshed in a conflicting web of cross-pressures which restrains them from acting on strongly held opinions.

At the center of the spectrum are leaders who consciously avoid direct identification with any one approach and who endeavor to maintain contact with all parties to the dispute. They measure the circumstances and try to fit their actions to the exigencies of the moment, always trying to maintain their focus on short-run possibilities and solutions.

(4) The isolation of the leadership of the two racial groups, brought on by segregation, is a serious and potentially disruptive weakness in the social structure of a city with a large Negro population. There are no social contacts between white and Negro leaders in Atlanta, and residential segregation places their homes far apart. There are numerous Negro owned businesses, and the institutions within the Negro community are so well developed that it is possible for a Negro to live a distinctly middle class life in Atlanta while having only marginal contacts with the whites. In such a situation, if a crisis arises involving the crucial issue of race, communication between the two racial groups, which is normally rather tenuous and formal, becomes very hard to maintain, and it is even more difficult to establish the conditions in which negotiation of the difficulties that caused the crisis can take place.

During the controversy over the sit-in demonstrations in Atlanta such a breakdown in communications occurred. It was caused in large measure by the

inability of the Negroes to agree among themselves, the militant attitude of the student leaders which antagonized many of the whites, and the stubborn refusal of certain white businessmen to discuss the matter at all. It was at this juncture that the student leaders turned to one of the oldest, most respected Negro leaders, who was widely considered to be a conservative although he did not voluntarily identify himself as such when interviewed. He contacted an influential white lawyer with whom he had a cordial relationship, and together these two men were able to initiate negotiations that eventually led to a settlement of the controversy.

(5) Thus when the Negro community becomes involved in a struggle against the institutions of segregation, both the liberal and the conservative leaders can perform useful roles:

(a) The liberal group's function is, literally, to start fights they are unable to finish. They are able to create a crisis, but are frequently unable to resolve it because they have no basis for contact with the dominant white leaders. As James Q. Wilson suggests, one of the inherent difficulties in the use of protest action is: "that the discretion of the protest leader to bargain after he has acquired the resources with which to bargain is severely limited by the means he was forced to employ in order to create those resources."<sup>12</sup> From the beginning of the sit-in dispute in Atlanta the leading merchants refused to negotiate directly with the demonstrators whom they considered to be irresponsible troublemakers.

(b) The conservatively inclined leaders, utilizing their reputations and the connections they have built up with the white community through the years, have the function of resolving the crisis situation created by the protest leaders. In the Atlanta dispute even the antagonism between the two groups was functional because it made the conservatives seem more reliable and responsible in the eyes of the whites, and so they were still able to act as negotiators when both sides were ready to compromise.

(c) Those leaders in the middle, who do not identify completely with either the conservative or the protest leaders, have the function of moderating this conflict over tactics. Some individuals find themselves in this situation because they are subject to cross-pressures which restrain them from becoming attached to either side in the controversy. Others are not committed because they have a flexible attitude toward social action which prompts them to regard all tactical weapons as potentially useful. Regardless of the influences that put them in this position, however, these leaders in the middle provide both formal and informal links between the conservative and protest leaders.

(d) Before the leaders can perform their various functions, of course, the liberal group must create a serious crisis through its actions. Until a

<sup>12</sup>James Q. Wilson, "The Strategy of Protest," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (September, 1961), p. 293.

genuine threat to the public order and reputation of the community exists, the dominant whites are unlikely to be willing to negotiate concessions with the conservative leaders.

### VIII

The situation in Atlanta does not seem to have been unique. Something of this same kind of unanticipated cooperation and sharing of functions between liberal and conservative Negro leaders seem to have taken place during the sit-in controversy in Knoxville, Tennessee. Negotiation began initially there without any demonstrations, but broke down after four tedious months of talks. Sit-ins began on June 9, 1960, and a boycott was started five days later on June 14. Merrill Proudfoot describes a meeting of the executive committee of the protest movement which took place on July 2, 1960, after about three weeks of demonstrations. The meeting was attended by the president of Knoxville College, who had not been involved in planning or staging the demonstrations, and he revealed that he had been contacted by an official of the Knoxville Chamber of Commerce who informed him that there was a movement underway to reopen negotiations. Proudfoot rather indignantly comments:

The circuitous means of communicating with one another has lent a comic-opera aspect to the way this major community problem has been handled. It would seem sensible for one of the merchants to have called Crutcher or James the leaders of the demonstrations and said, "Come on down and let's talk!" Instead the merchants hint to the Chamber of Commerce official that they might be willing; he contacts not Crutcher or James, but Colston — the one person in the Negro community who has the greatest status . . . and he in turn makes the contact within the Negro community.<sup>13</sup>

Also when a negotiating team was created to formulate the final agreement to desegregate, Colston was included once again, but this time he was accompanied by Crutcher. Although the description is not so complete it seems that a similar process operated at Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where the agreement to desegregate the lunch counters was not formulated by the protest leaders. Clarence H. Patrick reports that:

The demonstrators several times sought unsuccessfully for someone to organize and mediate a meeting between them and the store managers in an attempt to resolve the antisegregation movement on the basis of some mutual agreement. The leaders of the protest never met, as a group, with the managers of the stores where the protests occurred.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Merrill Proudfoot, *Diary of a Sit-in* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1962), pp. 111-112.

<sup>14</sup>Clarence H. Patrick, *Lunch Counter De-segregation in Winston-Salem, North Carolina* (Pamphlet Distributed by the Southern Regional Council, 1960), p. 7.

The evidence presented here suggests that in some Southern Negro communities a kind of tactical balance presently exists with both conservative and protest leaders playing a part in the fight for equality. However, there is no evidence that the period of change and transition in Negro leadership in Atlanta has ended. In fact, a major unsettling force seems to be developing beneath the level of leadership. Almost all the leaders interviewed, including the conservatives, felt that expectations are rising perceptibly throughout the Negro community as a result of recent successful attacks on the institutions of segregation. The Negro masses, who have traditionally been apathetic toward politics and efforts to fight segregation, seem to be gaining hope that change is possible and are shaking off the mood of cynical resignation that has paralyzed them in the past.

Looking forward, these circumstances suggest a prediction that the drive to break down racial barriers will not stall once a few victories are won, but will continue and intensify in the foreseeable future. The progress toward desegregation which has recently taken place in Atlanta, such as that in the public parks, buses, libraries, and lunch counters, has been in areas which this study has shown are least important to the Negro leaders, while large-scale integration of the public schools, housing segregation and discrimination in employment, which they consider most important, have yet to be approached on a broad scale.

Whatever the prospects for the future, however, the indications are that the issue of racial discrimination will dominate Atlanta's politics for some time to come. In fact, as the younger Negroes begin to look outside the boundaries of the Negro ghetto and yearn for integration into the dominant community, they are not likely to become satisfied until their status or social ranking is arrived at rationally, and until they are judged on the basis of their personal attainments, not merely on the basis of their color. A young lawyer expressed this yearning for community recognition and status when he said: "I want to practice as a lawyer, not as a Negro lawyer." Even more poignantly this mood was expressed by a college teacher who spoke as he gazed out the window of his office at Atlanta University:

You know, I've lived in this town for twenty years now, and I love it here. But the worst thing about it here is the isolation. Why, there are white people who drive by this school every day on their way to work who don't even know what it is. They think it's a hospital or a housing project, and, you know, the very worst thing is they don't take time to find out. They just don't care.