“Loosing the Bonds of Wickedness”: When Abolitionists Won the Churches

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Abstract

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Why was there so much more antislavery activism in some American Protestant denominations than in others? In this dissertation, I conduct a comparative case study of five national antebellum denominations to explain why abolitionists sometimes mobilized a strong, collective challenge to slavery within their own churches—and why they sometimes did not. I find that abolitionists faced suppression by denomination leaders in all five churches, but that the configuration of denominational authority shaped opportunities for abolitionist mobilization and success. In the face of opposition from leaders, church-centered abolition movements thrived only in denominations where leaders lacked the capacity to prevent their mobilization.

Across all five cases, the threat of a powerful proslavery backlash caused leaders to unite in opposition to abolitionists. Abolitionists managed to overcome this resistance when church authority was less concentrated overall, was primarily rational-legal rather than traditional or charismatic, and was also constrained by strong democratic practices. These characteristics limited leaders' repressive capacities and increased access points for challengers, creating opportunities for abolitionists to make demands for antislavery church policy, engage in meaning-making, and harness church networks, while also turning leaders' suppressive attempts into a rallying cry that drew additional supporters. Through these activities, they gained strength—and eventually rid their churches of slavery.

In contrast, in churches with highly concentrated traditional authority and less democratic decision-making procedures, abolitionism did not thrive. Instead, leaders successfully suppressed abolitionists by denying them access to arenas for contention, maintaining tight control over narratives regarding slavery and abolition, and excluding (or threatening to exclude) challengers. These churches have often been characterized as broadly tolerant of slavery, but I show that reality is more nuanced: instead of a widely held tolerance of slavery, the denominations with

limited abolitionism were those churches in which the configuration of power lent itself towards suppression and therefore hindered the growth and success of abolitionism.

This dissertation thus addresses inadequacies in the prevailing explanation for religious responses to slavery, challenging their emphasis on theology as the core reason for why some denominations supported slavery while others supported abolition. It also advances social movement theory by showing how organizational characteristics shape opportunities for movements targeting non-state entities and by showing how successful challengers were able to widen opportunities for their movement by exploiting their target weaknesses. Finally, it speaks more broadly to the relationship between large scale political contention and the struggles that play out within civil society organizations.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In the three decades leading up to the American civil war, abolitionists in some churches mobilized a powerful movement to purify their religious communities from the sin of slaveholding and to gain the support of their churches for the broader fight against slavery. While these abolitionists generally failed to wholly convert their churches to the abolitionist cause, in some churches they managed to gain important concessions that caused slaveholders and their supporters to depart from the church, thereby freeing those churches from direct ties with slavery. Yet, in other denominations, opponents of slavery remained marginal and the community tolerated slavery with seemingly little contention. What explains the differential emergence and success of church-centered abolitionism in these denominations?

Sociological research on religion and slavery has emphasized the role of this-worldly theology in stimulating abolitionism, and of otherworldly theology in promoting toleration of slavery (Patterson 1982, King and Haveman 2008, Budros 2011). The argument is that this-worldly churches sought to redeem society, while otherworldly churches taught acceptance of worldly conditions and a focus on the afterlife. Similarly, religious historians have contended that churches with little internal abolitionist activity were the ones that were indifferent to social and political problems more broadly (e.g. Ahlstrom 2004: 657-68, Manross 1943: 347, and Fife 1960: 143). However, these explanations fail to hold up to comparative scrutiny, as theological worldliness fails to account for which denominations experienced high levels of abolitionist activity and which did not.

In this dissertation, I conduct comparative case studies of five major antebellum Protestant denominations—the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Disciples of Christ—and draw on social movement theory to explain why an impactful collective challenge to slavery emerged in some churches but not in others. I show that abolitionists existed in all five denominations, but they only found opportunities to mobilize a church-centered challenge in some of them. In all five denominations, religious leaders attempted to suppress abolitionism in order to avoid backlash from the numerically larger proslavery forces, yet this suppression worked in only some denominations. As I will show, what accounts for denominational differences in abolitionist mobilization and success was the configuration of authority in the churches, which shaped the opportunity structure for would-be challengers.

The churches that eventually had strong, impactful internal abolition movements were the ones in which authority was less concentrated, primarily rational-legal rather than traditional or charismatic, and in which church leaders were constrained by democratic practices. Abolitionists took advantage of the opportunities presented by these authority structures to demand antislavery church policy, to engage in claims-making, and to harness church networks even in the face of resistance from leaders. In contrast, in churches with highly concentrated traditional authority, abolitionism did not thrive. Instead, leaders were able to suppress the movement by denying abolitionists access to arenas for contention, were able to maintain tight control over narratives regarding slavery and abolition, and were able to exclude (or threaten to exclude) challengers. These churches have often been portrayed as broadly tolerant of slavery, but I show that the reality is more nuanced: instead of a widely held tolerance of slavery, the denominations with limited abolitionism were those churches in which the configuration of power lent itself towards suppression and therefore hindered the growth and success of abolitionism.

The account I develop here advances our understanding of religion and slavery by applying social movement theory to resolve inadequacies in the prevailing explanation for the rise of abolitionism in antebellum churches and its subsequent impact on church slavery policies. I use the case of church-centered abolitionist to build upon and refine existing social movement theory on how targets respond to social movement pressure, with a particular emphasis on when and how non-state targets can prevent movement mobilization and how creative movement actors can sometimes defy suppressive attempts. More broadly, this study documents the interplay between political contention and organizational dynamics, showing how the configuration of authority within the churches influenced their roles in the broader political conflict.

Church-Centered Abolitionism

Church-centered abolitionism was an offshoot of the broader abolition movement that focused on removing slavery from the churches and gaining their support in the broader fight against slavery. Church-centered activists targeted their own religious communities, wishing to shed their ties to slavery and to purify their communities from acts they considered sinful. Most were also engaged in political antislavery activism, but they viewed religiously oriented abolitionism to be important in its own right.

Church-centered abolitionism kept pace with the broader abolition movement, which mobilized and demobilized at different moments during the antebellum period, in accordance with changes in the broader political landscape. The first wave of abolitionism occurred during the revolutionary period and culminated in the abolition of British and US involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the early 19th century. During this early wave, Northern states enacted gradual emancipation laws. Though Southern states did not immediately follow suit, many believed that the end of the transatlantic slave trade would naturally lead to a gradual end to slavery itself (Deyle 2009: 836).

In fact, the abolition of the slave trade neither stopped nor stalled American slavery. Between the termination of the slave trade and start of the civil war, the population of enslaved people in the United States tripled, reaching nearly four million by 1860 (Smith 1998). Growth in the number of enslaved people, along with the introduction of the cotton gin, led the South to become deeply reliant on unfree labor. The increased economic entrenchment of slavery in turn led to the development of a culture and way of life that was inextricably linked to human bondage, making the US South a true "slave society" and not just a "society with slaves" (Davis 1999, Fogel 1989, Kolchin 2003, Patterson 1982).

In the 1830s, a second wave of antislavery activism developed: the immediatism of Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and their allies, all of whom were committed to the immediate and total abolition of slavery. As this "radical" abolitionism grew into a national movement, pro-slavery forces in America rallied an ideological countermovement. Proslavery ideology crystalized after the 1830s, marked by a proliferation of writing in defense of slavery from both the North and South, which included the development of Biblical arguments in favor of slavery (Davis 2006: 175-92, Noll 2006, Tise 1987).

Many radical abolitionists included the church among their targets. Church-centered abolitionists disrupted denominational meetings, led public protests, organized religious antislavery societies, engaged in letter writing campaigns targeting co-religionists or church leaders, swamped church agencies with petitions, and distributed abolitionist literature (McKivigan 1984). They threatened to withdraw from churches that tolerated slavery, and often did so. In response, slaveholders and their supporters mobilized a countermovement to challenge this moral assault and prevent the adoption of antislavery church policies. Proslavery activists demanded that churches morally legitimize slavery and declare slaveholding compatible with Christian piety. Like the abolitionists, they backed their demands with the threat of withdrawal from the churches (McKivigan 1984, Davis 2006).

Churches caught between these two warring factions tended to side with the larger and more powerful proslavery force[1]. This was true even in churches that had previously expressed opposition to slavery during the less contentious 18th century, such as the Methodist Church. Yet, where abolitionists developed significant power as a movement, they were able to change leaders' strategic responses to the movement, eventually achieving significant gains. Church-centered activists wanted religious leaders to ban slaveholding, thereby accomplishing the double task of freeing the churches from slavery and using the churches' authority to end or dramatically reduce slaveholding. While none of the church-centered abolitionists of the 19th century managed to wholly convert their churches to the abolitionist cause, in several of the largest denominations abolitionists mobilized a sustained challenge to slavery, eventually achieving concessions that caused Southerners to leave the church in protest, effectively ridding the churches of association with slavery.

Theology and Church Centered Abolitionism

Past studies on religion and slavery have treated antislavery activism as a direct consequence of particular theological positions (Budros 2011: 441-2, Ahlstrom 1994: 661, Addison 1951: 192 Hein and Shattuck 2004: 77, Mullin 1986: 125-6, Butler 1995: 152, Garrison and DeGroot 1948: 330). Theology is thought to propel members and clergy of some churches towards antislavery activism, while leading those in other churches to accept slavery as a fact of life. This amounts, essentially, to explaining social movement success purely in terms of grievances, without examining the myriad factors that determine whether individuals act on their discontent at all,

[1] The Quakers, who were unique in their adoption of a total and permanent slaveholding ban, are an exception to this general pattern. They resolved their internal struggle over slavery in 1808 (Scherer 1975: 69-72, 131). By reaching an antislavery resolution during the earlier wave of abolitionism and prior to the South's transition into a true slave society (Patterson 1982), Quakers did not experience the same pressure to concede to Southern demands. Indeed, prior to the 19th century, it was not uncommon to hear antislavery views expressed in the South; the united support for slavery in the South itself developed over the early decades of the 19th century (Stampp 1943). Thus, even though early Quakers were themselves deeply involved in slavery and the slave trade (Scherer 1975: 69), Quaker abolitionists faced less opposition in their struggle for antislavery church policy than did the abolitionists who attempted to mobilize later, when the South was more united in defense of slavery.

whether they do so individually or collectively, and whether their collective responses are sustained and impactful.

Sociologists, in particular, have focused on the effect of "otherworldly" religion, which is Weber's (1993: 27-8) term for religion that directs behavior towards spiritual ends rather than worldly ends. Orlando Patterson (1982, p. 70-6) attributes slavery's success in the American South in part to evangelical otherworldliness, arguing that the evangelical Protestants tolerated worldly evils, including slavery, because they constructed "salvation as a purely spiritual change, the rewards of which are to be achieved in the here-after."

King and Haveman (2008) use the distinction between this-worldly and otherworldly theology in their investigation of state-level differences in antislavery activism. While Patterson considers otherworldliness to be a characteristic of the 19th century evangelical Protestantism in general and uses it to explain how America transformed from a "society with slaves" to a true "slave society," King and Havemen deploy the concept more narrowly. They contend that 19th century protestant denominations differed in their worldliness and find that more antislavery societies were founded in states where this-worldly denominations predominated, while fewer antislavery societies were founded in states where otherworldly denominations predominated (494).

In contrast, Budros (2011) found that the predominance of this-worldly churches was *not* correlated with a greater "risk" of abolition by Northern states in post-revolutionary America. Although he found that larger levels of overall religiosity in a state were associated with an increased risk of abolishing slavery, this-worldly theology itself did not have an effect. According to Budros, the worldliness hypothesis was undermined by the fact that several of the this-worldly denominations of the period did not actually support abolition, while several of the denominations in which abolitionism flourished were otherworldly.

Table 1: Worldliness and Abolitionism

Denomination	Worldliness	Abolitionist Mobilization
Baptist	Otherworldly	+
Lutheran	Otherworldly	-
Methodist	Otherworldly	+
Congregationalists	This-worldly	+
Disciples of Christ (Christian Churches)	This-worldly	-
Episcopalian	This-worldly	-
Presbyterian	This-worldly	+
Quaker	This-worldly	+

Notes: As detailed in chapter 4, abolitionist Presbyterians had mixed successes; they are coded here as positive mobilization cases because abolitionists mobilized in at least some branches of the church, but it should be noted that they were not always successful.
Sources: 1850 US Census of Religious Bodies, King and Haveman (2008: 502), Ahlstrom (2004:658-68), McKivigan (1984, especially ch. 1, 2, and 4), Engelder (1964), Weatherford (1957), Foss (1850), Scherer (1975), Heathcote (1919: 40-69), Protestant Episcopal Church (1785-1862), Methodist Episcopal Church (1855).

This-worldliness also fails to explain the emergence of church-centered abolitionism. Table 1 shows the largest denominations of the antebellum period along with their worldliness,

as coded by King and Haveman (2008), along with a dichotomous indicator of abolitionist mobilization. This-worldliness corresponds to abolitionist mobilization in only four of the eight denominations shown in Table 1. The Methodists and Baptists, for example, are famous for the sectional schisms brought about by extensive abolitionist agitation, and yet they are considered otherworldly. Among the this-worldly Episcopalians and Disciples of Christ, on the other hand, abolitionists achieved were marginal at best. As I will show in this dissertation, they mustered only a small number of isolated protests that failed to generate significant growth in numbers and legitimacy, and also failed also to achieve concrete policy changes. Indeed, they did not even stir up a national denominational debate over slavery. Thus, neither emergence nor success of antislavery activism appear to be the direct result of this-worldly theology.

Organizational Opportunities: A New Explanation for Church-Centered Abolitionist Emergence and Success

The problem with the existing research on religion and slavery is that it imagines church-centered abolitionism as the result of aggregated individual preferences, and not as a social movement. While theology may be able to explain the development of antislavery beliefs and may even provide the basis for mobilizing frames (see Young 2008, 2010), there are a host of other factors that intervene between incentives and the actual emergence of a successful movement. In this section, I draw together key insights from social movement theory to develop a new explanation for why abolitionism flourished in some churches but not in others.

We know from the extensive literature on social movements that, in addition to incentives, movement mobilization requires networks and organizational infrastructure along with opportunities for success that challengers recognize as such (Tarrow 2011: 163-4). While church-centered abolitionists were members of the organizations they targeted and therefore had built-in networks and organizational resources, favorable opportunities were often more problematic.

According to political opportunity theory, the prospects for movement mobilization and success depend on characteristics of the broader political environment (Eisinger 1973, Tilly 1978, Kitschelt 1986, Brockett 1991, Kriesi et al. 1992). McAdam (1996: 27) distilled four critical dimensions of the "political opportunity structure" which have been shown to influence social movement mobilization: (1) the formal legal and institutional structure of a polity; (2) the stability or instability of elite alignments; (3) the presence of absence of elite allies; and (4) the state's capacity and propensity for repression. Once mobilized, the success of a social movement then depends on challengers' tactics and deployment of legitimate frames (Tarrow 2011). But the repertoires and frames need not only be effective in their own right, they must also be appropriate for the political context (Cress and Snow 2000, Amenta et al. 2010). Still, even given appropriate tactics, opportunities may constrain achievements (Luders 2010, Meyer and Staggenborg 1996, Amenta et al. 1992).

There is one important limitation to the literature on political opportunities: it has focused on movements that target the state. Church-centered abolitionists, in contrast, targeted their own religious communities instead of (or in addition to) the state. How well, then, can one expect a theory developed from research on state-oriented movements to apply to movements with non-state targets?

Fortunately, there is new and growing research on movements with non-state targets, some of which focuses explicitly on extending political opportunity theory to movements with non-state targets. Scholars have shown that factors analogous to the dimensions of the political opportunity structure, such internal cleavages, changes in organizational structure, the presence

of elite allies, and the openness of the organization's "polity," all influence the ability of social movements to mobilize and to obtain concessions from the non-state entities they target (Jasper and Paulson 1993, King 2008, Raeburn 2004, Weber et al. 2009).

For several important dimensions of the political opportunity structure, Walker et al. (2008: 40-1) see states and organizations as occupying different positions along a continuum. They argue, for instance, that schools and corporations are less open to challengers than states, since they have a narrower jurisdiction (i.e. they encompass fewer possible challengers) and they represent a narrower range of interests (which they suggest leads to fewer or less severe cleavages among elites). Comparing states with universities and corporations, they contend that each type of target has some capacity for repression, facilitation, or channeling of social movement activity, but that the state has the greatest capacity for each response (43).

Kurzman (1998: 25) adapts political opportunity theory to religious targets in particular and develops a framework that is especially relevant to the present case. He distills McAdam's four dimensions of political opportunity into two dimensions of "organizational opportunity:" an attitudinal dimension, which encompasses the presence of elite allies and the propensity towards repression; and an authority dimension, which refers to leaders' capacities to block a movement they do not support. The authority dimension entails the openness of the "polity," the stability of elite alignments, and the capacity for repression.

Drawing on Kurzman's formulation of organizational opportunities, I hypothesize that church-centered abolitionism should flourish in one of two conditions: either when challengers have allies among the religious leadership (what Kurzman refers to as "attitudinal" opportunities), or when leaders lack the capacity to prevent mobilization. Thus, to understand differences in abolitionist mobilization across the churches, one needs to understand when and why elites supported the movement and the circumstances under which they were able to prevent mobilization if they did not support it.

Church-Centered Abolitionism as an Unpopular Movement

What factors determine elite support for a social movement? While the data do not support this-worldly theology as a direct cause of abolitionist mobilization, an alternative possibility is that theology impacted abolitionist *opportunities* by impacting elite support for the movement. Yet, according to Luders (2010), this too is unlikely. Investigating when targets such as businesses and local political officials conceded to the civil rights movement, Luders' (2010: 13) develops a model for how targets respond to challengers that is useful for understanding the present case. He shows that targets responded strategically, weighing the costs of social movement disruption against the costs of conceding to movement demands.

Luders contends that a target will concede to a disruptive challenger unless the cost of doing so equals or exceeds the disruption costs. For example, if a movement makes public claims that damage an organization's reputation or if protests drive away business, then leaders will be pressured to grant concessions regardless of their views of the movement in order to reduce that disruption. However, if the concessions would cost the organization significant time or money, or if third parties such as countermovements, customers, or supporters would object to the concessions, then the pressure to concede might be matched or exceeded by the costs. If concession costs exceed disruption costs, then targets should be expected to resist the movement.

Importantly, Luders (2006: 969) contends that dominant local norms or even leaders' individual values only influence the target's response when both concession and disruption costs are low. In other words, when targets are insulated from movement (and countermovement)

disruption or when neither challengers nor third parties impose significant costs, leaders are free to make concessions based on their own values or on prevailing local sentiment. Otherwise, we can expect them to respond strategically to social movement pressure, conceding when concession costs are lower than disruption costs and resisting challengers when concession costs exceed disruption costs.

Drawing on Luders, then, one would expect theology to play an important role in determining target responses to abolitionism *only when both concession and disruption costs are both low*, i.e. when church leaders had the freedom to make choices without significant costs to their organizations. As I will show over the course of this dissertation, religious leaders were deeply concerned with the consequences of slavery conflict for their churches, and frequently cited these concerns while attempting to suppress abolition. This was often true even for church leaders that expressed antislavery views in their own writings or correspondences. Especially in such cases, proslavery action on the part of church leaders cannot be explained by theology.

Church leaders confronted with abolitionist agitation frequently expressed intense concern over the Southern backlash that would occur if they showed any support for abolition. As I will discuss later in greater detail, the earliest American Methodist leaders were themselves strongly opposed to slavery and banned slaveholding in the original church constitution, but they quickly retracted antislavery policies when faced with Southern opposition (Coke 1816: 74). Their concessions to proslavery, which they made despite their own personal convictions, demonstrate both the powerful role of instrumental concerns and the extent of the threat posed by proslavery interests.

The view that organizations behave strategically, rather than based on values, is consistent with the organizational theories of Selznick (1949: 256) and Michels (2009: 338), who each warned that formal organization entails its own imperatives and leaders tend to become preoccupied with organizational persistence. The concern for organizational survival can even lead to actions that run counter to an organization's primary mission. Thus, although churches have a moral mission, and although leaders sometimes opposed slavery themselves, it is indeed possible that the moral problem of slavery became a subsidiary concern in the face of threat posed by the proslavery faction of the church.

The relative sizes of the proslavery and abolitionist forces in the 1830s suggest that the Methodists were probably not wrong in judging proslavery backlash to be a greater threat to church survival than abolitionist disruption. By the 1830s there was no measurable support for abolition in the antebellum South (Stampp 1943), but there *was* support for slavery in the North, as reflected in the violence and vandalism perpetrated by Northern anti-abolition mobs (Harrold 1995, Richards 1970). Membership in anti-slavery societies throughout the nation was small; in 1838 it was probably between 72,000 (AASS 1838: 129-52) and 150,000 (Birney 1838: 7), less than 1% of the combined white and free Black population of the United States (US Census 1840).

A description of church factions by the American Baptist Home Mission society in 1841 affirms this characterization:

> Our brethren at the South, with great unanimity, deprecate the discussion [of abolition] as unwarranted, the measures pursued as fatal to their safety, and complain of the language occasionally employed [by abolitionists] as cruel and slanderous. The brethren at the North are found divided in sentiment. Some are earnest and decided in believing it their duty to urge upon the South, with great plainness the consideration of this question. Another portion incline to some of

> [the abolitionists'] views, but distrust the rightfulness and wisdom of their measures. But still another division feel, that to the churches of the South alone belong the examination and decision of this matter. In the South there is but one party, therefore; in the North there are several (American Baptist Home Mission Society 1841, in Foss 1850: 68).

While the ratio of abolitionists to proslavery may have differed across the churches, the small number of decided abolitionists in the North and widespread support for slavery in the South make it exceedingly unlikely that abolitionists were numerous enough in any denomination to make them a *greater* threat to the interests of any national denomination than was proslavery. Thus, one would expect that church leaders faced with both an abolitionist challenge and the threat of proslavery backlash would tend to oppose abolition, regardless of church theology and personal beliefs about slavery, unless abolitionists were able to develop considerable strength as a movement. Thus, theology is unlikely to have been the major factor driving elite support for abolition, and abolitionists likely had few allies among elites in any national church.

Opportunities in the Face of Resistance: Beyond Elite Support

Sometimes small groups of challengers do make a big difference in history, even in the face of opposition from elites. If targets strategically suppress weak movements, how is it ever possible for them to gain concessions and make change? A critical piece of the puzzle is that leaders do not always have the capacity to *block* mobilization even when they are opposed to a movement. If target resistance fails to reduce mobilization, then challengers may be able to shift the balance of costs in their favor through sustained protest activity. Especially when their efforts lead to greater support from third parties, small groups of challengers may be able to take advantage of target weaknesses in order to challenge dominant framings, destabilize elite alliances, and undermine the legitimacy of repressive tactics (Tarrow 2011: 160).

In the absence of elite allies, there are three factors that create or limit opportunities for mobilization along the "authority" dimension identified by Kurzman (1998): the general openness of the polity, unstable elite alignments, and the capacity to repress. The openness of the polity refers to the access challengers have to institutional means for addressing grievances. It encompasses features like democratic governance structures and norms as well as federated organizational structures, which increase access points (Kriesi et al. 1992). While complete openness obviates mobilization by pre-empting challenges, some degree of openness is necessary for mobilization (Eisinger 1973, McAdam 1982, Tarrow 2011, Tilly 1978, Kriesi et al. 1992).

Like states, organizations may be more or less open to input from participants. Some churches in this study, for example, were highly democratic and had formal opportunities for members and clergy to express concerns and influence church policy. Others were far more top-down and only the most powerful officials had the ability to shape policy. Some churches had nested, hierarchical legislative structures, while others were made up of loosely affiliated congregations that cooperated through a variety of distinct agencies (e.g. education, missionary, and publication agencies). These different organizational structures provided activists in some churches with greater opportunities. Even when resistance from leaders meant they were unable to directly influence policy, activists that used open political channels were able to frame slavery as a moral problem that required a religious solution, and their visible presence helped them gain legitimacy and raise awareness among bystanders. Together, these actions led to movement growth.

The second element of authority-based opportunities is the stability or instability of elite alignments, which refers to the potential for factions to emerge among political elites or, in the case of non-state targets, organizational leaders. Divisions among elites decline when social movement threat looms large (McAdam 1982: 26). With the emergence of radical abolitionism in the 1830s, church leaders united in opposition to abolition because of the threat of proslavery backlash, so divisions among elites were indeed suppressed. However, the leadership of national churches reflected a diversity of perspectives on slavery, and this diversity did not completely go away. As I will show in chapter two, when abolitionists did manage to gain strength in some churches, the proslavery backlash also grew more radical, and the proslavery faction eventually made demands that more moderate church leaders could not concede to. Thus, abolitionist growth combined with the underlying instability in elite alliances, eventually leading to concessions.

The third element of authority-based opportunities for social movements is the capacity for repression. Repression by states is known to reduce mobilization and also to sometimes provoke it, but more than any element of the opportunity structure, repression is usually treated as a unique capacity of the state. (Eisinger 1973, Earl 2003, Earl 2011, McAdam 1982, Tarrow 2011, Kriesi et al. 1992, Opp and Roehl 1990, della Porta 2014). Indeed, many authors treat repression as synonymous with state violence, despite Earl (2003, 2011) and Ferree (2005) arguing for the importance of examining "private" (i.e. non-state) and "soft" (non-violent) forms of repression.

There is scholarly interest in extending the notion of repression to non-state actors, but even among authors who study movements with non-state targets, the concept of repression remains strongly associated with state violence, as expressed through police or military use of force against protestors. Walker et al. (2008: 43), for example, note that schools and corporations can repress movement activity using non-violent forms of coercion, but still argue that states have a greater capacity for repression because of the state's monopoly on legitimate violence. While Kurzman (1998) acknowledges the possibility of repression within religious organizations, his analysis actually focuses on religious bodies that can marshal state violence against their challengers.

While non-state targets such as religious organizations or universities do sometimes call on state violence when confronted by disruptive protest, they also have a range of other tactics available to them. Some tactics, like ridicule and stigma, which Ferree (2005) refers to as "soft" repression, can be deployed against organizational outsiders as well as insiders. In addition to these soft repression tactics, non-state targets can use a variety of non-violent but coercive tactics when movement actors are internal: they can exclude challengers or otherwise deny them benefits of participation, or limit access to official channels of communication, and so on.

Though the tactics available to non-state targets satisfy Tilly's (1978: 100) expansive definition of repression as "any action by another group which raises the contender's cost of collective action," they also do differ from the violent tactics deployed by police and military that are most readily recognized as repression. Earl (2003: 48) emphasizes the distinction between coercive forms of repression, which encompass "uses of force and other forms of standard police and military action" and "channeling," the latter of which entails "indirect repression, which is meant to affect the forms of protest available, the timing of protests and/or the flows of resources to movements." Yet this distinction seems to miss the coercive tactics available to organizations when challengers operate within their sphere of control.

Because neither repression nor channeling are perfectly suited to describing the tactics used by organizations against internal challengers, I opt instead to use the term *suppression*, which can entail the use of force and other coercive tactics but does not necessarily suggest violence. The term *suppression* also draws attention to the fact that, as Tilly (1978: 100) points out, a target may take aim at either a challenger's *collective action* or its *mobilization*. *Suppression* more fully encompasses this range of range of target responses, since a target may use coercion to strop a protest event, *or* they may use it to prevent the emergence of future collective action.

The suppressive capacity of organizations, like the repressive capacity of states, is a pivotal factor shaping the opportunities available to challengers. Where state capacity for repression is often measured in terms of state spending on police or military, suppressive capacity can be understood in terms of the coercive leverage at the target's disposal. The coercive leverage available to leaders of voluntary organizations depends on the specific powers granted to them by their organization and its participants. In general, when power is more centralized at the top of the organizational hierarchy and leaders have less accountability to their subordinates, they should have greater abilities to punish challengers whose actions they view as disruptive and costly. Both formal and informal authority structures matter; even in ostensibly horizontal or decentralized organizations there may be individuals who hold considerable power (Harrison 1959).

According to Chaves (1999), church authority has a distinctive feature: leaders possess authority both as leaders of their organizations *and* as spiritual figures. Church authority, he contends, is grounded in leaders' ability to withhold valued goods from participants, including the types found in other organizations, such as a jobs or a sense of community, but also including spiritual goods like salvation or prayers that can alleviate worldly suffering. Church leaders' control over these goods, according to Chaves, stems from two distinct types of authority: agency authority, the rational-legal authority held by leaders of any formal organization; and religious authority, which makes recourse to the supernatural for its legitimation. While agency authority allows leaders to fire clergy or exclude members, religious authority controls behavior by reference to the supernatural, e.g. by declaring some behavior as sinful, evil, or spiritually harmful. Chaves notes that religious authority can be either traditional (as in the case of Bishops who occupy a post traditionally endowed with spiritual authority) or charismatic (owing to the personal qualities of the leader), and that churches may differ in the scope given to religious versus agency authority.

The dual nature of church authority means that there are two kinds of coercive leverage that can impact opportunities for challengers *within* a religious organization: leaders may punish challengers by using formal channels to exclude them from jobs or membership, thereby drawing on agency authority, or leaders may use their religious authority to establish dissent as sinful and detrimental to one's spiritual status. Building on Chaves, I suggest that both types of authority may be more or less concentrated within a church. Agency authority is more concentrated when the heads of church agencies can make decisions about hiring, firing, and organizational participation with limited accountability to the broader population of clergy and church members. Religious authority is more concentrated when religious leaders can decide the moral status of human actions with limited responsiveness to the broader religious community because of they possess a special spiritual status granted through consecration, lineage, or personal charisma, for example.

The churches with the greatest capacity to suppress social movements are those that can both exclude challengers formally and declare their dissent sinful and offensive to God. But I also contend that churches have higher suppressive capacity when religious authority is granted a larger scope. Because agency authority is legitimated on the basis of rules that can be changed according established procedures, agency authority typically has some accountability built into it (although there may be barriers to this in practice). On the other hand, religious authority, which is traditional or charismatic, is much more insulated from the preferences and demands of religious adherents. Thus, I expect that suppressive capacity is lower in denominations where agency authority is granted a larger scope than religious authority.

For a non-state organization, high suppressive capacity can prevent the emergence of a collective challenge or limit its efficacy. High suppressive capacity implies that leaders have the coercive leverage they need to silence challengers as well as the authority to refute challengers' framings and maintain control over meaning. Leaders in organizations with high suppressive capacity are also able to block access to arenas for contention, such as physical locations in which to stage protest, meetings to disrupt, or publication outlets in which to express dissent. They can create formal policies that limit access to the institutionalized political structure of the organization, narrowing organizational "openness." Organizations with high suppressive capacity will deter some challengers by creating an expectation of reprisal (Gaventa 1980), and cause others to fail and demobilize by making mobilization difficult and costly.

Opportunities for Church-Centered Abolition

Drawing together these insights from social movement theory, I contend that differences in the levels of abolitionist mobilization across the churches are explained by the church opportunity structures. While the size and strength of the proslavery movement united church leaders against abolition, leading to a lack of "attitudinal" opportunities, opportunities existed along the authority dimension. In particular, openness, instability of elite alignments, and low suppressive capacity were the key factors that determined why abolitionism flourished in some denominations but not in others.

As I will show in Chapter three, the seeds of an abolition movement were present even in denominations where the movement never blossomed. While abolitionists had incentives to mobilize, they did not have favorable opportunities in these churches. Since a powerful proslavery backlash threatened to destroy churches that conceded to abolitionists, church leaders attempted to block abolitionist mobilization. Where the configuration of authority enabled leaders to deny abolitionists access to an arena for contention and impose high mobilization costs, abolitionists failed.

In other churches, however, abolitionists managed to mobilize even in the face of resistance. This happened in open denominations where leaders had low suppressive capacity, which allowed abolitionists to engage in protests activities and gain influence. Abolitionists with access to the denominational arena were able to frame slavery as a moral problem, gain legitimacy, and raise general awareness, all of which led to movement growth. As movement power grew, the unstable alliances between elites weakened and leaders eventually conceded to abolitionists. Thus, favorable opportunity structures ultimately allowed abolitionists to overcome suppression and achieve victory.

Data and methods

In order to evaluate the explanation that I propose here, I conduct comparative case studies of abolitionist mobilization and success in several of the largest protestant denominations of the 19th century. The analysis that follows focuses on controversies at the national level of the denominations. Abolitionists and defenders of slavery came into conflict with one another through their participation in national legislative or missionary bodies, depending on the denomination in question, and these agencies became critical sites of contestation. Abolitionists demanded that their churches forbid slaveholding, a demand that, if achieved, would have directly impacted slaveholders. While many white Northerners benefited from slavery through their business ties and more broadly though the perpetuation of white supremacy, they had less to lose directly from church action against slavery. Thus, even though Northerners frequently defended slavery, the greatest antagonisms occurred at the national level where abolitionists and actual slaveholders were brought together. Accordingly, the present research focuses on the debates that took place within national denominational agencies, where abolitionists and defenders of slavery pushed for church policies that reflected their respective interests.

Data for the case studies consists of national denominational meeting minutes for each church, augmented by additional primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include religious pamphlets and magazines, sermons, personal journals, and autobiographies. Secondary sources include denominational histories, biographies of church leaders and abolitionists, studies of religion and slavery, and histories of the slavery debates within individual churches. Temporally, I focus on the thirty years prior to the civil war. However, the central legislative bodies of the Episcopalians, Methodists, and Presbyterians have longer histories and I examined records going back to the founding of the autonomous American churches.

I use process tracing and comparison to analyze these data. Process-tracing takes advantage of temporality and causal mechanisms to show how different factors led to an outcome of interest (George and Bennet 2005: 152-79, Mahoney 2003: 363-5, Beach and Pedersen 2013: 1-3). Process-tracing can be used comparatively to develop and test explanations across multiple cases, a process Mahoney (Mahoney 1999: 1164-9, Mahoney 2003: 365-7) refers to as “narrative comparison.”

Cases

I selected my cases from among those denominations that had at least 1,000 congregations in 1850, as shown in Table 2. My goal was to select a set of major national denominations in which abolitionists had some notable successes (positive cases) along with a set of cases in which abolitionists were largely unsuccessful (negative cases). At the outset, I decided to treat Presbyterians as a special case. In 1838, the denomination underwent a schism that, while generally regarded to have centered on ecclesiastical and theological issues, is sometimes attributed at least in part to conflict over slavery (Adams 1992, Goen 1985: 68-78, Staiger 1949, Smith 1960). Following the split, abolitionists among the New School Presbyterians were far more successful than those among the Old School. The difference in the paths taken by the two resulting denominations make the Presbyterians a ripe case for careful analysis, but the disputed role of slavery in the 1838 schism makes the case difficult to compare with other denominations. Accordingly, I excluded Presbyterians from the selection pool for the primary analysis and chose the main negative and positive cases from among the remaining denominations. I return to the Presbyterians as a test of my explanation in the penultimate chapter of this dissertation.

Table 2: Denominations with more than 1,000 Congregations in 1850

Denomination	Abolitionist Success	Congregations in Slave States as a Percent of Total	Polity structure
Baptist	+	60%	Congregational
Methodist	+	52%	Episcopal
Presbyterian: Pre-1837 Schism	+	23%*	Presbyterian
Presbyterian: Old School	-	32%*	Presbyterian
Presbyterian: New School	+	11%*	Presbyterian
Congregationalists	+	0%	Congregational
Universalist	+	4%	Congregational
Quaker	+	12%	Congregational
Episcopalian	-	40%	Episcopalian
Lutheran	-	19%	Presbyterian
Disciples of Christ	-	37%	Congregational
Notes: *Data estimated from respective Presbyterian minute member counts, c. 1850 Sources: US Census of Religious bodies 1850, Moberg (1962), Ahlstrom (2004:658-68), McKivigan (1984, especially ch. 1, 2, and 4), Engelder (1964), Weatherford (1957), Foss (1850), Scherer (1975), Heathcote (1919: 40-69), Protestant Episcopal Church (1785-1862), Methodist Episcopal Church (1855), PCUSA Old School (1850: 486-7), PCUSA New School (1850: 283).			

In selecting denominations for the primary analysis, I first narrowed the set of possible cases to those that were well-represented in both the North and South. Then, to ensure the greatest comparability across my outcome conditions, i.e. to "control" for as much variation as possible, I aimed to match positive and negative cases with respect to formal polity structure (Przeworski and Teune 1970: 32-4, Seawright and Gerring 2008: 304-6). The formal polity structure of a denomination encompasses many of the stable structural characteristics of states that are commonly included in models of political opportunity (see Meyer and Staggenborg 1996, Kitschelt 1986, Kriesi et al. 1992). There are three basic church polity types: Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational (Moberg 1962: 94).

Episcopal polities are hierarchical and structured around a series of nested legislative bodies, with Bishops holding the highest positions in the governance structure. Their authority is granted both by their distinctive administrative position and through apostolic succession, a Christian practice whereby authority is handed down from one leader to another in a chain thought to link back to the original apostles of Jesus. Presbyterian polities are hierarchical, like Episcopal polities, and are governed through a series of nested hierarchical bodies whose members are representatives from lower judicatories. However, there are no Bishops in a Presbyterian polity structure, and the highest judicatory is a national administrative entity, such as the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, which is composed of delegates elected from subsidiary regional agencies. Congregational polities differ from Episcopal and Presbyterian polity forms in that they have no national legislative or policy-making bodies at all. Congregations may communicate, cooperate, and influence one another but are formally

autonomous. Policy is determined at the level of the congregation. If a majority of coreligionists deem a congregation or its leadership to be operating outside the boundaries of the faith tradition, they may deny the deviant congregation "fellowship" and refuse to acknowledge it or to join in cooperative activities with it, but no individual or organization possesses the power to demand a congregation's compliance with respect to doctrine, organizational conventions, or any other matter.

It is reasonable to imagine that such sizable differences in the formal authority structures of a denomination would have an impact on the abolitionists' prospects. Indeed, Chaves (1999) found that church adoption of gender-related reforms entailed, among other things, an interaction between the women's movement and the polity form of a church. Yet, as Table 2 shows, formal polity itself was not a determinant of abolitionist success. This may be a result of decoupling between formal and informal authority structures (McMullen 1994, Harrison 1959). Alternatively, it could be because polity type collapses multiple distinct dimensions of authority (Cantrell et al. 1983), or because of an interaction between authority structures and other important factors (Lieberson 1991: 1220-1). Thus, while polity type does not appear to explain denominational success, matching on the variable ensures that any polity-specific patterns or dynamics are accounted for.

The proportion of congregations in slaveholding states was another important case selection criteria, since one would expect the geographical distribution of a church's membership to impact the success of abolitionists. Unfortunately, given the small universe of cases, it was not possible to find perfect matches across outcome conditions, so I chose cases that were the closest to being truly national denominations, i.e. were well-represented in both the North and the South.

The positive cases with the most balanced geographical representation were the Baptists and the Methodists, while the negative cases were the Episcopalians and Disciples of Christ. These pairs also complemented one another with respect to formal polity structure, as discussed above: Baptists (successful) and Disciples (unsuccessful) were both congregational polities, while Methodists (successful) and Episcopalians (unsuccessful) were both episcopal polities. Thus, by matching on polity type and choosing churches with national representation, I selected these four cases.

Since both positive cases have a small majority of their congregations in the South and both negative cases have a small majority of their congregations in the North, the comparative design of the study cannot eliminate a causal effect of geography. Process tracing, however, sheds light where comparative logic alone is insufficient. I use process tracing to compare case histories to theoretical predictions about how geography might have impacted abolitionist success, which allows me eliminate geography as the primary determinant of denominational outcomes. I return to discuss the possible impacts of geography in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

Characteristics of the Selected Cases

As I have already indicated, Episcopalians and Methodists share an episcopal polity structure, meaning that the churches are headed by bishops who occupy uniquely authoritative positions in their churches. Because both of these churches are American offshoots of the Anglican church that took on their own organizational identities following the American revolution, they have some strong similarities. Both utilized a nested organizational hierarchy. Congregations are represented by delegates at regional conferences, each of which is presided over by a bishop.

Regional conferences in turn select their own delegates to represent them in a national conference, which is also governed by the Bishops.

Despite these similarities, there are important differences between Methodists and Episcopalians that affect legislative autonomy, a characteristic crucial to the openness of state targets (Kitschelt 1986). According to Gorrie (1856), Episcopal bishops in the 19th century constituted an "upper house" that oversaw and approved all decisions of the General Convention, which was composed of elected delegates. Bishops were only accountable to the upper house. Their authority was less bureaucratic and more sacred, derived from the fact of their consecration and to apostolic succession than from their status as elected officials. In contrast, the bishops of the Methodist church were accountable to the General Convention, which was the church's sole legislative body and was made up of elected delegates. While Methodist bishops oversaw the meetings of the convention, they voted alongside delegates. Comparing the governance structures of the two denominations, it becomes clear that the Episcopal Church bishops had considerably more control over the course of church affairs, meaning that authority was overall more concentrated and that religious authority was greater. These differences can be seen in figures 1 and 2.

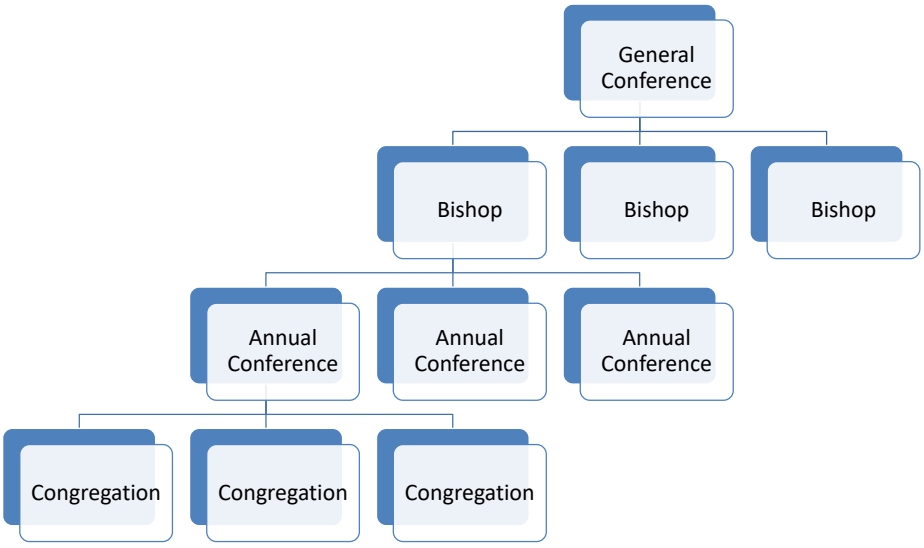

Figure 1: Organizational Structure of the Methodist Church

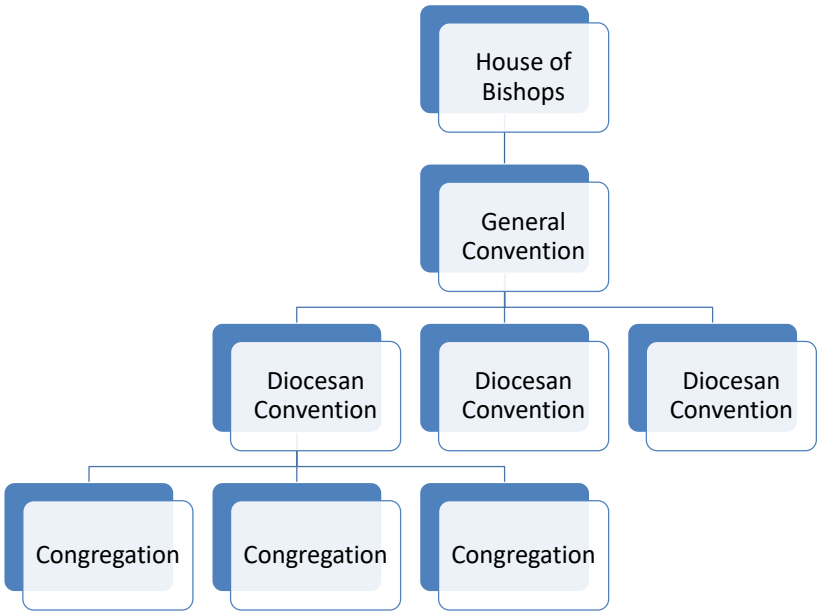

Figure 2: Organizational Structure of the Protestant Episcopal Church

The Baptists and the Disciples of Christ, in contrast, both had congregational polity structures. These denominations are better represented as loose, decentralized networks of affiliation, united by cooperation in church agencies like missionary societies and through a shared identification with their respective religious movements. Formally-speaking, all decision-making power was held by individual congregations. No entity could legislate for the churches or create policies that bound them. Although churches that departed from fundamental principles of doctrine or polity—for example, a Baptist church that began practicing infant baptism—could be rejected from fellowship by other churches, there was no formal policy by which a congregation was made or unmade as a Baptist or Christian Church. Similarly, an individual could be expelled by a congregation and might subsequently be treated as suspicious by other congregations, but there was no denomination-wide process for excommunicating members. Norms unified practices to a certain extent, but no laws ensured uniformity.

The differences between these Baptists and the Disciples of Christ during the antebellum period stem from the fact that Baptists had a more developed and differentiated system of national church agencies, as illustrated in figures 3 and 4. By the 1830s, Baptists had several centralized, bureaucratized, and democratically organized societies for organizing church affairs. While they lacked the capacity to create or enforce doctrine, their internal policies widely impacted the Baptist community. The Disciples of Christ only came together as a denomination in the 1830s, so its agencies were in their infancy. The church missionary enterprise was significantly less bureaucratized than that of the Baptist Church during the antebellum period, and no other agencies had yet developed. As a consequence, leadership was concentrated among fewer individuals, rules and procedures for decision-making had not been formalized, and no real

democratic structure was in place that would allow opinionated adherents to lobby for any kind of change.

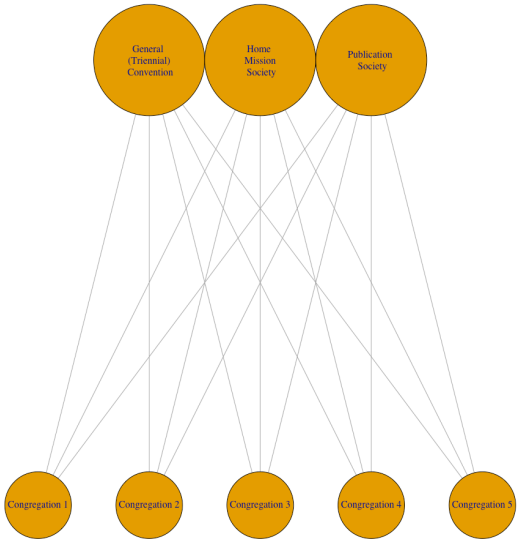

Figure 3: Organizational Structure of the Baptist Church

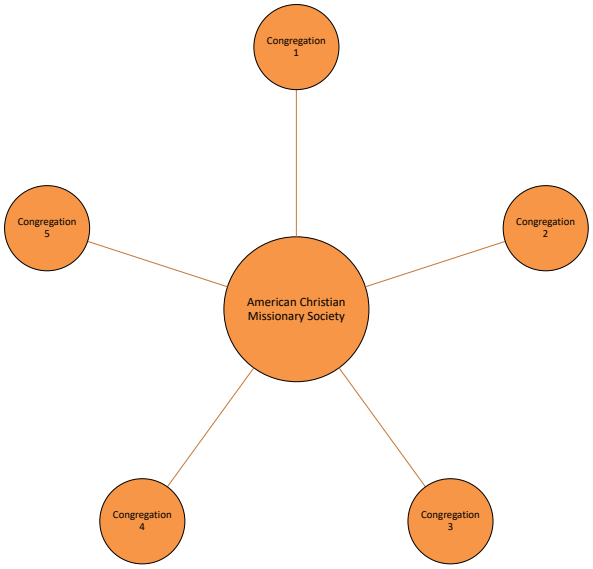

Figure 4: Organizational Structure of the Disciples of Christ

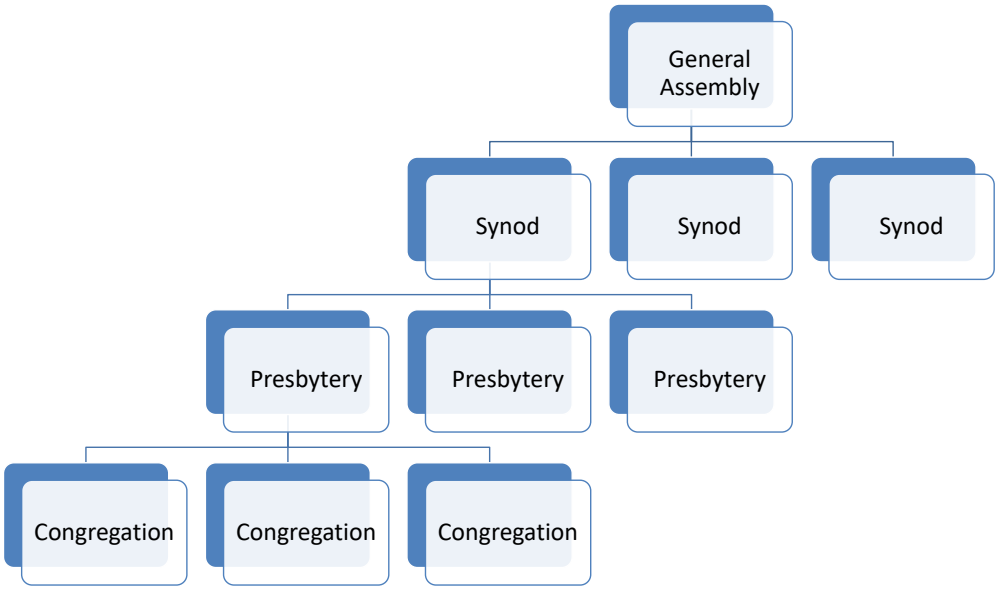

Figure 5: Organizational Structure of the Presbyterian Church

Finally, the Presbyterian Church, like the Methodist and Episcopal churches, had a nested hierarchical structure of representative governance units. Presbyterians did not have Bishops, however, as they hold that all ministers have equal authority in the church (Gorrie 1856, p. 82). As shown in 5, Presbyterian legislative bodies include a local Session, a Presbytery, a Synod, and finally the national General Assembly. Presbyteries and Synods each include all the ministers in their geographic areas, and the General Assembly is composed of a delegate from each Presbytery, selected by the respective Presbyteries themselves. While the General Assembly is the highest legislative body of the church, it is accountable to the Presbyteries in matters of church constitution, as changes to the constitution require the support of a two-thirds majority of the Presbyteries (Gorrie 1856). Though this mechanism, all preachers in the Church have the opportunity to vote on constitutional changes and their collective authority is greater than that of the General Assembly.

Conclusion

This dissertation is organized as follows. The next three chapters entail an empirical analysis of the development and achievements of abolitionism in the five churches I have selected. Chapter 2 compares two cases of abolitionist success, the Methodists and the Baptists. For each church, I first document the struggles over slavery that took place during the antebellum period. I then explain how the configuration of power in the churches created the conditions for this conflict, allowing abolitionists to mobilize, assert their arguments, challenge authority, antagonize their proslavery opponents, and eventually gain concessions.

In Chapter 3 I turn to examine the negative cases, the Episcopalians and Disciples of Christ—churches in which abolitionists had little to no success despite the presence of would-be challengers. For both these cases, I show that suppression of abolitionists was widespread and successful. I focus on events similar to ones that led to the growth of abolition among Baptists and Methodists and show why the events had different outcomes in these churches.

In Chapter 4, I extend my explanation to the case of the Presbyterians before and after their theological schism in 1838. I treat the two post-schism bodies as distinct denominations with distinct outcomes: the New School Presbyterians are a case of abolitionist success, while the Old School Presbyterians are a case of abolitionist failure. Finally, in Chapter 5, I conclude with a discussion of how denominational power configurations promoted or hindered abolitionism and what this can tell us about political opportunities and social movement success.

The positive cases—the Methodists, Baptists, and New School Presbyterians—each show that abolitionists were able to succeed when church authority was less concentrated, tended to be held by administrative officials rather than religious figures, and was checked by democratic regulations. Yet they also differ in important ways that shed light on exactly how social movement actors find and enlarge opportunities. The Baptist case shows how a decentralized and democratic church with limited capacity to either facilitate or suppress movements provided ample opportunities for challengers to mobilize, and also how these characteristics made the organization especially vulnerable to schism in the face of movement-countermovement conflict. The Methodist case, on the other hand, shows that even hierarchically structured churches can have significant weak points that enable challengers to overcome suppression.

The negative cases show that silencing challengers and denying them access to an arena for contention were crucial to abolitionist suppression. Yet the differences between the negative cases are also instructive. Among the Episcopalians, hierarchical authority is what mattered, and censorship and control over official meetings blocked abolitionists from gaining strength. Among the decentralized and minimally bureaucratic Disciples of Christ, however, power operated through a lack of institutional differentiation and insufficient bureaucracy: there were fewer access points and those that existed were controlled by individuals who exercised considerable personal discretion in handling matters that, elsewhere, were church policy issues.

Taken together, the Old and New School Presbyterians reinforce the account developed in earlier chapters. They show how power may operate differently even in churches that share the same formal organizational structure and highlight the pivotal role that open debate can play in subsequent mobilization. Silencing debate was a crucial strategy employed by the Old School Presbyterians, a tactic enabled by low openness and high concentrations of authority that prevented abolitionists in the church from gaining allies and provoking their opponents. In contrast, the New School Presbyterians did not prevent slavery debate from occurring in church forums, even during the period in which leaders were united in opposition to abolitionism. Engaging in open debate allowed abolitionists to present their arguments, challenge authoritarian leadership, provoke their antagonists, and ultimately tip the balance of concession and disruption costs in their favor.

Why does all this matter? First, I correct a fundamental misunderstanding of church responses to slavery and abolition: dissent existed even in the churches that appear broadly tolerant of slavery, and leaders resisted abolition even in the churches that eventually took a stand against slavery. What varied was neither the incentive to mobilize nor the strategic suppression by leaders, but rather the opportunities for challengers to mobilize and to win.

Second, these cases offer some important lessons on how dynamic interactions between movement, countermovement and target unfold over time. Successful challengers were able to take advantage of targets' structural weaknesses to harness opportunities for movement growth, but countermovements also played a key role by influencing targets' strategic cost calculations. In the churches where abolitionists failed, they carried out isolated protests but remained marginal. Without a sufficiently open venue in which to confront either their target or the opposing movement, abolitionists failed to gain strength, influence the framing of slavery within the church, provoke their opponents, or significantly shift their targets' cost calculations.

Finally, these cases speak more broadly to the dual relationship between large scale political struggles and smaller struggles that play out within businesses and civil society organizations. These small-scale interactions are not just a microcosm of larger political struggles, but are often the very sites in which the larger story plays out. While it is often asked whether religion enabled or hindered abolition, it has rarely been asked how and why religious organizations played the role that they did. The answer I propose to *that* question is that churches wound up either disrupting or supporting the status quo of slavery depending on how the internal struggles between abolitionists and proslavery played out. Where abolitionists managed to prevail, their churches underwent major structural transformations that undermined Northern solidarity with slaveholders. Thus, there is reason to zoom in on these lower-level struggles, which may often play an underappreciated role in broader processes of social change.

Chapter Two: Abolitionist Success Cases

While abolitionists could be found in every church, they were much more successful in some churches than in others. The case studies in this chapter trace out the interactions between abolitionists, church leaders, and the proslavery countermovement in two churches where abolitionists made significant gains: the Methodist and Baptist churches. In these denominations, abolitionists overcame church efforts to suppress them, provoked a radical backlash from the South, and garnered crucial concessions from church leaders that caused the Southerners to withdraw from their churches, accomplishing the abolitionists' goals of freeing the churches from slavery.

In this chapter, I examine the historical trajectories of antislavery conflict in these churches and draw on the similarities between the two cases to show how abolitionists took advantage of opportunities created by the configuration of church authority and the behavior of the proslavery countermovement. For each denomination, I describe the authority structure of the church and how, according to the organizational opportunity explanation, the configuration of authority should impact abolitionists' capacities for mobilization and growth. I then present the historical evidence, describing the development and progression of slavery conflict in the churches, showing how the churches attempted to suppress the church-centered abolition movement and how abolitionists overcame that suppression and eventually achieved crucial concessions. I then explain how, at each critical juncture, church openness and low suppressive capacity enabled abolitionists to circumvent suppression and make important progress towards freeing their churches from slavery.

Methodists

In the aftermath of the American revolution, Anglicans in the US separated from the Church of England and developed the Protestant Episcopal Church (PEC). Methodism, which had begun in the 18th century as a movement within the Church of England led by John Wesley, also separated from the Anglican church at this time, and leaders formed the new Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC or Methodist Church). Over the next half century, the MEC became the fastest growing church in America; by 1850, it was the single largest denomination and represented 34.2% of religious adherents (Finke and Stark 1992).

The Methodist Church was characterized by a high degree of openness and low suppressive capacity. Formally speaking, it had an Episcopal polity structure, which also characterizes the Protestant Episcopal Church, the Anglican Church itself, and the Roman

Catholic Church. This organizational form is hierarchical and headed by Bishops. Bishops of the Methodist Church shared authority with a democratically organized body called the General Conference (GC) and a series of smaller, nested regional bodies. At the local level, congregations were responsible for disciplining their own members. Those congregations fell within a "circuit" or station, and all the ministers within a circuit met together in Quarterly Conferences where they licensed preachers, recommended them for ordination, or disciplined them (Gorrie 1856: 36). At the next level were the Annual Conferences, which were headed by a bishop and contained all the ordained ministers from the circuits that existed within their roughly state-level boundaries. Every four years, the Annual Conferences elected delegates to represent them in the national meeting of the General Conference. The General Conference constituted the highest legislative and executive unit in the church, and a Bishop presided over each meeting (Gorrie 1856).

In the Methodist Church, Bishops were subject to the power of the General Conference, which was responsible for electing them prior to their ordination and held the power to discipline or dismiss them in the event of unsatisfactory conduct. The Protestant Episcopal Church, which I discuss in the next chapter, had a General Convention that functioned similarly, but Bishops in the Episcopal Church held more authority than their General Convention, constituting an "upper house" that approved all the decisions made by the GC and they were responsible only to one another for their conduct (Gorrie 1856). The bishops of the Methodist Church wielded considerably less authority because of their accountability to the General Conference.

The bishops of the Methodist Church, as ordained spiritual leaders, embodied what Chaves (1993) calls the *religious* authority structure of the Church. The General Conference, on the other hand, reflected the *agency* structure of the church. By rendering the bishops subordinate to the General Conference, the Methodist Church structure differed from other churches with Episcopal polities, as it emphasized *agency* authority over *religious authority.* The General Conference was democratically organized and its procedures were designed to channel input and promote deliberation, making the church far more responsive to adherents and ministers than one might expect from a church with an Episcopal polity form.

The supreme role of the democratically-organized General Conference also limited church suppressive capacity by reducing the concentration of authority. Methodist Bishops did not have the capacity to censure clergy according to their own evaluations, for example. Instead, the conduct of ministers was subject to the evaluation of the whole Conference, including Bishops and elected delegates, and all proceedings were open and subject to critique. The prominence of the GC also reflected a broader democratic ethos within the church and gave agency leaders the capacity to discipline Bishops whose actions were seen as excessively authoritarian. The relative weakness of religious authority in the Methodist Church also had a broader spiritual significance: since agency authority does not rely on spiritual consequences for leverage, adherents who are dissatisfied with the decisions of agency leaders can easily leave the church. Leaders with religious authority, on the other hand, can leverage spiritual consequences, which extend beyond the purview of the worldly church. Individuals can not simply leave the church to avoid these consequences, making religious authority more binding.

For all these reasons, Methodists had a high degree of openness and low suppressive capacity, so the organizational opportunities perspective suggests a positive outcome for abolitionists. To begin with, church openness means that abolitionists should have had some access to the institutional political process of the church. However, following Luders (2010), church leaders should have opposed the movement because proslavery was stronger, since the

South was united in support of slavery by the 1830s but abolitionists had not achieved similar levels of support in the North (Stampp 1943, Harrold 1995, Richards 1970). Yet, as I described in the previous chapter, openness also gives challengers access to an arena for contention, even when they lack support from elites. Thus, in attempting to access the existing channels for influencing church policy, Methodist abolitionists can grow by demonstrating their strength and unity, deploy their own frames, and challenging suppression. With the effective use of framing and protest tactics, abolitionists can take advantage of these opportunities and, by growing in strength, shift leaders' costs calculations and eventually achieve concessions.

The Methodist Struggle Over Slavery

John Wesley and the early American Methodist Bishops opposed slavery. In its first articulation of church policy, the new Church forbade slaveholding among members and clergy. However, following immediate Southern backlash, the slaveholding ban was indefinitely postponed that same year (Methodist Episcopal Church 1785: 15-7; Coke 1816 p.67, 74; Methodist Episcopal Church Annual Conferences 1840: 24). The subsequent decades marked a long journey away from antislavery principles, until eventually leaders expressed outright opposition to abolitionism and suppressed abolitionist mobilization.

After the controversy over the initial slaveholding ban, the General Conference resolved to allow Annual Conferences, which were organized at roughly the state level, to set their own policies on slaveholding. This move ensured that policies would be enforced within the same community that enacted them, which is to say that the New England conference could determine that no slaveholders would join New England Methodist churches, while the South Carolina conference could determine that slaveholding would be no bar to becoming a preacher in South Carolina. This change meant that policies would reflect regional sentiment and political context and would therefore reduce denominational conflict. It also meant that church slavery policies were unlikely to have any actual impact on slaveholding practices in the United States, since abolitionist Methodists in the North could not use the church to pressure slaveholders. Further, it meant that the many petitions abolitionist would send to the General Conference calling for greater Church action against slavery could be redirected to regional conferences without debate. (Methodist Episcopal Church 1855a, p. 22-3, 63, 65, 93).

Regionalization was part of a broader strategy aimed at preventing Southern backlash, which leaders viewed as a major threat to the church (see Coke 1816: 74; Asbury 1821: 298). By accommodating slaveholder interests, the Church prevented conflict until the emergence of radical abolitionism in the 1830s. Though Garrison and many of his followers would eventually grow frustrated with church toleration of slavery and leave organized religion entirely, the churches were major targets in the early years of the movement, and many church-centered abolitionists stayed behind to carry on this struggle even after Garrison and some of his colleagues abandoned the churches.

When radical abolitionists renewed the push to free the Methodist Church from slavery, the General Conference responded to this "new abolitionism" with direct suppression. A poignant example of the Church's new determined opposition to abolitionism occurred at the General Conference in 1836. After the adjournment of the day's conference, two delegates left and went on to speak at an antislavery meeting. When the conference resumed the following day, proslavery churchmen demanded the Conference reprimand the abolitionist delegates for engaging in abolitionist activity while visiting for the purpose of the Conference. After

"considerable excitement and discussion" that dominated two whole days of conference business, the Convention arrived at the following resolution:

> Resolved, by the delegates of the annual conferences in General Conference Assembled, 1. That they disapprove in the most unqualified sense the conduct of two members of the General Conference, who are reported to have lectured in this city recently upon and in favour of modern abolitionism. Resolved, 2. That they are decidedly opposed to modern abolitionism, and wholly disclaim any right, wish, or intention to interfere in the civil and political relation between master and slave as it exists in the slave-holding states of this Union. (Methodist Episcopal Church 1855a: 445-7).

In addition to passing this resolution, the General Conference appointed a committee to draft a pastoral address, which reflected the position that the majority of delegates had arrived at by the mid-thirties:

> This subject [of abolitionism] has been brought before us at the present session—fully, and, we humbly trust, impartially discussed, and by almost a unanimous vote disapproved of….It cannot be unknown to you that the question of slavery in these United States…is left to be regulated by the several state legislatures themselves; and thereby is put beyond the control of the general government, as well as that of all ecclesiastical bodies….From every view of the subject which we have been able to take…we have come to the solemn conviction that the only safe, scriptural, and prudent way for us, both as ministers and people, to take, is wholly to refrain from the agitating subject which is now convulsing the country, and consequently the Church, from end to end, by calling for inflammatory speeches, papers, and pamphlets. (Curts 1900, p. 116-7).

In response to these proslavery concessions and the debates that had preceded them, abolitionist Orange Scott wrote a reply and distributed it among the delegates. His pamphlet was not appreciated by the anti-abolitionists. Rev. William Winans proposed a resolution declaring Scott's report to be "palpably false," and an "outrage to the dignity" of the General conference that deserved "unqualified reprehension" (Mathews 1965: 143). While Scott fought to defend himself and his writing from accusations of dishonesty and slander, Winans' resolution passed and the Conference agreed to publish his rebuke of Scott.

Suppression did not end at the close of the 1836 General Conference. Knowing that abolitionist mobilization was swelling out from New England region, the Bishop presiding over its Annual Conference, Bishop Hedding, set out to suppress the movement at its center. Hedding accused Orange Scott of putting abolitionism before his duties as a presiding elder and demanded that Scott stop agitating the subject. When Scott refused, Hedding removed Scott from his position as a presiding elder and relocated him to another district (Clark 1855: 494-5). Subsequently, in New Hampshire, Hedding took abolitionist George Storrs aside for a similar talk, making it clear that he would not appoint Storrs as a presiding elder unless Storrs agreed to keep silent on slavery. Like Scott, Storrs refused (Clark 1855: 496-7).

During the New England Conference, several petitions on slavery were sent to a committee. When the committee presented its report, Bishop Hedding insisted that it was his job to ensure that the report was consistent with Methodism before allowing it to go to a vote, and he

instructed that the conference adjourn for the evening to allow his deliberation. However, when a motion was then made to adjourn it was not carried, as abolitionists wanted to see the report adopted immediately. Hedding then used his authority as Bishop to close the conference without allowing the report to go for a vote Clark 1855: 495-6).

Northern abolitionists objected to these suppression attempts. Not only was Hedding's opposition a source of difficulty for the activists, it was also an affront to the autonomy of the Annual Conferences. While the Bishops argued that the Annual Conferences had never had the authority to determine their own agendas (Methodist Episcopal Church 1855b, p. 138-151), abolitionists argued otherwise. To them—and many moderates in the church—Hedding's suppression constituted a radical overextension of Episcopal authority. To their antislavery campaigning, the abolitionists now added a new cause: the cause of "conference rights."

The Bishops responded to the new campaign for "conference rights" during the General Conference of 1840. A lengthy Bishops' address outlined the problem, in which they explained that it was a mistake to attribute to each Conference its own distinct legislative authority. The Bishops explained that all legislative authority resided with the General Conference, which appointed Bishops and sent them to serve as the presidents of Annual Conferences, and that neither the Bishops themselves nor the Annual Conferences had any authority other than that granted to them by the General Conference. Each year, the Bishops submitted to the General Conference a record of all their actions during the intervening years so that the General Conference could review and approve them (Methodist Episcopal Church 1855b, p. 138-151). The General Conference, in turn, was to approve the actions of the Bishops unless the Conference objected to them. And, as the Bishops asserted in their circular, the General Conference had approved of Hedding's suppressive actions (Minutes 1840, p. 99).

Though the Methodist Church had regionalized slavery policy during the early years of the 19th century, growing abolitionist disruption required a stronger hand. The Bishops' address reflects this change. Regionalizing slavery policy had allowed abolitionism to grow unchecked in the Northern Conferences, and it now threatened to impact the national church. In order to stem the tide, Bishops reclaimed their power as church leaders by blocking abolitionist resolutions and censuring abolitionist clergy but, at the same time, dodged accountability by pointing to the fact that even their own authority was derived from the General Conference. By shifting responsibility for slavery policy between different individuals and agencies as the context demanded, Methodist leaders responded strategically to the threat of movement-countermovement conflict.

Several other controversies played out in 1840, and all of them ended with decisions that favored slavery and its defenders. The Conference overturned an earlier decision that protected the right of the Baltimore Conference to deny official church positions to slaveholders (Methodist Episcopal Church 1855b: 34-5, 167-171). New England's request for stronger prohibitions against the buying and selling of slaves was voted down almost unanimously. And when faced with another address from British Methodists pleading for the American church to take action against slavery, the Conference replied by denying that they were supporting slavery and instead said that they felt it their duty to abstain from interference with the proper domain of civil government:

> But our Church is extended through all the states, and as it would be wrong and unscriptural to enact a rule of discipline in opposition to the constitution and laws of the state on this subject, so also would it not be equitable or Scriptural to confound the positions of our ministers and people (so different as they are in

> different states) with respect to the moral question which slavery involves. Under the administration of the venerated Dr. Coke, this plain distinction was once overlooked, and it was attempted to urge emancipation in all the states; but the attempt proved almost ruinous, and was soon abandoned by the doctor himself. While, therefore, the Church has encouraged emancipation in those states where the laws permit it, and allowed the freed-man to enjoy freedom, we have refrained, for conscience' (*sic*) sake from all intermeddling with the subject in those other states where the laws make it criminal. (MEC 1855b: 153-7).

Thus, by 1840, Methodist leaders had waged a multi-front war against abolitionism, censuring clergy for speaking out against slavery, demanding silence as a condition for leadership positions, and manipulating church rules so that leaders could adapt their strategies as the context changed.

The Church's suppression did not, ultimately, accomplish their goal. Due to the Church's high degree of openness, leaders failed to cut off channels for abolitionist disruption and the movement continued to take advantage of whatever channels were available. Because of the church's democratic governance structure, both pro- and anti-slavery factions had many opportunities to influence the proceedings of General and Annual Conferences, and there was no legitimate means by which the Church might actually silence all debate over slavery in public Church forums. Continued abolitionist mobilization kept the Church in a state of tension between the demands of the two factions and led also to increasingly radical demands from the South.

In 1843, a group of abolitionists left to create their own antislavery rival denomination. Disgusted with the perceived overreach of Bishops in the Annual Conferences and with the Church's increasing willingness to accommodate slavery, abolitionists and their supporters formed the Wesleyan Methodist Church (Matlack 1881 p. 139-141). Though the numerical loss that accompanied their departure was not ruinous, the size of the exodus aroused the fear of Northern conservatives, who knew that more of their church would follow if they did not take some action against slavery (Mathews 1965, p. 230-1, Matlack 151-2). Further, the abolitionists that remained within the church were emboldened by the actions of the Wesleyan Methodists, and in the following year several Northern conferences that had remained silent formally expressed opposition to slavery (Matlack 151-2). With these events, denomination leaders saw that the risk of losing more Northerners over slavery was serious.

Into this climate of increased tension and risk, there was a final test of the Methodist leaders. In advance of the 1844 General Conference, word began to circulate that Bishop James O. Andrew of Georgia had, since assuming his post as bishop, inherited slaves. Manumission was legally restricted in Georgia, so the policy of the church technically permitted Andrew to hold slaves while serving as church official, but there had never before been a slaveholding Bishop in the Church. And Bishops, unlike other officers, presided over the whole of the Church, meaning that Andrew's role would also entail his leadership in the Northern portion of the Church where his status might interfere with his work (West 1844, p. 165). The church feared that Bishop Andrew's slaveholding might be enough to unite the remaining antislavery moderates with abolitionists, but it was also clear that the South would surely leave the Church if he was not retained. This was their test of the General Conference: would it remove an existing bishop from office on account of his slaveholding? Or would it capitulate to Southern demands for legitimacy and allow him to remain?

When the Conference met in 1844, the conflict was every bit as fierce as had been anticipated. After painful deliberation, the GC resolved that it was inexpedient for Bishop

Andrew to maintain his post without emancipating his slaves, in light of the current climate (West 1844, esp. p. 231-2). The Conference based its determination on the conviction that Andrew's holding of slaves while a Bishop of the Church would "greatly embarrass the exercise of his office…if not in some places entirely prevent it" (ibid). As Andrew was unwilling to free those he held in slavery, the decision of the Conference meant his resignation.

The GC's refusal to appoint a slaveholder to the position of Bishop was a pivotal concession to the abolitionists, and it is all the more surprising when compared with the scale of anti-abolitionism that occurred in the preceding years. To put this shift into perspective, in 1836, 92% of the delegates to the General Conference supported the resolution opposing modern abolitionism, and 90% supported the resolution censuring the clergy that had spoken at an anti-slavery meeting.

Commentators widely credited the exodus of the Wesleyan Methodists with bringing about the major concession to abolition. When Rev. Lucius Matlack suggested to Bishop Thomson that, by leaving, the Wesleyans had promoted the growth of abolitionism within the Church, Bishop Thomson replied, "I have no doubt of that, that was the work of the Wesleyan Church, and it was well done." (Matlack 1881: 144). The editor of the Methodist Quarterly similarly credited the Wesleyans with saving the Church from a slaveholding bishop (Whedon 1865: 612). Rev. Moses Hill commented that if the Church *hadn't* responded by refusing to appoint Andrew, "the Wesleyans would have become a power in the land" (Hill, in Matlack 1881: 145). Following the abolitionist exit, Bishops also allowed abolitionists to advocate for antislavery more freely in the Annual Conferences (Matlack 1881: 152). In other words, the abolitionist exit had a profound impact on leaders' calculations of concession and disruption costs, contributing to their shift from repression to concession.

After the General Conference rejected Andrew in 1844, the Southern Church seceded to form the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The post-secession Northern Church did not, however, suddenly unite in support of abolition. Indeed, only 17% of the delegates in attendance at the 1844 GC represented seceder conferences, yet 38% of the GC delegates voted in favor of allowing Andrew to become a Bishop, meaning that a proslavery faction still existed among the Northern and Border clergy that remained within the church following the schism. Retaining the membership of the Border conferences and preventing further division within the Church became an important concern of the leadership (Matlack 1881: 182-3).

Thus, schism with the South did not leave behind a united Northern antislavery church. It did, however, create a climate in which abolitionists were able to grow in strength as a movement (Matlack 1881: 211). In 1852, abolitionists pushed for a strict prohibition against slaveholding in the Church. Six abolitionist-leaning Annual Conferences submitted proposals for changing the Church's language on slavery, but both the committee on slavery and the presiding Bishop postponed discussion of the changes, until finally the General Conference was forced to adjourn without debating the proposed revisions (Matlack 1881: 214). Following the close of the General Conference, debate poured over into the Methodist magazines (Matlack 1881: 217-26). Even though there was enough support for abolition in the church that multiple Annual Conferences demanded a slavery prohibition and these proposals were not immediately rejection, they clearly did still have opposition—even though Southerners were no longer a part of the church—and church leaders still tried to avoid disruption and division.

When the General Conference met again in 1856, 29 of the 38 Annual Conferences submitted petitions on slavery (Matlack 1881: 227). The committee established to review the petitions eventually offered a resolution suggesting a constitutional change to ban all

slaveholding. Any change to the Methodist Constitution had to meet a high bar of approval: first it would have to receive a two-thirds majority vote among delegates of the General Conference, after which point it would be sent to the General Conferences for approval. After days of debate, the slavery ban received support from fifty-six percent of the delegates, achieving a simple majority but not the required two-thirds (MEC 1856: 126-7). In 1860 when the GC met again the impasse remained unchanged, with abolitionists again failing to achieve a two-thirds majority in favor of the ban. Instead, the Church resolved only to "affectionately admonish" members and clergy to remain pure from the evil of slavery (Curts 1900:160). While the Methodists did not manage to free themselves from slavery before the coming of the Civil War, the war came and finished the job. When the General Conference met again in 1864, President Lincoln had already signed the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring an end to slavery in the United States.

The lackluster response to slavery following the North-South schism shows that the Northern Church was not wholeheartedly supportive of abolition, and that church leaders' choice to side with abolitionists over the case of Bishop Andrew was not a simple case of Northerners opposing slavery and Southerners supporting it. Instead, the fact that leaders resolved to have Andrew step down from his post shows how their cost calculations changed as abolitionists grew in strength. The General Conference's refusal to retain a slaveholding Bishop was a victory for abolition, a result of their sustained mobilization and growth in the face of leaders' dogged attempts at suppression. While abolitionists did not manage to convert the whole Church to the abolitionist cause, they did achieve a crucial and historically significant concession and, afterwards, made significant progress towards achieving a churchwide ban on slavery.

Why Methodist Abolitionists Won

While Northern conservatives and Border State slavery supporters may have undermined abolitionists' efforts to achieve a truly free Methodist Church prior to the Civil War, in the years immediately before the war more than 60% of the Church had come to support a complete, enforceable ban. This was a significant advancement considering the broad support for silencing and punishing abolitionists that had existed for years prior. Abolitionists achieved their gains through persistent effort, but several key events created discrete shifts in the balance of abolitionist and proslavery power in the church.

The first event that shifted leaders' cost calculations was the growth in abolitionist support during the "conference rights" controversy of 1836, which followed on the back of Bishops' efforts to censor abolitionist Annual Conferences. Second, the formation of the antislavery Wesleyan Methodist Church pressured Church leaders to satisfy the demands of the abolitionists that remained within the Church, for fear of losing them to the rival offshoot. Third, the subsequent refusal of the Church to support the bishopric of slaveholder James O. Andrew led to the North-South schism and rid the Church of the abolitionists' most ardent opponents. These pivotal events each marked a growth in abolitionist power within the church and changed leaders' perceptions of the relative risks associated with conceding to abolitionists or proslavery, allowing abolitionists to eventually achieve broad support.

Another important factor that led to concessions was the escalation of movement-countermovement conflict. Abolitionist agitation promoted proslavery countermobilization, and over time Southern demands grew more radical. Prior to the 1830s, the proslavery faction had been satisfied with the Church's agreement not to enforce any antislavery policies but, in response to abolitionist mobilization, they began to ask for complete moral legitimation of

slavery, manifested in a willingness to offer any official church position to slaveholders. As one Southern Methodist clergyman wrote, "[t]he Southern Conference can have no duty more solemn and imperative than to press, at this crisis, their positive, undeniable claim to be placed on the same footing with other divisions of the connection in all appointments to office," (Wightman, in Mathews p. 243).

Because Methodist Bishops were accountable to the General Conference, their authority was subject to challenge and their suppressive attempts lacked legitimacy. And because the General Conference was organized according the democratic rules and designed to incorporate diverse perspectives from below, abolitionists had opportunities to make their voices heard even when leaders did their best to silence them. These features of the church authority structure meant that denominational suppression did not stop abolitionist mobilization. And when leaders rebuked and punished abolitionists, suppression itself became a new grievance that abolitionists aired publicly. In this way, suppression actually increased sympathy for the abolitionists and served as an impetus for *increased* mobilization.

Together, growing abolitionist strength and proslavery radicalism placed the church in a lose-lose position. By the time the case of Bishop Andrew came to the fore, both retaining Andrew and rejecting him would have resulted in schism; there was no option that would have preserved Church unity. Once it became clear that proslavery concessions were no longer a path to denominational unity and that the threat of abolitionist exist would be as disruptive as proslavery exit, Church leaders finally resolved to refuse the proslavery demands and allow the South to secede.

Despite the hierarchical structure of the Methodist Church and the efforts to suppress abolitionism, the proceedings of the General Conference were democratic and there was still a general responsiveness to the grievances of members and those communities they represented. At each session, petitions were heard from individuals or from the lower administrative units, and these petitions were generally debated and voted on during the course of the meeting. When the GC created a committee to respond to petitions from the Church, committee members were selected to reflect the diversity of viewpoints on a topic, even when church leaders sought to suppress challengers. As a governing body with many built-in avenues for aggrieved parties to seek redress and to influence the political process, the functioning of the General Conference created a high degree of openness in the Methodist church.

The participatory norms of the General Conference also reflected a broader denominational commitment to democratic governance, which constrained the authority of individual church officials. The bishops of the Methodist Church drew their authority from the General Conference, which was responsible for electing them and disciplining them if necessary (Gorrie 1856: 35). Drawing on democratic norms and their roles as agents of the General or Annual conferences, ministers of the church felt empowered to oppose bishops where necessary (e.g. Merritt et al. 1837). Ministers and church members expected opportunities to influence church politics and efforts by Bishops to limit political participation were seen as a violation of church principles. Thus, the democratic norms of the General Conference limited its suppressive capacity. At the same time, the suppressive capacity of Bishops was limited by their subordinance to the General Conference.

Despite being formally centralized and hierarchical, the Methodist Church did not actually suppress abolitionist mobilization. Denominational openness meant that abolitionists had opportunities to air their grievances and publicly frame slavery, which led to gains in support. Limited suppressive capacity meant that abolitionists were able to circumvent efforts to

silence and discipline them, and also meant that suppressive efforts sometimes backfired, leading to increased abolitionist visibility and support from bystanders. Abolitionists took advantage of openings to grow their strength. As a result, instead of succumbing to Church suppression, abolitionists managed to rid their church of most slaveholders and dramatically increase the proportion of Methodists willing to stand against slavery.

Baptists

The Baptist church, while structurally quite different than the Methodist Church, followed a similar path: leaders attempted to suppress abolitionist mobilization but failed, and abolitionists eventually achieved important concessions. The similarities between the two cases underscore how openness and low repressive capacity constituted opportunities for abolitionists even in the face of resistance from leaders. The differences between the two cases clarify exactly how characteristics of the church authority structures and the dynamics of movement-countermovement conflict created these opportunities for abolitionist growth and success.

Baptist churches began springing up in New England in the mid- to late-seventeenth century. One of Finke and Stark's (1992) "upstart sects" that "won America," the Baptists claimed only 16% of religious adherents at the end of the 18th century, but grew rapidly during the antebellum period, and by 1850 were second only to Methodists in their share of the nation's religious adherents (Fink and Stark 1992). Baptists maintain a congregationalist organizational structure; there is no central organizational body that determines doctrine or authorizes ministry. The only mechanism for determining who is and who is not a Baptist is fellowship: Baptist ministers join in associations and can agree to "disfellow" a congregation that fails to adhere to Baptist doctrine or practice (Gorrie 1856: 137). Church centralization began in 1814 with the development of the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions, known typically as the "General Convention," or alternatively as the "Triennial Convention" on account of its triennial meetings (Kidd and Hankins 2015: 95). Subsequently, in 1824 the Baptist General Tract Society was formed, and in 1832 the American Baptist Home Mission Society was created to support missionary work on the American frontier and in the South (Leonard 2005: 21).

Over time, the agencies for domestic and foreign missionary cooperation rose to a special status, eventually becoming the basis of a national denominational structure. Through participation in the General Convention and the Home Mission Society, Baptists ministers went from being nodes in a loose network of affiliation to being members of formal national organizations. While those organizations could not create rules to govern the behavior of individuals or congregations, in managing the missionary enterprise at the national level, their policies came to reflect the Baptist Church as a whole. Thus, it was within these national missionary agencies that the conflict over slavery broke out in the Baptists Church, and it was through the formation of a distinct Southern Baptist Convention for missionary activity in 1845 that a North-South Baptists Schism took place (Putnam 1913). Today, the Southern Baptist Convention is still understood to be a distinct denomination, even though the schism that created it was, on paper, simply the division of a missionary agency.

Denominational centralization made a national conflict over slavery possible, since cooperation in national agencies is what brought slaveholders and radical abolitionists into direct engagement with one another. However, these agencies lacked the formal policy-making capacity that the central legislative bodies of other denominations had, so leaders were unable to create binding policies on slavery. This meant that leaders had virtually no suppressive capacity.

Leaders' lack of doctrinal or legislative authority meant they also had a weak hold on membership, and dissatisfied Baptists could choose to withdraw from the missionary organizations without leaving the Church itself. Additionally, these agencies were organized according to democratic norms, which granted challengers avenues to air their grievances, publicly make claims about the evils of slavery, gain supporters—and antagonize their opponents. The democratic norms of the national agencies created openness to abolitionism, allowing abolitionists opportunities to push for a national slavery policy and to air their grievances publicly. Democratic norms also further reduced suppressive capacity, since they undermined the legitimacy of leaders' suppressive attempts, potentially opening leaders to challenge and raising support for abolitionists.

Drawing on Luders (2010), one would expect the Baptist Church, like the Methodist Church, to try to suppress abolitionist mobilization because the proslavery faction was much larger and more unified during the antebellum period. Considering the configuration of church authority, however, the organizational opportunities perspective suggests that the Baptist Church would be unable to actually reduce abolitionist mobilization because of its openness and low repressive capacity. Based on my earlier hypothesizing, the emphasis on rational-legal authority (over traditional or charismatic authority), the well-established democratic processes in the church, and the low overall concentration of authority should create opportunities for abolitionists to grow in strength as a movement. These characteristics of the Baptist Church mean that even when leaders resist abolitionists, abolitionists will have access to a denominational arena for contention, where they can frame slavery and abolition, challenge authoritarian leadership, and gain support from bystanders. In other words, the authority conditions in the Baptist Church mean that abolitionists would be well-positioned to sustain a collective challenge to slavery, develop movement power, and, contingent upon their effective framing and protest tactics, eventually achieve concessions.

The Baptist Struggle Over Slavery

In the wake of the American Revolution, many Baptists expressed disapproval of slavery, even in the South. Between 1787-and 1801, prominent Kentucky preacher Elder Carmen instructed Baptists to remove slaveholders from their churches and associations (Birney 1890:18). In 1789, the Virginia General Committee of the Baptists passed a resolution stating that slavery was a "violent deprivation of the rights of nature" and encouraged Baptists to work towards its eradication (Putnam 1913: 12). That same year, the Philadelphia Baptist Association advised its members to form gradual abolition societies (Putnam 1913: 12). According to Kidd and Hankins (2015: 100-102), the Baptist Associations of Shaftsbury, NY; Ketocton, VA; Southampton County, VA; and Carrollton, GA all issued statements opposing slavery or the slave trade or encouraged action against slavery.

Despite the measure of support for abolition found among Baptists at the close of the 18th century, Baptists overall were divided in their positions on slavery and most Baptist associations were reluctant to enter the fray. The Kentucky Association to which Elder Carmen appealed for an official policy statement refused to issue one statement (Kidd and Hankins 2015: 99-100). Though the Virginia General Committee passed a resolution opposing slavery in 1789, afterwards they refused to issue further comments on the subject and declared slavery to be a political problem rather than a religious one (100). The Bethel, SC association declined to respond to a query about slavery in 1799 (ibid), and in 1807 the North District Association in

Kentucky expelled a prominent antislavery preacher for refusing to stay quiet over the issue (102).

Slavery became an issue of national denomination concern when the Baptist Union of England wrote to the board of the American General Convention, believing it to be an agency capable of establishing national Baptist policy on slavery, and enjoined its leaders to oppose slavery (Foss 1850:14-5). The board, without bringing the issue to the attention the General Convention as a whole, resolved that they "cannot, as a Board, interfere with a subject that is not among the objects for which the convention and the Board were formed" (Bolles 1835: 8). The board sent a reply to the British Baptists including this resolution, and excused their refusal to challenge slavery on the grounds that the legislative autonomy of US states made the issue too complex, and also that widespread emancipation would cause major social problems. The board also emphasized the importance of responding to slavery delicately, so as to avoid alienating Southern Christians and destroying the unity that had been achieved among the American churches (9-11).

The letter to British Baptists expressed confidence that abstaining from actions on slavery was the most prudent choice. Despite their seeming confidence, however, the board chose *not* to bring the exchange to the attention of the General Convention or to share their thoughts on slavery with the broader community of Baptists (Foss 1850: 16-17). British Baptists published the correspondence, however, and it was quickly reprinted by American news outlets. The content of the letter itself, the board's attempt at secrecy, and the fact that the board took several months to respond all suggest that Baptist leaders were trying to avoid controversy by not taking a public position on slavery. Leaders' fears that the South would withdraw their "zealous" support for the missionary endeavor inspired leaders to take a sympathetic position towards slavery (Bolles 1835: 11). But in attempting to keep their sympathetic letter private, leaders showed that they also feared provoking the abolitionists.

Controversy over slavery was not far behind, no matter how determined leaders were to avoid it. In 1839, abolitionist Baptists decided the Church ought to be doing more to eradicate slavery and made plans to form a Baptist Antislavery Society (Baker 1948: 48). The first meeting of the American Baptist Antislavery Convention was held in New York the following year, in 1840. Attendees drafted a letter to Southern Baptists, imploring them to "confess before heaven and earth the sinfulness of holding slaves," to "admit [slavery] to be not only a misfortune but a crime," and to "petition for guarantee, to all, for 'natural and inalienable rights.'" (Groser 1840: 525).

Southern Baptists did not take the advice of the abolitionists kindly, and a backlash ensued. The prime target of the backlash was the General Convention. Though the agency had no formal legislative power, as they had been quick to remind the British Baptists, Southern demands on the GC illustrate the crucial leadership position that the organization had come to possess. Southerners asked that the General Convention reprimand abolitionists and declare the permissibility of slavery among Baptists. The Savannah River Baptist Association, for example, resolved that they "deem the conduct of northern Abolitionists highly censurable and meddlesome" and wanted the General Convention to demand that Northern Baptists remove "those fanatics" (abolitionists) from their missionary associations and threatened that they would be unable to continue cooperating with the General Convention if said meddlesome abolitionists were allowed to remain (Savannah River Baptist Association, in Foss 1850, p. 49). They further resolved that they would not pay their dues to the General Convention until it provided a satisfactory response.

Other Southern churches and regional associations demanded the expulsion of abolitionist Elon Galusha from the Board of the General Convention because he had served as vice president of the antislavery convention and was a signatory on the offensive letter. Like the Savannah River Association, they also wished to see a statement from the General Convention making its views on slavery and abolition explicit (Foss, 49-51).

Again, the leaders of the General Convention attempted to avoid conflict by assuring both the proslavery and the abolitionist factions that the Convention lacked all authority over matters of church policy. The Board issued a circular wherein it asserted that its responsibilities had been

> misapprehended by brethren near and remote, and the consequence of the misapprehension has been to hold the Board accountable for things done and not done, *in relation to all of which alike the Board has done nothing, because it had nothing to do*. With respect to such things the Board has, so to speak, neither a name nor existence. (Christian Watchman 1840, emphasis in original)

The Board, so its members claimed, did not have the power to respond to the slavery controversy in the way that the clergy and adherents of the Church wished. Taken at face value, the Board's response points to the organization's limited capacity to satisfy challengers. However, even as the board of the General Convention could not speak for all Baptists or determine the policies that individual Baptist churches should enforce, the policies and positions that *were* within the scope of their authority were of critical importance to the nation's Baptists. Policies related to the selection of missionaries, for example, determined whether the salary and social influence associated with being a Baptist missionary were available to slaveholders. At the same time, General Convention policies drew a line in the sand, determining what the Baptist Church would stand for. In that sense, the claim that leaders were not in any position to make decisions pertinent to slavery was a false one.

Voluntary participation and democratic organizational structures made the General Convention quite open to challengers. When leaders were faced with the disruptive impacts of conflict between the proslavery and antislavery factions, however, they attempted to close channels of influence *exactly by claiming that the organization had no capacity to satisfy challenger demands*. This strategic response to social movement pressure was indeed a suppressive strategy.

The suppressive function of Baptist leaders' efforts to avoid responsibility for the slavery controversy becomes even clearer considering their subsequent actions. At the next meeting of the General Convention, which took place in Baltimore in 1841, denominational leaders re-elected every board member except Elon Galusha, the abolitionist who had served as the president of the Baptist Antislavery Convention and who several Southern associations had asked the board to fire. The General Convention could not have chosen a more symbolic replacement: in place of Galusha they elected Richard Fuller, a South Carolina slaveholding preacher who, earlier that year, had engaged in a print debate over slavery with Galusha (American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, hereafter ABFMS, 1841: 16, ABFMS 1838: 133, Stringfellow 1841). Additionally, slaveholder William B. Johnson of South Carolina was elected as the new president of the Convention (ABFMS 1841: 16). The leadership choices made in 1841 indicate that the General Convention was not neutral to the competing demands made by abolitionists and proslavery. Instead, they represented a clear concession to proslavery.

A second major concession to proslavery also took place during the 1841 General Convention meeting. Prior to the meeting's start, a secret caucus of Southerners and proslavery

Northerners met with the intention of combatting the abolitionist influence in the church. They drafted a resolution that rebuked abolitionists for asking the missionary organizations to divest from slaveholder influence and wealth (Cone 1841, in Foss p. 79). When the Convention met, the proslavery faction introduced its resolution, which argued that these abolitionists were introducing "new tests" of fellowship not found in the revealed law of God, and framed abolitionists as opponents of the Church and of the faith.

> The undersigned deem it their duty and privilege to record their full conviction that no new tests unauthorized by the Scriptures, and by the established usages of the great body of our churches, should be suffered to interfere with the harmonious operations of our benevolent associations, as originally constituted; and they embrace this fitting occasion to express their decided disapprobation of all such tests, believing them to have a direct tendency to part asunder those who have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," and above all that they invade the prerogative of Jesus Christ, the one and only legislator of the churches of the saints, to whom be glory for ever, amen. (Cone 1841, in Foss, 75-76).

The resolution, which became known as the "Baltimore Compromise" passed in the General Convention, indicating the body's accommodation of proslavery and its rejection of abolitionism.

In censuring abolitionists and signaling their support to proslavery, the General Convention attempted to navigate a conflict instigated by a small but disruptive group of challengers (abolitionists) who were opposed by a larger and more united opposing movement (proslavery). Even as the Convention proclaimed neutrality, they punished abolitionists and made concessions to proslavery. Since leaders clearly had the capacity to make an influential statement and to punish activists by denying access to leadership positions, board members' claims that the General Convention had no authority in matters of slavery policy should be seen as an effort avoid the divisive effects of slavery controversy.

While the proslavery faction won at that the Baltimore Convention, the abolitionist struggle for the Baptist Church was not over. Denominational openness had already enabled abolitionists to express their grievances, make claims about the nature of slavery before the broader church community, harness church networks to build their own antislavery organization, and gain support. With significant abolitionist organizing already underway, the events of the 1841 Convention did not actually suppress abolition, and instead served as a catalyst.

Concluding that they would be excluded from leadership positions, as Galusha had been, and that they had lost any chance to influence the denomination's direction regarding slavery, in 1843 a group of abolitionists decided to withdraw from the General Convention and the Baptist Home Mission Society to form their own missionary society grounded in abolitionist principles, which eventually became known as the American Baptist Free Mission Society (Putnam 1913: 31-2). While the number of members in the first years of the organization is not known, McKivigan (1984: 96) estimates that by 1850 they had ten thousand members. The loss of membership may not have immediately threatened the survival of the Baptist Church, but the abolitionists did show that they were ready to act and undermined leaders' certainty that siding with the more powerful proslavery faction would broker peace.

At the same time, the abolitionists who remained within the church increased pressure on leadership. The next national meetings took place in 1844, with the General Convention and the Home Mission Society meetings occurring in alternating sessions over the same several days.

During a session of the Home Mission Society, abolitionist Samuel Adlam put forth a motion designed to force convention delegates to express their true positions. The resolution stated simply that slaveholding was no bar to appointment as a missionary; anyone who voted in favor of it would be siding with slavery. The resolution was debated for the duration of the session. Delegates proposed alternative resolutions, but debate was so intense that none could pass (Foss, p. 88-9, Lincoln 1844- Report of the American Baptist Home Mission Society p. 5-6). After several days of dispute, a clergyman from New York submitted a new resolution calling for the creation of a committee that would draw up plans for an "amicable dissolution of the society" or otherwise change the society's constitution in some way that would better facilitate cooperation across sectional lines. The resolution passed and the members of the committee were appointed (Lincoln 1844 p. 5-6).

Like the abolitionists, the proslavery faction was determined to see the church take a stand. Several months after the convention meetings, the Georgia Baptist Association suggested a candidate for domestic missionary work to the Home Mission Board. In their letter suggesting the candidate, the Georgia Baptists expressly stated that he was a slaveholder and stated that selecting him would quell fears of antislavery bias among the board. This time, however, Baptist leaders did not bend to proslavery interests. Instead, the Home Mission Board replied to the letter, stating that they would not consider the candidate's application because they felt confident that the Georgia Convention's aim in suggesting him was "to test the action of the Board in respect to the subjects of slavery or anti-slavery" and that, in light of that objective, "their official obligation either to act on the appointment or to entertain the applicant, ceases" (Hill 1844, in Foss 1850 p. 125-6). Where Baptist leaders had previously been making a public performance of neutrality while also enacting policies that favored slavery, following the abolitionist exit, the Home Mission Board finally made a major concession to abolition and refused to accommodate slaveholder interests.

After Georgia's failed test of the Home Mission Board, the Alabama Baptist Association put a similar challenge before the Foreign Mission Board. They sent a letter to the board of the General Convention asking for assurance that "slaveholders are eligible and entitled equally with non-slaveholders to all privileges and immunities of their several unions, and especially to receive any agency, mission or other appointment, which may fall within the scope of their operations or duties," and declared they would not cooperate with the Convention if they did not receive this assurance (Hartwell 1844, in Foss 1850: 104). The answer they received was not the one they had hoped for. The Board of the General Convention replied that,

> "in the thirty years in which the Board has existed, no slaveholder, to our knowledge, has applied to be a Missionary…. If, however, any one (sic) should offer himself as a Missionary, having slaves, and should insist on retaining them as his property, we could not appoint him. One thing is certain; we can never be a party to any arrangement which would imply approbation of slavery" (Sharp 1844, in Foss 1850 p. 106-7).

This reply came from the same board that, just a few years earlier, had told British Baptists that slavery was too delicate a matter to interfere with, and who attempted to keep that correspondence with British Baptists as quiet as possible. For years, the Board simultaneously worked to appease the more powerful proslavery faction while officially declaring its neutrality. However, once abolitionists showed themselves to be a well-organized collective willing to back their demands with withdrawal from the church, Baptist leaders reconsidered their strategy.

Realizing that quiet concessions to proslavery were not going to save the church from conflict, they instead chose to concede to abolition and resist the increasingly radical demands from proslavery.

While the Church had been set on suppressing abolitionism when they believed doing so would prevent conflict, their actions failed to reduce abolitionist mobilization. Abolitionists retained access to the denominational arena for contention through the democratic rules and procedures of the General Convention and used this arena to frame slavery as a subject of religious concern and challenge the overreach of Baptist leaders. Through their continued agitation, abolitionists threatened to draw moderates out of the church and provoked their proslavery opponents. Eventually, their provocation led to more drastic measures from the South, and proslavery leaders began to demand the full force of the church's legitimacy in defense of slavery. In the face of increasingly radical proslavery demands and growth in abolitionist strength, leaders finally rejected the Southern ultimatum and ended their years of capitulation to proslavery.

Why Baptist Abolitionists Won

When conflict over slavery took hold of the Baptist Church in the decades leading up to the civil war, both the abolitionist and proslavery factions appealed to the domestic and foreign missionary agencies for adjudication. The missionary bodies took on the de-facto role of church policymakers but, without any formal authority with which to demand compliance, their role was precarious. The fact that the national Baptist Church was held together by agencies whose leaders had no *religious* authority meant that the Church was especially vulnerable to organizational fracturing and the loss of participants, as leaving the church had no spiritual consequences.

Openness and low suppressive capacity made it difficult for Baptists leaders to navigate the conflict between abolitionists and proslavery. Because the agencies were democratically organized and designed to channel influence, abolitionists had the means to influence the political processes of the Church. When they encountered resistance from leaders that prevented them from achieving their political goals directly through these official channels, they still had access to a denominational venue in which to engage with supporters and opponents, submitting petitions that required a church response, proposing abolitionist resolutions, and engaging in extensive public debate. These were opportunities to frame slavery and abolition, to challenge leaders' suppression, and to provoke the proslavery faction.

Low suppressive capacity meant that abolitionists continued to organize and find new ways to gain support even when Church leaders silenced and punished them. Because authority was exclusively rational-legal (and not traditional or charismatic), because it was checked by strong democratic institutions, and because it was less concentrated overall, church leaders also lacked the ability to block abolitionists from public arenas, to control the public agenda, and to reduce mobilization through costly sanctions. Church leaders' inability to suppress abolitionism meant that conflict between abolitionists and proslavery persisted, and eventually abolitionists were able to shift leaders' cost calculations and gain important concessions.

Two factors changed leaders' strategic calculations. The first factor was the departure of some abolitionists from the primary church missionary agencies to form the American and Foreign Baptist Missionary Society (later renamed the American Baptist Free Mission Society) in 1843. The formation of the alternative missionary agency increased the costs associated with abolitionist disruption. Second, as conflict between the abolitionist and proslavery factions

intensified, Southern demands grew more extreme. In view of these more extreme demands for legitimacy, the costs of conceding to Southern demands also increased—granting complete legitimacy to slavery might not just alienate the abolitionists, but also a broader party of Northern moderates. With the costs of both abolitionist disruption and the costs of proslavery concessions rising, leaders eventually reversed their course and conceded to the abolitionists, even knowing that doing so would lead to schism.

The national conflict in the Baptist Church was shorter-lasting than the national conflict in other denominations. For most of American Baptist history, discussion of slavery occurred in meetings of regional associations where it was of limited impact. As the denomination centralized with the formation of national church agencies and these organizations became the targets of both abolitionists and proslavery, the two factions came into direct conflict with one another. Since the national agencies of the denomination did not possess any real suppressive capacity, however, they were poor arbiters of the conflict. Further, because the leaders did not have any religious authority, adherents did not feel bound to accept their determinations. Participation in the missionary agencies, while socially important, did not define what it meant to be Baptist, and the leaders of these agencies did not speak for God. In this context, it did not take long for the weak glue of cooperative missionary activity to fail in holding the denomination together.

Explaining Abolitionist Success

Leaders in both the Methodist and Baptist churches knew that concessions to abolitionists would provoke major backlash from the larger and more unified proslavery countermovement, so they tried their best to suppress their internal abolition movements. In other words, the presence of a countermovement united leaders against abolitionists, despite the varied views of slavery held by these leaders. Yet, the openness and lack of suppressive capacity in these churches enabled abolitionists to assert their dissatisfaction with slavery, frame slavery as a moral problem to which religious communities had a duty to respond, harness church networks and organizational resources, and expand their support. Growing in strength and influence, abolitionists continued to force the question of slavery onto the national denominational agenda. Their actions in turn led to sustained countermovement mobilization and increasingly radical demands from the proslavery faction. Eventually, these demands went beyond Church leaders' limits, shifting leaders' concession cost calculations and causing leaders to eventually make significant concessions to abolitionists.

The Methodists, though hierarchically organized under the supervision of Bishops, maintained a highly democratic organizational structure that provided abolitionists with opportunities for influence. The principal characteristic of the Methodist Church that led to its openness was that the authority of the General Conference equaled or exceeded that of the Bishops. The Bishops were accountable to elected officials for their behavior, and delegates had the authority to determine the agenda of the General Conference (even if this was not always true in the Annual Conferences). Additionally, the institution of petitioning allowed aggrieved individuals and Annual Conferences to raise issues of importance at the General Conference. Contentious matters were sent to committees that were expected to be composed of church leaders with varying opinions, and delegates could vote against resolutions of such committees and submit amendments and alternative motions. While there were certainly means by which a largely unified General Conference could—and did—silence unpopular opinions in the

Conference, its ability to wholly ignore protests was hindered by its democratic institutions and values.

All these factors combined to make the Methodist Church one in which abolitionists found a high degree of openness and limited suppressive capacity, which enabled mobilization and growth. Denominational suppression, which entailed both direct efforts to silence and punish abolitionists as well as strategic efforts to close political opportunities, was hindered by the existence of multiple avenues for influence, the accountability of Bishops to elected officials, and the leadership's obligation to live up to the democratic ethos of the church.

The Baptist Church was open to abolitionists for similar reasons: the concentration of authority was generally low because national leadership was limited in scope (authority for most matters belonged to individual congregations) and was spread across two different missionary agencies. Leaders were democratically elected officials with agency authority, not religious authority, and were accountable to the denomination through procedures designed to incorporate input from below. These features allowed abolitionists to mobilize even in the face of resistance from leaders, since leaders lacked the capacity to control the denominational agenda, or block abolitionist disruption, or punish challengers enough to gain their compliance.

The Baptist missionary agencies were never supposed to serve a policy-making function for the denomination as a whole, but as the major centralized bodies within the church, they developed a powerful role in defining what it meant to be Baptist. Their internal decisions became statements of Baptist policy, even as they had no binding authority on Baptist congregations. This decoupling between the actual and intended function of the organizations further undermined leaders' efforts to suppress abolitionism.

The Baptists and Methodists, though different in their formal organizational structures, both failed to foreclose opportunities for sustained abolitionist mobilization. Although their position vis-a-vis movement-countermovement conflict made suppression of abolitionists the most desirable strategy, leaders had limited rational-legal authority while the democratic rules and procedures in each denomination made it possible for abolitionists to circumvent suppressive tactics and proceed with their disruptive activities. In addition, sustained abolitionist mobilization also provoked proslavery countermobilization. Without the capacity to reduce abolitionist mobilization, church leaders saw growing support for abolition and increasingly radical demands from the South, which eventually shifted their cost calculations and led them to make concessions to abolitionists after years of siding with proslavery forces.

Chapter Three: Abolitionist Failure Cases

In the Methodist and Baptist Churches, openness and low suppressive capacity enabled abolitionists to overcome resistance from church leaders. In this chapter, I explore two negative cases—cases in which abolitionists did not mobilize a sustained church-centered challenge to slavery, and I examine what was different about them. As I will show, abolitionists in the Protestant Episcopal Church did not mobilize a church-centered challenge at all, while abolitionists among the Disciples of Christ made some modest efforts , but these failed to grow into a sustained movement. Existing research has described these denominations as indifferent to slavery and emphasized the role of theology in producing this supposed indifference (Ahlstrom 1994: 661, Addison 1951: 192 Hein and Shattuck 2004: 77, Mullin 1986: 125-6, Butler 1995: 152, Garrison and DeGroot 1948: 330). However, a closer look at the history of slavery and racial justice struggles in these churches raises serious questions about this interpretation.

I offer an alternative account in this chapter, arguing that the impetus for an abolition movement in these churches was present, but that abolitionism failed to flourish because the conditions for successful mobilization were absent. Most notably, church leaders among the Episcopalians and Disciples of Christ were far more effective at suppressing abolitionism than Baptist and Methodist leaders. Because authority was more concentrated overall and relied more on spiritual legitimation (instead of rational-legal legitimation), and because there were fewer democratic rules and procedures to counter religious leaders' authority, Disciples and Episcopalian leaders compelled a greater degree of deference from would-be challengers, effectively silenced abolitionists, kept tighter control over the framing of slavery and abolition, and blocked abolitionists from provoking proslavery backlash. These actions undermined the growth of abolitionism and preserved the appearance of denominational indifference.

Demonstrating successful suppression is a big empirical challenge. Repression usually manifests in observable conflict between challengers and authority (especially in the violent conflict between activists and police or military). Successful suppression, in contrast, leaves few traces since, by preventing mobilization, it prevents the very confrontations through which it could be observed. Since suppressed mobilization is not directly observable, and since it is not possible to prove that a movement *would* have emerged in the absence of the authority structures I have described, my strategy in this chapter is to first show that the prevailing explanation does not fit the data, and then to show that the historical evidence *is* consistent with my alternative.

In each section, I show that there *were* abolitionist activists among the Disciples of Christ and the Episcopalians and that they did engage in some isolated protest activity, indicating that the seeds of a church-centered abolition movement were present. Further, I show that church leaders were, like the Baptist and Methodist leaders, highly concerned with appeasing the South and that they excluded, silenced, and punished abolitionists with the stated intention of preserving church harmony, i.e. preventing white supremacist backlash. Finally, I show how the configuration of authority was implicated in the success of these tactics, and that abolitionists either did not openly challenge leaders' suppression or did not gain any support when they tried to do so. Taken together, this evidence shows that the churches were far from indifferent to slavery, suggesting instead that suppression played a pivotal role in preventing abolitionist mobilization among the Disciples and Episcopalians.

Episcopalians

When the first permanent English settlement was established in 1607 in Jamestown Virginia, the Church of England, or Anglican Church, was established with it. It became the official church in Virginia, Maryland, North and South Carolina, and Georgia (Addison 1951:27-39). During the American revolution, the church was disestablished and most clergy fled back to England. When the revolution was over, the few clergy who remained set about making a church that could exist independently on American soil. In 1789 they held their first General Convention, marking the start of the American denomination known as the Protestant Episcopal Church (Addison 57-62).

The Protestant Episcopal Church (PEC), as its name implies, had an episcopal polity structure. The General Convention was the church's legislative body and it was composed of Bishops as well as delegates from each state level diocese. Bishops occupied an "upper house" with the right to create law and to veto decisions made by clergy or lay delegates to the General Convention (Addison 69). Each diocese was governed by a Bishop, who oversaw the congregations within its bounds and met annually with its preachers in a diocesan convention. While Bishops had to be elected by their diocesan convention, once elected they were only accountable to their fellow Bishops (Gorrie 1856: 24-5).

The General Convention of the PEC played a similar role to the General Conference of the Methodist Church, but it did not reflect the same democratic ethos. Where petitions to the Methodist General Conference were generally discussed by committees and openly debated, even when pertaining to contentious topics, public contention was not typical in the General Convention of the PEC. Records of the General Convention sometimes mention petitions that were received and immediately tabled without debate. Since the topics of these petitions were not mentioned, there is no way to know whether petitions on slavery were received and dismissed in this way or whether they were simply not received at all, but in either case it is clear that the General Convention was not a venue in which abolitionists aired their grievances or sought to influence policy, which stands in stark contrast to the Methodist General Conference. Without a forum for public debate and with much more autonomous religious leadership (Bishops), the PEC was far less open to social movement activity than was the Methodist or Baptist Church.

The concentration of power among the Bishops, as consecrated spiritual leaders and as the heads of the church agencies, provided Bishops with suppressive capacity. Bishops retained the ability to oppose the will of the clergy or lay delegates both within their own diocesan conventions and within the national convention. The few records that allude the slavery controversy among Episcopalians show a quiet dismissal of any issues that might provoke Southern backlash, something that was possible because of the special spiritual station of the

Bishops, which demanded deference from the clergy, as well as their ability to control the proceedings of the conventions by tabling provocative topics. In short, as a social movement target, the antebellum PEC was characterized by low openness and high suppressive capacity.

The Suppression of Slavery Conflict in the Protestant Episcopal Church

The Protestant Episcopal Church appears to have had very low levels of overt abolitionist activism. Events that caused controversy in other churches, such as the hiring of slaveholders to church offices, generally aroused little or no controversy (cf. Jay 1860, p. 18-20). From the first meeting of the General Convention of the PEC in 1785 until the start of the civil war, there are no records of abolitionist petitions like those commonly submitted to the Methodist General Conference. These facts have led previous researchers to conclude that Episcopalians were indifferent to social and political issues such as slavery (Ahlstrom 1994: 661, Addison 1951: 192, Hein and Shattuck 2004:77, Mullin 1986:125-6, and Butler 1995: 152). Indeed, the church itself propagated this view, stating that the ministry of the church had nothing to do "with party politics, with sectional disputes, with earthly distinctions" (PEC 1856: 13). Yet, several events in Episcopalian history challenge the indifference narrative, however. In this section, I document the few traces of Episcopalian abolitionism, showing the isolated attempts to challenge slavery within the church. I also show how leaders responded to both abolitionism and broader struggles for racial equality with suppression.

One occasion in which Episcopalians ventured into the debate over slavery was when Bishop John Henry Hopkins of Vermont delivered a speech on slavery in 1851. He gave the speech in two public venues, and then later published it under the title "Slavery: Its Religious Sanctions, Its Political Dangers, and the Best Mode of Doing it Away." To some readers, Hopkins was an antislavery moderate—indeed, the title of his essay speaks to his belief that slavery should be eradicated. Yet despite believing that slavery should be "done away with," he also thought that the Bible sanctioned it and that abolitionists were wrong for aggressively demanding that slaveholders must immediately free those they held in bondage. In his essay, Hopkins declared that *as a person* he considered slavery ugly and a threat to the peace and prosperity of the nation, but that he could not condemn it on religious grounds (Levy 1967).

Many Episcopalians found Hopkins' position to be shameful. At least ten different Episcopalians authored replies, challenging Hopkins' arguments on the biblical permissibility of slavery. Bishop Alonzo Potter of Pennsylvania, along with the clergy of his diocese, wrote a letter of protest declaring that Hopkins' apologies for slavery were "unworthy of any servant of Jesus Christ," and the letter received more than one hundred signatories (Potter 1863, Levy 1967). Another Episcopalian author described Hopkins' essay as an "attempt to press Holy Scripture into the cause of a system of tyranny almost unequalled in the history of our race, and founded on violence and robbery" (Drisler 1863, 1).

The controversy surrounding Hopkins' statement indicates two things: first, that Episcopalians, including high level church officials like Hopkins and Potter, did enter into social and political controversies; second, strong antislavery views also existed in the Episcopal Church. It is important to note, however, that both Hopkins' speech and the ensuing debate occurred outside the denominational arena. Hopkins gave his speech at the Young Men's Association of New York, not at a church or a meeting of the General Convention. Similarly, Episcopalians expressed their opposition to Hopkins' statement in pamphlets and magazines, beyond the sphere of denominational control, and although Hopkins' opponents included ministers and even a fellow bishop, the minutes of the General Convention bear no record of the

controversy. Episcopalians did not barge into the next General Convention demanding that one side or another be censured, as had occurred in both the Methodist and Baptist churches.

The silence over slavery within church agencies was not a reflection of a broader separation between purely religious concerns and social or political matters, however. While Episcopalians avoided debating slavery at the General Convention, they were quite open to discussing temperance, which was also a source of controversy during the period, and they discussed at length their efforts to evangelize among the enslaved. When the church sought to spread the Bible to enslaved people, however, no one mentioned the violence or subjugation those people endured. Where state laws prohibited teaching enslaved people to read, for example, the General Convention agreed to offer an oral (rather than written) catechism, but at no point in the discussion did anyone suggest the church might do something to challenge the legal mandate against literacy itself, or the broader system of injustice behind it (see, for example, PEC 1874: 45-6, 593-4, 1838: 58-9, 1841:47-48, 1844: 203).

What determined whether social or political issues were an acceptable focus for church concern was whether they challenged Southern proslavery interests. The church, for example, collaborated with the American Colonization Society (ACS), which offered America a way out of its thorny race problems by sending Black Americans to Liberia or other locations in Africa. While some Black Americans who had given up on the potential for racial equality in American did voluntarily emigrate, most Black Americans considered colonization to be a racist and undemocratic movement that sought to protect slavery by removing free Black Americans from the American political sphere (Power-Greene 2014). By the late 1820s, General Convention minutes show a sustained investment in African colonization, and by the 1850s the Church reported a sizable number of "colonists" (Black Americans who emigrated from the United States) as well as white missionaries working to spread the gospel and represent the Church in West Africa (PEC 1829: 39, PEC 1874: 418, PEC 1853: 302-309). These activities were not apolitical, but they were consistent with the interests of proslavery.

Further evidence that Episcopalian leaders were committed to preventing Southern backlash comes from the experiences of the Black abolitionist clergyman Rev. Peter Williams, especially after a racist and anti-abolitionist mob destroyed his church in 1834. Peter Williams had served the Black congregation of St. Philip's Church, New York, since its organization in 1809, but it took eleven years for the PEC to agree to ordain him. His ordination was made conditional on his agreement that he would not attend the meetings of the General Convention and his congregation would have no representation there (Townsend 2003: 493). Despite the obvious lack of racial equality, Williams was eventually ordained, and the community of St. Peters flourished.

In 1834, a racist mob, provoked by a nearby meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, unleashed a ten-day campaign of terror targeting Black neighborhoods and churches of New York, along with any establishments associated with abolitionism. On the third day of rioting, the mob stormed into St. Phillip's and destroyed much of the church's interior, tearing apart the altar and the organ, shredding the carpet, and even carrying the church pews into the street and setting them on fire (Hewitt 1980, Townsend 2003, 488-9). When Williams reported the event to the Bishop of New York, Benjamin Onderdonk, the Bishop expressed sympathy but quickly followed by directing Williams to resign from his position on the National Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) and asked Williams to publicly renounce all connection with the organization. Williams, with the deference to his superiors required of an Episcopal priest, complied (Townsend 2003: 490-1, Hewitt 1980: 8).

In his letter to Williams, Bishop Onderdonk suggested that Williams' antislavery activity could be as much to blame for the tragedy fat St. Phillips as the racism and proslavery fanaticism of the mobs, and that "on whichsoever side right may be," the Church should be on the side of Christian "meekness, order, and self-sacrifice to common good and the peace of the community" (Onderdonk 1834, in Sernett 1999: 212). Onderdonk's sentiments are typical of many "moderate" churchmen of the period: while he seems to express some sympathy with Williams and the plight of Black Americans, he was far more concerned with protecting the Church from proslavery backlash.

Onderdonk's primary concern was that Williams should no longer be publicly associated with the abolitionist cause, indicating his that he viewed curtailing abolitionism as the best way to prevent proslavery backlash. In a church where Bishops possessed high levels of spiritual authority drawn from their sacramental linkage to the apostles, Williams' willingness to step down from his post at the AASS in obedience to Onderdonk was not a matter of preference—it was a matter of moral obligation. Further, failure to comply could have meant his removal from the congregation he fought long and hard to serve (Townsend 2003: 495-7). Two days later, Wlliams announced his resignation from the AASS in a letter that appeared on the pages of several major newspapers (Williams 1834, in Woodson 1926: 629; Townsend 2003: 490).

The efforts church leaders made to prevent aggravating the Southern portion of the church were spelled out more clearly in the cases of Isaiah DeGrasse and Alexander Crummell. In 1836 Isaiah DeGrasse, who grew up in Rev. Williams' parish, passed the admission exam for the General Theological Seminary of the Protestant Episcopal Church and enrolled to begin his training for the ministry. Shortly after he began, however, Bishop Onderdonk asked DeGrasse to silently withdraw on account of fears that "the South" would object to his presence (DeGrasse 1836, in Jay 1843: 15). Onderdonk explained that the seminary required the funds of its Southern supporters and, given "the extreme excitability of public feeling on this delicate subject," DeGrasse's enrollment might risk "bringing the Institution into disrepute" and "exciting opposing sentiment among the students" (DeGrasse 1836, in Jay 1843: 16). Onderdonk offered that DeGrasse might still take part in the activities of the seminary without formally enrolling, but DeGrasse found this idea too humiliating to consider.

In the end, DeGrasse decided to "acquiesce as a Christian" and withdraw from the seminary but undertook private study rather than participating in the seminary unofficially, as Onderdonk had offered. Nonetheless, he disapproved of Onderdonk's willingness to concede to proslavery interests: "it is my present opinion," wrote DeGrasse, "that Bishop Onderdonk is wrong in yielding to the '*unrighteous prejudice'* (his words) of the community. If the prejudice be wrong, I think he out to oppose it without regard to consequences." (DeGrasse 1836, in Jay 1843: 16). Yet over the course of their communications Onderdonk made it clear that, in the end, DeGrasse had no choice: "[t]he Bishop further said that the Trustees of the Seminary could receive or exclude any individual from the privileges of it, whom in their wisdom they thought fit, without being amenable to any person, or without being obliged to give any explanation for their course whatsoever" (17).

Three years later Alexander Crummell, another young Black man from St. Phillips with aspirations for the Episcopal ministry, attempted to join the seminary. When his application was rejected without explanation, he petitioned the Board of Trustees to consider his case. The Board's statutes indicate that such a petition should have been handled by the faculty of the seminary. Instead, the trustees formed a committee to address the petition, which voted to stand behind Crummell's rejection. Bishop George W. Doane had initially been selected to head the

committee, but he removed himself before the committee issued its decision. His reasons for doing so were not documented but, following the committee's verdict, he submitted a protest and asked that his reasons be documented. The committee refused the request for documentation of his protest, and it is not known what exactly Doane protested. However, Crummell later described Doane as "that lion-hearted prelate" who, in that instance, had been his sole supporter (Trustees 1839, in Birney 1885, p. 46-7, Crummell 1992: 33).

An analysis of the DeGrasse and Crummell cases confirms that even when leaders seemed to disagree with the Southerners they sought to appease, as Onderdonk claimed with respect to DeGrasse's admission to the seminary, they conceded to proslavery in order to keep the peace in the church. These cases also illustrate the pivotal role that silencing played in the Episcopalian strategy. Primary sources indicate that DeGrasse and Crummell were denied access to seminary education because they were Black, but official church records do not mention race or allude to any debate over the ethics of racial exclusion, and the church managed the controversy as quietly as possible (e.g. DeGrasse in Jay 1843 pp. 14-17, Crummell 1839 pp. 4). Leadership during the Crummell case directly forbade entering Bishop Doane's protest into the church records, even though Done explicitly requested that his protest be recorded. These were deliberate tactics aimed at preventing anger from the proslavery South, and they were unidirectional—Episcopalians quietly conceded to proslavery at the expense of justice but had no problem quashing abolitionism. And if private correspondence and personal diaries had not exposed the events that took place behind closed doors, church leaders would have successfully wiped clean the historical record so that their deliberate suppression might have looked like indifference.

In another instance of church suppression, white abolitionist John Jay II addressed the New York Diocesan Convention of 1860 to demand church action against illegal slave trading that had cropped up in New York ports.[2] Jay submitted a resolution calling upon the Bishop of the New York Diocese to condemn the slave trade, but found himself greatly hindered by the resistance of his colleagues, who used procedural rules to repeatedly disrupt his speech (Episcopal Church Diocese of New York 1860). While Jay was introducing his resolution, a motion was made to table it. The presiding bishop, instead of allowing Jay to continue, put the motion to a vote immediately. Another minister protested, arguing that laying a resolution on the table before the speaker had finished speaking on it amounted to gagging him, but the Bishop continued, and Jay's resolution was tabled. Later that same day Jay again tried to give his speech. New objections were made, but this time the Bishop allowed him to deliver his address (Jay 1860, 4-6; Episcopal Church Diocese of New York 1860, 75, 87). When he finished, however, a new motion was made to table the resolution, and Jay's resolution never came to a vote. It did not matter that Jay spoke only of an illegal resurgence in slave trading rather than the system of Southern slavery itself, or that he spoke to an audience of Northerners. Nor did it matter that Jay himself was a lawyer and a Columbia graduate, or that his grandfather was John Jay I, founding father and first Chief Justice of the United States. Episcopalians were determined to suppress dissent.

Blocked at every opportunity, Episcopalian abolitionists remained on the margins and failed to generate significant conflict or gain concessions from church leaders. In the absence of a serious abolitionist challenge, the PEC carried on with their accommodation of proslavery and avoided denominational schism, leading to the common perception that Episcopalians just didn't

2. For a discussion of this history see Vinson 1996.

worry too much about slavery (Ahlstrom 1994: 661, Addison 1951: 192 Hein and Shattuck 2004: 77, Mullin 1986: 125-6, Butler 1995: 152, Garrison and DeGroot 1948: 330). Yet, there were indeed vocal opponents to slavery in the PEC. There were antislavery Bishops, and Bishops who advocated for racial justice. There were more than a hundred signatories to Bishop Alonzo Potter's letter challenging the biblical defense of slavery. Additionally, Episcopalians served as officers in the American Anti-Slavery Society (McKivigan 1984: 203-20). The church had more congregations in the North than in the South (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1850). There were, in other words, the seeds for a movement—yet, a serious collective challenge to slavery in the church did not develop.

Why Episcopalian Abolitionists Failed

The reason that abolitionist Episcopalians failed to mobilize lies in the lack of openness and the high suppressive capacity of the Church as a social movement target. The agencies of the PEC were not structured to aggregate input from clergy or members. Bishops had the authority to determine what constituted a proper domain of concern for the church, and input from the General Convention delegates was confined to those topics. Since slavery and racial justice were expected to arouse the anger of Southerners, these topics were not debatable. Without the ability to advocate for change in these large national forums, abolitionists did not have the chance to publicly frame slavery as a religious problem, insist on its importance as a matter of denominational concern, or gain supporters.

Deference to religious authority was also an important principle in the church. Given the sacred status of the Bishops, an abolitionist challenge their Episcopal authority would have been at odds with their own religious convictions and their basis for participation in the church in the first place (Townsend 2003: 495-7). Thus, abolitionists were reluctant to oppose church leaders, so Black Episcopalians were stuck quietly tolerating personal injustices, and those who saw error in their leaders' judgements generally expressed their dissatisfaction privately. Protecting the church from Southern backlash was more important to church leaders than racial justice, and it was the obligation of the clergy and members to defer to those leaders.

In the absence of open venues for debate and channels for clergy and members to influence church slavery policy, the PEC embodied low openness. Given the high concentration of spiritual and administrative authority in the hands of Bishops, who determined what could be a topic of concern in the conventions and who could pursue official posts, the Church also had high suppressive capacity. Because of these two features, abolitionist Episcopalians lacked the opportunity to mobilize a serious challenge to slavery.

Disciples

The Disciples of Christ (known also as the Christian Churches) began as an early 19th century movement to restore a "primitive" version of Christianity—a Christianity that was simple, scripturally anchored, and untouched by all the endless theological and doctrinal divisions that had afflicted the Christian world (Garrison 1931: 3-6). The movement united two communities of restorationists: the followers of Barton Stone, who had referred to their community simply as the Christian Church, and the followers of Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander Campbell, who were known as the Disciples of Christ. Although the founders envisioned all Christians belonging to a single, united church, from 1830 onward the movement coalesced into a distinct denomination. The young church included both abolitionists and slaveholders, and a small

number of abolitionists attempted a struggle to purify the church from association with slavery. Yet, as was the case among the Episcopalians, the abolitionists remained a minor fringe group that failed to significantly impact church policy or even provoke major denominational conflict.

The opportunity structure that abolitionists Disciples encountered in their church was one of low openness and high suppressive capacity, just like in the Protestant Episcopal Church. Yet the formal organizational structure of the Disciples' church differed significantly. The PEC is centralized and hierarchical, with a strong legislative body headed by religious authority figures (Bishops). The Disciples, on the other hand, had a "congregational" polity structure in which congregations affiliated with one another, but there was no legislative body that could establish binding church policy. Leaders of the movement even minimized the distinction between lay persons and clergy and encouraged lay persons to preach (Garrison 1931: 105). When the church missionary society formed in 1849, it was less of an organized system of delegates and more a "mass meeting" of any Disciples interested enough in the missionary cause to attend (187).

How did such a decentralized church provide such an unfavorable opportunity structure for abolitionist mobilization? The answer lies in a decoupling between the formal and informal authority structures in the church (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Two main factors concentrated power in the hands of a few leaders despite its formally non-hierarchical organizational form: the influence of a living founder of the Disciples movement in church agencies and media, and the minimal bureaucratic development of the church missionary agency.

Alexander Campbell, along with his father Thomas Campbell and Barton Stone, founded the Disciples of Christ. Alexander Campbell was the author of the majority of Disciples' theological writing and served in two important leadership roles during his lifetime. He was the first president of the the American Christian Missionary Society (ACMS) when it was established in 1849 and was subsequently re-elected to the post *every year* until his death in 1866 (American Christian Missionary Society 1909: 30). He also served as the editor of the main Disciples periodical, the *Millennial Harbinger*. He had founded and edited the proto-Disciples periodical, *The Christian Baptist* magazine beginning in 1823. Then, when the Campbells severed ties with the Baptist Church in 1830, he continued the magazine under a new title, *Millennial Harbinger,* and published it continuously until his death in 1866 (Garrison 1931). While there were other Disciples periodicals, the *Millennial Harbinger* was "the backbone of the periodical literature of the Disciples" and was the longest running church publication at the outbreak of the civil war (Garrison 1931: 147). As the living voice of the church's founding principles, the editor of its main periodical, and the president of its only national agency, Alexander Campbell had an outsized influence on the church—and he used it to suppress abolitionism.

The second factor that concentrated authority in the Church was its skeletal bureaucracy, which left a small group of leaders with unchecked power to make decisions that elsewhere were a matter of formal policy and public debate. Since the Disciples had only developed into a denomination in the 1830s and did not centralize missionary activity until 1849, they lacked procedures for collective decision making. For example, when abolitionists wished to bring their concerns to the attention of the missionary society, they wrote personal letters to the corresponding secretary of the society (Vandegrift 1945: 13-29). Likewise, leaders gave their answers in private correspondence. Without formal channels to influence decision-making or public venues in which to oppose church policies, it was much harder for challengers to voice their concerns, frame contentious issues, and mobilize support.

The concentration of authority and lack of bureaucratic procedures led to low openness, as abolitionists could not influence church policies through official channels or the centrally controlled media. Concentrated authority and insufficient limited bureaucracy also contributed to a high suppressive capacity in the Disciples of Christ because abolitionists had no means to challenge authoritarianism. Because the most prominent church leader was also the theological father of the movement, his influence carried a spiritual weight, which made it more costly for dissenters to exit the religious community. Together, low openness and high suppressive capacity created an unfavorable opportunity structure for the abolitionists within the church. As a result, abolitionists were marginal and failed in their efforts to either influence policy or provoke major controversy, as we will see in the next section.

Suppression of Slavery Conflict Among the Disciples

The founders of the Disciples of Christ each expressed negative views of slavery but did not prohibit slaveholding in the church. Barton Stone had himself been a slaveholder until he emancipated those he had enslaved "out of conscience" (Stone and Rogers 1853: 44). Later, however, he wrote against manumission, believing colonization to be the only remedy to the problem of slavery in America (Stone and Rogers 1853: 288-92). Thomas Campbell's objections to slavery began in 1819 when he preached to a group of enslaved people in Kentucky and was later informed that doing so was illegal (Eminhizer 1970: 25-6). Subsequently, he wrote on the subject several times, in 1834 referring to slavery as "that largest and blackest blot upon our national escutcheon" (Campbell 1890: 367).

Alexander Campbell's early writings on slavery, while never abolitionist, tended to focus on the major problems associated with slavery. For example, in 1830 he published an essay titled "Emancipation of White Slaves," in which he argued that the slaveholder's fear of those they kept in bondage made slaveholders themselves into slaves (Campbell 1830: 120). The essay critiqued the cruelness of the institution and the immoral deeds required to protect it, but Campbell distanced himself from abolitionists by informing his readers that, in the spirit of Apostle Paul's admonition (Ephesians 6:5-9), he would advise any enslaved person to "be faithful and obedient servants, not only to masters good and gentle, but even to the froward and perverse" (Campbell 1830: 128). Thus Campbell, though believing that the system of American slavery promoted many sins and should be gradually eradicated, was by no means an abolitionist.

As time passed Campbell's writings began to focus more on the evils of *abolition* than on the problems with slavery. According to DeGroot (1940: 75-8), Campbell believed that discouraging abolitionism was the best way to protect the church and nation from the growing divisions over slavery. By 1845, when conflict was roiling the Baptists and Methodists, Campbell published a series of his own essays titled "Our Position to American Slavery" in the *Millennial Harbinger*. His essays frequently appeared on the first page of the magazine, and they expressed Campbell's view that, while slavery might be politically or economically inexpedient and individuals could have varied views of it, it was certainly biblically permissible. According to Campbell, this meant that no Christian had the right to consider it sinful or evil, nor could they attempt to exclude or otherwise discipline their fellow Christians for the keeping or purchasing of enslaved people (Campbell 1845: 49-53, 67-71, 108-9, 145-149, 193-6, 232-6, 236-40, 257-64).

Campbell also published his correspondences with abolitionists who wrote to express their dissatisfaction with Church toleration of slavery, or with Campbell's own writing. In 1845 one reader asked Campbell (Campbell 1845: 313-8) to cancel his subscription to the paper and

asserted that the reason Campbell had difficulty maintaining subscribers was that "all our brethren, who are good punctual paying men, are abolitionists, and they choose to read other papers." The reader added, referencing the title of Campbell's essays on slavery, "When you write on slavery again, say *my* position instead of *our* position." In his five-page response, Campbell cast the reader as intolerant and fanatical, and described his own noble ambitions to prevent division and defend the Bible. The exchange indicates that there were indeed abolitionist Disciples who, like abolitionist Baptists and Methodists, wanted their church to take a principled stand against slavery. It also shows how Campbell, the editor of the church's most significant periodical, had the last say—by publishing his own commentary alongside the complaints of abolitionists, Campbell was able to not only counter the arguments of abolitionists, but also frame them as irrational and unchristian.

In another instance, Campbell (1845: 505-7) published a correspondence between elder William Winans and two of his congregants. The congregants had written to inform Winans they were separating from his church and explained their reasons for doing so. They argued that there was a "grave delinquency in that congregation" because of "the peculiar connexion it holds" (sic) with slavery and because of the congregation's "neglect…of the duty of sympathizing with those in bonds." Winans described the letter to Campbell and his readers as an example of the difficulties that abolitionists have been causing for their preachers, and he complained that the poor behavior of abolitionists only promoted slavery. Campbell again took the opportunity to add his own commentary, admonishing abolitionists and concurring with Winans, stating that he knew "of no class of men who stand so much in the way of the abolition of slavery as the abolitionists of the present day" (505).

As the chief authority on Disciples theology and the editor of the *Millennial Harbinger*, Alexander Campbell exerted a significant degree of control over the denominational discourse around slavery. He determined what perspectives were amplified through his influential magazine, articulated what he believed to be the proper Christian position on slavery, and reframed the arguments of abolitionists so as to render them absurd. Among the Baptists and Methodists, the main periodicals were significantly less partisan, documenting debates between abolitionists and their proslavery opponents as a matter of public interest without editorializing. Further, the editors of their magazines did not speak with the authority of a denomination's very founder. Thus, in his capacity as editor, Campbell cut off a major public forum for debating slavery and used his position to promote its toleration and undermine sympathy with abolitionists.

Another venue in which Disciples leaders suppressed abolitionism was the missionary enterprise. When the American Christian Missionary Society (ACMS) was first established in 1852, leaders selected slaveholder J. T. Barclay as their first representative abroad. Abolitionist Disciples made their objections clear in the small meetings of their regional societies and in personal letters. John Kirk of Ohio, for example, expressed the abolitionists' views on Barclay in a letter to Isaac Errett, a prominent local leader who would later become the secretary for the ACMS:

> [I]n the name of religion and humanity, can we consistently sustain either Brother Barclay as a missionary at ancient Palestine, or how can we co-operate with a missionary society that sends such a character, guilty before high heaven and all good men, of such ungodly conduct? My soul, come not thou into their secret assemblies. (Kirk 1852, in Moore 1909, p. 455).

Yet abolitionists like Kirk were unable to mount a serious challenge to Barclay's hiring without a public venue for confronting leaders, and the young ACMS and lacked the democratic norms that provided the basis on which Baptist and Methodist abolitionists demanded to be heard. Thus, abolitionist Disciples were quietly dismissed by the small set of leaders responsible for ACMS policy.

The discretion possessed by individual leaders in the Disciples of Christ is particularly apparent in the case of abolitionist missionary Pardee Butler. In 1855, following the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska act, Disciples preacher Pardee Butler joined the hosts of migrants who established residence in Kansas in order to cast their votes regarding the extension of slavery into Kansas; Butler joined those hoping to prevent the extension of slavery and, once settled, began preaching (Butler 1940 in Vandergrift 1945, p. 23). His abolitionism did not go unnoticed in Kansas however, and on one occasion he was "rafted" (sent downriver bound to logs) by a gang of Missourians determined to protect Kansas from free-soilers and abolitionists (Butler 1940 ch. 5-8).

Despite the challenges Butler faced in Kansas, he was determined to continue his work as a minister of the Gospel and to evangelize on the Western frontier. Since the American Christian Missionary Society was established to fund exactly this kind of work, Butler wrote to ask for the agency's support in 1858 (Lamar 1893 p. 214-5). By that time, Isaac Errett had taken his post as the corresponding secretary. In his reply to Butler, he explained that he would like to support Butler's preaching in Kansas but knew that abolitionist Disciples would view Butler's hiring as a victory and believed they would use it to create "a breach between the North and South." something feared by the church leaders.

> "It must, therefore, be distinctly understood, that if we embark on a missionary enterprise in Kansas, this question of slavery and anti-slavery must be ignored; and our missionaries must not be ensnared into such utterances as the [abolitionist leaning] 'Northwestern Christian Magazine' can publish to the world, to add fuel to the flame already burning in our churches on this question." (Errett 1858, in Lamar 1893 p. 215).

Errett thus demanded Butler's silence as a condition for his support—and this was not because Errett himself was a slaveholder or supporter of slavery. Indeed, abolitionist suppression among the Disciples was carried out by leaders who expressed their sympathies with abolitionists, as had been the case among the Episcopalians. In his letter to Butler, Errett identified himself as an opponent of slavery: "[a]s an anti-slavery man, I sympathize much with you. I share your feelings, but in the missionary work I know nothing of slavery or anti-slavery" (ibid). Errett was determined to suppress abolitionism to avoid the divisive effects of slavery controversy despite his professed convictions on the matter.

Butler refused to accept the terms suggested by Errett, and set about raising funds from his own congregation in order to continue missionary work in Kansas. Butler's supporters published the exchange in the magazine of the abolitionist Disciples, the *Christian Luminary*. Readers responded with cries that Errett and the Missionary Society sought to "gag" Butler and his fellow antislavery men. In response, antislavery Disciples began organizing an alternative missionary convention that would support the missionary work of those who opposed slavery openly and would do so without the polluted funds of slaveholders (Lamar 1858: 215-7). In 1859 abolitionist Disciples met in the first North-West Christian Convention, answering Butler's call for "a convention made up of men who regard slavery as a moral evil" and "a missionary fund,

which shall be placed in such hands that it will not be prostituted to the vile use of bribing men into silence on the subject of slavery." (Butler 1959, in Vandergrift p. 28). Assembled together, they formed the Christian Missionary Society (52-77).

The abolitionist exodus did not have the same impact among Disciples that it did among Baptists or Methodists. When abolitionist in these churches formed their own rival organizations on antislavery principles, denominational leaders reevaluated their suppressive approach to abolitionists and began to make concessions. Yet Disciples leaders did not suddenly change their course when the abolitionists left. Why not?

The events surrounding Pardee Butler's "gagging," while disturbing to the abolitionists themselves, did not occur in a public venue like the slavery debates among Methodists and Baptists had. Among the Baptists, for example, denominational meetings were at times dominated by passionate speeches spilling across multiple long convention sessions, significantly derailing ordinary business, and there was secret caucusing and wars over resolutions or their amendments. Among the Disciples, the controversy was much quieter, giving abolitionists fewer opportunities to draw in moderates. Butler's silencing was enacted through private correspondence, with all the authority of the ACMS behind Errett and no means for Butler to formally protest. The best that Butler and his supporters could do to draw attention to the church's suppression was to publish the letters in a small paper whose readers were already sympathetic to the abolitionist cause and frustrated with the inaction of the Church. There were no channels by which to influence even the policies of the ACMS itself, and the actions of these disenfranchised abolitionists made significantly fewer ripples.

Through Campbell's cultural influence, the ACMS' hiring of a slaveholder amidst abolitionist protest, and their determined silencing of Pardee Butler, the Disciples suppressed abolitionism to protect the church against the divisive potential of movement-countermovement conflict. While supporting abolitionism would have been costly for every denomination, rejecting it was much less costly in those churches where few channels of influence existed for abolitionists to seize and through which they might pressure denominational leaders to reject slavery. In the absence of such channels for influence, the ultra-congregationalist Disciples, with their underdeveloped Church bureaucracies, were in the hands of a few individuals who could single-handedly establish Church policies and doctrines and were impervious to the disruptive efforts of abolitionists.

Why Disciples Abolitionists Failed

There were enough opponents of slavery in the Disciples to form an antislavery missionary organization, challenge the appointment of a slaveholding missionary, and to write into the *Millennial Harbinger* expressing their disgust with the Church's unwillingness to oppose slavery. Yet, compared with the Baptists or the Methodists, the Disciples have been described as neutral towards slavery. Historians claim that the Church's mission to unify Christians under the banner of an undivided "primitive" meant that slavery policy took a backseat, with charismatic leaders championing a "moderate" path to prevent schism (Burnley 2008, Harrell 1966, Garrison 1931, Moore 1909). While it was indeed true that church leaders feared the divisive impacts of abolitionism, this reflected the high threat of conflict that surrounded the slavery issue and not a broader theological disinclination towards engagement in social and political issues.

The structural preconditions for the concentration of authority among the Disciples of Christ differed from those among the Episcopalians and demonstrate an alternate configuration of suppressive capacity. The missionary organizations of the Disciples were substantially less

mature in the decades before the civil war. Though the founders of the Disciples of Christ began ministering in the first decade of the 19th century, it was not until 1832 that the founders united to form their own religious body. A cooperative missionary organization formed among the Disciples in 1849 and with it the creation of state-level missionary meetings. These developments occurred much later than in other congregational denominations, and the organizations remained less bureaucratized than their counterparts in other denominations before the civil war.

Given the relative youth of the Disciples and the immaturity of their institutions during the antebellum period, Disciples lacked elaborated and bureaucratized structures of organization that there were few inroads for abolitionists to influence policy in other denominations. The power of individuals in prominent leadership positions was largely unchecked by any democratic apparatus, allowing decisions to be made by fewer individuals and hence with little controversy. Accordingly, abolitionists within the Disciples of Christ church encountered far less openness than did abolitionists within the Baptist Church, and suppressive efforts by the church were far more successful.

The lack of bureaucracy meant that controversial issues—like the hiring of a slaveholding missionary—did not become the basis of formal church policy but were instead resolved on a case-by-case basis and without the opportunity for public debate. In the absence of a public venue for debating contentious issues and challenging church policy, abolitionists could only express their dissent in private correspondence. This created lower overall openness because there were no channels by which abolitionists could directly influence church regulations. It also created higher suppressive capacity, because leaders could simply ignore dissent.

The powerful influence of Alexander Campbell, as a founder of the church, the president of the ACMS, and the editor of the *Millennial Harbinger*, also shaped opportunities for abolitionist mobilization. Campbell was responsible for much of the theology and doctrine of the Church. To disagree with him on religious matters was to undermine the basis for one's own participation with the church. Thus, like the sanctity of the Episcopal bishops, Campbell's position demanded a degree of deference from his followers. He used his authority to establish the "proper" religious view of slavery and abolition, control a major public venue in which slavery could have been debated, and control the framing of abolitionism. Campbell's role thus further reduced church openness through his spiritual authority, while his control over a major periodical gave him the capacity to suppress abolitionism.

Explaining Abolitionist Failure

The Disciples of Christ and the Protestant Episcopal Church were similar in their lack of openness and high suppressive capacity, despite having different formal polity structures. In the PEC, authority was concentrated at the top of a spiritual and organizational hierarchy, enabling leaders to demand deference while also foreclosing opportunities to influence church policies. Among the Disciples of Christ, the lack of bureaucracy and the presence of a living church founder left unchecked power in the hands of a small number of individuals, so that abolitionists were similarly unable to influence policy and were also silenced and ridiculed. The concentration of spiritual and organizational authority, more than any particular organization form, curtailed opportunities for abolitionist mobilization.

The two churches suppressed abolitionism in similar ways: by controlling the denominational agenda, silencing dissenters, and framing slavery as a political or social issue rather than a religious concern. Among the Disciples, Alexander Campbell controlled the

denominational agenda by editing its main periodical. Though there were other Disciples periodicals, Campbell possessed a special authority and his magazine, the *Millennial Harbinger*, was the longest running and most influential. In his role as editor, Campbell was able to determine which perspectives were expressed in the core Disciples periodical and authored much of the content himself. The Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church, on the other hand, controlled the denominational agenda by deciding which ideas could be debated in church conventions.

Both denominations used silencing as a key tactic to prevent abolitionist mobilization. For the Disciples, the silencing of Pardee Butler was a key example. The corresponding secretary of the ACMS, in private correspondence with Butler, demanded his silence on slavery in order to offer support for his missionary work. For the Protestant Episcopal Church, the importance of silencing as a major strategy was evident is the demand that Rev. Peter Williams publicly cut his ties to the AASS, in the quiet handling of the Alexander Crummell and Isaiah DeGrasse cases, and particularly in the refusal of church leaders to record Bishop Doane's protest to the decision to exclude DeGrasse. In both churches, silence functioned to prevent abolitionists from causing disruption and, by extension, from raising awareness about church toleration of slavery and gaining the support of moderates.

Disciples and Episcopalians also both claimed that slavery was outside the purview of the church. Addison (1951: 192), Hein and Shattuck (2004:77), Mullin (1986:125-6) and Butler (1995: 152) accepted this claim and used it to explain the lack of a major antislavery movement in these churches. However, Baptists and Methodists also attempted to argue that slavery was a political issue and not a church matter. Indeed, all the churches in this study attempted to frame slavery as political, and this appears to have been a deliberate tactic aimed at avoiding movement-countermovement conflict over slavery. The Methodist Church, for example, explained in 1836 that they "wholly disclaim any right, wish, or intention to interfere in the *civil and political relation* between master and slave as it exists in the slave-holding states of this Union" (Methodist Episcopal Church 1840, p. 447; emphasis added). In another instance, the church explained their inaction on slavery to their British brethren by stating that the Church was "extended through all the states, and as it would be wrong and unscriptural to enact a rule of discipline in opposition to the constitution and laws of the state on this subject" (Methodist Episcopal Church 1848, p. 155).

Similarly, when the Baptist Home Mission Board issued a circular in response to conflict over slavery within the church, it also emphasized the political nature of the conflict and, by extension, the Board's lack of authority in intervening: "The church has felt herself often called to struggle most vigorously against the tendency so observable in our national character, to drag down every interest into the vortex of *some great and absorbing political question of the day.* The church has wisely and uniformly refused to furnish an army for the *secular* conflicts of the times…." (Baptist Home Mission Board, in Foss 1850, p.70; emphasis added). The church framed slavery as just another exciting political topic that ultimately would not stand the test of time for its moral significance. As I have shown, however, this did not stop the Church from engaging in overt, direct suppression of abolitionism—their disinterest in "secular" controversy appears to have been one-sided.

These examples illustrate that even in those denominations where abolitionists mobilized a major challenge to slavery and gained concessions, church leaders had still tried to argue that slavery was a political or civil issue beyond the purview of the church. Thus, it does not appear to be the case that Disciples and Episcopalians were importantly different in the extent to which

they considered slavery political and considered political matters beyond the purview of the church. Rather, all churches tried to frame slavery as a political matter in order to delegitimize church-centered abolitionism, with the ultimate goal of avoiding conflict.

In their control over the denominational agenda, silencing of abolitionists, and attempts to frame slavery as political rather than religious, the Disciples of Christ and the Protestant Episcopal Church similarly worked to stymie the development of a robust antislavery movement. The outcome depended not on the use of these tactics alone, however. Instead, it was the authority of leaders to carry them out successfully that mattered. Controlling the denominational agenda proved unsuccessful among Baptists and Methodists because agency authority trumped religious authority and the agencies of the church were highly democratic and leaders were accountable to their subordinates. But controlling the denominational agenda was successful among Disciples and Episcopalians because there was significantly less expectation of democratic governance and leaders were *not* accountable to their subordinates. Similarly, silencing failed among Methodists and Baptists because adherents and clergy alike felt at liberty to challenge church leaders and had access to a public forum in which to do so. Finally, Episcopalians and Disciples were more effective at framing slavery as a political problem because their leaders spoke with greater spiritual authority.

Chapter Four: The Presbyterian Case

In the four cases I have examined so far, leaders tried to suppress abolitionism when abolitionist agitation and proslavery backlash threatened to divide the churches. The Disciples of Christ and Protestant Episcopal Church leaders succeeded in suppressing abolitionism, preventing the emergence of a strong collective challenge to slavery. They were able to do this because church authority was concentrated among a few top church leaders, including some with considerable *religious* authority in particular, and church agencies lacked democratic rules and procedures. Baptist and Methodist leaders, on the other hand, failed to curb mobilization because their democratic organizational practices and low concentration of authority created avenues for abolitionists to disrupt denominational affairs, gain support and, over the course of successive episodes of slavery-related conflict, eventually gain concessions from church leaders.

In this chapter, I extend this explanation to a new case. In selecting churches for my analysis, I initially excluded the Presbyterians because of a denominational schism they experienced in 1837-1838. This schism is generally understood as a theological and ecclesiastical schism, with ecumenical cooperation and revivalism creating the central wedges that divided the "Old School" Presbyterians from the "New School." However, slavery may also have been a factor in the schism (Adams 1992, Goen 1985: 68-78, Staiger 1949, Smith 1960).

To the extent that slavery did play a role in the 1837 schism, understanding the schism in this large, national denomination is important in its own right. What's more, the two denominations that emerged out of that schism would each later confront their own slavery challenge: in 1857, the New School Presbyterians had a major North-South schism over slavery; The Old School Presbyterians, in contrast, stayed united until the outbreak of the civil war when they split over making a declaration of support for the Union. In this chapter, I examine the trajectories of the undivided Presbyterian Church prior to the schism and then trace the developments within each of the two subsequent branches of the Church, asking whether openness and repressive capacity might explain why a strong abolition movement emerged in the New School Presbyterian church but not in the Old School Presbyterian church.

The Early Presbyterian Church

Presbyterians were among the Puritan immigrants who settled in the American Northeast in the 17th century. The church grew with Scottish and Irish immigration, and in 1707 an Irish immigrant, Francis Mackemie, organized the first American Presbytery (Ahlstrom 2004). The national Church first confronted the issue of slavery in 1774, at which point the General Assembly, its central legislative body, decided to postpone the conversation until their next annual meeting. It was not discussed again for another thirteen years, in 1787 (Hardin 1865, Presbyterian Publication Committee 1858). While opposition to slavery during the 18th century is typically described as having been less controversial than it would later become during the 19th century, the Church's tabling of the conversation suggests some fears of the divisiveness of slavery debates even during the post-revolutionary period.

When the church did address the subject in 1787, they expressed a view that would prove to last many decades: they argued that the church did "highly approve of the general principles in favor of universal liberty," but also expressed concern over the social implications of freeing large numbers of enslaved people. The Church therefore recommended that Presbyterians first focus on promoting the education of Black Americans both free and slave, and only later work towards a gradual, sensible end to slavery. (Presbyterian Church in the USA 1904, p. 548).

In 1795 the Presbytery of Transylvania, Pennsylvania submitted an overture to the General Assembly addressing the subject that would eventually rend the church: the question of fellowship with slaveholders. While the Northern church was by no means a unified front against slavery, there was enough of a general feeling of disinclination towards slavery that some Northerners felt it might be necessary and justified to sanction slaveholders by withholding communion. The General Assembly, however, "in the spirit of peace and brotherhood," emphasized toleration for ideological difference (Presbyterian Church in the USA 1847, p. 111). Over the next several decades, the church produced a few more soft condemnations of slavery combined with statements of peaceful toleration of difference.

The GA made its strongest statement against slavery in 1818, when Church leaders declared that they "consider the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature, as utterly inconsistent with the law of God." After elaborating on both the nature of God's law and the nature of slavery, they conclude that "[i]t is manifestly the duty of all Christians …to use their honest, earnest, and unwearied endeavors…to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery throughout Christendom, and if possible throughout the world." (McGill 1865: 18-9)

However, after condemning slavery the General Assembly of 1818 went to great pains to reassure the southern membership that slaveholders themselves were not being condemned and that the proper and Christian way to proceed was to maintain the brotherhood between slaveholders and non-slaveholders. "We do, indeed, tenderly sympathize with the portion of our Church and our country where the evil of slavery has been entailed upon them—where a great, and the most virtuous, part of the community abhor slavery and wish its extermination as sincerely as any others—but where the number of slaves, their ignorance, and their vicious habits generally, render an immediate and universal emancipation inconsistent alike with the safety and happiness of the master and the slave." (PCUSA, 1818)

It appears that their "tender sympathies" for slaveholders won out, because this was the last the GA had to say about slavery over the next two decades. And when they did eventually discuss slavery again…they concluded that slavery shouldn't be talked about. Conflict began

brewing in the early 1830s, and in 1834, ninety-two students at Lane Seminary in Ohio withdrew because of leaders refusal to allow debate over slavery. They later enrolled at the Oberlin Institute (Adams 1992: 689). This no doubt caught the attention of the General Assembly. In 1835, the GA received several petitions on slavery and appointed a committee to review them and report back with its suggestions for how the body should respond to the controversy.

In 1836 the committee shared their conclusions. They asserted that it was not appropriate for the church to interfere with the laws of states that regulated slavery and manumission and that any action by the church would likely be divisive, and recommended finally that the Assembly should take no further action on the subject (McGill 1865: 22-4). Committee member James Dickey of Chillicothe, Ohio submitted a minority report arguing that in adopting a position of silence, the church would be "recreant to the cause of truth and mercy." Dickey's report referenced the church's historical engagement with issues of civil and religious liberty and argued that the right to liberty extends to all of humanity, and finally asked that the Assembly resolve that buying, selling and keeping people in slavery is a sin that should be subject to discipline and that all Presbyterians must cease any involvement in slavery and work towards its eradication.

After hearing the report from the committee on slavery as well as Dockey's minority report, the General Assembly tabled the discussion for two weeks (PCUSA 1847 Pp 505-6). When they returned to the debate, committee member Dr. James Hoge, the Virginia-born moderator of the 1832 GA session who presided over the Columbus, Ohio presbytery, motioned to throw out both reports and indefinitely postpone discussion of slavery. Hoge argued that "the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church…declares that no church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience, in virtue of their own authority" and that the enormity of the slavery question rendered it impossible for the body to render a just decision. His resolution to avoid all further discussion of slavery was adopted by a vote of 154 to 87, despite protests by nine ministers (PCUSA 1847: 530).

At the same time that the Presbyterians were struggling to articulate a moderate position on slavery, other theological and ecclesiastical divisions were growing. Presbyterians had cooperated with Congregationalists since their arrival in the United States. In 1801 their cooperation was formalized under the "Plan of Union," which established a structure for worshipping and evangelizing together on the sparsely populated Western frontier. This plan was not favored by all.

"Old School" Presbyterians were a party that rejected ecumenical cooperation on the grounds that it undermined both Presbyterian theology and polity. The Old School party viewed the formal polity of the church as possessing a sacred quality, reflecting the organizational form of the church indicated by Jesus himself. In 1834, when the Old School submitted a document summarizing their complaints to the Assembly, they wrote:

> We believe that the form of government of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, is, in all essential features, in full accordance with the revealed will of God; and therefore whatever impairs its purity, or changes its essential character, is repugnant to the will of our Master. (Baird 1856: 676).

In the view of the Old School, the alliance with Congregationalists, who eschewed hierarchical governance structures and allowed congregations to act autonomously, diluted the sacred polity form of the church. The Old School also rejected New School revivalism and was highly

concerned with the preservation of religious orthodoxy. The "New School," on the other hand, supported cooperation with Congregationalists through the Plan of Union and through the development of ecumenical agencies for missionary work, religious education, and other church business. The New School also endorsed the "New Divinity" of Charles Finney and other theologians who gave individuals more agency in their own salvation than was typically of orthodox Calvinists of the day. (Moorhead 2000).

These tensions escalated over the early nineteenth century, and by the late 1830s, the Old and New School factions could no longer hold together. In 1837, the General Assembly was dominated by members of the Old School party, who used their numerical advantage to dissolve the Plan of Union and expel four Synods that had been formed under it (Thompson 1963: 395). When the Assembly met again the next year, representatives of the expelled Synods tried to sit and were not acknowledged. In response, the New School leaders "took the floor," elected their own officers, and then closed the meeting, planning to meet again at a nearby church. After their departure, the Old School stayed behind to carry on its meeting (396). In this way, two General Assemblies came to exist—and this schism persisted until a reunion in 1870.

Despite the centrality of theological and ecclesiastical concerns to the 1837-8 schism, historians typically agree that slavery was at least a secondary concern. The Presbyterians had a strong majority in the North, and the Old School/New School controversy largely took place between Northern theologians, so it was not a sectional phenomenon. However, it appears to have absorbed some of the sectional conflict. The New School was by no means united in support of abolition, but most abolitionists were New Schoolers. According to Thompson (1963: 383-98), this alone was enough to make the Southerners support the Old School. According to Staiger (1949: 401-2), Southern support was deliberately cultivated by Northern Old Schoolers: a sectional schism would have shrunk the church considerably while leaving the Northern Old and New School still in conflict with one another. An alliance between the Old School and the South against the New School, on the other hand, would allow both parties to maintain their position in the church and would get rid of both the doctrinal rivals and a good number of the abolitionists.

Table 3: Proportion of Presbyterian Membership by School and Region

Old School: North	40%
Old School: South	19%
New School: North	36%
New School: South	4%
Total	100%
Sources: PCUSA Old School (1850: 486-7), PCUSA New School (1850: 283).	

The entanglement between slavery and the Old School-New School controversy meant that, following the division in 1838, the Old School contained more Southerners, and the New School contained more abolitionists, as shown in Table 3. Yet, both branches remained predominantly Northern. According to the GA minutes (1850), following the schism the North was divided, with slightly more than half belonging to the Old School. The South went almost entirely with them, but about one fifth of the South aligned instead with the New School. Thus, the Old School represented diverse sectional interests, but the Northern Old Schoolers were unlikely supporters of abolition, both because they were theologically orthodox and because, according to Staiger, they had pledged not to agitate the subject of slavery in exchange for the

support of the South in their theological conflict (1949: 401-2). The New School, on the other hand, was both theologically and geographically less diverse, being composed entirely of theological liberals, the vast majority of whom were from the North.

What are the implications of the 1838 schism for the success of abolitionism in the resulting denominations? From the perspective of elite support for abolition, the difference at first seems stark: the pledge Old School leaders had made not to legislate on slavery, along with the sizable Southern contingent won with said pledge, both should have made the Old School very closed to abolitionism. The New School, on the other hand, drew a much smaller proportion of its support from the South, and contained most of the denomination's abolitionists, and one would expect far more openness to abolitionism there. In Chapter 2, however, I showed that the threat of Southern backlash was powerful enough to make denominational leaders suppress abolitionism, even when they personally supported the movement. Thus, elite support for abolition was not a matter of moral views alone, and instead reflected leaders' personal perspectives and their pragmatic concerns as church officials.

In terms of authority-based opportunities, both denominations should embody some openness on account of the democratic norms of the General Assembly, which pre-dated the schism. Yet it is important to recall that a key concern among the Old School was the sacredness of the hierarchical church polity structure, which they believed was polluted by the influence of Congregationalism. Thus, it is no surprise that in the aftermath of the schism, authority was more concentrated among the Old School. Where the New School had cooperated with Congregationalists in ecumenical religious societies, the Old School brought such activity under the control of the General Assembly to prevent any undue influence and authority from external actors (Miller 1870: 13-4). By excluding the Synods that embodied Presbyterian-Congregationalist hybridization, they ensured that each organizational entity from the congregation to the Synod was properly embedded in a chain of authority, at the top of which was the GA itself.

If the findings from earlier chapters are robust, then the Old School's centralization of authority should increase their suppressive capacity, making it easier for the Old School to suppress abolitionism and avoid major denominational conflict over slavery. In contrast, the New School should have had lower suppressive capacity because organizational power was distributed more broadly, in some cases extending to Congregationalist clergy that operated outside the sphere of denominational control. Indeed, from 1840-1849, the New School even took measures to formally decentralize the church, passing much of the General Assembly's authority on to the Synods (Miller 1870: 59-65). While the change was not long-lasting, it left the church with less central authority during a critical period of the slavery debate and speaks more broadly to the distinct orientations of the Old and New School. And just as the concentration of authority should have increased suppressive capacity among the Old School, so too should the lower concentrations of authority among the New School have resulted in lower suppressive capacity.

Old School

In its first years as an autonomous body, the Old School General Assembly received and promptly ignored many anti-slavery petitions. In 1841, for example, the committee appointed to handle petitions reported that they had received papers related to slavery "which they deemed it expedient not to offer to the house; and they proposed that the same be returned to the persons from whom they came." A motion was made that one or more of the petitions should be read, but it was indefinitely postponed. Another delegate called for reading the papers as a point of order,

but after an objection the whole discussion was indefinitely postponed. (PCUSA 1841: 419). Thus, abolitionists were denied access to the denominational arena for contention.

It was not until seven years later, in 1845, that leaders finally appointed a committee to address the antislavery petitions they received. However, the committee's response was not favorable to the abolitionists, who had sought from the church leaders a stronger statement against slavery and a clear statement that slavery is inherently sinful. The committee concluded that it would be impossible for the Church to condemn slavery as inherently sinful without contradicting the "plainest declarations of the word of God." They acknowledged the many sins associated with slavery and the responsibility of Christians to ameliorate the conditions of the slaves but insisted that, "[s]ince Christ and his inspired apostles did not make the holding of slaves a bar to communion, we, as a court of Christ, have no authority to do so." Further, they stated that "however desirable it may be to…remove slavery from our country," church legislations will not accomplish this end. They resolved that keeping people in slavery does not bar one from Christian communion and that the church would refuse further requests to make the issue of slaveholding a matter of church discipline (McGill 1865, pp. 33-4). Thus, the Old School broke years of silence on slavery only to refute the arguments of the abolitionists and reiterate their determination *not* to take a stand against slavery.

Abolitionist-leaning Presbyteries did not give up. They saw the 1845 resolution as a betrayal of the church's historical opposition to slavery, as embodied in the 1818 statement, and they continued submitting petitions asking the church to live up to its previous statements and come out against slavery. However, when the Assembly met again the following year, delegates reiterated their unwillingness to address the matter. They did so again in 1849, this time elaborating and justifying their refusal to act. They argued that, given the "civil and domestic nature of [the] institution," it was the responsibility of civil institutions to seek a remedy. Further, the Assembly believed its procedures for disciplining slaveholders who behaved cruelly were adequate and that the prudent course for the church was to resist fanaticism and, instead of lending support to abolitionism, support the religious education of master and enslaved persons alike (PCUSA 1853: 254-5). In 1850, the Assembly again stated that their earlier pronouncements were adequate and declined to speak further on slavery (PCUSA 1853 455-6, 473, 475).

For the next decade the records of the Old School General Assembly are silent on slavery. There is no record of petitions received from abolitionists or committees established. The only exceptions are a statement in 1854 proudly crediting the church's "moderate" position on slavery with opening up the South to evangelizing (1854: 184), and a resolution in 1857 asserting that the Assembly had no duty to reply to a letter they had received from the Reformed Presbyterian Church, which appealed to the assembly for action against slavery (1857: 44).

As the nation moved towards war, however, the Assembly's silence was broken. In November of 1860, three weeks after the election of Abraham Lincoln, the Synod of South Carolina held its annual meeting. One minister in attendance, Rev. W. B. Yates, submitted a resolution to "sever all connection with the Northern portion of the General Assembly" because the 1818 statement was still in place, making it "the duty of all members of the Presbyterian Church to use all efforts for the abolition of slavery" (PCUSA Synod of South Carolina 1861: 8). A committee established to consider the proposal, and its members decided not to seek a withdrawal from the GA at that time since, in their view, the act of 1818 had been "virtually rescinded" (28), and the policy of non-interference that the General Assembly had adopted in 1845 provided adequate protection for Southern interests. Yet the committee's resolution also

declared the Synod's belief that the South had a right to stand up and defend slavery, and that God was on their side in doing so (28).

Just one month after the Synod of South Carolina decided *not* to withdraw from the Presbyterian Church, the state of South Carolina left the Union. By February of 1861, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas had joined South Carolina and, together, they formed the Confederate States of America. Confederate forces attacked Fort Sumter in April that year. Lincoln declared an insurrection and began recruiting volunteers to bolster to federal army.

It was thus against the backdrop of a building war that the General Assembly met again on May 16, 1861. With several Southern synods unsurprisingly absent, the predominantly Northern GA was tasked not only with responding to the crisis, but also with approving the minutes of all the Synods that had met since the last GA—including those of South Carolina. Synodical reports were submitted to the GA at each meeting, and this time they included South Carolina's debate over secession and its resolution affirming the right of slaveholding Presbyterians to defend their interests (PCUSA 1861: 296-7, 303, 315). The Assembly approved the South Carolina minutes "with exceptions": they argued that the decision of 1818 had never been rescinded, and reaffirmed the moderate and unenforceable antislavery position the church had taken at that time. The GA made clear their opposition to South Carolina's stated intention to stand up against any attacks on their way of life (333).

In response to the national crisis, the General Assemble agreed that it was the duty of the church and its membership to support the federal government and the constitution of the United States (PCUSA 1861: 325). Dissent ensued, on the grounds that the church was unnecessarily engaging in political matters and that the church was not in a position to determine which governing body a Christian owed its patriotism and allegiance to (namely, the state or the federal government), nor was it in a position to demand that Southerners commit treason within their states by declaring loyalty to the federal government (336-41). A committee was appointed to respond to the protests. The committee determined that the church was organized as a national church under the federal government and argued that political disunion was also a disruption of the church of God, an action to which the church thus was obligated to respond. The GA of 1861 adopted the resolution of the committee and made a corporate statement of support for the union (341-4).

After the General Assembly committed itself to the Union, Southern presbyteries withdrew to form their own church. In December 1861, they met together in Augusta Georgia to form the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (PCUS Synod of South Carolina 1861).

Absolved of the need to accommodate southern sensibilities, the Old School General Assembly could have taken a stand against slavery, but they did not. Instead, the minutes of the Old School GA again go silent on the topic of slavery for the remainder of the war years. Yet, in May of 1864, one month after Congress passed the 13th amendment, the church finally adopted a surprisingly strong resolution admitting regret at the church's failure to stand by their 1818 statement against slavery. They blamed the nation's suffering in part on God's anger at the nation's failure to eradicate slavery, and thanked God for finally delivering the nation from the blight of slavery. They articulated the means by which God finally brought about the nation's (and the church's) stand against slavery:

> When the country was at peace within itself, and the Church was unbroken, many consciences were perplexed in the presence of this great evil, for the want of an

> adequate remedy. Slavery was so formidably intrenched behind the ramparts of personal interests and prejudices, that to attack it with a view to its speedy overthrow appeared to be attacking the very existence of the social order itself, and was characterized as the inevitable introduction of an anarchy, worse in its consequences than the evil for which it seemed to be the only cure. But the folly and weakness of men have been the illustrations of God's wisdom and power. Under the influence of the most incomprehensible infatuation of wickedness, those who were most deeply interested in the perpetuation of slavery have taken away every motive for its further toleration. The spirit of American slavery, not content with its defences (sic) to be found in the laws of the States, the provisions of the Federal Constitution, the prejudices in favour of existing institutions, and the fear of change, has taken arms against law, organized a bloody rebellion against the national authority, made formidable war upon the Federal Union, and in order to found an empire upon the corner-stone of slavery, threatens not only our existence as a people, but the annihilation of the principles of free Christian government; and thus has rendered the continuance of negro slavery incompatible with the preservation of our own liberty and independence… (Minutes 1846, pp. 298).

In their statement, the church not only acknowledged the evil of slavery itself but also the church's own misperception of abolitionism, blinded as its members were by "personal interests and prejudices." Once the "infatuation with wickedness" drove slaveholders so far as to declare war against their own nation, they "rendered the continuance of negro slavery incompatible with the preservation of…liberty and independence."

The General Assembly's dramatic reevaluation of its position on slavery in the wake of Northern triumph speaks to their motives for suppressing abolitionism. Prior to the union's decisive victory, Church leaders sought to avoid conflict and division. Even as they repeatedly quashed any expression of abolitionism, debate over slavery was recurring. Had leaders shown any openness to the abolitionist cause, they no doubt would have added strength to the movement and, with it, opposition from the defenders of slavery. The outbreak of war and secession of the Southern churches did not even make abolitionism an acceptable matter for the GA to endorse—it was only when the nation had established its own law against slavery that church leaders themselves would do so.

Old School Suppression of Abolitionism

Old School Presbyterians shared in the moderate antislavery legacy of the pre-1838 Church, and the fact that some abolitionists remained in the church after the 1838 schism in evident in their continued petitioning in the years following division. Yet the Church did not allow abolitionists any opportunities to influence official policy or exercise informal influence over the denomination by publicly debating their antislavery opponents. Without access to an audience or opportunities to combat proslavery framings, however, their mobilization was stifled.

Old School Presbyterians were able to deny abolitionists access to the public forum of the General Assembly despite the fact that the Assembly had historically been governed according to democratic norms. Further, according to Adams (1992: 684), in the conservative Calvinist theology of the Old School, the Church had a right to speak out on every issue. So why were leaders able violate the democratic norms of the General Assembly and insist that a major social issue of the day should not be a matter of Church policy?

It is useful to recall how, in the Methodist case, undemocratic actions on the part of Church Bishops were met with incredible resistance. When the Bishops sought to prevent Annual Conferences from making antis-slavery statements, their authority to do so was challenge and the controversy actually led to abolitionists *gaining* support from moderates who disapproved of the Bishops' overreach. No such protests were made against repeated unwillingness of Old School Presbyterians to allow debate over slavery in the national forum.

The Old School Presbyterians were the portion of the Presbyterian Church that viewed a hierarchical polity structure as sacred, reflecting the divine plan for the organization of earthly churches. For example, while criticizing the New School's disregard for church polity, Rev. James Thornwell wrote that "[God] has furnished [the Church] with the necessary apparatus of means, officers, and institutions, in Sessions, Presbyteries, Elders, Pastors, and Evangelists. Let us take Presbyterianism as we have it in our Form of Government, and let us carry it out in its true sprit….." (Palmer 1875: 225). The Old School commitment to hierarchical party concentrated authority at the top of the organizational hierarchy and invested it with a greater degree of religious authority than was not typically possessed by leaders of church agencies.

The Old School emphasis on Church polity limited opportunities for abolitionists in two ways: first, it meant that the formal controls embodied in the polity structure functioned as intended, concentrating (agency) authority among the leaders of the General Assembly; second, it meant a greater deference to that authority's since the leadership structure was imbued with religious authority as well as agency authority. With high levels of both agency and religious authority, the Old School had the ability to control the denominational agenda and silence abolitionists without facing challenges from the adherents and clergy. In this way, the Old School functioned much more like the Protestant Episcopal Church. And, much like the Protestant Episcopal Church, abolitionists failed to mobilize a collective challenge to slavery in the church.

New School

Following the 1838 Schism, the New School was free to preach a more flexible version of Calvinism and was free to collaborate with Congregationalists in worship and benevolent activities. It was also comparatively free from the threat of proslavery backlash, since Southerners now made up only 11% of the New School, where they had accounted for nearly one quarter of the undivided Church (PCUSA New School 1850). In light of this, one might expect the New School to have taken off down the path of radical abolitionism. But being theologically liberal when compared with orthodox Calvinists did not necessarily mean being liberal more broadly. The New School was still composed of seminary-trained Calvinist ministers who, broadly speaking, were not in favor of challenging the status quo.

Abolitionists were indeed present and vocal in the New School, however, and abolitionist-leaning Presbyteries continued to submit petitions to the General Assembly demanding that the Church take action on slavery. The New School's response was to avoid conflict by regionalizing the slavery issue, in a manner much like the Methodists had employed. In 1839 the New School GA resolved that, given regional differences in attitudes towards slavery, discretion must be given to the regional presbyteries to determine the course of action that would be "most judicious and adapted to remove the evil [of slavery]." Thus, at the national level, the New School GA could agree that slavery was an evil—as the Church had clearly stated in 1818—and Presbyterians should be working towards its defeat but, in the interest of avoiding conflict, the GA left the creation and enforcement of any practical antislavery policies to local

communities. The GA left that responsibility in the hands of Presbyteries for several years, refusing to make any additional comments on the morality of slavery (PCUSA New School 1858: 10-1). During that period, from 1840-1849, the New School also granted greater legislative autonomy to the Synods more broadly and reduced its own meeting frequency to once every three years (Miller 1870: 59-65).

Tensions over slavery did not stop, even as the GA abrogated authority to its lower administrative units. Leaders made efforts to ignore the issues, just as their brethren in the Old School were doing, yet the New School could not suppress debate to the same extent. In 1846, several petitions on slavery were received, and debate broke out. One delegate motioned to establish a special committee to discuss the petitions, while another motioned to ignore the subject entirely, on the grounds that the topic had already been referred to the lower judicatories. Before voting on a resolution, the Assembly decided to move through the roster of delegates and give each one the opportunity to speak on the subject of slavery (PCUSA New School 1894: 150-1). This willingness to accommodate debate over slavery in the national Church forum was remarkably different from the enforced silence among the Old School.

After days of hearing opinions and debating resolutions, the New School GA finally agreed that American slavery was "intrinsically an unrighteous and oppressive system and is opposed to the prescription of the law of God, to the spirit and precepts of the Gospel, and to the best interests of humanity." (PCUSA New School 1894: 161-3). While impressive as a clear statement of opposition to slavery, the 1846 statement by the New School was like the Church's 1818 statement, in that it lacked enforceability—thus, it was doomed to exists as a statement alone, and individuals were free to interpret the material implications of the statement however they liked. Indeed, the Assembly went so far as to state that it had no inability to create" new tests of membership" that had not been derived directly from scripture, i.e. they could not exclude slaveholders from the church. Further, they asserted that presbyteries alone had the authority to determine what moral qualities were necessary for church membership (163).

As lacking in enforceability as the pronouncement was, there were still some who felt it was too strong, and that the Church should not make any statements on slavery, indicating that there was still a faction in the Church that wished to protect the institution. In addition, the 1846 General Assembly overturned a ruling by the Cincinnati Synod, which had suspended a minister on account of his status as a slaveholder (McKivigan 1984: 102). In response, eleven ministers left the New School Presbyterians to form the Free Presbytery of Ripley, which later developed into the Free Presbyterian Church and accepted Old School and New School Presbyterians alike.

The abolitionists that remained within the church continued to push for decisive action, their cause aided by pressure from the Free Presbyterians. In 1849 the Assembly responded to their agitation with another statement, which emphasized the prudence of gradualism and reaffirmed earlier statements on slavery. It also stated that the GA had no reason to believe that Southerners were not doing everything in their power achieve emancipation or that they tolerate "any of those evils which ought to call forth the discipline of the Church" (PCUSA New School 1894: 224-8). In other words, the New School GA leaders were, at least in their public statements, operating under the assumption that the Southern portion of the church shared with the North the view that slavery was an evil to be eradicated, and granted them the charity of assuming that the only reason Presbyterian Southerners continued to hold others in slavery was that they had no legal or practical methods for their emancipation.

Little by little, however, abolitionists began to make some headway in the church, challenging leaders to address the persistence of slavery among some New School Presbyterians.

In 1850, the GA not only declared that they "exceedingly deplore the working of the whole system of slavery" but also took the small step of reminding adherents that it was a disciplinable offense to hold others in slavery, except in states where manumission was illegal. Still, progress was quite limited, and for the next few years that GA continued to avoid action. In 1851, abolitionists called for a statement opposing the fugitive slave law and asserting the right of individuals to act in charity regardless of any "human enactments," but after considerable debate the GA decided to simply reaffirm its past statements (298-9). In 1852, abolitionist Presbyteries asked the Church to demand that the Presbyteries examine every case of slaveholding under their jurisdiction and try those found to be in violation of Church discipline. They also asked the GA to try entire Synods that were widely reputed to be in violation of church anti-slavery principles (PCUSA New School 1894: 333). Contention followed and the Assembly failed to agree to a response, and the topic was indefinitely postponed.

In 1853 the Presbytery of Oswego, NY, frustrated with was it saw as the failure of the church to stand behind the 1818 declaration, submitted a statement declaring their intention to withdraw from the Assembly unless it agreed to expel slaveholders from the church (PCUSA New School 1894: 380). While the GA rejected the divisive spirit reflected in Oswego's declaration, they also went further than ever before in challenging slavery. That year, a resolution was passed requesting that the southern presbyteries supply data on the state of slavery within their jurisdictions, including the extent of the practice, the actions taken by the presbyteries to eradicate slavery if at all possible, and whether the Southern churches protected the family ties and religious (392). The resolution was protested vehemently by the southern presbyteries, who viewed it as incriminating, burdensome, and designed to create rather than resolve conflict. Yet, the Southern Presbyteries were outnumbered and, despite their disapproval, the resolution prevailed.

The GA continued to move forward in the direction of antislavery action despite Southern resistance, but gains were slow. In 1855, they resolved that a pastoral letter opposing slavery (but also opposing fanatical abolitionism) be sent to all churches and that a committee be appointed to investigate the Assembly's constitutional capacity for driving slavery out of the church. Further, they recommended that "this evil be removed from the church as soon as it can be done in a Christian and constitutional manner." When the appointed committee met the following year, they produced a report declaring that the Assembly had the constitutional power to discipline only Synods, and that disciplinary authority for lower-level bodies or individuals rests in the body directly above them in the denomination's organizational hierarchy. Beyond that, the committee found, the Assembly's role was merely advisory. Thus, while interest in anti-slavery actioned appeared to be growing, the Church avoided the pressure to respond on the basis of limits in its formal capacities as an organization.

Meanwhile, faced with mounting threats, the Southern Presbyterians grew more radical in defending their own positions. In 1857, the Presbytery of Lexington delivered an official notice to the body declaring that many of its ministers, elders and members held people in slavery "from principle" and "of choice" and that the Presbytery itself "assumed the responsibility of sustaining such ministers, elders, and church members in their position." In other words, they challenged the long-standing opinion of Presbyterian leaders that white Southern slaveholders were themselves victims, shackled by the laws and circumstances of the era.

Confronted with Lexington's brazen disregard for the church's historical position on slavery, the GA called on the Presbytery to rectify its position, stating that "[s]uch doctrines and practices cannot be permanently tolerated in the Presbyterian Church." The Assembly reiterated

its past statements on slavery and declared that the South, in claiming that slavery was "'an ordinance of God,' and that the system of slavery existing in these United States [wa]s scriptural and right," had "departed from the established doctrine of the church in relation to slavery" (PCUSA New School 1857).

The Southern Presbyteries, upon finding that the General Assembly failed to satisfy Lexington's demands for legitimacy and, instead, censured the Presbytery for its vocal support of slavery, decided to leave the New School. After the close of the 1857 General Assembly, they met to form their own, separate denomination, the United Synod of the Presbyterian Church (Engelder 1964).

Explaining New School Abolitionist Success

Why, after years of silencing abolitionists and dismissing their concerns, did the New School Presbyterians finally take action against slaveholding within the church? The key lies in the failure of Church leaders to effectively suppress abolitionism. Because, unlike the Old School Presbyterian Church, New School leaders lacked strong agency and religious authority, and so lacked the ability to control the denominational agenda and silence challengers. This meant that abolitionists managed to continue hijacking denominational meetings in order to have their perspective heard, which both threatened Church leaders who feared disunion and also antagonized their Southern opponents. Much like the Methodist Church, the New School Presbyterians eventually found themselves between two opposing movements making increasingly extreme and mutually exclusive demands. Only then, once it was clear that schism was unavoidable, did Church leaders eventually change their course and concede to the abolitionist rather than the South.

The New School shared with the Old School the democratic norms of the GA but, unlike the Old School, New School leaders did not resacralize their polity following the 1838 schism; the New School, after all, was the party much less concerned with the archetypical Presbyterian polity structure. Instead, they tolerated the influence of horizontally organized Congregationalists and participated in ecumenical societies that, according to critics, created external pathways of denominational influence. Thus, denominational authority was spread more broadly across the denomination, with multiple channels for abolitionists to gain support and challenge the suppressive efforts of Church leaders. At the same time, authority was largely agency-based and subject to democratic norms. This openness and low suppressive capacity were what made it possible for abolitionists to circumvent efforts by church leaders to keep abolitionists quiet. Abolitionist agitation was eventually successful at provoking Southerners to the point of denominational schism in 1857, despite the fact that only a small portion of denominational adherents resided in the South.

Lessons from the Presbyterian Case

The Old and New School Presbyterians shared a common institutional and theological origin and yet took different paths regarding slavery. The Old School was much less open to abolitionism and had greater suppressive capacity, allowing leaders to suppress abolitionism by keeping abolition off the denominational agenda in a manner similar to that deployed by leaders of the Protestant Episcopal Church. The New School, on the other hand, was open and had a low level

of repressive capacity, so even though its leaders tried various tactics to limit abolitionist mobilization in the name of avoiding denominational conflict, abolitionists were able to mobilize, and eventually gained a strong enough position that they received some important concessions from church leaders—a pattern much more like the Methodist Episcopal Church.

There was a stronger Southern influence on the Old School Presbyterians. Is this sufficient to explain their successful suppression of abolitionism? Recall that the proportion of adherents in the South was still fairly low—only 32%. Methodists and Baptists both had larger proportions of their adherents in the South, and yet still failed to suppress abolitionism, so the Old School's stronger Southern support base is unlikely to be the primary cause of their success at suppression. Additionally, it was not the case that the New School Presbyterians, with only 11% of their adherents in the South, went on to embrace abolition following the 1838 schism. Instead, they tried—much like the Old School—to avoid conflict over slavery by limiting access to the national forum of the church. Time and again, they tabled discussion of slavery or simply asserted that the Church had already addressed the issue adequately and would not take up the debate it again. And yet, every few years, abolitionists succeeded at forcing the issue back onto the agenda. And by the time abolitionists became frustrated enough to withdraw from the church, they had amassed enough support that denominational leaders had something to fear from their departure.

Much of the social movement scholarship on political opportunities emphasizes the significance of elite supporters. Yet, in the case of church-centered abolitionists, leaders were not just acting on their own values, they were acting as agents of their organizations—and they were caught between an emerging abolition movement and a powerful countermovement that had the support of a united South. In spite of the absence of "attitudinal" support from elites, abolitionists found opportunities wherever leaders lacked the ability to enforce silence and control the denominational stage. Although leaders strove to protect the churches from conflict, abolitionists were busy exploiting every weakness in the church authority structure in order to gain opportunities to raise awareness, frame the problem, and mobilize moderates.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Why was there so much more abolitionism in some Protestant denominations than in others? The cases I have examined here suggest an answer: organizational opportunities, the organizational analog of political opportunities, constrained whether abolitionists were able to mobilize a successful church-centered abolition movement. Due to the configuration of denominational authority and the presence of a strong countermovement, abolitionists in the Episcopalian, Disciples of Christ, and Old School Presbyterian Churches failed to collectively challenge slavery and remained on the margins of their religious communities. In the Baptist, Methodist, and New School Presbyterian Churches, however, authority conditions were more favorable and abolitionists were able to mobilize a collective challenge, eventually gaining concessions. Figure 6 summarizes the central argument of this dissertation, showing the pattern of abolitionist growth or failure that unfolded across the churches and how features of church opportunity structures constrained abolitionist achievements.

Summary of Findings

Church leaders were caught between a large, united proslavery faction and a small but disruptive abolitionist faction. To preserve their organizations from conflict and schism, leaders united to oppose abolitionists—even when they privately expressed sympathy with abolitionist goals, and even in churches with an earlier history of antislavery action. Thus, leaders' personal or theological views of slavery cannot explain their responses to abolitionism, and abolitionists in each church lacked the elite support that is so often considered a crucial determinant of movement mobilization and success (Kurzman 1998, McAdam 1996, Kitschelt 1986, Brockett 1991, Kriesi et al. 1992).

Though abolitionists did not have support from church leaders, they were sometimes able to seize other opportunities. The pattern of abolitionist success and failure can be seen in Figure 6. In churches with some degree of openness, denominational organizations and publications served as an accessible venue for contention, and structures of accountability limited leaders' abilities to close those venues to abolitionists. When abolitionists attempted to harness these venues, church suppressive capacity impacted their success. Where church leaders could silence and discipline challengers due to high concentrations of religious and agency authority and a lack

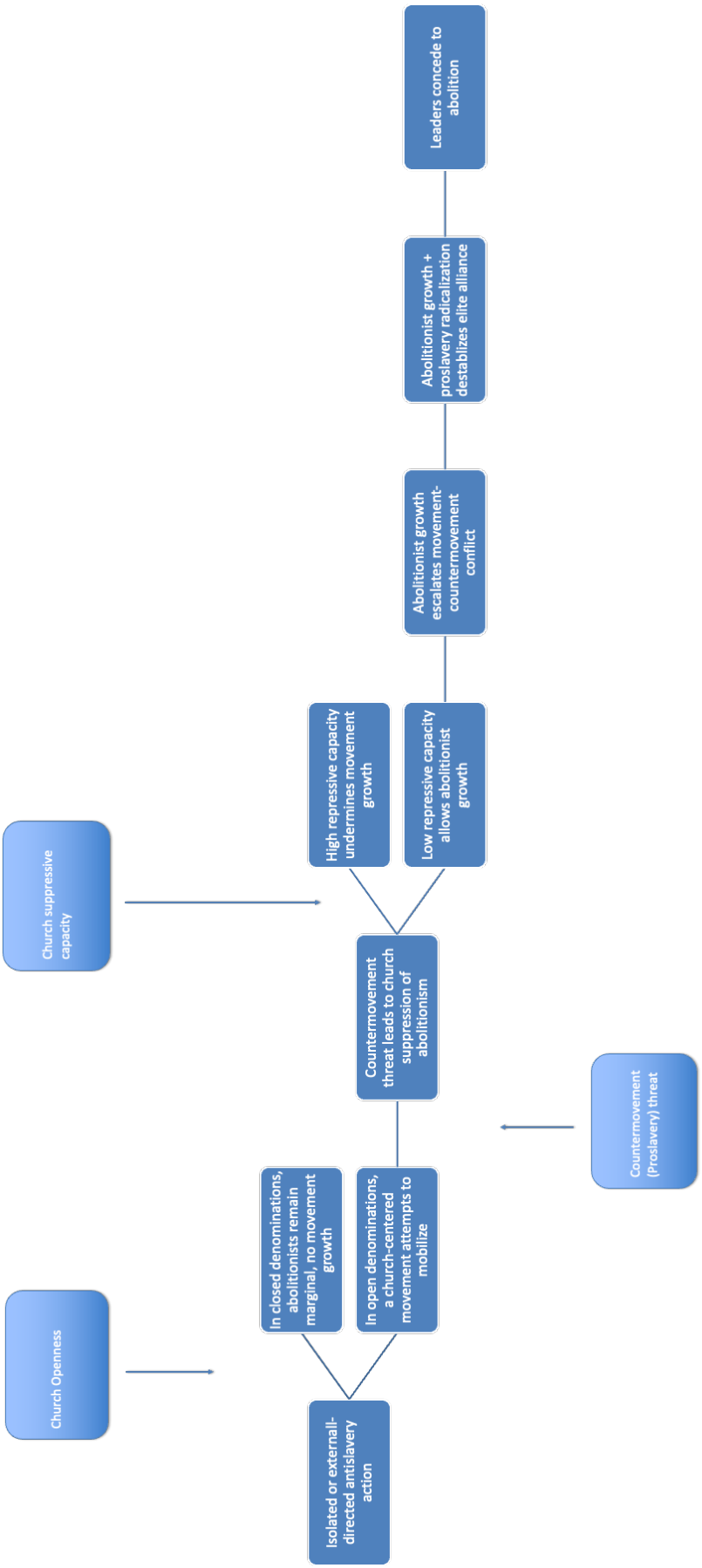

Figure 6: Pathways to Abolitionist Growth and Success

of accountability structures, they blocked abolitionist mobilization. But in denominations where leaders' authority was primarily rational-legal and was checked by democratic rules that spread authority more broadly across individuals and church institutions, leaders lacked the ability to suppress abolitionist mobilization, and their suppressive efforts often led to greater sympathy and support for abolition.

As abolitionists grew in strength, they became a greater threat to proslavery. The proslavery countermovement responded to increased threat by making increasingly radical demands of church leaders that destabilized the alliance that had formed among leaders to oppose abolition. In this context, church leaders made pivotal concessions to abolition, knowing all the while that doing so would lead the Southerners to exit the church.

The organizational opportunity structures that abolitionists encountered in their churches were the manifestation of specific configurations of church authority and the presence of a strong proslavery countermovement. In particular, opportunities for abolitionist growth and success were determined by the concentration of authority, the type of authority, and the presence or absence of democratic rules and procedures. The configuration of denominational authority determined each church's level of openness, which influenced whether abolitionists even attempted to direct their activism towards their churches, and also determined the capacity of denominational leaders to suppress abolitionist mobilization and growth.

Concentration of Authority

Among the Episcopalians, Old School Presbyterians, and the Disciples of Christ, a high concentration of authority contributed to low openness and high suppressive capacity. High concentrations of authority meant that there were fewer access points for challengers. In the Protestant Episcopal Church, Bishops were positioned at the top of a hierarchically structured organization and had the capacity to create and enforce binding policies on slavery. Bishops could overrule decisions made by church judicatories, prevent topics from making their way onto the denominational agenda, and control access to both the institutionalized political system of the church and the broader arena for contention. In the Old School Presbyterian Church, power was concentrated through a re-emphasis (following the 1838 schism) on proper chains of denominational authority and through the severing of alliances with agencies that operated beyond the scope of denominational control. A key concern of Old School leaders had been the potential for agencies outside the Church to serve as rival sources of authority; in closing those opportunities, they concentrated authority and reduced access points for challengers.

Among the decentralized and minimally bureaucratized Disciples, power was concentrated in the hands of the leaders of the church missionary agency and the editor of the top church publication. Though these leaders lacked the capacity to create binding policies for all congregations, clergy, or adherents, the leaders of the missionary agency were able to determine whether slaveholders or abolitionists would serve as missionaries, which effectively established the church's position on slavery. At the same time, the editor of the church's main periodical was in the position to assert the church's position on slavery and control what alternative views could be published, and what framings of slavery would prevail.

Thus, across these three churches, there were different pathways to the concentration of church authority, but the effect was similar. Top leaders in these churches controlled the denominational agenda, established dominant frames regarding slavery, and denied challengers

access both to the institutionalized means for changing church policy *and* the public arena in which challengers might engage potential supporters or opponents.

Where authority was less concentrated, abolitionists had more access to church institutions such as official meetings and publications. Even when leaders resisted abolitionists who tried to use those institutional channels, abolitionists who were engaged in the institutional political sphere were able to contest proslavery framings, challenge church suppression, gain supporters, and provoke antagonists. Through these activities they gained strength and escalated conflict, which together shifted leaders' costs calculations and ultimately won concessions.

Baptists were decentralized like the Disciplines of Christ but were more bureaucratized. They had a greater number of distinct church agencies, each with its own established rules and procedures, and this multiplicity entailed a larger number of access points for challengers. Church business was handled according to established protocols that prevented top leaders from exercising too much personal discretion. For instance, when Southerners wrote to the General Convention to demand that the Church censure abolitionists, the Board of the General Convention, a group made up of both pro- and anti-slavery members, deliberated and drafted a public response. Then, the event reverberated through the meeting of the General Convention, where the delegates to the Convention collectively voted to replace an abolitionist board member with a slaveholder. Taken as an individual episode, this was a clear victory for proslavery, but viewed in terms of the broader development of the church-centered abolition movement, it also functioned to raise the visibility of the abolitionist struggle and sensitize moderates to the suppressive efforts by church leaders. Movements cannot grow without visibility, and they often also gain sympathy and support when leaders attempt to crack down. Thus, access to this arena for contention—a place for struggles to play out—is a precondition for success.

In the Methodist Church, which was formally more like the Protestant Episcopal Church, leaders had greater formal capacity both to satisfy challengers and to suppress them but, like in the Baptist Church, bureaucratic agencies proliferated to coordinate the many tasks associated with spreading the Gospel. The federated organizational structure provided multiple access points, and agencies were structured to channel influence and promote deliberation. The well-established procedures for receiving and resolving petitions from clergy and from congregations, for example, made it possible for abolitionists to push their concerns, publicly partake in meaning-making, and challenge institutional overreach, even in the face of suppression from leaders.

Among the New School Presbyterians, the bureaucratically developed, federated agency structure similarly increased access points for challengers. In addition, cooperation with Congregationalists and ecumenical collaborations with other denominations allowed influence to flow in from outside, especially from the benevolent societies that were often sites of abolitionist mobilization. These institutions offered challengers venues for organizing and gaining support that existed outside of denominational control.

Thus, the concentration of authority was a critical factor determining abolitionist success. Highly concentrated authority allowed leaders to block abolitionists from influencing policy, but also from engaging in meaning-making work, gaining visibility and support, and provoking antagonists. All of these dynamics proved to be pivotal in shifting leaders' cost calculations, eventually leading to success for Baptist, New School Presbyterian, and Methodist abolitionists, while the abolitionists among the Disciples, Old School Presbyterians, and Episcopalians remained atomized and marginal.

Type of Authority

The specific type of authority also mattered for abolitionist mobilization and success. As Chaves (1993) shows, church authority is composed of both a rational-legal *agency* dimension and a *religious* dimension, which may be traditional (in the case of ordained clergy) or charismatic (in the case of popular exhorters or the leaders of new religious movements). While agency authority is embodied in the powers granted to leaders by their organizations and is especially impactful in terms of the ability to hire and fire clergy, religious authority refers to the supernatural and grants leaders the ability to decide what is sinful or whether or not individuals can enjoy the spiritual rewards of participation in the church, such as healing or salvation.

Churches characterized by greater religious authority were less open to challengers, when compared to those with greater rational-legal authority, which is rule-bound and subject to challenge according to specified procedures. By its nature, rational-legal authority is delimited in scope, and there are structures of accountability to keep it within those bounds. These accountability structures constitute access points available to challengers that do not exist in churches where religious authority prevails. In churches with greater religious authority, leaders' claims to the supernatural meant that defying leaders or leaving the organized church could have implications for a challenger's spiritual status. As a result, challengers were more bound to their churches and leaders had greater control over meaning-making.

In the Protestant Episcopal Church, for example, Bishops presided over the national and regional judicatories and demanded a high degree of deference. Abolitionist clergy such as Peter Williams and Isaiah DeGrasse were silenced and marginalized by Bishops, but they reluctantly accepted the authority of the Bishops despite their frustrations. The importance of religious authority in constituting the Protestant Episcopal Church also bound adherents to the church, and there were no efforts by abolitionists to leave the church and form a rival anti-slavery denomination. In contrast, Methodist abolitionists challenged Bishops who tried to suppress abolitionism, and Bishops' efforts to extend their own authority in the interest of suppression garnered support for abolitionists. As early as 1816, Black clergy and adherents left to form the autonomous African Methodist Episcopal Church, taking the liberty to completely break from the hierarchy of the MEC, and later the Wesleyan Methodists also left to create an antislavery church.

Among the Disciples, religious authority was embodied in the person of Alexander Campbell, who joined his father Thomas Campbell and fellow preacher Barton Stone to lead the very movement that became the Disciples of Christ. Alexander Campbell was the source of most of the Disciples' theological writing, was the president of the church's missionary agency from its founding until his death, and was the editor of the primary Disciples periodical. The decentralized nature of the Church meant that he could not compel clergy or adherents to adopt his views, but his control over Disciples media, agencies, and theology made his views authoritative. Those abolitionists that did dissent struggled to gain enough supporters, as evident in their failed attempt to form and sustain an antislavery missionary organization. In contrast, influential Baptist theologians and exhorters lacked lasting and important organizational positions from which to exert a such a large and continual spiritual influence on the Baptist community.

In the Old School Presbyterian Church, polity structure was invested with spiritual significance. Even though top leaders were agency officials, Presbyterians believed that the Presbyterian form of Church organization was derived directly from the followers of Jesus and therefore obedience within the organizational chain of command took on an element of religious

authority. Leaders used this to suppress debate. In contrast, New School Presbyterian ecumenical endeavors deemphasized formal polity structure and agency authority prevailed. As a result, adherence to the rules and procedures of meetings took on a great significance, while the authority of any individual member of the clergy was reduced.

In the churches with high levels of religious authority (as opposed to rational-legal agency authority), challenges to church authorities either gained little traction or were not made in the first place. High religious authority also meant that abolitionist efforts to exit the church over slavery policy were limited because the organizational entity of the church was endowed with a spiritual reality and exiting the church thus carried potential spiritual consequences. Thus, churches with greater religious authority were more effective at preventing the emergence and growth of an abolition movement because of their greater hold on meaning and their greater capacity to bind individuals to their organizations. In churches where agency authority was more significant, rules and procedures governed its exercise and challengers not only had the ability to express their grievances according to those rules but also had a legitimate basis on which to challenge suppression.

Democratic Rules and Procedures

Finally, democratic organizational practices contributed significantly to church openness and also reduced suppressive capacity. Methodist, Baptist and New School Presbyterian agencies were organized to encourage deliberation and incorporate varied opinions. This gave challengers the means to access the institutional political system. It also made leaders more accountable to their religious communities, which limited their ability to silence and discipline challengers they opposed. Democratic rules and procedures checked the power of top denominational officials, ensuring that they stayed within their formally specified powers. Among the Episcopalians, Disciples, and Old School Presbyterians, on the other hand, leaders were less accountable to their subordinates, had greater autonomy in matters of church policy, and denominational meetings did not necessarily incorporate diverse perspectives or channel input. This meant that leaders had considerably more discretion in choosing to silence or punish challengers.

A lack of democratic decision-making processes enabled the silencing that was so key to abolitionist suppression among the Episcopalians, Disciples, and Old School Presbyterians. For example, when Episcopal Church leaders blocked Alexander Crummell's enrollment in the General Theological Seminary, leaders sidestepped the ordinary procedure for handling his petition, directing it to the Board of Trustees instead of the seminary faculty. The Board selected members to a committee, then censored the lone voice of dissent, that of Bishop Doane, who appears to have left the committee in protest when the committee agreed not to admit Crummell. While Doane was outvoted, indicating that there was some level of democratic process, the course of events reflects a top-down leadership style aimed at silencing conflict. In contrast, had Methodist leaders attempted to circumvent their own rules or to silence dissenting views to this extent, their actions would likely have become a basis for challenge and abolitionist growth, because democratic rules and procedures were well elaborated in the church Discipline and leaders were expected to adhere to them.

Among the Disciples, there were no democratic procedures for selecting missionaries, determining the criteria for their selection, or through which members and clergy might voice concerns about those selected. Instead, church leaders made their selections without accountability to the rest of the church. As a result, they were able to hire a slaveholder for missionary work abroad and, at the same time, demand silence over slavery from an abolitionist

candidate for domestic missionary work. In the Baptist Church, on the other hand, the choice to hire slaveholding missionaries was a matter of public debate. When the Georgia Baptists asked the Board of the Baptist Home Missionary Society to hire a slaveholder, the Board published a circular that was available to all members of the church. In the circular, the Board noted that if they had chosen to hire a slaveholder, it would have resulted in a challenge that required a vote from all delegates to the Home Missionary Society (Hill 1844). While the publication of the circular reflects Baptist openness, the process the Board described exemplified the accountability measures that were part of Baptist organizational practice. No such practices existed among the Disciples of Christ.

Among the Old School Presbyterians, some democratic organizational practices did exist, but leaders exercised discretion in adhering to them, as happened in 1841 when the committee that was supposed to respond to abolitionist petitions chose not to address them. Delegates challenged the efforts to keep abolitionist petitions off the floor, but the discussion was indefinitely postponed. Thus, a departure from the formal rules and procedures that ordinarily protected democratic deliberation was possible when leaders thought it expedient.

Democratic processes combined with less concentrated authority and a greater emphasis on agency authority created opportunity structures that facilitated abolitionist success in the Methodist Church, New School Presbyterian Church, and among the Disciples of Christ. Denominational openness allowed abolitionists some access to the institutional political system of the churches, and where their access ended because of leaders' firm opposition to the movement, abolitionists were still able to proclaim their demands before the church and to engage in meaning-making work, which allowed them to both gain support and antagonize their opponents. The limited suppressive capacity of leaders in these churches, whose authority was primarily rational-legal and, thus, constrained by structures of accountability, also worked to the advantage of abolitionists. While leaders did censure and attempt to silence abolitionists, they failed to truly dampen abolitionist mobilization because they lacked the institutional control to completely shut out abolitionists and their suppressive efforts lacked legitimacy. Together, these features enabled abolitionists to mobilize in the face of resistance and to grow in strength, thus provoking increasingly radical demands from their opponents, which eventually caused denominational leaders to change course and side with the abolitionists.

Geography

Thus far, I have said little about the possible impact of geography, although American slavery had an obvious spatial dimension. Since the churches differed in the levels of support they drew from the South, it is reasonable to imagine that regional culture may have shaped denominational propensities towards abolitionism. More concretely, one might imagine that if a denomination draws more of its support from the South, then there should be less overall support for abolition more powerful denominational suppression. This hypothesis can be quickly rejected in light of the data presented in Table 4, which shows abolitionist mobilization within major antebellum religious denominations by their proportion of congregations in slaveholding states in 1850. If indeed greater presence in the South led to unchallenged toleration of slavery, Baptists and Methodists should have seen the lowest levels of abolitionist mobilization. Instead, the opposite is true.

More generally, geography does not appear to explain which denominations developed strong church-centered abolition movements. Among denominations with successful abolition movements, the proportion of congregations in the South varied from virtually none (in the

Congregational Church) to as much as 60% (in the Baptist Church). Among denominations that did not develop strong abolition movements, the proportion of congregations in the South varied between 20% (in the Lutheran Church) and 40% (in the Episcopal Church).

Of course, none of these denominations drew the vast majority of their support from the South, nor did any early American religious bodies that were significant enough to be included in the 1850 US Census. The antebellum Northern US was more densely populated and had a higher rate of religious adherence than did the South, and the growth of religious adherence in the Southern US that occurred during the antebellum period resulted when denominations that were already well-established in the North spread into the South (Finke and Stark 1992). Had there been any truly Southern churches, churches that depended as little on Northern support as the Congregationalists did on Southern support, then an effect of geography likely would be observable—it is highly unlikely that a church with fewer than 5% of its congregations in the North would be home to a thriving church-centered abolition movement, for example.

Table 4: Abolitionist Mobilization and Proportion of Congregations in the South for all Denominations with at least 1,000 congregations in 1850

Denomination	Abolitionist Mobilization	Proportion of Congregations* in Slave States as a Percent of Total
Baptist	+	60%
Methodist	+	52%
Pre-Schism Presbyterian	+	23%
Quaker	+	12%
Post-Schism Presbyterian: New School	+	11%
Universalist	+	4%
Congregationalists	+	0%
Episcopalian	-	40%
Christian Churches	-	37%
Post-Schism Presbyterian: Old School	-	32%
Lutheran	-	19%

Sources: 1850 US Census of Religious Bodies, Foss (1850), Ahlstrom (2004:658-68), Scherer (1975), Heathcote (1919: 40-69), McKivigan (1984, especially ch. 1, 2, and 4), Engelder (1964), Protestant Episcopal Church (1785-1862), Methodist Episcopal Church (1855), PCUSA Old School (1850), PCUSA (New School (1894).
* Proportion of Congregations in Slave States reported for all denominations except Presbyterians. Since it is not possible to disaggregate Old and New School Presbyterian data using the 1850 census data, I use state-level membership data from Presbyterian minutes to instead calculate the proportion of church members in the South.

Thus, in saying that geography does not explain which churches developed strong abolition movements, I do not mean to argue that churches were not influenced by the strength of their Southern support base. Rather, there were no cases in the universe of major antebellum denominations that lacked a sufficient proportion of Northerners to stimulate an abolition movement, since abolitionist thrived when as little as 40% of a church's congregations were in

the North. At the same time, the churches with little to no abolitionism had between 60% and 80% of their congregations in the North, so a large Northern population also did not guarantee a thriving abolition movement.

Theoretical Conclusions

Traces of Successful Suppression

In this dissertation, I have argued that church "indifference" to slavery was the product of active and successful abolitionist suppression carried out by church leaders. Producing evidence of suppressed mobilization is no trivial task, however. Scott (1990) refers to this problem as the "interpretation of quiescence." A lack of conflict can indicate a lack of discontent, but it can also indicate a lack of real or perceived opportunities for channeling that discontent into collective action.

What I have shown here is that there was more dissent—and hence potential for the emergence of an abolition movement—among the Episcopalians, Disciples, and Old School Presbyterians than is typically thought. Previous authors have taken the seeming lack of conflict at face value, accepting the "public transcript" (Scott 1990) uncritically, and thus tried to explain the indifference to slavery in these denominations as a result of their theological views. Yet, in each of these churches, there were dissenters. There were small, isolated attempts to change the church course on slavery. Thus, it is not sufficient to ask why these churches didn't produce abolitionism. It is necessary to instead ask why the abolitionists in these churches were not able to organize and sustain a church-centered abolition movement. And this is what I have done here.

I have shown that in the denominations where a church-centered abolition movement did not emerge, the few observable instances of abolitionism were met with suppression and leaders maintained tight control of the institutional arena of contention. By managing who could speak openly and what issues could be debated in official venues or in the primary church media outlets, leaders prevented abolitionists from asserting their own framing of slavery as an urgent moral problem in need of a religious resolution. By protecting church institutions from abolitionist disruption, leaders also prevented the escalation of movement-countermovement conflict, which in other churches turned out to be a critical step towards abolitionist success. Leaders in these churches also had the greater force of *religious* authority behind them, in addition to their *agency* authority, and the sacred quality of that authority seems to have affected abolitionists' willingness to challenge leaders and the amount of support they received when they did.

It is not possible to prove that abolitionists would have mobilized in these churches if denominational authority had been less concentrated, entirely rational-legal, and subject to democratic checks. Yet, the existing explanation for abolitionism, theological worldliness, does not account for the observed differences in abolitionist activism across the churches. Further, the detailed case studies I have presented here show that the pathways to abolitionist success that existed among the Methodists, Baptists, and New School Presbyterians were not available to abolitionists among the Episcopalians, Disciples, and Old School Presbyterians because of the configuration of denominational authority in these churches. In sum, the explanation I have developed here is a significant improvement over the prevailing theological account.

Provocation, Tipping the Scales, and Social Movement Success

An important part of the abolitionist success story was played by their proslavery opponents. While some church leaders expressed opposition to slavery, they united to resist abolition regardless of their own personal views because abolitionists threatened to cause conflict. Abolitionists were smaller and weaker than the proslavery countermovement, and therefore easier to suppress. When abolitionists did manage to mobilize due to the openness and low suppressive capacity of church leaders, however, they provoked the very proslavery backlash that church leaders had feared.

Prior to the rise of radical abolitionism, it had not been uncommon for church leaders to state that slavery was an evil, and the proslavery faction of the churches did not challenge such assertions except where they were accompanied by an attempt to adopt a slaveholding ban. This changed when the antislavery movements grew in strength. When abolitionist threat increased, the proslavery faction began making more radical demands, eventually insisting that church leaders affirm the moral legitimacy of slavery. Thus, proslavery Methodists demanded a slaveholding Bishop, proslavery Baptists demanded a slaveholding missionary, and proslavery Old School Presbyterians began to claim that the Church had overturned its earlier statement describing slavery as "utterly inconsistent with the law of God." (McGill 1865: 18-9).

As proslavery began to demand more from leaders in the way of moral and practical accommodations, the church leaders that personally objected to slavery found these demands more difficult to satisfy. Against the backdrop of growing abolitionist strength, which also made abolitionists more difficult to suppress, these more radical proslavery demands shifted leaders' cost calculations and undermined the stability of the elite alliance against abolitionists.

These events speak to the complex, dynamic interaction between movements, countermovements, and targets. They show that provocation can influence both suppression *and* concessions, depending on the specific constellation of factors. The history explored here also underscores the crucial temporal dimension of social movement success, which happens over the course of multiple instances of contention, each of which may change the landscape for the next confrontation.

Institutional Incapacity as a Wedge for Challengers

The church-centered abolition struggle shows how challengers can transform the structures that limit their own opportunities: abolitionists encountered configurations of power that narrowed the options available to them, but sometimes managed to find and widen opportunities for action. Where abolitionists were able to gain concessions, Southerners left the churches en masse, transforming those very structures. And while the churches did not immediately become the champions of abolition, the abolitionist-induced schisms in the churches severed religious bonds that had once held the North and South together and left a growing antagonism in their place, which may have hastened the start of the civil war and the end to slavery in America (Goen 1985). While schism was not the kind of success that church-centered abolitionists had envisioned, their efforts were certainly not wasted.

Methodist, Baptist, and New School Presbyterian leaders tried but failed to suppress abolitionist mobilization. What constituted a lack of capacity for the church leaders to carry out the actions they deemed advantageous was, from the perspective of abolitionists, an opportunity. Yet these were not opportunities for immediate success. Instead, they were chances for abolitionists to *make more opportunities*. Abolitionist success, like social movement success more broadly, was achieved over multiple instances of collective action. At several critical

junctures, individual episodes of contention changed the opportunity structure for abolitionists, improving their position for the next round of conflict. The lack of suppressive capacity in these churches meant that even as leaders opposed the movement, they could not prevent a subsequent round of contention or the widening of opportunities for abolitionist success.

In contrast, the few observable instances of protest among the Disciples, Episcopalians, and Old School Presbyterians failed to gain traction or result in the widening of opportunities. Abolitionist protests occurred outside the denominational arena, in marginal magazines or the meetings of adjacent societies, and they had no avenues to force their concerns onto the denominational agenda. As a consequence, they did not gain support, the proslavery challenge did not escalate, and they failed to influence the framing of slavery. Thus, abolitionists, in order to be successful, had to find structural openings *and then create more opportunities for themselves.* This speaks to the interplay between structure and agency: social actors encounter structures that constrain their options, but creative actors may be able to change their circumstances even when their options are limited.

The External Impacts of Internal Conflict

Finally, I wish to suggest a broader take-away from this research. It has often been asked whether religion promoted abolition or preserved slavery. Answers have varied: Patterson (1982), for example, contends that evangelical Protestantism was the perfect cultural support for slavery, while Young (2006), in contrast, argues that evangelical Protestantism provided the cultural tools for its undoing. What both perspectives share is the tendency to think of religion as a set of commonly held beliefs.

Yet, having examined the historical struggles that took place over slavery within these churches, it seems clear that any efforts to attribute a singular position on slavery to any of these religious bodies would be a mistake. Rather than representing a singular dominant or widely shared view on slavery, each religious body was divided. And, what's more, each denomination had the potential to serve as a site for contention over slavery. The prevailing views on slavery at any moment were just that—the views that prevailed in a contest for power between abolitionists, proslavery forces, and the churches.

This is important because the role the churches played in the broader political struggle against slavery was itself a consequence of the struggle that played out within the church. And this is also true when we think about the role of religion in contemporary political struggles over, say, abortion or lgbtq+ rights. For every Evangelical church bussing protesters to an anti-abortion rally, there is an Episcopal Church with a proudly waving rainbow flag. These positions reflect the current status of internal struggles within the religious communities.

Larger social and political struggles are not just mirrored in these smaller social units—these smaller social units are actually important sites where political battles are waged and where social change takes place. The role that any business or civil society institution plays in the broader, external process of social change depends on the outcomes of internal struggles. Whether a church protected slavery or promoted abolition depended on whether abolitionists inside the church succeeded or failed. When change happens within an organization, it can produce cultural shifts that spread beyond the organization, but it can also lead to structural transformations: leadership may change; organizations may emerge, split, or collapse. While the cultural consequences of these smaller-scale struggles shape individual perceptions, their structural consequences change the institutional configuration of society.

In the Baptist, Methodist, and New School Presbyterian churches, abolitionist success led to sectional schism. The result was that, some fifteen years before the outbreak of the civil war, more than half of American Christians went from participating in national churches to participating in sectional churches—churches that encompassed either the North or South, but not both. A major link of empathy and identification that had previously spanned the Mason-Dixon Line was now broken, crystallizing the cultural and political divide between North and South (Goen 1985). Before their schism, Northern and Southern Methodists were co-religionists. Following the religious schisms, each side saw the other as antagonist, as the party responsible for a division that could have been avoided had prudent and reasonable actions been taken.

Christianity, as an arena of social conflict over slavery, dramatically reconfigured the social space of the United States over the fifteen years before the civil war. My analysis suggests that it is in this sense—and not in its role as a source of culture—that religion had its greatest impact on slavery. Religious bodies were fields for conflict over social values. They contained a multitude of conflicting factions, elites, activists, and confused individuals but, until the moment of schism, they bound together these diverse perspectives into religious communities. Along with white supremacy and individual economic interests in slavery, this cohesion undercut Northern resistance to slavery. When abolitionists ushered in the crisis in the churches and led to a major reconfiguration of social, affective, and organizational ties, they also created new opportunities for abolitionists in the political sphere.

I suggest, more broadly, that recognizing these kinds of smaller-scale social conflicts helps us to understand when and how larger-scale social and political transformations are possible. Battles are fought not just on the National Mall of Washington D.C., but also in local school board meetings, corporate offices, university faculty meetings, mosques, synagogues, and temples. These smaller battles lead to cultural changes that aggregate over the whole of society, and they lead to structural realignments that alter the configuration of power in national political conflicts. A greater attention to contention on a smaller scale thus has the potential to uncover more about how social structures are kept stable, and about how and why they are sometimes radically transformed.

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