The Political Economy of Early Southern Unionism: Race, Politics, and Labor in the South, 1880–1953

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Southern unions were the weak link in the American labor movement, organizing a smaller share of the labor force than did unions in the northern states or in Europe. Structural conditions, including a racially divided rural population, obstructed southern unionization. The South's distinctive political system also blocked unionization. A strict racial code compelling whites to support the Democratic Party and the disfranchisement of southern blacks and many working-class whites combined to create a one-party political system that allowed southern politicians to ignore labor's demands. Unconstrained by working-class voters, southern politicians facilitated strike-breaking and favored employers against unions.

Why were unions so much less successful in the South than in the North at gaining membership and advancing the interests of workers during the heyday of union growth from 1880 to 1953? Some consider southern culture to be noticeably different than that of the rest of the United States. But was culture behind the South-North disparity in union success; or was the disparity due to political and structural factors not unique to the South?

SOUTHERN EXCEPTIONALISM

"There exists among us," W. J. Cash wrote in 1940, "both North and South—a profound conviction that the South is another land, sharply differentiated from the rest of the American nation, and exhibiting within itself a remarkable homogeneity."[1] Described as "conservative," "tradition-loving," "conventional," "courteous," and "generous," southern whites have a strong sense of "group identification" and are recognized by both northerners and southerners as holding a distinct culture.[2] Late to industrialize, defeated and

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[1] Cash, *Mind*, p. vii. Just a few of the other works exploring the distinctiveness of southern society include: Clayton and Salmond, eds., *South*; Davis, Gardner, and Gardner, *Deep South*; Link, *Paradox*; Mandle, *Roots*; Myrdal, *American Dilemma*; Reed, *Enduring South* and *One South*; Wiener, *Social Origins*; Woodward, *Origins*, *Burden*, and *Strange Career*; and Wright, *Old South*.

[2] Over 90 percent of residents of both regions agreed that southerners had a distinct culture; Reed, *Enduring South*, pp. 29, 11, 22.

occupied in a bloody civil war, the South remained agricultural and rural for decades after the North became an urban, industrial society. Isolated from a world economy it had once led, the South's low wages attracted few immigrants but, curiously, before World War I it drove out few emigrants.[3]

The South also avoided forms of working-class collective action and political competition that were common in other industrialized places during the period from 1880 to 1953. Unions were rare, making the South the choice site of "American Exceptionalism." Southern politics was also exceptional. Instead of the vigorous party competition found in other democracies, the postbellum South was long dominated by a lily-white Democratic Party. For 30 years after emancipation, divisions among the South's white population were suppressed in the name of white supremacy; after 1896 these divisions were ended by replacing democratic pretenses with open disfranchisement.

Writing in the 1930s, the economist George Mitchell linked the South's distinct culture and its backward economy with its authoritarian politics. "The South," he said, "is still an authoritarian society. The cotton industry has reproduced for its owner the position of power held by the masters of plantations."[4] But cotton did not produce authoritarianism; race prejudice lay at the root of the South's twisted politics. Southern whites united, Ulrich B. Phillips acknowledged in 1928, because of "a common resolve indomitably maintained—that it shall be and remain a white man's country." "Correct" racial views, Phillips concluded, "are the essence of white Southern identity."[5]

Racial politics had effects beyond race relations. Secured by racism, authoritarianism was a tool used to advance an economic program otherwise unacceptable to many southerners. Fears that industrialization would produce a radical proletariat or would undermine plantation labor discipline were overcome by advocates of industrialization who built a pro-industry coalition of "bosses" and "planters" committed to using state power to reinforce existing elites.[6] Elected to secure white privilege, southern politicians used office to promote labor discipline with convict labor programs, police support against strikers, laws restricting labor mobility, and by granting

[3] Wright, especially, emphasizes the negative effect of labor-market isolation on southern growth; see Wright, *Old South*, pp. 170–74. On emigration from the South, see Mandle, *Roots*; Margo, *Race*; and Wiener, *Social Origins*.

[4] Mitchell, *Textile Unionism*, p. vi.

[5] Phillips, "The Central Theme of Southern History" (1928), quoted in Reed, *One South*, p. v. Also see Clayton and Salmond, eds., *South*, p. xii.

[6] On antebellum arguments over southern industrialization see, for example, Fitzhugh, *Cannibals*; Genovese, *World*; and Bateman and Weiss, *Deplorable Scarcity*. The political alignments around postbellum industrialization are discussed in Carlton, *Mill*, pp. 83–84, 68; Hackney, *Populism*, pp. 210–30; Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work*; Mandle, *Roots*; and Wiener, *Social Origins*.

employers autonomous company towns.[7] Thus, New South industrialists used the political hegemony secured by white racism to promote a form of industrialization compatible with continued elite rule: industrialization "acceptable to planter and industrialist alike."[8]

So successful was the use of racial politics to promote capitalist industrialization that by the 1880s the South, in C. Vann Woodward's words, "came to be regarded . . . as a bulwark of, instead of a menace to, the new capitalist economic order." "The Southern states," said the editors of the *Industrial South*, "were the breakwater for all fanaticism. They are the bulwark against all the storms of political passions. They send forth conservative influences."[9] The South remained a conservative bastion, resisting union drives, from the Knights of Labor in the 1880s through the CIO's Operation Dixie after World War II.[10] Weak unions linked the South as a poor, economically isolated region and the South as a conservative and distinctly authoritarian polity. Elsewhere, strong labor unions connected workers' aspirations for higher wages with broader campaigns for social reform. Union weakness has been cited as a primary cause for the anaemic American welfare state.[11] But union weakness was not a national phenomenon in the United States. There were periods of extraordinary union growth and strength in the northern states, bringing unions there to levels comparable to unions in Scandinavia and elsewhere in Europe. But northern unions were undermined by union weakness in the American South. Union weakness there undermined unionization and social reform throughout the United States.[12]

Labor economists have accepted the weakness of southern unionism as a fact familiar enough to require no explanation. The South usually enters economists' analysis as a regional dummy variable, included to control for its unique history, culture, or politics; rarely is an attempt made to account

[7] On the troubles Federal authorities had in recruiting southern labor during World War I, see Breen, "Sectional Influences."

[8] Lichtenstein, "'Through the Rugged Gates'," p. 9. Also, see Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge*, p. 225; Jaynes, *Branches*, p. 271; Letwin, *Challenge*, pp. 28–29; and Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work*.

The Great Migration of African-Americans to northern cities led to racial conflicts that divided northern workers, reducing support for unions and economic reforms there as well. See Brown, *Race*.

[9] Woodward, *Origins*, pp. 50, 3–4. Also note Kousser, *Shaping*.

[10] On the South in the United States political economy, see, for example, Berquist, *Labor*; Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan*; Bruce, "Political Parties"; and Zieger, *CIO*, p. 230. On southern unions, see Douty, "Early Labor Organizations"; Goldfield, "Failure"; Halpern, "Organized Labor"; Marshall, *Labor*; McLaurin, *Paternalism* and *Knights of Labor*; Meyers, "Knights of Labor"; Rabinowitz, *First New South*; Taft, *Organizing Dixie*; and Zieger, *Organized Labor*.

[11] See, for example, Korpi, *Democratic Class Struggle*; Shalev, "Social-Democratic Model"; and Therborn, "Karl Marx."

[12] Time-series data on comparative unionization rates for the United States and European countries are available in Friedman, "Is French Union Growth." Early union growth in the United States and other countries is discussed in Friedman, *State-Making*.

systematically for southern "exceptionalism."[13] F. Ray Marshall, for example, attributed weak southern unions to a laundry list of factors: "the unity of white managers and workers, the race problem, the surplus of labor in a low-income agriculture, the nature and composition of southern industry, the undemocratic political tradition, the idea that industrialists were benefactors."[14] Michael Goldfield, similarly, gave eight reasons for the failure of the CIO's Operation Dixie: the concentration of industry in company towns, racism, southern traditionalism and individualism, lack of large cities and workplaces, competition with overpopulated agriculture, the concentration of employment in competitive industry, failures among the union leadership, and "unified opposition to unions" by clergy, business, political leaders, and law enforcement.[15]

Some analysts offered simpler explanations, attributing weak southern unions, for example, to distinctive features of southern culture. Southern workers, it was said, had lower expectations: the "Southern work-people, hoping for less, are less demonstrative of their suffering" hence presumably were less inclined to do anything to improve their circumstances.[16] Others said that southerners were too individualistic to join unions. "The basic Southerner," Cash argued, "is a back country pioneer farmer . . . the dominant trait of this mind was an intense individualism—in its way perhaps the most intense individualism the world has seen since the Italian Renaissance."[17] Not content with this explanation, Cash later attributed union weakness to the "simple childlike psychology" of southern mill workers. They would join a union, or any other "new thing in sight, from a passing circus or the Holy Rollers up—or down," but

> when it came to fixing a grievance continuously in view and methodically preparing for a strike by regularly paying union dues, they were quite incapable of it. And as for winning a strike, they hadn't a chance. . . . It followed, too, from the very carelessness of their psychology—from their willingness, once they had discharged their irritations, had their lark, and begun to get hungry, to drift cheerfully back to work, regardless of the fact that even their immediate aims had not been accomplished. . . . It is enough here not only that unionism had no hold in the South in 1914 but that there was as yet no soil in which it could really take root.[18]

[13] Freeman and Medoff are exceptional in giving an explanation for union weakness, employer resistance. But they do not explain why southern employers resist unions more than their counterparts elsewhere. See Freeman and Medoff, *What do Unions*, pp. 27–32. For other examples where the South enters the analysis as a dummy variable, see Ashenfelter and Johnson, "Unionism"; Lee, "Unionism"; Moore and Newman, "On the Prospects"; Schmidt and Strauss, "Effect"; and Scoville, "Influences."

[14] Marshall, *Labor*, p. viii. A similar laundry list is to be found in Goldfield, "Failure," pp. 171–81. Zieger puts more blame on union leadership in explaining Operation Dixie's failure; see *CIO*, p. 233.

[15] Goldfield, "Failure," p. 167.

[16] Frederick Law Olmstead quoted in Morris, "Labor Militancy," p. 32.

[17] Cash, *Mind*, pp. 29–31. For other examples, see Cannon, "Social Deterrents," pp. 382–401; Carlton, *Mill*, p. 144; and Goldfield, "Failure," p. 171.

[18] Cash, *Mind*, p. 243.

Still other scholars said that close ties between southern workers and their paternalist employers inhibited unionization. Writing just *before* the great textile strikes of the early 1930s, Harriet Herring argued that the rapid pace of southern industrialization had outstripped feelings of class consciousness. Instead of Marxian "ideas about the inexorableness of the industrial order," southern workers believed "in the rewards of ability and ambition. There has been too much similarity in the whole social philosophy of employers and employees for much disagreement between them."[19] Booker T. Washington and W. J. Cash believed that southern workers, white and black, were "more accustomed to work for persons than for wages," and accept the "moral right . . . of the upper orders to tell the people what to do and think."[20] Eager to put a positive spin on this interpretation of southern character, one employer told a congressional committee in 1885 that:

> There is a good feeling existing between the employers and the employed, both white and black, at the South which is not equaled in any other section of this country, or in Europe either. . . . Everything is in harmony, . . . That is caused by the fact that there is a liberality upon the part of the employers which dispenses justice to the employed willingly and cheerfully and without compulsion. This fact is recognized by the employees, and where there is justice between capital and labor, and no oppression, there is, of course, no necessity for collisions, strikes, or animosities.[21]

Not all shared this idyllic view of southern labor relations. Historian Richard Morris, for example, cited widespread labor militancy to dispute arguments that southern workers passively accepted poverty and oppression.[22] Discounting claims that southern workers rejected unions, George Mitchell attributed union weakness in southern textiles to state support for industrialists and the dispersal of industry in company towns.[23] "Notwithstanding claims that unionism is alien to the tradition of southern labor," Frederic Meyers, found "evidence . . . that past efforts to organize Southern labor have met with considerable success."[24] C. Vann Woodward agreed, citing strikes and unions throughout the South in the 1880s and 1890s as evidence that southern workers favored unions. It was, he argued, the political triumph of the South's "conservative party of business" that doomed unionism there.[25]

[19] Herring, *Welfare Work*, p. 23.

[20] Washington, "Negro," p. 756; and Cash, *Mind*, p. 352.

[21] Richard Payton in United States Senate, *Report 3*, p. 589.

[22] Morris, "Labor Militancy," pp. 33–36.

[23] Mitchell even argues that southern unions enjoyed advantages because southern workers were readier than their northern counterparts to join unions; Mitchell, *Textile Unionism*, p. 87.

[24] Meyers, "Knights of Labor," p. 479. Meyers's argument has been supported by several recent case studies. See, for examples, Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*; Douty, "Early Labor Organizations"; McLaurin, *Paternalism* and *Knights of Labor*; Reed, Hough, and Fink, eds., *Southern Workers*; Worthman, "Black Workers"; and Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor*.

[25] Woodward, *Origins*, pp. 228, 266, 5.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS FOR THE WEAKNESS OF SOUTHERN UNIONS

But if southern culture did not prevent working-class collective action, then what explains the weakness of southern unionism? In this article I introduce new data to evaluate cultural, structural, and political explanations for southern unionism. I first reject "cultural" explanations by showing that little of the North-South unionization gap remains after assessing the impact of measurable structural and political factors. Arguing further, I attribute the size and impact of the key "structural" variables, such as race and urbanization, to the political hegemony established by a southern white economic elite with the support of race-conscious southern whites. State support was crucial for unionization because working-class collective action needed public support to balance the economic power of employers. Northern workers sometimes won state support by electing sympathetic candidates, usually Democrats, and by influencing other elected officials who needed their votes to win reelection in closely divided constituencies. But wide election margins freed southern politicians from dependence on labor voters, leaving them free to follow a pro-business ideology and to favor employers against workers. State support for employers against workers in labor disputes, restrictions on labor mobility, the persistence of company towns, and the impact of racial divisions among workers all reflected employers' political hegemony in a one-party southern political process.

In regression analysis, virtually all of the North-South unionization gap during the period from 1880 to 1953 is explained by structural and political factors, leaving little to be explained by any distinct southern culture. Strikes were also less successful in the South than elsewhere, providing a link between state policy and unionization because it is shown that strikebreakers were used more aggressively and strikes were less successful in states where one political party had a wide margin of supremacy over its opposition.[26] Pro-labor legislation was also less common in the South and in northern states dominated by one political party. It is concluded that political competition forced northern politicians to make concessions to organized labor; the absence of such competition in the South allowed southern politicians to cater to the region's economic elites at the expense of organized labor.

COUNTING SOUTHERN UNIONS

The South has been hostile terrain for labor unions at least as far back as 1880. There were few labor unions anywhere in the United States in 1880, and even fewer in the South where the Census Department found only 134

[26] Data on American strikes from 1881 through 1894 and in 1903 are described in Friedman, *State-Making*.

TABLE 1
STATE LEVEL UNIONIZATION BY SOUTH OR NON-SOUTH, 1880–1914

Variable	Non-South	South	South / Non-South
State union members / 100 nonag. labor force, 1880	1.9	0.6	0.316
AFLdelegates / 100,000 nonag. labor force, 1880s	4.1	0.8	0.195
Union members / 100 workers, manufacturing in 24 states, 1900	8.7	3.2	0.368
AFL Central Labor Unions / 100 cities, 1900	6.6	4.9	0.742
AFL Central Labor Unions / 100 cities, 1912	20.9	6.1	0.292
Cities with union local / 100 cities: 4 unions, 1890	10.3	8.9	0.864
Cities with union local / 100 cities: 18 unions, 1903	18.9	14.8	0.786
Cities with union local / 100 cities: 14 unions, 1914	16.4	14.1	0.861
State union members / 100 nonag. labor force, 1939	22.3	10.8	0.484
State union members / 100 nonag. labor force, 1953	35.7	17.1	0.479

Note: The South includes the eleven confederate states plus Kentucky and Oklahoma.
Sources: Membership in 1880 is estimated from the number of local unions reported in United States, Department of the Interior, U.S. Census Office, *Tenth Census*. Estimates are described in Friedman, "New Estimates." The nonagricultural labor force by state is from United States, Department of the Interior, U.S. Census Office, *Tenth Census of Population*.

The address of delegates to AFL conventions is reported in the AFL, *Report* and subsequent years.

Membership in 18 manufacturing industries in 24 states are described in Friedman, *State-Making*, ch. 6. The unionization rate is calculated as union membership divided by the average number of wage earners from the United States, *Census of Manufactures, 1900*.

The location of AFL central labor unions is reported in the American Federation of Labor, *The Federationist* (various issues).

Data on the existence of a union local in any of the 1799 largest United States cities have been collected from union publications for 1890 for the Boilermakers, Carpenters, Postal workers, and Typographers (ITU). Data for 1903 are for the Boilermakers, Boot and Shoe Workers, Bricklayers, Carpenters, Cigar makers, Coopers, Flint glass workers, Hod Carriers, Machinists (IAM), Electrical Workers (IBEW), Molders (IMU), Metal Polishers, Painters, Postal Workers, Sheet Metal Workers, Stove mounters, and Typographers (ITU). Data for 1914 cover 14 unions including the Boilermakers, Carpenters, Cigarmakers, Coopers, Flint glass workers, Glass Blowers, Machinists (IAM), Electrical Workers (IBEW), Molders (IMU), Leather workers, Metal Polishers, Painters, Postal Workers, and Stove mounters.

Union membership for 1939 and 1953 is from Troy, *Distribution*.

local unions with an estimated membership of barely 9,000.[27] Of the 160,000 union members in 1880, fewer than 6 percent lived in the South. Even after taking account of the relatively small nonagricultural labor force in the South, there were fewer union members in the South than elsewhere, only 0.6 union members per 100 persons in the southern nonagricultural labor force compared with over 1.9 elsewhere in the United States (see Table 1).

[27] The number of local unions is reported in United States, *Tenth Census*. The procedure used to estimate membership per local is described in the appendix to Friedman, "New Estimates." The nonagricultural labor force by state is from United States, *Tenth Census of Population*. I estimated union membership in 1880 by assuming that union locals were the same size in every state. Since it is likely that southern union locals were smaller than locals elsewhere, there were even fewer southern union members in 1880 than I report.

The "South" is defined for this article as the 11 states of the Confederacy plus Kentucky and, later, Oklahoma.

TABLE 2
UNIONIZATION RATE FOR PARTICULAR UNIONS, SOUTH AND NON-SOUTH, 1890–1914

Union	Non-South	South	South / Non-South
Bricklayers, 1903	11.4	24.2	0.47
Bricklayers, 1910	21.2	39.4	0.54
Carpenters, 1890	3.3	9.4	0.35
Carpenters, 1903	14.1	25.7	0.55
United Mine Workers, 1909	25.3	43.7	0.58
Boot and Shoe Workers, 1902	0.1	6.9	0.01
Machinists, 1903	16.9	17.3	0.98
Machinists, 1914	21.0	11.8	1.78

Sources: Union membership is estimated from union publications reporting dues collections by local unions. Unionization rates have been calculated by dividing estimated membership by the reported labor force in the occupation from the United States Censuses of 1890, 1900 (for 1902 and 1903), and 1910 (for 1909, 1910, and 1914).

After this inauspicious start, southern unions barely kept up with northern membership growth. Union density in southern manufacturing in 1900 was barely a third the national average, and it was below the national average in every southern state for which data are available and in almost every industry. Compared with an average unionization of 8.1 percent in the North, southern unionization rates ranged from 0.3 percent in North Carolina and 1.8 percent in Texas up to only 2.2 percent in Louisiana, and 2.4 percent in Tennessee. Only Virginia, with a unionization rate of 5.7 percent had a rate even half the national average.[28] Southern union density was also below the national average in four of five national unions for which state data are available (see Table 2).[29] New Deal–inspired union growth in the 1930s

[28] Estimates are drawn from reports of union membership in state bureaus of labor statistics for California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Several modifications were made to these data:

Not all states reported union membership for 1900, and some reported membership for several different years. Because this was a period of rapid union growth, this could bias the estimate of a state's membership rate for states reporting membership for later years. To put membership on a comparable basis, I used equation 1

$$TMEMB_{t,i} = USMEMB_{1900,i} / USMEMB_{t,i} \quad (1)$$

where $USMEMB_{t,i}$ is national union membership for industry i in year t.

The unionization rate is estimated using equation 2

$$UPR_{i,s} = (MEMB_{i,s} * TMEMB_{t,i}) / WE_{i,s,} \quad (2)$$

where $UPR_{i,s}$ is the unionization rate in industry i in state s; $MEMB_{i,s}$ is reported membership in state s for industry i; $TMEMB_{i,s}$ is union membership in that state and industry; and $WE_{i,s}$ is the number of wage earners in that industry and state.

[29] The exception, the International Association of Machinists in 1914, originated in the South and was strongest on railroads; southern weakness may have been masked by the union's concentration on interstate commerce because the union was weak in southern metal working; see Fitch, "Birmingham District"; and Perlman, *Machinists*.

TABLE 3
REGRESSION FOR LOG-ODDS OF UNIONIZATION RATE IN AMERICAN STATES, 1880, 1900, 1939, AND 1953

	1880		1900		1939		1953	
Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	-5.78**	-4.89**	-6.79**	-2.40**	-4.37**	-0.95*	-2.33**	-0.03
Southern state	-0.05	-0.64	2.82**	-0.11	3.94**	-0.51	0.48	-0.81**
Percentage nonwhite	-2.87#	-0.44	-1.08*	-1.23	-1.41	-3.74*	-2.12*	-0.65
Percentage urban	2.51*	0.02*	2.29**	-0.04	0.01	0.01	0.003	0.004
Percentage foreign-born	-5.05*	-4.97**	-0.084	0.23	-1.39	-1.96	-1.87	-1.75
Percentage agricultural in state	1.63	1.51	-1.02#	-1.30*	-2.50**	-1.93*	-0.60	-0.93
Log of industry establishment size			-0.22**	-0.21**				
Industry sex ratio (males / employees)			2.50**	2.82**				
Percentage Democratic	2.16		5.34**		6.23**		4.79**	
*Percentage Democratic * South*	-0.85		-5.96**		-6.82**		-2.85	
Election margin		-1.88**		-1.04**		1.69*		-1.39*
Number of industry dummy variables			18	18				
Mean of dependent variable	-3.94	-3.94	-1.80	-1.80	-1.380	-1.380	-0.805	-0.805
R^2	0.58	0.56	0.58	0.55	0.57	0.42	0.66	0.60
F-value	4.78	6.46	20.02	17.92	7.43	5.00	11.15	10.29
N	36	36	397	397	48	48	48	48

** Significant at the 99 percent confidence level.
* Significant at the 95 percent confidence level.
# Significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

Note: This table includes the results of weighted regressions where the dependent variable is the log-odds of the unionization rate. The log-odds is calculated as

$$LOD = \text{LOG}(UPR / (1 - UPR)) \quad (1)$$

where *UPR* is the unionization rate calculated as follows

$$UPR = MEMB / WE \quad (2)$$

where *MEMB* is the number of union members in the industry within the state and *WE* is the nonagricultural labor force.

The weight used is the following

$$UPR*(1 - UPR) * (WE**0.5) \quad (3)$$

where (*WE***0.5) is the square-root of the number of wage earners.

Sources: 1880: Union membership and the nonagricultural labor force are from the sources described in Table 1. The proportion of agricultural workers in the state labor force, the percentage of the population foreign born, nonwhite, or living in urban areas are from the United States *Census* for 1880. The victory margins for the winning party in the gubernatorial elections of 1878 or, where no election was held then, in 1880 are the absolute value of the difference in the percentage of the vote received by the two leading parties. The victory-margin data are from Congressional Quarterly, *Guide*.

1900: Union membership and wage earners by manufacturing industry are from the sources described in Table 1. Independent variables are from the sources in Table 3. The average number of

TABLE 3—continued

workers per establishment and the proportion of males among the wage earners in an industry are from the *Census of Manufactures*. Election results are for the gubernatorial election of 1898 or, if no election was held then, of 1900 are from Congressional Quarterly, *Guide*.

1939: Union membership and the nonagricultural labor force are from Troy, *Distribution*. Election results for the presidential election of 1936 are from Congressional Quarterly, *Guide*. Other independent variables are from United States, *Census of Population, 1930*.

1953: Union membership and the nonagricultural labor force are from Troy, *Distribution*. Election results for the presidential election of 1952 are from Congressional Quarterly, *Guide*. Other independent variables are from United States, *Census of Population, 1950*.

narrowed the North-South gap only slightly, leaving the southern unionization rate still half that of the North in 1939 and 1953 (see Table 1).

Regression analysis of the state and city-level data summarized in Table 1 has been performed to separate the impact of structural and political factors inhibiting southern unionism from residual factors including those associated with southern values and culture. Regressions have been estimated for the determinants of unionization rates by state for 1880, 1939, and 1953, by manufacturing industry within 24 states in 1900, and for the presence of a union in selected occupations for 1799 cities in 1903 and 1914 (see Tables 3 and 4). In addition to a regional dummy variable for the South, I include as independent variables such "structural factors" as the proportion foreign-born, the proportion nonwhite, and, for the state-level regressions, the proportion of the state's labor force employed in agriculture and the proportion living in urban areas. For the city-level regressions the logarithm of the city's population is included as well as the proportion foreign-born and nonwhite in the city's population.

I also include in these regressions measures designed to capture working-class political power. These include the Democratic candidate's share of the vote and the victory margin of the winning party in the state in gubernatorial elections in 1878 (for the 1880 state-level regressions), and 1898 (for the 1900 state-industry regressions). The county victory margin in the presidential election of 1900 is included in regressions for the presence of a union local in cities in 1903, the county victory margin in the presidential election of 1908 is used for unions in 1914, the presidential vote from 1936 is used for 1939, and from 1952 for 1953.[30] The Democratic share is included to test the hypothesis that Democratic elected officials were more pro-labor than Republicans. The victory margin tests the hypothesis that electorally vulnerable officials were more responsive to the wishes of a large voting block, such as workers, than to

[30] In each case, both gubernatorial and presidential election results were used. The results presented are from regressions with a high *F*-statistic.

It would be desirable to include both the election margin variable and the Democratic vote variable in the same regression to test for their separate impacts. Unfortunately, the Democratic vote share is perfectly correlated with election margins in the South because the Democrats won every race in the elections considered.

TABLE 4
LOGIT REGRESSIONS FOR PRESENCE OF UNION LOCAL IN CITIES, 1903 AND 1914

Variable	1903		1914	
	Coefficient	*T*-Statistic	Coefficient	*T*-Statistic
Intercept	-15.41	-55.48	-12.52	-46.86
Log of city population	1.66	53.97	1.25	44.69
Percentage black in city	-1.36	-5.27	-0.66	-2.21
Percentage foreign-born in city	-2.68	-12.45	-1.44	-5.84
Building trade city pop*	0.21	3.98	0.75	9.85
Election margin	-0.01	-0.09	-0.38	-2.43
West	1.07	13.22	1.13	12.12
South	0.22	1.98	0.46	3.56
Mid-west	0.48	10.58	0.66	12.30
Number of union dummy variables	17		13	
N	32,652		25,396	
Mean of dependent variable	0.1814		0.1611	
Chi Squared	12,565.0		8,578.4	

Note: This table presents the results of logit regressions where the dependent variable equals one if there is a union in the occupation in the city and equals zero otherwise. The regressions are estimated across the 1,799 largest cities in 1900.
Sources: Union locations are for the unions and from the sources in Table 1. City population and the proportion foreign-born and nonwhite are from United States, Census Office, *Twelfth Census*, pp. 609–46. County election results for 1900, for the 1903 results, and 1908, for the 1914 results, are from Robinson, *Presidential Vote*.

the interests of relatively smaller numbers of financially powerful employers.[31]

The regressions are all statistically significant and explain much of the variation in unionization. Furthermore, structural and political variables explain the North-South unionization gap with little recourse to residual cultural or psychological explanations. Indeed, the southern dummy variable is often positive and it is significantly less than zero only in 1953; only in that year can one say with confidence that southerners were less likely to join unions.[32]

The regression results are generally consistent with the established literature on unionization. The proportion of foreign-born usually reduced unionization, sometimes as much as did the proportion nonwhite.[33] (This result is

[31] Political party, election margin, and working-class political leverage are also examined in Friedman, "Success."

[32] Note that this does not mean that southern culture supported collective action, only that when compared with the North the South was not distinctly hostile towards collective action. This analysis does not address the possibility that cultural values hostile towards unionization were common in *both* the North and South.

The cultural argument for the weakness of American socialism has been made by Seymour Martin Lipset; see, for example, Lipset, *First New Nation*, "American 'Exceptionalism'," and "Why No Socialism."

[33] Note that this does not hold in the manufacturing union regressions for 1900.

There is more literature on white racism than on nativism but unions had trouble crossing the language and culture gap separating immigrant and native worker. On immigration and racism, see, for example, Greene, *Slavic Community*; Mink, *Old Labor*; and Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy* and *Rise*.

particularly striking because the region with weaker unions, the South, had few immigrants so the negative effect of immigration on unionization narrowed the North-South unionization gap.[34]) The regressions also suggest that unions were stronger in urban areas—a finding consistent with a large literature identifying large cities as the centers of union organization and working-class political action since the early nineteenth century. The diverse social and economic life within cities may have enabled urban workers to join in collective action by freeing them from dependence on individual employers.[35] The South's smaller number of workers and the tendency for those workers to live in smaller communities precluded scale economies in organization. City size was associated with stronger unions throughout the country; southern cities such as New Orleans, Atlanta, Richmond, and Birmingham were no exception.[36] The greater number and the larger size of northern cities favored union organization there compared with the South.

There is considerable anecdotal evidence that it was especially difficult to organize unions in company towns dominated by one or a few employers. Common in early industrialization throughout the world, by the late nineteenth century, political opposition had almost banished company towns from the North just when rapid industrialization under an authoritarian government gave them new life in the South. Domination of the town's economic, political, and cultural institutions made southern company towns fortresses of anti-unionism. All employers could fire workers for organizing a union. But in company towns, "the act of discharging, automatically [also] removed him from the community, since he had to give up his house when he lost his job." Owners of company towns could regulate "the life that goes on there after the day's work is over in his mill. He has the power to discharge the worker at the mill, to refuse him credit at his store, to dump a worker's furniture out of a house, to have him expelled from church, to bar his children from school, and to withhold the service of a doctor or hospital."[37] Such power intimidated many workers; and by removing discharged activists from the community, employers made it harder for unions to grow "up from within."[38] Employers valued the power that company towns gave them to to "look after the morals" of their workers.[39] One South Carolina manager disarmingly acknowledged that "we govern like the Czar of Russia."[40]

[34] The proportion of African-Americans in the southern population is higher than the immigrant proportion in the North. On the other hand, the African-American share in most southern industries is lower than the immigrant share in many northern industries.

[35] See, for example, the discussion in Friedman, "Dividing Labor." Compare Gutman, "Workers' "; and Shorter and Tilly, *Strikes*.

[36] Marshall, *Labor*, p. 24; Fink, *Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills Strike*, pp. 7, 59; Rachleff, *Black Labor*; and Worthman, "Black Workers."

[37] Bernstein, *Lean Years*, p. 6.

[38] Herring, *Passing*, p. 66.

[39] An unnamed official quoted in Tannenbaum, *Darker Phases*, p. 47.

[40] Quoted in Bernstein, *Lean Years*, p. 7. Also see Ingalls, "Wagner Act."

The persistence of small company towns reflected the political climate around southern industrialization. Company towns depended on conscious political decisions to cede sovereign authority to private capitalists. The establishment of some company towns corrected market failures in areas that were experiencing rapid population growth or the emergence of new industries.[41] But all reflected political victories by employers over their workers. There was no housing- or retail-market failure in Birmingham, Alabama after 1900, for example. But after defeating a strike with a lock-out, the owners of the city's Sloss furnaces and the Ensley steel mill were able to compel their workers to live in company housing on streets patrolled by company police charged with keeping "out persons of sinister purpose" including not only union organizers but also inquisitive social scientists with cameras.[42] Without regard for economic efficiency, the establishment of company towns within Birmingham was a political act, the outcome of class conflict.

So thorough was the employer grip on local government that officials in towns such as Alcoa, Tennessee "could not sharpen a pencil without getting approval from a Company official."[43] Employers held this power because they had won government support over the active opposition of organized labor and others concerned with upholding democratic forms. Lacking state sanction, few northern employers could maintain company towns.[44] Southern employers could because of the political weakness of the southern labor movement. And behind labor's political weakness was the overwhelming imperative to maintain white supremacy through supporting a one-party political system.

UNION RACISM

Unionization increased with the proportion of whites in the labor force, an effect so strong that by itself it explains much of the gap between northern and southern unionization. A 35 percentage point increase in the proportion black in a state's population, approximately the difference between northern and the southern averages, reduced the unionization rate by over 60 percent in 1880, and by over 30 percent in 1900, 1939, and 1953. The same increase in a city's black population reduced the probability that there will be a union local by over 30 percent in 1903 and by 20 percent in 1914.[45]

[41] This is emphasized in Price Fishback's work. See Fishback, "Economics."

[42] Straw, "'This is Not a Strike'," p. 247. John Fitch lost his camera in one town to a deputy who explained that his job was "to keep people he didn't know off the property"; Fitch, "Birmingham District," p. 1539. On company towns North and South, see Fishback, *Soft Coal*.

[43] Parker, "Black Community," p. 79.

[44] Those, such as Pullman, who tried were eventually forced to divest themselves of their dominions. (The Pullman case is discussed later.)

[45] Of course, this understates the negative effect of racial differences on unionization because racism was the basis for the southern political system, which, after the 1890s, excluded white workers from any real influence on government policy.

A voluminous literature describes the difficulties unions had in organizing across the color line.[46] Union racism inhibited the organization of black workers and weakened unions of white workers by creating a pool of potential strikebreakers. Abandoning the egalitarian ethos of the Knights of Labor and the early AFL, some unions sought to reduce the labor supply to their trade by excluding blacks or admitting them on such an unequal basis that few sought membership. Few unions admitted African-Americans on an equal basis with whites. Black workers responded by complaining that unions' "hidden purpose . . . [was to] shut out and keep shut the doors of industry against a class of people on account of their race."[47] W. E. B. DuBois complained that unions "mobbed" immigrants to make them join unions but mobbed African-Americans "to keep them out."[48] Black workers responded with "a very widespread prejudice and distrust of labor unions." Some warned that attempts to "deprive the black man of his opportunity to labor" forced him "to be a professional strike breaker" to enter employments denied him by white-led unions.[49]

Still, race was not an insurmountable hurdle to union organization. Rather than allow racial divisions to undermine unionization, many white-led unions adapted their policies to accommodate black workers where they were present in significant numbers. After surveying 60 union leaders in 1913, Booker T. Washington found that most acknowledged that "race prejudice is a two-edged sword" hurting unions and white workers as much as black workers. Unionists, he concluded, have learned "that it is not to the advantage of organized labor to produce among the Negroes a prejudice and a fear of labor unions." As a result, "in every part of the United States where Negro laborers have become strong . . . the Negro has been welcomed into the unions."[50] Its early leaders' socialist ideals committed the American Federation of Labor to treat all without regard "to creed, color, sex, nationality, or politics." But ideology mattered less than recognizing "the shadow of black competition" looming on the horizon.[51] AFL leader Samuel Gompers warned a colleague that if they did not support union organization among

[46] For a *small* sampling of this literature on race and the American labor movement, see Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*; Davis, *Prisoners*; Du Bois, ed., *Negro Artisan*; Gitlin, *Twilight*; Gutman, "Negro"; Halpern, "Organized Labor"; Ignatiev, *How the Irish*; Karson and Radosh, "American Federation of Labor"; Rachleff, *Black Labor*; Mink, *Old Labor*; Northrup, *Organized Labor*; Reid, *Negro Membership*; Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy* and *Rise*; Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*; Washington, "Negro"; Wesley, *Negro Labor*; Wolfe, *Admission*; and Worthman, "Black Workers."

[47] D. A. Straker, Detroit attorney in 1914 quoted in Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge*, p. 100.

[48] Du Bois quoted in Barrett and Roediger, "In Between Peoples," p. 202.

[49] Washington, "Negro," pp. 763, 758. Strikebreaking was recommended by some African-American leaders. See, for example, the discussions in Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*, p. 128; *United Mine Workers' Journal*, 3 October 1901, p. 5; Reid, *Negro Membership*, p. 169; Marshall, *Labor*, p. 54. On the use of African-American strikebreakers, see Whatley, "African-American Strikebreaking," pp. 525–58.

[50] Washington, "Negro," p. 763.

[51] Du Bois, ed., *Negro Artisan*, pp. 157, 155.

colored workers "and thus make friends of them, they would of necessity be our enemies and utilized by our opponents in every struggle and whenever opportunity presents itself."[52] The secretary of the Broom Makers' union, an organization with 1,000 black members, agreed: "I am informed that some organizations refuse membership to the Negro. I consider it a serious mistake, as white labor cannot expect the Negro to refrain from taking their place unless we will assist him in bettering his condition."[53] Even southern racists among his union's membership, observed John Frey of the International Molders' Union, realized that "the question of Negro membership was an industrial one. The castings made by the Negroes were worth as much as those made by white men . . . It was not a question of social equality, but . . . of competition."[54]

Of course, many unions in the North as well as the South continued to reject black members well into the twentieth-century. Some craft organizations were able to remain exclusive in trades with few black workers, especially where union control over training allowed the white workers' unions to prevent blacks from entering the trade.[55] But where it mattered, in occupations with large numbers of black workers, market competition prevented union racism from remaining a barrier to organization. Around 1900 DuBois found that there were over 41,000 blacks in labor unions, including 20,000 members of the United Mine Workers and significant numbers of Barbers, Bricklayers, Carpenters, Cigar makers, Longshoremen, and Tobacco workers. Representing fewer than 4 percent of union members, African-Americans were under-represented in American unions; but economic interest as well as ideology moved unions towards racial justice.[56]

THE POLITICS OF SOUTHERN UNIONISM

In both North and South, unions were most successful where working-class voters had leverage over elected officials. Two variables represent labor's political leverage: the proportion voting Democratic and the election margin for the winning political party. In much of the North, especially after the New Deal of the 1930s, the Democratic Party was allied with organized labor, and a higher Democratic vote was associated with more state support for unions. Unions were also stronger where narrow election margins forced elected officials to respond to the wishes of working-class voters, including union members.

[52] Gompers to John Callahan, 17 May 1892, quoted in Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, p. 304, n. 96.
[53] Quoted in Du Bois, ed., *Negro Artisan*, p. 160.
[54] Quoted by Washington, "Negro," p. 765.
[55] See, for example, the discussion in Du Bois, ed., *Negro Artisan*, pp. 160–74.
[56] Of course, southern whites were also under represented.

From the 1880s through the 1950s, a wider margin of victory was consistently associated with fewer union members.[57] In the regression analysis (see Table 3) a 20 percentage point increase in the winner's victory margin lowered the unionization rate by 30 percent in 1880, by 17 percent in 1900, and by nearly 20 percent in 1953. The negative effect of political supremacy on unions was particularly important in the South because the margin between the parties was larger in that region. Democratic voting was also associated with more union members, especially in the North where, even before the New Deal, Democratic candidates were often allied with unions and where the usual Republican majority associated Democratic voting with narrower election margins. There, a 20 percentage point increase in Democratic voting was associated with a doubling in the northern unionization rate in 1880, 1900, 1939, and 1953. But the positive effect of increased Democratic voting was much smaller in the South because the Democrats won every election there and, therefore, increases in Democratic voting were associated with wider election margins. Democratic voting increased southern unionization by small amounts in 1880 and 1953, but reduced unionization in 1900 and in 1939 (see Table 3).

Election margins had more effect on the survival and persistence of union locals than on their initial establishment. The union boom leading up to 1903 spread unions even to many cities with wide election margins.[58] But an aggressive employer response was particularly effective in destroying union locals in localities dominated by one political party. As a result, election margins have only a small negative effect on the probability that there will be a union in a locality in 1903 but a strong negative effect in 1914 (see Table 4).[59]

WHY DID POLITICS MATTER TO UNION SURVIVAL?

State policy was critical for unionization because employer resistance to unions made labor disputes public affairs. State officials and local police determined the outcome of many disputes through their policy towards public actions by strikers, strikebreakers, and employers. Employers called on state officials to provide legal authority for private force against unions, to sanction strikebreakers, and to provide police force to break picket lines. For their part, unions sought state sanction for demonstrations to rally workers and to prevent the use of strikebreakers.

[57] Election margins were narrower where union membership was higher within the northern and southern regions as well as over the whole United States.

[58] The expansion of unions in many hostile localities during the 1897 to 1903 boom was noted by Selig Perlman in Commons et al., *History*.

[59] This is confirmed in a logit regression for union survival from 1903 through 1914 available upon request.

TABLE 5
STRIKES: SOUTH AND ELSEWHERE

Strike Characteristics	Period	Non-South (percentages)	South (percentages)
Union successful	1881–1894	55.3	42.3
Union successful	1903	65.0	46.1
Strikebreakers used	1881–1894	12.9	16.2

Sources: Data for 2,038 individual American strikes during the period from 1881 to 1894 are from the United States, Commissioner of Labor, *Third Annual Report* and *Tenth Annual Report*.

Southern employers resisted unions more effectively than did their northern counterparts, winning a significantly higher percentage of strikes. Between 1881 and 1894, for example, strikers were nearly 25 percent less likely to achieve any of their demands in the South than elsewhere; and they were 30 percent less likely to achieve any of their demands in 1903 (see Table 5). Southern strike defeats reflected the same structural factors linked with weak southern unions: small cities and racial divisions in the workforce.[60] These were associated with strike defeats throughout the country, North as well as South, but southern strikers were also more likely to have confronted strikebreakers. Between 1881 and 1894, for example, southern employers were nearly 50 percent more likely to have introduced strikebreakers than were their northern counterparts. Despite the smaller size and shorter duration of southern strikes, strikebreakers were employed in 16.2 percent of southern strikes compared with 12.9 percent of strikes elsewhere.[61]

The lack of political competition in the South made it possible for southern elected officials to support employers against strikers. Strikebreaking was a political act because strikebreakers needed police protection to cross picket lines and their employers needed protection for their property during strikes to operate with strikebreakers and to move materials in and out of struck establishments. But protecting struck employers could be politically risky because it was sure to antagonize large blocks of working-class voters, not only in large northern cities such as Chicago, New York, or San Francisco, but in some larger southern cities with competitive politics such as New Orleans.[62] Even powerful employers, such as the McCormicks of Chicago, complained regularly of local officials who failed to provide adequate police protection during strikes. By contrast, employers, North and South, were more successful in introducing strikebreakers where officials were elected by such wide margins that they did not depend on working-class voters. After controlling for election victory margins and other strike

[60] On the other hand, northern workers suffered in their strikes from the much greater ethnic heterogeneity among northern workers.

[61] Data on the use of strikebreakers are not available after 1894.

[62] See Arnesen, *New Orleans*, passim.

TABLE 6
LOGIT REGRESSIONS FOR USE OF STRIKE BREAKERS IN STRIKES, 1881–1894

Variable	Mean	Coefficient	*T*-Statistic
Intercept	1.000	−3.92	−7.73
Union involved	0.66	0.59	2.66
Election margin, 1880	0.07	1.82	1.89
Log (number of strikers)	3.69	0.15	2.53
Log (strike duration in days)	2.11	0.46	7.89
Log (average size of establishments struck)	4.15	−0.08	−1.36
Percentage agricultural of state labor force	0.29	0.77	1.24
Percentage nonwhite in state	3.54	−0.01	0.77
Unskilled laborer strike	0.31	0.54	2.02
*Union*laborer*	0.17	−1.02	−3.11
Construction	0.20	0.52	2.02
Mining	0.08	−0.89	−2.93
Transportation	0.06	1.09	3.95
City size >1,000,000	0.29	−1.07	−4.34
City size 250,000–1,000,000	0.14	−0.52	−2.00
City size 100,000–250,000	0.10	−0.19	−0.76
*Construction*city size > 1,000,000*	0.09	−2.00	−2.55
*Construction*city size 250,000–1,000,000*	0.03	−1.10	−1.74
*Construction*city size 100,000–250,000*	0.02	−1.26	−1.95
South	0.08	−0.32	−0.68
West	0.014	0.72	1.42
Mid-west	0.40	0.18	0.93
Number of year dummies	13		
Number of issue dummies	4		
N	2,044		
Mean of dependent variable	0.132		
Chi Squared	246.68		

Note: This table presents the results of logit regressions for the use of replacement workers in individual strikes from 1881 to 1894. The dependent variable equals one where there are no strikebreakers and zero otherwise.
Sources: Data for 2,038 individual American strikes during the period from 1881 to 1894 are from the United States, Commissioner of Labor, *Third Annual Report* and *Tenth Annual Report*. The election margin is given for the presidential election in the state from Congressional Quarterly, *Guide*.

characteristics, southern strikes were *less* likely to involve strikebreaking than strikes in other regions (see Table 6). Electoral considerations explain *all* of the greater use of strikebreakers in the South.[63]

A comparison of state policy in two Alabama mining strikes shows how political hegemony freed elected officials to favor employers in strikes. In 1894 Alabama's governor was conservative businessman T. G. Jones, who was narrowly elected over a strong Populist challenge in an election that temporarily shattered the monolithic structure of Alabama's Democratic Party. Fearful of further antagonizing industrial workers, who were still

[63] Using the coefficients in Table 6, the 25 percentage point difference between election margins in the North and the South would raise the share of strikes involving a strikebreaker from the northern average of 12.9 percent up to 18.9 percent, higher than the southern average of 16.2 percent.

eligible to vote in 1894, Jones hesitated to send troops to protect strike-breakers during that year's miners' strike and he withdrew them quickly after the miners objected. As miner leader, W. J. Kelso, noted: "the governor had taken his forces off the field for campaign purposes, for fear."[64] Deprived of state support, the mining companies were forced to accept a compromise settlement that entrenched the miner's union in the coal fields for the next 15 years.

Regretting his failure to employ greater force against the striking miners, Jones joined Alabama's business elite in promoting a constitutional convention in 1901 as "the best guarantee against a new threat to property in the form of a Populist revival."[65] Constitutional disfranchisement was presented as a tool to maintain white supremacy. But behind the racist rhetoric, poor whites were disfranchised along with blacks as a way of undermining any future populist challenges to Alabama's business elites' domination of the state government. The subsequent restoration of "conservative" government freed Jones's successor, cotton-mill owner and investor B. B. Comer, to support the mine owners in a 1908 strike. Insisting that "the peace of the state must be preserved," Comer banned "assemblies of strikers near the mines," forbade "marching along public highways," and instructed officers and sheriffs "to attend strikers' meetings and arrest incendiary speakers."[66]

When these measures failed to end the strike, Comer laid down terms to the union leadership: Either end the strike or he would call the legislature into special session to amend the vagrancy laws to allow him to arrest striking coal miners. The union was warned that "blood would flow in the streets of Birmingham" and eight leaders "would swing."[67] Comer was confident that the legislature would approve his requests because he had already turned the strikers' racial egalitarianism against them. Southern coal mining employed a large number of African-Americans; the biracial workforce compelled the miners' union to enlist their support. Comer warned the union leadership that the [white] public was "outraged at the attempts to establish social equality between white and black miners." "Idleness," he added, "always begets crime" and he could no longer tolerate a strike which had created so many idle blacks: "You know," he warned "what it means to have eight or nine thousand niggers idle in the state of Alabama, and I am not going to stand for it." Backing words with deeds, Comer ordered the militia to destroy the strikers' tent cities as threats to health and good order.[68]

[64] Quoted in Ward and Rogers, *Labor Revolt*, p. 103.

[65] Quoted in Hackney, *Populism*, p. 149. Also see Grantham, *Life*, pp. 20–21.

[66] Quoted in Straw, "'This is Not a Strike'," p. 224.

[67] Letwin, *Challenge*, p. 151.

[68] Straw, "'This is Not a Strike'," p. 99; Rogers, Ward, Atkins, and Flynt, *Alabama*, pp. 368–69; and Hackney, *Populism*, p. 320.

Homeless and facing arrest, the strikers were forced back to their homes in the company towns, returning to work on the operators' terms.

Thus racism was pressed into service against unions, but only after it was used to reduce working people's influence over elected officials. United Mine Workers' Vice President John White blamed the strike's failure on "that old race antagonism." The workers overcame racial divisions, maintaining biracial solidarity throughout the strike. But when the operators "saw that they had completely tied up the industrial situation in that country . . . then they went to the old closet and brought out the ghastly specter of racial hatred and held it before the people of Alabama."[69] "You are no longer dealing with the industrial question," White warned the strikers, "but with the racial problem."[70] As if to prove White's point, G. B. McCormack, president of the Alabama Coal Operators' Association, refused talks with the union because of its efforts to "force social equality between whites and blacks." Montgomery County Sheriff Higdon warned strikers that "this is a white man's country and there will be no nigger domination here."[71]

The miners' defeat was not due to a timeless clash between racial egalitarianism and the broader culture of white supremacy. Racial conflicts were as strong in earlier union victories as in the 1908 defeat. But in 1908 the miners' union was more vulnerable to racial attacks because disfranchisement had reduced the size and significance of the black electorate and the subsequent political hegemony allowed Alabama's political elite to use race against unions without fear of a voter backlash. Had more African-Americans and workers been eligible to vote, politicians might have feared antagonizing them with racist attacks on unions. Instead, postdisfranchisement, southern politicians could safely ignore workers, white or black. Few workers could register; those who did rarely voted; and if they voted, their votes could be "counted out" by corrupt election officials. But most important, their votes rarely mattered anyway in the South's one-sided electoral competitions after 1896. The South's economic elite was free to use its advantages of wealth, established leadership, and influence "to dominate the region's political life for a long time, while charting a conservative course and serving their own class interests." Presenting their program as a defense of the "white community in terms of cherished southern myths and cultural values," southern politicians were able to assure prospective investors: "'You're in the South here. You don't need to worry about unions.' They were just told: 'We guarantee you won't have a union.'"[72] Union organizers faced:

[69] Quoted in Straw, "'This is Not a Strike'," p. 106.

[70] White is quoted in Letwin, *Challenge*, p. 150.

[71] Quoted in Straw, "'This is Not a Strike'," pp. 98, 102.

[72] Grantham, *Life*, pp. 22–23. In 1947 Boss Crump of Memphis publically assured International Harvester that he would prevent the United Auto Workers or any other union from organizing its plant if they located in Memphis; Honey, *Black Workers*, p. 157.

> The mayor, the police chief, the deputy, the businessmen, the president of the Chamber of Commerce—everybody was against us. . . . They controlled most of the churches in the towns. Even the black churches they sometimes controlled too with donations. They owned practically everything else. They controlled the educational apparatus. They controlled the police force.[73]

One-party rule freed southern legislators to enact laws to promote business at the expense of labor. Ten southern states, and none in the North, had anti-enticement statutes restricting labor-market competition; several leased convicts to private businesses; and most restricted strike picketing and strikers' free speech.[74] A competitive political environment in some northern states forced politicians to heed the views of organized labor, sometimes even to help unions and strikers. Fear of losing the support of industrial workers, for example, led Massachusetts Republicans to establish the nation's first Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1869. (Initially staffed by prominent labor activists, the Massachusetts BLS survived employer attacks by adopting a less partisan stance under its long-time director and advocate of moderate trade-unions, Carroll Wright.) By 1900 the Massachusetts example had been followed in 29 other states where state bureaus of labor statistics provided moral support to unions and sinecures for labor activists.[75]

State bureaus of labor statistics were only one of several state programs established in response to the demands of organized labor. Active labor movements used a period of close political competition in the mid-1880s to win the enactment of reforms in several northern states. In 1886, for example, Massachusetts and New York established state strike arbitration programs favorable to organized labor. The votes of Massachusetts legislators who had been elected by narrow margins from districts with many union members were crucial in enacting a program that gave organized labor formal recognition in the state regulatory apparatus.[76] In 1887 legislators in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York granted a longstanding demand of organized labor by establishing an official holiday (Labor Day) honoring workers and their unions. By 1900 northern unions had won other concessions, including factory inspection, restrictions on homework and sweatshops, a Labor Day holiday, free state employment bureaus, and the estab-

[73] Union activists quoted in Griffith, *Crisis*, p. 88. For similar experiences, see Brattain, "'Town'."

[74] Zimmerman, "Penal Systems." Legislation restricting workers did not divide capitalist employers in industry from southern planters because both united against organized labor and to hold down wages. Judicial attitudes towards organized labor in the different states are summarized in Groat, *Attitude*.

[75] The state bureaus and their origins are discussed in Brock, *Investigation*; Cartosio, "Strikes," pp. 19–42; and Shaw, "Social and Economic Legislation." On Wright, see Leiby, *Carroll Wright*; and Wright, *Battles* and "Historical Sketch."

The presence of a state BLS is associated with higher unionization rates in regressions similar to those in Tables 3 and 4. These regressions are available upon request.

[76] See the discussion in Friedman, "Worker Militancy," pp. 5–17, *State-Making*, ch. 2, and "Success."

TABLE 7
PROPORTION OF STATES WITH LABOR REFORMS ENACTED BEFORE 1900

Labor Reform	North	South
State bureau of labor statistics	0.862	0.417
Factory inspection	0.690	0.083
Sweat-shop regulation	0.276	0.000
State employment bureau	0.241	0.000
State strike arbitration	0.724	0.167
State Labor Day holiday	0.862	0.583
Protection of union membership (1907)	0.361	0.000

Sources: Hatch, "Government Industrial Arbitration, 389–655; and Willoughby, "State Activities." Protection of union membership is from United States, Commissioner of Labor, *Twenty-Second Annual Report*, pp. 197–98, 231, 322, 381–82, 479, 594, 689, 822, 846–47, 1010, 1055–56, 1164, 1441.

lishment of programs for state strike arbitration.[77] Such measures were rare in the South where politicians did not need to make concessions to win labor votes. In 1900, for example, 86 percent of northern states had a bureau of labor statistics compared with only 42 percent of southern states; 69 percent of northern states had state factory inspections compared with only one southern state; and 72 percent of northern states had programs for the arbitration of strikes by state officials compared with only 17 percent of southern states. Thirty-six percent of northern state had laws protecting union membership; no southern state had such legislation (see Table 7).

Labor reform legislation lagged in the South because it was concentrated in states with narrow election victory margins (see Tables 8 and 9). Election margins in states without a bureau of labor statistics were four times those in states with a bureau, and the margins were five times as great in states without factory inspections as in states with inspections. In regressions for the number of labor reform measures enacted in the state, urbanization and unionization in 1880 were associated with additional labor reforms. Even after controlling for these factors, increases in the election victory margins were associated with fewer labor reforms (see Table 9).

Labor's political influence in many Northern states extended beyond strikes to police and regulatory behavior. It allowed Illinois unions to undermine company towns and to avenge themselves on a prominent opponent. Seeking political advantage after the Pullman Strike of 1894, a strike conducted against a prominent Republican fund raiser and activist, the state's

[77] See, for example, the union demands discussed in McNeill, *Labor Movement*; and Mitchell, *Organized Labor*. Southern unions demanded many of the same programs as their northern counterparts; see Mullenix, "History"; and Taft, *Organizing Dixie*.

Shawn Kantor and Price Fishback find that greater voter participation was associated with the defeat of workers' compensation programs in Missouri referendums in the 1920s. This may suggest that higher voter participation in northern states would have retarded labor reform rather than advancing it, as I have argued. But it may be, as Kantor and Fishback discuss, that their finding reflects a characteristic of voting on complicated issues in referendums rather than the nature of the political coalition behind labor reform. See Kantor and Fishback, "Coalition Formation."

TABLE 8
STATE ELECTION MARGINS IN STATES WITH AND WITHOUT SELECTED LABOR REFORMS, CIRCA 1900

Labor Reform	States Without Legislation	States With Legislation
State bureau of labor statistics	33.3	8.1
Factory inspection	25.3	4.8
Sweat-shop regulation	17.3	4.6
State employment bureau	17.1	4.0
State strike arbitration	23.1	8.4
State Labor Day holiday	21.3	13.0
Protection of union membership (1907)	23.5	15.0

Sources: Legislation by state is from the sources cited in Table 7. Election data by state for 1890 are from Burnham, *Presidential Ballots*. Election results for the presidential election of 1900 are used for the protection of union membership row; they are from Congressional Quarterly, *Guide*.

Democratic governor proposed raising taxes on the Pullman company and regulating sleeping-car rates. The Pullman Company beat back this attack, but it lost a suit brought by the state's Democratic Attorney General Maurice T. Maloney over the company's right to own the land and residences of the town of Pullman.[78] Thus two Democratic politicians with labor constituencies were able to bring down the North's most prominent experiment in company-town building.

CONCLUSIONS: THE POLITICS OF UNIONIZATION

Observing the turmoil of the Pullman strike of 1894, advocates of southern industrialization declared the South "the ideal place for Northern capital and industry." Its workers had "no disposition to strike"; instead, they were ready for "long hours of labor" at "moderate wages."[79] But the South was not always so friendly to capitalist industrialization. Even after the Civil War, many celebrated the region's agrarian heritage while others favored industrialization but opposed unfettered capitalism.[80] Populists in the 1890s opposed capitalists' demands for state support; they were sometimes joined by conservatives and moderates who condemned corporate attacks on labor organizations as "blows to our free institutions."[81]

It was only in the 1890s that southern employers gained secure political support for capitalist industrialization. Disfranchisement of African-Americans and of many white workers and small farmers removed the popular

[78] The Illinois Supreme Court required the company divest itself of the town of Pullman, denouncing paternalism as "opposed to good public policy and incompatible with the theory and spirit of our institutions." Quoted in Lindsey, *Pullman Strike*, p. 342. Also see Buder, *Pullman*, pp. 206, 212; and *Chicago Tribune*, 25 October 1894. Illinois party politics and organized labor are discussed in Schneirov, *Labor*.

[79] The *Southern Manufacturers' Record*, 13 July 1894, p. 385, quoted in Woodward, *Origins*, p. 265.

[80] See, for example, the classic discussion of agrarianism in Woodward, *Burden*, pp. 3–26.

[81] A former South Carolina state attorney general quoted in Carlton, *Mill*, p. 139.

TABLE 9
REGRESSIONS FOR NUMBER OF LABOR REFORMS ENACTED BY STATES BY 1900

Variable	Mean	Coefficient	*T*- Statistic
Intercept	1.000	1.155	1.109
Election Margin	0.148	-2.344	-1.782
Percentage urban in state's population	36.863	0.014	1.998
Percentage agricultural of state's labor force	45.105	0.016	0.953
Unionization rate of state's labor force, 1880	1.217	0.569	2.851
Southern state	0.293	-0.921	-1.382
Mean of dependent variable	2.951		
R-squared	0.666		
F-Statistic	13.930		
DFE	35		

Note: This regression includes as the dependent variable the number of six selected labor reforms enacted in the state by 1900. The labor reforms are those given in Tables 7 and 8.
Sources: Labor reforms are from the sources discussed in Table 7. Sources for the independent variables are given in Table 3. Election data by state for 1890 are from Burnham, *Presidential Ballots*.

base for radical political movements, preventing effective challenge to one-party hegemony. By eliminating serious political competition, disfranchisement freed southern politicians to act as agents of capital against labor. Nowhere else in the United States did state officials work so closely with employers against labor. Many northern politicians shared ideology and personal interests with employers, but a vigorous democracy and party competition restrained those who depended upon working-class voters for election. Electoral security freed southern politicians to advance a one-sided probusiness agenda.

Behind weak unions was political hegemony; and behind hegemony was white racism. Racism allowed southern politicians to disfranchise their opponents, freeing them to support employer campaigns against unions without fear of electoral consequences. Southern politics had implications beyond the South. By hindering the development of southern unionism, race-based political hegemony in the South inhibited the establishment throughout the United States of what elsewhere has been the pillar of twentieth-century social democracy: a strong labor movement. Throughout the twentieth century, political movements to redistribute wealth and power in the South were rendered feeble by weak unions. The weakness of southern labor unions hindered the establishment in the South of cross-ethnic, cross-race political coalitions along class lines that empowered workers politically in the North and in Europe. By leaving southern politicians free to favor business against labor, southern racism undermined labor not only in the American South, but throughout the world.

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