

**EXPLORING SYSTEMATIC VARIATION IN CLAIMS OF THREAT:  
A TIME-SERIES ANALYSIS, 1870 TO 1900**

by

**ELIZABETH ROSE WATTS WARREN**

**(Under the direction of Dr. Martha A. Myers)**

ABSTRACT

This project explores the efficacy of the argument that social structural factors generate a public discourse conducive to the formation of vocabularies of punitive motives. The argument has implications for a model of punishment since several theorists posit that how and when a society punishes its criminals depends upon its social environment. To date, this argument has remained at the level of conjecture. This project is an initial step in determining if structural variation in public discourse exists.

County-level data on discourse were derived from a content analysis of newspapers over a 30-year period. I found limited support for a structural explanation. Specifically, time-series analysis (ARIMA) for two counties in postbellum Georgia showed that under selected conditions, certain claims of threat were predicted. These conditions required acute and/or extended economic crises and contested political events. Claims most vulnerable to structural variation were those differentially targeting the activities of black offenders for condemnation. This last point has implications for the social production of a deviant population that is black. Smaller incremental social change, such as diminishing racial inequality, registered intermittent effects as well.

Although no one factor was decisive across contexts and measures, the project has implications for a model of punishment. Specifically, an adequate model of punishment

necessitates not simply the examination of penal events and statistics, but an identification and analysis of those contextual processes underlying the generation of these events.

INDEX WORDS: ARIMA Models, Claimsmaking Activity, Content Analysis, Economic Model of Punishment, Print Media, Postbellum Georgia, Public Discourse, Racial Disparity, Racial Inequality, Threat Hypothesis, Time-Series Analysis, Vocabularies of Punitive Motives

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## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to the memory of my husband who never wavered in his support of me. He was the inspiration for this study and remains so. The sun shines less brightly. Miss you.

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Although it appears to happen magically, any developmental specialist knows that learning to stand requires the coming together of an infinite number of skills. Teetering as she clutches, the child pulls herself up with great effort and falls often. But standing is also a collaborative effort and with help, she eventually learns to stand alone.

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Tell me, what do you do  
When you’ve done all you can  
And it seems like you can’t make it through?  
Child, you just stand.....  
(Donnie McClurkin)

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## CHAPTER 1

### PUNISHMENT AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

We met a gentleman a few days ago who told us that he did not have a mouthful of bread in his house and not a grain of corn to feed his horses. He was at the time out among friends trying to borrow a few dollars to supply immediate wants. This gentleman before and since the war has stood high as a well-to-do solvent farmer. Nor is this an isolated case by any means. We have heard of numbers of farmers who will be compelled to abandon their crops and turn their horses out to grass if not assisted. This is not all –actual want is now upon our people, and before the summer is over starvation may be expected. There are hundreds of laborers loafing around the county simply because the farmers cannot employ them. These people have to eat and if we do not arrange to give them employment, they must be forced to steal and rob. And to speak candidly, no one could much blame them, for the pinchings of hunger are terrible enough.

(0087)

The foregoing commentary on crime appeared in the Greensboro, Georgia Herald in the late 1870s. In the mid-1880s, the same newspaper tersely wrote:

Some lazy, prowling marauders broke into J.E. Carlton & Co's. store Saturday night and helped themselves to what they wanted.

(0368)

In the span of a few short years, the rhetoric on crime, in general, and theft, in particular, changed from one of compassion to one where the perpetrators were maligned as “lazy, prowling marauders.” While speculative, it is possible that property offenders brought before the bar of justice during the earlier period were dealt with leniently. In contrast, the “marauders” of the latter text, when and if caught, were likely subjected to



punitive social control (i.e., prosecution, conviction, and sentencing). What was the catalyst for this change in sentiments? While it could be due to differences in the act and/or perpetrators, some theorists contend that changing sentiments and subsequent penal events have much less to do with the nature of the crime (and/or perpetrators), and more to do with crime's situated meaning (Ferrell 1999). In other words, how a society constructs threat and then responds to it depends upon crime's social context.

Indeed, theorists argue that popular conceptions of changes in penal events and criminal statistics are grounded in syllogistic reasoning -- increases in criminal activity lead to increases in arrests, indictments, convictions, fines, and prison populations (Melossi 1989). Challenging this logic, these theorists argue that the relationships are not so straightforward (Black 1976; Greenberg 1977; Hall et al. 1978; Melossi 1985; Box 1987; Hale 1989; McCullagh 1992). They contend that the nexus of economic, social, and political power arrangements gives form to crime and punishment. Thus, the production of criminal statistics and, indeed, of criminals themselves, arises and operates within a specific social milieu that is historically contingent and changing (Pfohl 1994).

This social milieu perspective owes much to the increasing respectability of a number of studies in the sociology of punishment tradition. Anchored by such notables as Emile Durkheim ([1900] 1973), Svend Ranulf (1938), Georg Rusche and Otto Kirchheimer ([1939] 1968), and Michel Foucault (1975), punishment is variously conceptualized as an expression of collective outrage, middle class anxieties, needs of capital, or State power. Although each of these theories varies in terms of its explanation of punishment, implicit in all is the assertion that punishment is part of a set of wider

social relations. This sociological tradition provides the foundation for seeing all crime control events - arrests, indictments, convictions, incarcerations-- as part of, not apart from, their social moorings. One of the most influential traditions garnering a great deal of empirical support is the economic model of punishment.

### **Economic Model of Punishment**

Rusche and Kirchheimer ([1939] 1968) contend that punishment serves as a "coercive ancillary to the labor market" (Garland, 1990: 94), obtaining its form, severity, and utility from labor market changes. For instance, an historical analysis of punishment by Rusche ([1933] 1980) indicates that as the economy of a nation, distribution of wealth, and population pressures changed from the middle ages to the mid-twentieth century, so, too, did the value of labor and the kinds of punishment imposed by a society. Thus, one moved from a period of fairly equal distribution of wealth and benign punishment for infractions (fines) in the early middle ages, through periods of unequal distribution of wealth, massive population pressures, and punitive retaliatory punishments (death and mutilation) in the late middle ages, to labor shortages and imprisonment in the industrial age. From this perspective, the value of labor determines the kinds of punishment (fines, executions, imprisonment) a society metes out to its violators.

Rusche and Kirchheimer ([1939] 1968) also suggest that the labor market influences the severity of punishments a society adopts. They argue that punishment, irrespective of its form, is more severe during periods of economic crisis and more lenient during periods of prosperity. In a contemporary example, the severity of punishment

hypothesis explains variation in internal prison regimes, from the use of treadmills when labor is plentiful, to contract labor when labor is scarce (Garland, 1990).

The severity of punishment hypothesis operates via the "principle of less eligibility" which requires that prisoners be "kept below the living standard of the lowest classes of the free population" (Rusche and Kirchheimer [1939] 1968: 108). As living standards outside the prison walls decline during economic crises, so, too, must punishment require more coercive prison environments, longer prison sentences, and greater numbers of convictions.

Finally, the utility of punishment hypothesis gleaned from the work of Rusche and Kirchheimer ([1939] 1968) suggests that punishment serves to remove a part of the population from the labor market. That is, by capturing potentially troublesome populations, such as the young and unemployed, punishment insulates capital from one of its most explosive contradictions -- the production of surplus populations (Spitzer 1975).

The economic model of punishment first propounded by Rusche and Kirchheimer ([1939] 1968) almost sixty years ago has generated a plethora of empirical studies examining the links between various aspects of punishment and the economy. Most relevant for this analysis is the severity of punishment hypothesis which predicts increasing punitiveness in the criminal justice system with declining economic fortunes of a society. Much of this research has an institutional focus, documenting a consistent and significant relationship between unemployment and imprisonment rates (convictions, prison admissions, sentence length, or prison populations).

In a comprehensive review of forty-four empirical studies of the relationship between labor surplus (usually unemployment) and imprisonment indices, Chiricos and DeLone (1992) found that the economy exerted an independent effect upon punishment, irrespective of crime. This effect held in studies of other countries (Greenberg 1977; Box and Hale 1982; Melossi 1989; Laffargue and Godefroy 1989) and historically, in this country, with regional and racial variations noted (Myers and Sabol 1987; Myers 1990a, 1991b, 1998). More importantly, during periods of economic decline, imprisonments escalated as did sentence lengths and severity of internal prison routines. In contrast, periods of economic expansion produced leniency in punishment (Melossi and Pavarini 1981; Adamson 1984).

An economic model of punishment reveals that policing and crime control are often used by class elites to condition the poor to new or unmet structural requirements of capitalism and to restore authority structures imperiled by the crisis (Barlow et al. 1995b; Beckett and Sasson 2000). Gordon et al. (1982) observed that there was a labor shortage in the U.S. between 1820 and 1840 as the U.S. economy transformed from an agriculturally-based economy to manufacturing. Insufficient proletarianization meant that processes were not yet in place to force people to accept wage labor. What followed was the criminalization of begging by the State to address the labor shortages on behalf of capitalism. Similarly, Chambliss (1964) and Walker (1980) noted that the enforcement of vagrancy laws were traditionally used in response to labor shortages of capital. In conjunction with the “utility of punishment” argument one can see, therefore, that the war

on vagrants, idlers, and thieves, which are routinely waged in the media, are simultaneously practical and ideological (Beckett and Sasson 2000).

### Contradictions and Critiques

There are exceptions to the economic model of punishment, however. For instance, Wallace (1981) found that during a period in the 1970s, labor force changes failed to predict increases or decreases in prison populations. Greenberg (1980) found that the relationship between unemployment and imprisonment held in Poland for some periods, but not in other similar periods. Jacobs and Helms (1996) found no effects of unemployment on prison admissions and Galster and Scaturro (1985) found an inverse relationship between unemployment and imprisonment in the U.S. between 1976 and 1981. It is not surprising, then, that some researchers contend that the relationship between labor surplus and punishment is non-existent (Parker and Horwitz 1986), conflicting (Iverarity and Grattet 1989), sporadic (Galster and Scaturro 1985), and elusive (Melossi 1989).

Other critics contend that the economic model of punishment is reductionistic (Garland 1990). By relying upon a single causal mechanism such as the economy, the theory excludes other potential sources of influence, such as those of political, social, and ideological origins. Indeed, it is a bit naive to assume that somehow the effects of the economy are pure (Althusser 1971). If penalty reflects the nature of a society, as most scholars accept, it is likely crosscut by the political, cultural, and ideological expressions of that social organization as well.

A second major critique of the economic model is that it is mechanistic, conjuring images of a grand conspiracy between capital and the State (Hale 1989). Although empirical demonstrations of a relationship between labor surplus and punishment are enlightening, they do not explain how the wheels of justice and economic imperatives happen to coordinate so smoothly. A vocabularies of punitive motives perspective may be useful in addressing both critiques and represents a workable adjunct to the economic model of punishment.

### **Vocabularies of Punitive Motives**

As evident in the previous review of the research, many theorists note the elusive and often independent relationship between the economy, crime, and punishment (Greenberg 1977; Box and Hale 1982; Melossi 1985, 1989). How economic motives are translated into penal events is unclear in Rusche and Kirchheimer's ([1939] 1968) formulation; requiring later theorists to speculate on an intervening mechanism. Melossi (1985, 1989) provides the most complete account of this intervening mechanism, its relation to the economy, and its relevance for understanding changes in punitive responses to behavior (McCullagh 1992).

Advancing a "longitudinally grounded labeling process," Melossi (1985: 182) proposes that vocabularies of punitive motive direct the use of law by agents of social control in accordance with oscillations (contractions and expansions) in the economy. Based upon a longitudinal study of Italian imprisonment data between 1896 and 1965, Melossi concluded that during upswings in the business cycle, a feeling of security produced a moral climate of leniency in society and in the criminal justice system.

Upswings were boom times wherein the dominant discourse tolerated and ignored many infractions of the law.

However, in periods of economic distress, a "'discursive chain' of punitiveness and severity spread across society, linking the attitude of 'moral panic' expressed by business leaders and 'moral entrepreneurs' to the ways in which citizens, police, courts, and correctional authorities perceived behavior as deviant and/or criminal" (Melossi 1985: 183). Periods of economic crisis produced shifts in the discourse toward punitive verbalizations and punitive responses to infractions. This discourse provided justifications for the behavior of social control agents.

Power relations are implicit in this account as grounded labeling theory suggests that all discourses are not created equally. Consequently, Melossi (1985) argues that the origins of the discourse appeared to derive from "authoritative texts" at the macro level and from local "economic actors" and "moral entrepreneurs" at the micro level. The discourse was then drawn upon by "social actors" or local judicial agents to justify their actions (Melossi 1985: 179). Melossi located the structural determinants of "authoritative texts" primarily in economic relations and identified these texts as legislative enactments, quotes by economic and political elites, and judges' pronouncements. Punitive motives expressed by elites, then, framed the criminal and structured thought and subsequent interactions. As do Box and Hale (1982), who came to the conclusion that what intervenes between the economy and punishment are human agents interpreting the meaning of the economy in their decision-making capacities, Melossi argues that it is through shared meanings carried in discourse, and not some grand conspiracy, that

economic effects, such as unemployment, are translated into increased social control (arrests, indictments, convictions, fines, and prison populations).

The work of Melossi (1985, 1989) in the vocabulary-added perspective has several implications for a study of crime control processes. First, this perspective reminds us of the socially situated nature of crime and crime control and makes us cognizant of the fact that crime and how it should be punished is what we regularly talk about. As Durkheim ([1893] 1960: 102) observed:

Crime brings together upright consciences and concentrates them. We have only to notice what happens, particularly in a small town, when some moral scandal has just been committed. They stop each other on the street, they visit each other, they seek to come together to talk about the event and to wax indignant in common.

Second, a vocabulary-added perspective draws our attention to the symbolic nature of all of those processes related to crime control, especially that of the news media. Just as talking about crime and “waxing indignant” was a ritual of community making in the era of face-to-face communal living, a way of policing its borders and casting out normative violators, so too is writing about crime its modern-day counterpart (Tuchman, Daniels, and Benet 1978). Viewing crime news, therefore, as part of the ritual of shared meaning allows one to argue that what intervenes between an act and a social reaction are vocabularies of motives (Mills 1963; Melossi 1985), often circulated in print, which direct the use of law by agents of social control.

Third, one need not assume a Durkheimian perspective as it is easy to see that crime news has the potential to primarily serve the interests of the dominant class in a neo-Marxian sense. Therefore, a vocabulary-added perspective draws out the implication



that meanings of crime are quite possibly enacted in a social milieu that is crosscut and determined by economic, political, and cultural power relations.

This study examines the intersection of crime and crime control in post-bellum Georgia by exploring the condemnatory discourse that Melossi and others speculate intercedes between crime, the social structure, and its punishment. Historian Edward Ayers (1984) writes in Vengeance and Justice that as the economy worsened in the South after the Civil War, prosecutions soared. He thus speculates that a relationship existed between the social structure, what people said about crime, how crime was viewed, and how criminals were subsequently punished. Melossi (1985) might explain Ayers' observation this way: what predicted punishment (prosecutions) was not crime (legal syllogism), but what was said about crime ("vocabularies of punitive motives"). Consequently, punishment fluctuated on the basis of a public discourse rather than on the basis of the actual rate of crime itself.

As with Melossi (1985) and Box and Hale (1982), Ayers' observation remains at the level of speculation. However, discourse is most likely predictable and a systematic analysis should render its patterns discernible. Orienting my analysis to Ayers' observations of 19<sup>th</sup> century southern social arrangements, I examine not the motive power of ideas, which is well established. Instead I seek to discover the power behind the words. This project identifies the shifts in discourse on crime typical of various economic conditions as well as demographic and political relations. From there, it might be made clearer if this discourse at the micro level crystallizes into structural relations at the macro level (arrests, indictments, and incarcerations). Consequently, this research

contributes to criminological theory by assessing the efficacy of the argument that public discourse intervenes between crime and crime control.

### **Plan of Research**

As noted above, conventional reasoning pertaining to the nexus of crime and crime control is an exercise in legal syllogism. The discussion posits a “longitudinally grounded labeling theory” (Melossi 1985: 182) and argues that shared meanings circulated by vocabularies of punitive motives are a way of understanding how structural imperatives are translated into penal events. Chapter 2 establishes that shared meanings are a principle enterprise of the modern-day news media. Crime news, as all news, is a claimsmaking activity that selects certain events and individuals for problem definition requiring certain solutions. The social control effects of this problem definition suggest that crime claims rise to the level of social control and are better regarded as crime control claims. Moreover, these crime control claims are packaged as synonymous with the best interests of the community, the implication being that shared meanings are crafted by dominant economic and political elites. The literature reviewed leads to expectations that structural imperatives compel increases in the level of crime control claims, the focus of crime control claims (black perpetrators over white), and the tone of crime control claims. Chapter 3 grounds insights gleaned from the review of the literature on structural influences of 20<sup>th</sup> century media in the contexts of the postbellum southern Georgia counties of Greene and Whitfield. Examining the 19<sup>th</sup> century structural imperatives fashioned by periodic economic crises, political power struggles, and a perilous cotton economy, the literature assesses the effects of these factors on

punishment. The assumption is that if these structural factors explain punishment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and if crime control claims intervene, then these factors should explain crime control claims as well. Historian Edward Ayers' Vengeance and Justice (1984), serves as a springboard for this discussion of context. Chapter 4 introduces the data sources and sampling procedures for identifying the measures of crime control claims. The chapter also introduces the analytic strategy for assessing the effects of structural sources on claims. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 present time-series models of economic, political, and social change influences on crime control claims and a synthesis of these findings is discussed in Chapter 7. The results indicate very little support for the contention that vocabularies of punitive motive are linked to structural imperatives and, thus, elite interests in this 19<sup>th</sup> century context. One notable exception is the finding that acute and extended economic crises predict racial disparity in crime control claims, net of crime. That is, race not only intervenes in how the economy shapes punishment (as many researchers have found), but also intervenes in how the economy shapes the discourse on crime. National political events and smaller incremental social change register intermittent effects as well. Chapter 7 concludes with a discussion of the study's import for a sociology of punishment tradition and its limitations.

## CHAPTER 2

### MEDIA AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Melossi (1985) and others (Hall et al. 1978; Box and Hale 1982; Ferrell 1999) argue that everyday citizens as well as the police, prosecutors, and judges consume a plethora of crime images and, in turn, interpret these meanings within the context of their everyday lives. Hall et al. (1978: 165-66) argue that:

When the journalist, or the judge, or the members of the ordinary public have to respond to, or explain, troubling events...they tend to draw, often in a piecemeal and unreflexive manner, on the social images, the 'ideas of society', the sources of moral anxiety, the scattered meanings which frame their everyday experience in order to construct, out of them, social accounts which carry credibility. These accounts are not constructed afresh out of each individual's head. They draw upon the publicly objectivated 'vocabularies of motives' already available in the public language – the available field of practical ideologies.

Theoretically, then, shared meanings intervene between crime and crime control leading one to ask, what evidence is there that crime news is structurally determined?

This is a complicated question for several reasons. First, the question contradicts the historical notion of the news as self-initiated and autonomous (Chibnall 1981). The media largely assume that there is no reason to explain news content beyond, perhaps, organizational processes. Journalists speak of news as if events select themselves (Hall 1979). In short, news exists on its own, news persons faithfully represent its reality to their audiences and, most simplistically, crime news occurs because crime happens. This

conception of news work is favored in this exchange between Felix and Cecily in Neil

Simon's The Odd Couple:

Cecily:           What field of endeavour are you engaged in?  
Felix:            I write the news for CBS.  
Cecily:           Oh, fascinating.  
Gwendolyn:     Where do you get your ideas from?  
Felix:            (He looks at her as though she is a Martian): From the  
                    news.  
Gwendolyn:     Oh yes, of course, Silly me...

(Cited in Curran 1996: 119)

The conception of an autonomous news entity driven by its own internal logic derives from a Fourth Estate legacy of news work wherein the media and, in this instance, the print media's interests are aligned in opposition to the operation of government.<sup>1</sup> This opposition was written into the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which said that Congress shall make no laws abridging the freedom of the press. The potential significance of an unfettered media for a free democracy was not lost upon Thomas Jefferson who wrote: "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter" (Hulteng et al. 1983: 2). Years later, Winston Churchill called the press "the unsleeping guardian of every other right that free men prize" (Fedler 1978: 13).

Hence, conventional logic is that the media are independent and objective, and that they collectively preserve America's freedoms. They are democracy-at-work and at their best, they debunk and verify, reveal dangers, and provoke action. "If criminals are roaming the streets," its residents "want newspapers to hear their cries for help, so that an indifferent police force will be compelled to act." (Hamill 1998: 49). Journalists consider

themselves “watchdogs” and moral guardians of a social order predicated upon their view of what this social order ought to be (Gans 1979: 293). Thus, crime news just happens.

The logic of news as *sui generis* is problematic for two reasons, however. First, it is clear that not every crime occurring within a 24-hour period is reported in the newspaper. Thus, offensive or criminal behavior must be discovered, reported, and then treated as though it were a criminal act. That is, there must usually be an arrest. Citizens and the police therefore exercise some discretion in the early phases of criminalization by choosing to respond (or not respond) to an act as “criminal.” Second, there is insufficient space in a newspaper to report each crime committed on a daily basis. As ethnographies of news agencies reveal, crime news is selected to fit the needs of the newspaper organization-- philosophy of the publisher, audience and market niche, timing of the incident -- and other concerns (Tuchman 1978; Cohen and Young 1981; Schudson 1989). A crime event is not a story until it is treated as such by official processes and it passes through a number of “gatekeeping” functions of the news media. Crime news therefore is a social construction and an understanding of it is fruitfully examined from a social constructionist perspective.

Constructionists argue that social problems, like crime, are socially constructed because our sense of what crime is has been produced and/or constructed through social activities (Spector and Kitsuse 1977). When newspapers publish articles on crime, for example, they engage in interpretive acts (selection, rephrasing, editing) that ultimately (re)presents crime events for the paper’s readers.

Constructionists coined the term “claimsmaking” to define news as interpretive acts that claim the attention of its audience and generally examine typifications or features of the claims. What sorts of claims about crime are made? When do claims about crime get made? What sorts of people make these claims? These are all questions central to the constructionist enterprise (Best 1995). Again, these sorts of questions, however, lead us to assume that media “claims” stand on their own and require no explanation as to determinants. That is the case because social constructionists seek to explain the content rather than the broader context of crime news. In fact, “strict constructionists,” such as Spector and Kitsuse (1977), insist that context is irrelevant to an analysis of claims (Nichols 1995). What is of sociological import is not the conditions giving rise to an issue but what is said about the issue. Of course, this is paradoxical because the social constructionist perspective assumes that claims are responsive to context. Hence, the social in social constructionist.<sup>2</sup> Again, much of the literature begs the question: “Where do the claims come from?” Interestingly enough, constructionist studies provide clues, identifying primarily two alternative explanations of crime claims: organizational and structural. Furthermore, the studies suggest that neither source is pure and both are likely cross-cut by influences of the other in a context that is historically contingent.

### **Organizational Explanations**

Constructionist studies of news organizations suggest that what determines the probability of an event being presented as crime news has to do with various situational dynamics: its appearance is “timely” for purposes of deadlines; it is dramatic and new

(but not so new as to not fit with established news frames and/or themes); its newsworthiness is ratified by other colleagues; it conveys some important moral, political, or human interest; its source is reliable (with corroboration if it involves important people); and, lastly, an editor judges that the event merits public attention (Hall et al. 1978; Gans 1979; Schudson 1989; Rock 1998). Thus, as Gans (1979) suggests, newsworthiness is a function of news values criteria that are flexible and vary from case to case.

Gans (1979) studied journalists in two national broadcast news organizations -- NBC and CBS --and two national news magazines ---Newsweek and Time. The field work was conducted at two points in the mid 1960s and the mid 1970s. While the world had changed between these two periods, he found that the way journalists selected and presented the news had not.

Gans (1979) found that journalists conceive of nation and society as having a moral center and that violation of social values represent a threat to that center. Journalists see themselves as moral guardians of a social order predicated upon a consensus of values. This is the Fourth Estate logic in action. Consequently, those stories with dramatic impact were selected as particularly newsworthy because they appeared to threaten this sense of order. Crime news was prime news in a double sense of the word, then. First, it was news that seemed important because it concerned a threat to the consensus as to what holds society together – community (i.e., the terrorist attack). Second, it was news that “primed” the audience to recognize that cherished values had been violated, or at least as journalist interpret these values for the public.



Gans (1979) argues that since values cannot be openly inserted in the news, they must be inferred from the journalists' and editors' selection of news and by the depiction of the event(s) in either sympathetic or condemnatory tones. Thus, the tone of the text is a value statement that conveys a message. Whether or not the news actually has a value impact has, indeed, generated a spate of media effects studies. Nonetheless, Gans contends that media have the capacity to move audiences by its selection of news items and by its tone of presentation.

Value actions by journalists are largely taken-for-granted assumptions of how the world works. According to Gans (1979: xv), then, news is an unrecognized source of power because it reaffirms "the economic, political, and social ideas and values.... dominant in America." News is about major divisions in American society – race, class, gender, and age-- and values, when inserted into texts, reflect these interstices of power.

Gans (1979) comes close to acknowledging that crime claims are likely crosscut by various power relations: economic, political, and cultural (Schlesinger and Tumber 1994; Schudson 1989). The door is opened wider by a second major constructionist study of media. Tuchman's (1978) research is an ethnography of four newspapers in the New York City area over a ten year period (1966-76). She notes that news is partly a product of organizational routines but elaborates upon the fact that news work is situated in a network of economic, political, and cultural relations. The ideological implications of this are that the sources a news reporter relies upon, the "beats" he or she covers, and the "knowledge" the reporter brings to the story are all situationally determined and reflected in the news. In other words, covering the monthly meetings of the Chamber of

Commerce selectively determines the meaning of economic events for an area; accompanying politicians on their stumps produces a discourse that sets political agendas; and covering police stations and the courts generate the meaning of crime by adopting official (i.e., legitimate) typifications of it. News work, therefore, is ideological and authoritative because it frames the news in a particular way, producing an official picture, that limits access to ideas: "... the right to know is the right to know the facts established by NBC, not the right to know all (or even other) possible opinions on the topic" (p. 174). In other words, the "Fourth Estate" logic assumes that in the marketplace of ideas, the truth will always emerge. This is not true, according to Tuchman (1978) where, as is the case in modern capitalism, all of the vendors are selling the same goods (ideas).

The studies by Gans (1979) and Tuchman (1978) suggest that newswork is a theoretic activity and that journalists' theories of society inform the selection of crime news for (re)presentation to an audience. Both suggest that crime claims are an organizing discourse with the capacity to structure thought and interactional processes by its adoption of news routines and use of official sources to frame the meaning of crime and criminal. More importantly, Tuchman's (1978) research leads us to examine aspects of the social structure for explanations of the timing and nature of crime claims.

### **Structural Explanations**

To reiterate, crime claims are likely crosscut by various power relations ( Hall et al. 1978; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Schudson 1989; Schlesinger and Tumber 1994), but these wider influences are possibly complicated by news routines and organizational processes which sometime intrude upon this structural embeddedness. Indeed, media are

free of direct compulsion from structural determinants and yet there is ample evidence suggesting that journalists most often freely articulate definitions of crime that comport with those of the rich and powerful (Fishman 1978; Gitlin 1978; Hall et al. 1978; Hall 1979; Schlesinger and Tumber 1994; Cook 1998). Social constructionist literature indicates that this articulation reflects economic and political power relations.

### Economic Relations

In Marxian formulations, ideas emanating from media are ultimately expressions of economic relations. For example, in a market economy, the media serves up consumers with its emphasis upon advertising. A “pro-capitalist ethos” is reflected in its normative practices: its push to get the story and to get it first amid a constant pressure for profits (Fairclough 1995: 43). News and entertainment, or news as entertainment, have been historically instrumental in achieving commercial ends which is the exposure of mass-produced goods to a mass market. While advertising in newspapers commands approximately 80% of newspaper space (Parenti 1986), crime control claims occupy a large percentage of the rest.

The media, according to Schudson (1989), was organized for the first time in the nineteenth century as a capitalist entity. Operating as it does today, we lose sight of the fact that it could have chosen to be a public-service, non-profit operation. Nonetheless, since that time, the news media has evolved in concert with capitalism. As the recent mergers of Time Warner, ABC, and CNN attest, the media by and large has participated in its on-going economic transformation – the processes of concentration, centralization,

conglomeration, and maximized profits. What the industry learned in its infancy as a part of the capitalist order, then, was that mediated crime sells newspapers.

William Randolph Hurst and Joseph Pulitzer, early publishers of the San Francisco Examiner and the New York World, respectively, pumped life into fledgling nineteenth century newspapers by emphasizing sex, disasters, and crime. It was called “yellow journalism” (Fedler 1978: 34). Other newspapers quickly followed. Readers were simultaneously repelled and entertained by stories of sensationalized crimes, innocent victims, and heroic law enforcement officials. As crime stories reeled off the presses, newspaper profits soared, and publishers like Hurst and Pulitzer became millionaires. And as personal fortunes rose, so did another shift occur in the nature of crime texts.

Early nineteenth century crime texts emphasized crime as a social concern -- born of economic, political and social issues. However, by the late nineteenth century, crime texts depicted crimes as individual acts of inexplicable origins demanding individualized punishment (Surette 1998). This shift in attribution was accompanied by a shift from courtrooms, as loci of crime news, to police departments and official source definitions of crime and criminals (Papke 1987). Consequently, what developed as capitalism progressed was a definition of crime and criminals increasingly removed from its context within capitalist relations. The ideological import of this extraction for capitalist relations – obfuscation of structurally derived sources of inequality – has received increased scholarly attention (Chibnall 1975; Fishman 1978; Hall et al. 1978; Hickman 1982; Barlow et al. 1993; Barlow et al. 1995a, 1995b).

A comparison of media images of crime and official crime statistics consistently demonstrates that crime claims do not correspond to the realities of crime. For instance, one finds that the types of offenses most likely to occur (property crimes) are least likely to receive coverage (Barkan 2001). The media overemphasizes acts of violence with murders, robberies, and assaults most often being the lead stories. If it “bleeds, it leads” is the journalist’s mantra and with the resulting distortion associated with the overrepresentation of the “more severe, intentional, and gruesome incidents, the public overestimates its frequency and often misperceives reality” (Heath and Gilbert 1996: 371). This overestimation is reflected in public opinion polls that continue to show that crime is a pressing social problem even while crime is declining (Barkan 2001). As this misperception has little basis in reality (Barkan 2001), one must entertain the notion that crime claims reflect structural antecedents.

The phrase “crime is a pressing social problem” is interesting because, unlike the phrase “crime is a pressing social condition,” the former implies that something can and should be done about the problem. Clearly, the news media is particularly adept at producing a social problems discourse that frames an issue and offers solutions. In the creation of a crime wave, we are able to see how the nature of claims emerge from organizational processes attuned to capitalist ethics. Additionally, we witness the capacity of news media to craft a meaning of crime in concert with the community’s best interests and therefore to prime punitive social control responses.

Sociologist Mark Fishman (1978) studied the creation of a crime wave against the elderly in a 1976 study of the New York City media (two newspapers and one television

station). He concluded that the dramatic increase in crime news of violence against the elderly reflects the internal workings of news organizations rather than an actual increase in violent crime. He demonstrated that during a six-month period in 1976, a newspaper editor took seemingly unrelated assaults and developed a theme--attacks on elderly victims by juveniles -- and began reporting this as a sort of crime that was on the rise. Fearing that a competitor had discovered a story, other news media outlets adopted the story-line and politicians eventually supported the definition of the problem. In a short time, crimes against the elderly by youths became one of the city's most pressing social problems and politicians scurried to fashion new social control strategies (i.e., new elder crime legislation). Noting that attacks on the elderly by youths had not, in fact, risen during the period of study, Fishman attributed the crime wave to the penchant of news organizations to create news "themes" with dramatic impact and to getting the story first in a drive for profits.

Fishman's (1978) study is important for two reasons. First, it reveals the discretion of editors in deciding what is newsworthy and therefore in fashioning a picture of the nature of the threat to society. Thus, his study highlights the role the media plays in focusing attention on a particular social problem and making a claim as to its seriousness. Second and most importantly, his study suggests that these claims have social control effects – resulting in heightened fear and punitive social control responses to violators.

Several researchers place these important social control effects of crime claims and the resultant fear of crime within capitalist social relations. In Policing the Crisis,

Hall et al. (1978) examines the claims of newspapers in creating a crime wave of youthful mugging during a recession in 1970s England. This is a content analysis of two major London newspapers, The Daily Mirror and The Times, and the Annual Report of the Police Commissioner between August 1972 and August 1973. They noted that traditional assaults were renamed as “muggings” by judges during this period and this new crime wave was amplified in the media, fueling a moral panic far out of proportion to actual increases in behavior. As accounts of muggings were articulated by judges and reflected in the media, arrests, prosecutions and convictions for these offenses escalated. Interestingly, the relabeling of assaults as muggings in judges’ sentencing homilies and subsequent news articles and police reports coincided with a severe economic contraction in England. Consequently, Hall et al. (1978: 29) conclude that the crime claims in the media, by way of “ideological displacement,” serve the interests of the state by preserving its legitimacy and expanding social control over potentially troublesome populations (young unemployed black males) during an economic crisis. The idea of ideological displacement connotes the process of conceiving of crime as a threat to the moral center of society rather than what it is – an attack upon the unequal distribution of society’s resources. Thus, during periods of strain upon economic elites, the level of crime claims carried in the newspapers not only escalates but disproportionately targets the behavior of black males, becoming more condemnatory as well.

Hall et al.’s (1978) work is a blend of Marxian, Gramscian and Althusserian structuralism in that the media craft consent for more punitive social control measures that protect the interests of economic elites. Marx and Engels ([1848] 1987) contend that

in every epoch, the ruling ideas are those of the ruling class. Gramsci, however, explains how these interests are achieved. According to Gramsci, the structure of most societies produces a stratum of organic intellectuals “which function to create consent on behalf of the dominant social group” (Garner 2000: 269). By organic, Gramsci means that this stratum grows up with the socially dominant group and its interests are intertwined and bonded to the interests of that social group. Gramsci’s work suggests that by way of the production of ideas, intellectuals assist elites in converting the latter’s power into legitimate authority or hegemony. Hall et al.’s (1978) study revealed that the media functions as part of that stratum of “organic intellectuals” in the era of modern capitalism in marshaling the motive power of ideas on behalf of economic elites to secure a top down consensus for punitive controls. Crime in the news is ultimately a discourse of social control. It deflects attention away from structural sources of inequality, crafting a consensus for punitive controls in the process. Crime claims are better regarded as crime control claims.

Hickman (1982) applied the insights of Hall et al. (1978) in an exploratory critique of the existence of a fear of crime in the United States that exceeds, by far, actual rates of violent criminal behavior. She suggests that their notion of moral panic, a term originally established by Cohen (1972), is a viable means for understanding this anomaly and invites systematic analyses of the social control effects of mediated crime as well as its structural antecedents. Humphries’ (1981) study is a second exploratory attempt. Combining content and textual analyses of crime stories in the New York Post, he applies the notion of a moral panic to the U.S. context in an attempt to understand the structural



influences of crime news. His analysis reveals that during two periods of economic (1951) and political turmoil (1968), the Post targeted the criminal behavior of young, male, nonwhite perpetrators for coverage. By overemphasizing crimes of violence, journalists made it appear that these types of offenders and offenses predominated. His textual analysis then identifies language cues used to (re)present the offenders and offenses to the reader as more threatening. Humphries concludes that the process extracts criminal activities from a class-based social structure that differentially criminalizes the activities of the poor rather than the rich, and discursively attributes deviance to race. Both processes accomplish ideological displacement. Like Hall et al. (1978), Humphries does not contend that crime claims function in a conspiratorial sense but in a Gramscian sense: crafting mass consent for increased punitive social control.

There is additional evidence that crime is not only more salient in the U.S. during economic downturns, but also that blacks are specifically targeted for condemnation. In a content analysis of crime news appearing in Time magazine in the late 1960s, Barlow et al. (1995a) predicted that economic cycles were associated with increasing concern with crime and criminals. Economic stagnation and high unemployment were predicted to produce changes not only in the types of crimes emphasized in the news but in the characterization of criminals as well. Several hypotheses were tested and one finding is of particular interest to this project. Barlow et al. (1995a) found that negative characterizations of criminals escalated in the news during periods of high unemployment -- more so than in periods of stagnation. This finding was especially evident when the

perpetrators were black. In fact, they found that black males were rhetorically linked to crime in a ratio that significantly outstripped their proportion in arrest statistics.

The findings of Barlow et al. (1995a) in conjunction with others (Hall et al. 1978; Tuchman 1978; Humphries 1981; Hickman 1982) are important for this project for several reasons. First, they suggest that crime control claims likely have economic determinants and escalate during periods of economic crisis and adverse changes in the labor market. Second, they suggest that crime control claims become more condemnatory as well during economic downturns. Third, they suggest that crime control claims have social control effects that differentially select the behavior of black male offenders for scrutiny and condemnation.

To assert these structural relationships invites criticism for suggesting that complicity exists between media and capitalism. The premise contradicts the autonomous, self-constructed, “democracy-at-work” image of media (Beckett 1997: 4) and seems reductionistic as well. Indeed, the constructionist studies of Fishman (1978), Tuchman (1978), and Gans (1979) suggest that influences on media content are more complex and variable than a purely structural model might predict. This type of analysis might also be criticized for “assuming ideological effects without actually investigating how audiences ‘read’ texts” (Fairclough 1995: 47). Fairclough (1995) noted that the media is a site of complex, contradictory and ideological processes and that ideology should not be seen as a constant and predictable aspect of its texts. Any analysis of ideology must therefore recognize the fuller sociocultural and historical context of its

claims and texts. For this reason, a social milieu perspective is well suited to discovering its absence or trace.

### Political Relations

Punishment is essentially political (Foucault 1975; Garland 1990) and nowhere is its symbolizing nature more stark and explicit than in the confluence of political rhetoric on crime and media-scripted threat. Elections have increasingly become primary occasions for marking moral boundaries and connoting moral outrage (Edelman 1988; Scheingold 1991; Beckett 1997; Culverson 1998; Surette 1998; Tonry 1994, 1999; Sparks 2001).

The 1988 media campaign of a Republican and then Vice-President George W. Bush, Sr. against the Democratic Party nominee Michael Dukakis, Governor of Massachusetts, illustrates this point. The national economy was depressed and Dukakis used the electoral stump to tout the economic revival of Massachusetts under his leadership. Unfortunately, Dukakis had also “revived” the freedom of a black man by the name of Willie Horton who was convicted of murder. Governor Dukakis opposed restricting prison furlough programs and Willie Horton escaped while on furlough and committed an additional assault on a white couple and a rape of the woman. Throughout his campaign, Dukakis stood by his stance on the furlough program even while Bush tapped into the fears of a mostly white and privileged constituency to oppose it (Culverson 1998). Dukakis was labeled “soft” on crime and no presidential aspirant before or after him has successfully deflected this attribution.

The foregoing example illustrates the cogency of crime as a political construction (Beckett 1997). That is, crime acquires its meaning through representational practices and claimsmakers such as politicians are prime conduits of its meaning. And as legitimate sources, news media rely upon these significations as (re)presentations of social order and its antithesis -- crime (Beckett and Sasson 2000; Jacobs and Helms 1996). Indeed, battles over signification may often be waged in the media and in the public sphere, so this is not to argue that politicians have infinite power to define. Yet, journalists respond to political representations of crime with an alacrity denied ordinary citizens. As the case of Willie Horton illustrates, black males have long been “the social problem” of America. To define them as criminal was a stock tool of 19<sup>th</sup> century southern politicians and newspapers who sought to discredit their demands for equality and, importantly, their right to vote (Fredrickson 1971). Today, race is considered a “wedge issue” in election politics suggesting that crime is politicized in the media, then racialized, for political gain (Tonry 1994; Beckett 1997; Gilliam, Jr. and Iyengar 2000; Mendelberg 2001) So when a campaign issue in the 20th century resonates with the public, as did Willie Horton, we witness the continuing power of political significations to not only structure crime texts but to also define and (re)represent reality.

There are a few quantitative studies examining political effects on punishment, usually conceived in terms of arrests or incarceration rates in the United States (Caldeira and Cowart 1980; Brown and Warner 1992; Jacobs and Helms 1996; Beckett 1997; Jacobs and O’Brien 1998; Beckett and Sasson 2001; Jacobs and Carmichael 2001). Jacobs and Helms (1996) examined the effects of national-level data of political and

economic determinants on prison admissions. They found that, after controlling for several economic variables as well as percentage black and young in the population, election year had positive and independent effects upon punishment.

Similarly, Jacobs and Carmichael (2001) used state level data to gauge the effects of Republican strength on punishment (prison populations). This was a pooled time series analysis, with an examination of census years and between year estimated values for explanatory variables. Controlling for economic factors, they found support for the hypothesis that Republican Party strength was positively and significantly related to escalations in state-level prison populations.

A third study within the punishment tradition reveals the often coordinated interests of political and economic elites. Beckett and Sasson (2001) contend that the punitive turn in 20th century criminal justice policies – current incarceration zeal and fear of crime by the public – has less to do with actual crime rates, which are falling, and more to do with capitalists’ interests. Assuming a Gramscian position, they argue that the protest movements of the 1960s represented a significant threat to established social and economic relations. The economy was sluggish and demands for the redistribution of wealth posed an hegemonic crisis for the State. The political representatives of the capitalist class were able to restore order by crafting consent around a “vision of government that divests the state of responsibility for social welfare but emphasizes its obligations to provide ‘security’ against foreign and domestic threats” (Beckett and Sasson 2001: 62). Beckett and Sasson emphasize that the war on crime and the get-tough rhetoric of politicians in the past were a hegemonic strategy. The “rhetorical turn”

transformed the conceptualization of the poor as “in trouble” to the poor “are trouble.” They contend that the claims of dangerousness escalated during economic crisis. Furthermore, as politicians used typifications of the poor which historically are racially charged, they were doubly able to (re)represent an image of 19<sup>th</sup> century dangerousness. Once this image was resurrected, the wars on crime and drugs relieved economic elites of the burden of supporting a welfare state whose beneficiaries were poor and black.

The foregoing review suggests that crime control claims are analyzable on the basis of economic conditions (Beckett and Sasson 2001), but possibly operate independently of this as well (Jacobs and Helms 1996; Jacobs and Carmichael 2001). None of these studies explains media discourse on crime per se. However, each draws the inference that heightened media attention upon law and order drives public concern for these issues, producing a fear of crime and subsequent shifts in penal policies, especially during elections. These effects are seen at the national level as well as the state level. The logic extended to media discourse on crime – that it too is positively and significantly related to election year politics – is intuitively present. Beckett (1997) examined this logic.

Crime is socially constructed, according to Beckett (1997) noting that fear of crime and penal policies associated with controlling crime are largely unrelated to actual crime rates or fear of victimization. For example, “get tough’ crime policies are most strong among rural and southern white men, who statistically, incur the smallest risk of becoming crime victims. Those exposed to the greatest risks (women and minorities),

while expressing concerns, tend to be much less supportive of extremely punitive measures of crime control.

Beckett examined the relationship between crime rates and the public's concern with these issues. She divided her analysis into two periods: the war on crime (1964-1974) and the war on drugs (1985-1992). She hypothesized that increases in public concern about crime would be positively and significantly associated with prior political initiatives, operationalized as political speeches and/or legislation on crime and drug issues. She found support for this hypothesis, noting a six to fifteen-month delay in effects.

Using frame analysis, Beckett found that the media accepted official definitions of crime (a breakdown of authority, an attack on civil liberties, zero tolerance, etc.) and that these definitions subsequently entered the public discourse relatively undisturbed. Beckett also found that the rhetoric of law and order was increasingly concentrated around elections and noted that they served several purposes. First, crime rhetoric mobilized electoral coalitions around a particular candidate, serving as wedge issues, as did the Willie Horton incident. Second, crime rhetoric appeared to reaffirm the media's Fourth Estate image of democracy- at-work. Third, the coverage filled the need of media for news of dramatic impact. During initiatives of the Reagan and Bush presidencies, for example, media coverage of drug busts were particularly self-gratifying to the media:

The ride-along footage of drug busts, the touring of enemy territory, the grave assessment of casualties – all of these made for exciting television. And the excitement registered in ratings (Beckett 1997: 77).

This review of the literature indicates how politicians, as claimsmakers, define social problems in ways that deflect attention away from social conditions (Beckett and Sasson 2001). By emphasizing the pathology of criminals, for example, politicians obscure the role of social inequality in the generation of crime. Political factors such as Republican Party strength and election year also predict increases in punishment (Jacobs and Helms 1996; Jacobs and Carmichael 2001). Moreover, political rhetoric figures prominently in the generation of claims of dangerousness in crime control claims (Beckett 1997) and resultant fear of crime by the public (Beckett and Sasson 2001). This is especially so of claims of dangerousness constructed along racial and class lines.

The research by Jacobs and Carmichael (2001) and Jacobs and Helms (1996) alerts us to the possibility that crime claims may exist independently of capitalist relations. However, Beckett's (1997) study of political effects did not control for economic determinants. This possibility will be examined in this project. Taken together, these studies suggest that crime control claims are a function of electoral politics, possibly net of economic factors.

## **Conclusion**

In Chapter 1, I noted that several scholars argue that the relationship between crime and punishment is not as straightforward as it initially appears. When and how crimes are punished depend upon vocabularies of punitive motives in circulation and the discourse takes its direction and confers meaning on crime based upon conditions in the economy (Hall et al. 1978; Box and Hale 1982; Melossi 1985, 1989). During periods of prosperity, a rhetorical climate of leniency is generated such that some criminal



infractions are tolerated. During periods of stress, a ‘discursive chain’ of punitiveness spreads throughout society in general and the criminal justice system specifically. Crime is condemned more so in this latter condition. Consequently, what intervenes between an act and its punishment is shared meaning informed by social structure. The media studies discussed in this chapter provide some empirical support for these theoretical relationships. First, the literature suggests that crime receives more coverage during economic crises, electoral year politics, and adverse labor market changes such as high unemployment. Second, these structural conditions specifically target the behavior of black male offenders for coverage. Third, crime is represented as more threatening overall during these periods, and fourth, especially when the accounts represent the offenses of blacks rather than whites.

The research on media and social structure reviewed thus far pertains to 20<sup>th</sup> century relationships. The purpose of this project, however, is to test these relationships in a 19<sup>th</sup> century context. This effort is clearly an extension of the media tradition but is one that should extend the generality of the theory. Therefore, Chapter 3 places the context of this project within postbellum Georgia, 1870 to 1900, and examines the effects of economic crises, national political elections, and changes associated with the cotton economy – price of cotton, relative size of the labor force (black), and levels of inequality – which likely affected the coverage, focus, and tone of crime control claims.

## CHAPTER 3

### SETTING

#### Introduction

In Chapter 2, I discussed several main social constructionists studies on the media and the insights gleaned from these studies that the sources of crime control claims fell into two broad categories: organizational explanations and structural explanations. From a 20<sup>th</sup> century perspective, I noted that contemporary crime control claims may be a product of organizational context – editorial ethics, concerns for objectivity, timeliness, dramatic impact, and third party verification. Ethnographic work of news in general (Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979) and crime control claims in particular (Fishman 1978) showed that organizational routines exerted at best a mixed control of news events. While important, these organizational explanations still reflect strong contextual effects as well (Fishman 1978; Hall et al. 1978; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979). The implication of the research was that shared meanings are more often than not crafted by dominant economic and political elites and that structural imperatives predict increases in the level and specific nature of crime control claims (Hall et al. 1978; Tuchman 1978).

Ethnographic studies by Fishman (1978), Gans (1979), and Tuchman (1978) further suggested that the selection and presentation of news has the capacity to structure the thoughts and actions of the reading public, including social control representatives.

This organizing effect is similar to Melossi's (1985, 1989) view of authoritative texts. However, Melossi identified authoritative texts primarily as legislative enactments, quotes by economic and political elites, and statements by judges. Hegemony, or coerced consent by the dominant class, was accomplished by such texts when necessary because their pronouncements were capable of imposing a particular and overarching worldview (Melossi 1993). When moral elites proclaimed their views in what Melossi called vocabularies of punitive motives, people listened and responded. Only secondarily does news discourse conform to such a definition. In this 19<sup>th</sup> century southern context, however, media discourse was such an utterance.

Indeed, if punishment is read like a "gazette of morality" (Melossi 1993: 262), then 19<sup>th</sup> century journalists not only saw themselves as primary definers of that morality but also were in a social position to achieve this definitional power. In the case of Greensboro Herald (later merging with the Journal and renamed the Herald-Journal) and the North Georgia Citizen of Whitfield County, each newspaper bolstered its community, reviled its detractors, condemned its criminals, and recorded their community's growing pains amid the social dislocations of the period. The owners and editors of these newspapers throughout the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were a vital part of the "county governing class" of the community (Bartley 1983: 105). Between 1870 and 1900, the Herald-Journal could (but did not) boast of four attorneys, three judges, one mayor, two Democratic party officials, and one member of the City Council as owners and/or editors. For example, James B. Park, son of a former slaveowner and prominent Greene County planter and grandson of a Revolutionary War soldier, graduated from

Emory College and was admitted to the bar the same year he acquired the Herald-Journal in 1875. He later became a judge of the Ocmulgee Circuit. William Weaver was elected mayor of Greensboro, the county seat, following a three year stint as Park's editor, then was appointed judge of the county court before resuming his mayoral duties for another seven consecutive years. Succeeding Park as owner was Columbus Heard, a lawyer and later judge and chairman of the local Democratic Party. His editor, Jake H. Lewis, served on the City Council while editing the newspaper and was related to then solicitor-general, H. L. Lewis. Edward Young, an attorney, also served over a ten year period as editor of the newspaper and as mayor of Greensboro, as well. The proprietorship of the North Georgia Citizen was much more stable than the Herald and Herald-Journal, changing hands only once during the thirty year period under study. One editor, Frank T. Reynolds, was candidate for a clerkship with the Georgia legislature and a second editor, A. J. Showalter, later became a renowned book publisher. Clearly, this coterie of small town elite had its pulse on the economic, political, and cultural relations of Greene and Whitfield counties. Additionally, these individuals were in a unique position to not only rhetorically construct threatening populations but were a part of the intellectual strata capable of accruing and exercising power in the legal system. As lawyers, judges, and mayors, they often crafted the very sanctions under which judicial processes operated. It follows, then, that the social problems discourse characterizing 19<sup>th</sup> century media texts is a prime candidate for consideration as vocabularies of punitive motives (Melossi 1985). It is in this vein that Ayers's (1984) observations on postbellum Georgian crime and punishment are of relevance to this project.

In Vengeance and Justice, Ayers (1984) described crime and punishment, North and South, from a nineteenth-century perspective. He indicated that economic and ideological influences impacted the ways in which certain behaviors, persons, and groups were criminalized and punished. In the North, a rhetoric of "dignity" conditioned official social control responses to behavior deemed criminal. Crimes against property dominated court calendars. In the South, however, a rhetoric of "honor" fueled not only violent interpersonal offenses, but also violent reactions (legal and extralegal) to often trivial infractions.

Based upon a contextual analysis of three communities in Georgia, Ayers contended that economic cycles of boom and bust mobilized the rhetoric which in turn explained the types of crimes committed and the tenor of social control. He found that as lamentations of hardship peaked in the press in Greene and Whitfield counties, so too did penal events – arrests, indictments, and incarcerations. Furthermore, he found that sharp upswings in prison populations and lynchings followed economic cycles of depressions. This latter relationship has been empirically documented by other researchers (Beck, Massey, and Tolnay 1989; Massey and Myers 1989). However, Ayers speculated that what intervened between crime and its punishment was a rhetorical climate conducive to punitive social control.

With these points in mind, my purpose in this chapter is to assess the relevance of structural explanations for crime control claims in a 19<sup>th</sup> century context. Again, a structural explanation resting upon a neo-Marxian vision of society directs our attention to economic crises and political divisions characterizing postbellum Georgia.

Additionally, as will be seen in the following paragraphs, the social divisions and the boundaries erected around the construct of race characterizing postbellum Georgia potentially had significant economic and political consequences. Hence, what is found was the use of various mechanisms of social control – legal in terms of criminal law and legislation and extralegal in terms of vigilantism – to control the “dangerous classes” who threatened privilege and the status quo. The need for social control of dangerous classes was not lost on postbellum southern newspapers and they participated in its exercise with as much zeal as official (and unofficial) representatives of the State (Ayers 1984). Subsequently, this social control zeal comported with a Gramscian vision of society in that where dominant interests were threatened, social control agencies, including the media, emerged to craft consent for punitive controls which had the effect of restoring a social order protecting dominant interests (Gramsci 1971; Hall et al. 1978; Barlow et al. 1995a, 1995b). The need for heightened social control also comported with a “threat” vision of society which argued that where blacks were numerous, white dominance was threatened, propelling whites to use social control agencies to maintain their ascendant position.

Threat theories emerge out of the work of Blalock (1967) who asserts that competition results from perceived minority group threat to the established supremacy of economic and political power holders. Inherent in the argument of threat theorists is that groups reside in niches and these niches contain all of the essential environmental resources necessary for their survival (Nagel 1986; Soule 1992). A fundamental niche exists where there are no competitors for a group’s resources and a realized niche exists

when competition is present but resources are distributed such that there are no overlaps in requirements. Equilibrium obtains, therefore, when niches do not overlap.

Competition erupts when these niches are disturbed by changes in environmental conditions. In applying Blalock's (1967) theory to postbellum southern society, one might argue that the emancipation of its slaves and enfranchisement of the freedmen disrupted the South's complementarity of niches, at least in the perception of whites, and competition for scarce resources ensued.

Threat visions of society are often used to explain the processes of punishment in postbellum southern relations. With this idea in mind, I identify the significant features of postbellum Georgia society which may account for crime control claims. First, the South, as well as the nation as a whole, was beset by periodic depressions and recessions which likely affected crime control claims. Second, another major sphere of disrupted social relations centered upon political challenges to the status quo, which likely had implications for crime control claims. Last, a cotton economy threatened by the emancipation of the South's slaves and concomitant issues of profitability, labor shortages, and social divisions constructed around race were recurring dimensions of this context.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I discuss the significant features of the economic and political arrangements of Greene and Whitfield counties in Georgia. I present expectations for relationships beginning with economic crises, then political events, and finally, social change indicators related to the cotton economy. Postbellum Greene and Whitfield counties were selected for extensive study for three reasons. First,

both counties displayed important similarities and contrasts in structural influences of interest to this project. Second, both were included in Ayers' (1984) study. Third, both had continuous newspaper publications for the period under study.

For the specific indices, I borrowed heavily from empirical studies on 19<sup>th</sup> century punishment for two reasons. First, 20<sup>th</sup> century studies on media determinants remain largely descriptive and hence do not adequately specify a model of relations. Second, Melossi's (1985, 1989, 1993) theory and the social control effects of crime claims discussed in Chapter 2 provide a rationale for placing the generation of crime claims within the sphere of punishment processes.

According to Melossi (1993: 273), punishment is not only an event such as an arrest, indictment, or conviction but also is a text of an entire process. The process extends "from legislative statutes, to media reports, to articles in specialized journals and magazines" and the text is "read" by those in society. Indeed, the subject of punishment is not the body of the alleged offender but the mind of the public (Garland 1990).

Melossi (1985) contends that it is in the authoritative texts – judicial and elite pronouncements – that punishment is wielded and that media claims are merely contributors to this overriding text. This is akin to Hall et al.'s (1978) distinction between primary and secondary definers. While I argue that this distinction must be historically determined, the important point here is that Melossi (1993) extends our view of punishment. It is a process, not merely an event. This extension allows one to argue that if structural factors determine conventional penal events (arrests, indictments, prison admissions), then it is likely that other events along the chain (i.e., crime claims) have



structural influences as well. Therefore, the hypotheses generated rely not only upon the insights gleaned from Chapter 2 on media and social structure, which is an emergent and largely descriptive literature base. They are also fully anchored in empirical studies of structural determinants of punishment in a 19<sup>th</sup> century context.

With the 20<sup>th</sup> century literature as our guide, the next sections present structural factors that have been shown to generate punishment in the postbellum context and associated hypotheses.

### **Economic Crises**

Twentieth century media studies reveal that crime is more salient and responded to more punitively during economic downturns (Hall et al. 1978; Humphries 1981; Hickman 1982; Melossi 1985, 1989, 1993). As Melossi notes (1985) a discursive chain of punitiveness accompanies economic crises. In a 19<sup>th</sup> century context, Ayers (1984) indicated that economic cycles of boom and bust mobilized a punitive rhetoric that in turn explained crime and crime control. Hard times, “lamentations” and social control operated in tandem in 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgia, producing redundant labor which had to be controlled (Ayers 1984).

Economic crises were part and parcel of postbellum society and the years following the Civil War were generally turbulent years for Southerners, black, white, rich, and poor. Though experienced differently because of vastly different social positions, the effects of the various recessions and depressions characterizing the 19<sup>th</sup> century economy on the climate of well-being was felt by all. The emergent middle class in Greene County and Whitfield County was comprised primarily of merchants (Ayers 1984; Bryant 1992)

who nonetheless relied upon Northern banks for provision. Consequently, Georgia newspapers wrote of the Panic of 1873, a major depression in which bank failures in the North had dire consequences for the system of credits extended to Southern farmers (Herald 9/25/1873: 2). A series of depressions and recessions occurred as well in the 1890s causing a second wave of business and agricultural failures, especially in the South (Myers 1998). According to Ayers (1984), the percentage of business and agribusiness failures in the South between 1889 and 1896 exceeded, by far, those in other parts of the country.

Several empirical studies have shown significant effects of economic crises on punishment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of interest, Olzak's (1990) study of extralegal violence found a positive and significant effect of depression year on the incidence of black victim lynchings in the South. Myers (1998) study of prison admissions found, on the other hand, that depressions and recessions did escalate punishment but these effects were not exerted in precisely the same way for black males and white males.

If social control agencies, including the media, craft consent for punitive measures and therefore intervene between crime, the economy, and crime control, then economic crises should facilitate the representation of crime as a pressing social problem. During economic downturns, crime coverage should increase and focus more on blacks. Additionally, the tone of the articles should become increasingly condemnatory with blacks being singled out disproportionately for condemnation. As will become more apparent following the discussion of the cotton economy, it is expected that these effects

\*will be stronger and more immediate in Greene County than in Whitfield County because of the former's settled link to the international cotton market.

### **Political Events**

By 1870, Georgia had been reconstructed three times (Bartley 1983). In January 1866, the new Reconstruction government in Georgia was recognized by President Johnson after it formulated a new state constitution and ratified the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment outlawing slavery. However, the new constitution failed to recognize the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment giving freedmen the right to vote and the state was placed under military rule again in 1867. The first national elections in which blacks voted were held in November 1868 with overwhelming support for the Republican presidential candidate Ulysses S. Grant. Congress, with Grant's leadership, ratified the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment and launched a third and final Reconstruction in Georgia after hearing testimony of Ku Klux Klan intimidation. By 1870, however, the North retreated from critical oversight and the racial violence that preceded elections began taking its effect. By November, 1870, state elections brought Democratic majorities to both houses of the Georgia legislature. By 1872, Georgia newspapers were claiming redemption with the ascension of Georgia's first Democrat to the governor's mansion. Now, it seemed, it was just a matter of mopping up and redeeming those local governments still under "nigger rule" (Duncan 1986: 82). Radical Reconstruction, as it was called, had lasted only four years in Georgia and in 1874, "Old Greene Redeemed" was the joyous exclamation of the Herald (10/8: 2).

But while newspapers throughout Georgia claimed "redemption" in the early years, their continuing pronouncements revealed uneasy doubts. Blacks had the potential

to reassert their numerical majority at the polls in many counties throughout Georgia. This potential generated continued vigilance and racialized rhetoric throughout the remaining decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One Greene County editor, in observing the rumor that the Radical Party in Georgia was officially dead, cautioned his readers that the “intelligentsia must not be caught sleeping” (Herald 11/8/77: 2). Another Greene County editor, following a state election, lamented as late as 1891 that we all “should have two years off” and relegate politics to “some dark corner and throw away the key” (Herald-Journal 1/02/91, Fr).

Battle fatigue by political elites settled in as other southern states witnessed sporadic successes of blacks in the 1880s and 1890s in national, state, and local elections (Williamson 1986; Ayers 1992). White Democrats won national office in the contentious election of 1884 with the ascension of Grover Cleveland. However, southern whites would not rest long on its laurels because Republicans reclaimed the office in the following election. “A free and equal ballot” was the campaign theme of successful Presidential candidate Benjamin Harrison in 1888. It seemed that the drive for universal suffrage generated by Reconstruction politics would not allow southern whites to totally ignore the mass of struggling blacks in their midst. Neither would national Republican leaders forget that “below the Mason and Dixon lines, there were potential Republican ballots being cast with decreasing frequency” (Sinkler 1971: 254).

Henry W. Grady, late 19<sup>th</sup> century journalist and politician noted that “[e]conomic issues are as naught;” what must be settled is the question as to whether or not the white man shall bow to the political dictates of blacks. “The worst thing in my opinion that

could happen,” said Grady, “is that the white people of the South should stand in opposing factions, with the vast mass of ignorant and purchaseable Negro votes between” (Bartley 1983: 85). Such stirring rhetoric reflected the tenor of the times.

One-party rule was momentarily challenged in the 1870s by freed black men who, by voting Republican, destabilized the overarching goal of politicians in Georgia for a “white man’s government.” Again, the goal was threatened in the 1880s when blacks, largely barred from voting “their” Republican ticket, became the swing vote for a Democratic nominee for governor, Alfred Colquitt (Coleman 1991). Even though Colquitt was a Democrat, a planter, and a member of the Ku Klux Klan (Bartley 1983), Dixiecrats wanted no government in which the black man’s vote was decisive and vowed never to submit to this indignity (Coleman 1991). And, again, the black vote was extremely problematic in the 1890s when a Georgia Populist candidate, Tom Watson, ran for Congress and attempted initially to consolidate class interests across this racial abyss (Bartley 1983).

Enfranchisement kept the political system under constant threat, strain, and tension and led to racial violence and ultimately de facto disenfranchisement after the turn-of-the-century. The refusal of Georgia whites to ratify the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment, its Black Codes, numerous reconstructions, cumulative poll tax, birth of the Klan, and death of Populism all figured prominently in restricting the franchise to whites. A “one party” system was perceived to be essential to the survival of the Democratic Party in Greene County. Antipathy for those who threatened the unity of a white government was whipped up by a partisan press who labeled all such as scalawags, carpetbaggers, scum

and generally degenerates who operated outside the community weal. Many black leaders throughout Georgia were arrested during early political campaigns for petty offenses such as trespassing, vagrancy, incitement, insurrection, and slander (Bartley 1983; Duncan 1986; Sterling 1994). Election year politics designed to either mobilize or stabilize electoral coalitions and a white man's government remained central concerns of political elites for much of the late-nineteenth century.

Electoral politics in Upcountry areas like Whitfield were driven more by issues of class than race, however. The deepening recessions of the 1880s and depression in 1893 hit the Upcountry hard, as it did in Greene County, but for different reasons, forcing many of the businesses to close their doors in Dalton. Unlike Greene, however, Whitfield courts were generally lenient in punishing crime throughout the 70s and the early 80s. When arrested, many defendants merely left the area (Ayers 1984). Defendants were primarily white and their labor was not needed to sustain a planter aristocracy as in Greene. Nevertheless, the latter years saw increasing arrests for vagrancy and property crimes in Whitfield, a county where violent crimes traditionally predominated in the courts. The "cry of hard times" was carried by the local newspapers and destitution provided an opening for the Republicans and, later, Populist candidates (Hahn 1983). Attracted to the debt relief platforms, Upcountry yeomen momentarily embraced independent candidates and Populism. The violence and intimidation surrounding the elections were usually white-on-white as candidates and supporters left the Democratic Party and ran as independents. The "invisible hand" of the market was rendered visible and oppressive in the Populist campaigns, but to no avail. The resentments of capitalism

held by the yeomen paled in comparison to the fear of a republicanism borne of a fusion of black and white political power. A third party, or even a two-party system, failed in the Upcountry (as elsewhere in the South) because white farmers were unable to embrace a vision of themselves as being in the same condition as blacks: as being permanently dispossessed (Bartley 1983; Hahn 1983).

Despite a paucity of blacks in their midst, the Upcountry residents of Whitfield County displayed the same cultural aversion to blacks as did white Southerners in general. Whites, rich and poor, feared that the strivings for economic and political justice bred ambition for social equality by blacks. From the mass of disinherited whites in Whitfield came the day-to-day violence and a code of honor that had nothing left to defend but white skin (Ayers 1984).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century context, I found that election year was a viable indicator of political threat. Also, I found that newspapers carried fear of crime rhetoric especially during contested elections (Beckett 1997) and that Republican party strength and election year predicted increases in punishment. Blalock's (1967) threat hypothesis is typically applied to analyses of political competition though not with the level of success of economic predictors. Olzak (1990) found that periods of strong challenges by Populist and independents significantly predicted peak periods of lynching in the South in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and this was net of economic factors. This result seems to support an earlier study by Inverarity (1976) who found that during election years, lynching rates peaked in postbellum Louisiana parishes amid Populist challenges. He concluded that lynchings, ostensibly in response to crime, were actually in response to boundary crises and that

crises were a threat to white rule. Soule (1992), on the other hand, found no support for a positive relationship between lynching and Populism in postbellum Georgia. She examined Populist strongholds and found a negative but insignificant effect and thus concluded that political threat does not predict punishment. Soule examined counties that overwhelmingly voted the Populist ticket, however, and this may not have been the most effective way of discerning threat. As Olzak's (1990) study suggests, election year was significant primarily in those instances where a Populist or independent party challenge threatened the dominant Democratic Party. As this victory was at the county level, it seems that a Populist stronghold (or a Populist county) does not pose such a threat. Hence, her conclusion that political threat does not predict punishment may be premature. Problems abound for the perspective, however, in that other studies that support Blalock's political threat theory (Reed 1972; Corzine, Creech, and Corzine 1983) have been shown to be methodologically flawed (Tolnay et al. 1989a). For the most part, it appears that political threat hypotheses has not been disproven so much as unproven.

The fact that the political threat hypothesis has not been disproven is important because it seems clear from all accounts of postbellum southern history that redemption politics and subsequent white-rule-at-all-costs strategies emerged from a climate of perceive political threat, independent of economic threat. As long as black men had the franchise and as long as independents threatened a black/white fusion, elite-fostered rhetoric served to divide a possible coalition of poor black and white farmers (Tomaskovic-Devey and Roscigno 1996). Additionally, descriptive accounts suggest that politically-active blacks were accused of crimes and incarcerated well after Redemption



was claimed. It seems that just the potential for competition was sufficient for violent suppression (Olzak 1990) and for that reason, a “siege mentality” persisted throughout much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hackney 1969: 924). White southern men especially perceived threat of enemies from within (freed blacks) and from without (North) long after the threat was spent. Witness D. W. Griffith’s film “Birth of A Nation,” which symbolically expelled the Negro and reaffirmed the unity of the South under “white rule.” This film was made after formal disenfranchisement of blacks and after Jim Crow laws were firmly entrenched in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Impressionistically, it appears that election year politics brought forth this siege mentality, at least in rhetoric. Therefore, if crime is politically constructed and used in the interest of political elites to secure their advantage (Jacobs and Helms 1996; Beckett 1997; Beckett and Sasson 2000; Mendelberg 2001), it is possible that rhetorical claims, ostensibly in response to crime, are actually in response to political threat. For these reasons, crime coverage should increase during elections and focus more on blacks. Additionally, the tone of the articles should become more condemnatory with blacks disproportionately singled out for condemnation. I expect that politics will play a unique role in the representation of black crime and criminals. Hence, political effects on black crime claims will be stronger and more immediate in the earlier decades in Greene County and in the latter decades in Whitfield County. This is due to the different timing of political threat. That is, black political threat was probably effectively controlled by the 1880s in the plantation counties but the Populist movement may have re-focused the energies of whites in delegitimizing black claims for citizenship in Upcountry counties like Whitfield.

## **Social Change and the Cotton Economy**

Empirical studies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century suggest that social control agencies, including the media, craft consent for punitive measures as a means of controlling redundant labor. Low profits and/or high unemployment are conducive to a rhetoric that is less tolerant of criminal infractions and this rhetoric especially targets problem populations (young, male, nonwhites) (Barlow et al. 1995a, 1995b; Hall et al. 1978; Humphries 1981). These studies draw our attention to economic relations and in a 19<sup>th</sup> century context, these economic relations centered on a cotton economy and its price, efforts by economic elites to reclaim control over a labor force largely comprised of emancipated blacks, and the resultant inequality. I discuss these relations in the succeeding sections and then discuss the neo-Marxian and threat themes which this historical review revealed. Considering several indicators drawn from the punishment literature, each section concludes with hypotheses related to crime control claims.

### Plantation Greene County

The defining feature of the landscape of Greene County after the Civil War was not only the physical destruction to the land wrought by Sherman's March to the Sea but also the presence of immense tracts of land without laborers and former slaves with their freedom. As bedraggled regiments of Greene County soldiers returned to their lands, they must have asked, what shall we do? Their livestock was gone, their lands were idle, and their money was worthless (Raper 1943). Greene County was a plantation society and in its antebellum years, it was one of the top producing counties of a cash crop that perennially made Georgia the "Empire State of the South" (Raper 1943: 33).



Figure 3.1 Georgia Counties

Cotton was first planted in Savannah, Georgia while it was a trustee colony of the British government in 1735 (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1883). The seed came from England and although cotton was grown in other colonies (Florida, Virginia, and South Carolina), Georgia was the first state to produce it commercially. Greene County was settled inland about 200 miles northwest of this coastal city of Savannah with area ceded by treaty and force from the Creek Indians in 1786. Rising from the Ogeechee and Oconee Rivers, the lands comprising Greene County – so named for Revolutionary war hero Nathaniel Greene – were miles of “fertile bottomlands, piedmont uplands, and

rolling hills” (Bryant 1992: 9). It is not clear when cotton was first produced here commercially but within a single generation of the treaty in 1786, a landed aristocracy grew up around plantations, slavery, and the very profitable sale of cotton (Raper 1943).

By the dawning of the Civil War in 1860, then, the per capita wealth of Greene Countians was six times the national average and black slaves constituted 60% of the county’s wealth (Bryant 1992). Of course, this wealth was not shared equally. Planters such as Dr. Thomas N. Poullain of Scull Shoals with 133 slaves and R J. Willis and Thomas Wray with 102 and 90 slaves, respectively, were planter elites (Raper 1943). In fact, half of the families in Greene County owned all of the slaves and most of the remaining half owned none and/or were small farmers (Rice and Williams 1973). Of course, slaves did not participate in sharing the wealth. Nonetheless, the antebellum plantation economy fueled a tax base which allowed for the growth of forty-three industries, two schools (Mercer University and a Female Academy), building projects, and extensive rail services in the span of a few short years. The plantations produced their own food, clothing, and necessities. Cotton was a surplus crop that propelled decades of peace and plenty for the county (Rice et al. 1973).

But with the stroke of Lincoln’s pen, Greene’s substantial wealth was reduced to almost nothing. When the soldiers returned from the war, Greene County had money without value, land without laborers, and laborers with freedom. For Southerners, and especially plantation belt counties such as Greene deeply embedded in a labor intensive economy as cotton production, the decades following the Civil War were fraught with economic, political, and social crises:

The present prospect of the cotton crop is unfavorable, wrote one Greene County editor soon after the war (Herald 9/14/67: 2). The late incessant rains have done immense damage to the cotton (Herald 2/10/70: 3). The crops are dull, writes another, and are a failure (Herald 1/12/71: 2). The rains and the boll weevil have prevailed (Herald 9/7/82: 2).

Throughout the remaining decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Greene County newspaper noted the perilous relationship of the farmer to nature and to the dictates of the winds of change. The social world had been upended and this was never more evident than in the issues surrounding the production of cotton. In their third annual letter to the planters of Georgia, Florida, and Alabama, Messrs. A.M. Sloan and Co. wrote:

It may be repugnant to the pride of the Southern people to admit that the emancipation of her slaves, in a financial point of view, was the most disastrous stroke inflicted by the enemy. It further appears that the envied prosperity of the South was founded more specifically in her slaves....” If in lieu of slave labor we had been compelled to pay even an ordinary standard of wages” her prosperity would have been “greatly retarded” (Savannah Morning News 8/22/71: 3).

This may well have been the case because as freedom for the slaves advanced, the profitable production of cotton on a grand scale diminished. By 1870, the per capita wealth of the people in Greene County plummeted to one-eighth its pre-war levels and half of the households in the county no longer reported owning any property (Bryant 1992). “Instead of that even steady progress toward prosperity,” noted one observer, “we only see fitful flashes of better times amid the dark lowering clouds of adversity” (Herald 12/9/75). A way of life had clearly changed in Greene County.

After the war, large and small farmers alike borrowed heavily from northern banking interests in order to produce the one cash crop that could provide them with an income – cotton. The process, however, neglected subsistence crops (corn, oats, wheat)

which, then, had to be imported from other parts of the state and country. The county was living on credit and it was a ruinous relationship (Bryant 1992). A spiraling debt burden tied many former elites and most small farmers to their lands with no relief in sight. Predictably enough, the impulse to produce more and more cotton in order to pay off debts only served to drive down prices in recurring cycles of panic. In this same letter, Messrs. Sloan and Co. cautioned southern planters against overproduction and the declining prices this practice engendered:

...the large crop of 1870 and the steady decline in prices upon increasing stocks... all attest to the arbitrary power of an established principle of trade, that when any article is produced largely in excess of immediate demand, that prices must proportionately recede. To the subject of unlimited production of cotton we give full consideration, and to...urging our friends to abandon to provisions, as a measure directly affecting the welfare and progress of the South (Savannah Morning News 8/22/71: 3).

Postbellum southern farmers were caught in an international cotton market wherein for the first time the old ways were no longer sufficient to secure their survival (Ayers 1984). The unregulated production of cotton and its sale at any cost plus living on credit from one year to the next was proving disastrous to the economic recovery of the county (Bryant 1992).

#### Upcountry Whitfield County

In many respects, Greene County and Whitfield County were of different worlds (Hahn 1983). Yet, as we shall see, both were cut from the same cloth of southern economic, political, and sociocultural relations (Ayers 1984). Table 3.1 presents a snapshot of the contrast provided by the dicennial census. With a population of 17,547 inhabitants occupying 340 square miles (or 52 persons per sq. mile), Greene County was

Table 3.1 Cotton Production in Greene and Whitfield Counties, 1880

	Greene County	Whitfield County
Population	17,547	11,900
Black Population	11,974	2,211
Acreage in Cotton	43,037	4,048
Bales of Cotton Harvested	12,448	1,240

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1883. Vol 6, Pt. 2. Washington, DC.

densely populated. Cotton was the chief crop of the county with forty thousand plus of its acreage devoted to its production (representing 45% of its total improved acreage) and 12,448 bales of cotton were produced in the year preceding the census. Blacks outnumbered whites by 2:1 and provided, as renters, sharecroppers, or wage laborers, the labor producing this cash crop for sale on the market.

Whitfield County, on the other hand, was much less concentrated. Its population of 11,900 persons inhabited 330 square miles (or 36 persons per sq. mile) and its chief crops were corn, wheat, and sweet potatoes. Indeed, 255,923 bushels of corn, 40,267 bushels of wheat, and 2,832 bushels of sweet potatoes were produced for subsistence and exchange by Whitfield farmers in 1880. Only four thousand of its tilled acreage (or less than 10%) were devoted to cotton production and from which 1,240 bales of cotton were made. A majority of the farms were worked by their owners and Whitfield was overwhelmingly white (81%). As a snapshot, one might see a county ruled by King Cotton (Greene) and one ruled by its own internal dynamic (Whitfield). However, what

is not readily apparent is the ever tightening grip of the cotton economy that Whitfield farmers were also experiencing.

In 1860, Whitfield County harvested 102 bales of cotton and probably shipped only a fraction of it to cotton factors in Atlanta, retaining much of the fiber for home use (Hahn 1983). By 1880, the number of bales had increased to 1,240 and doubled again by 1890 to 2,707 bales. Acreage devoted to the fiber likewise more than doubled from 4,048 acres in 1880 to 9,161 acres in 1890. Interestingly enough, the per capita wealth of Whitfield varied inversely to its cotton economy. In 1870, it was \$202 but by 1880, it was \$161 (Georgia Comptroller General, 1870-1936). Increasingly mired in a vicious cycle of growing for cash rather than for consumption and needing credit for expenses, Whitfield farmers, like those of Greene, were becoming poorer as the 19<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close.

Part of the last lands ceded by the Cherokee Indians in the late 1830s (Coleman 1991), Whitfield County was carved out of neighboring Murray and Walker Counties in 1851 (Whitfield County History Commission 1981). Lying approximately 200 miles northwest of Greene County and on the Georgia/Tennessee border, most settlers of the area were hardy Scots-Irish who moved south from Tennessee and west from North Carolina. Situated between the mountains of Rocky Face and Chattooga, the settlers were attracted to the fertile valleys, ample streams, and cool temperatures afforded by the locale. The Western and Atlantic Railroad connecting Atlanta to Chattanooga ran through the county seat of Dalton by 1847 and a feeder to Rome facilitated a rapid explosion in population and a thriving pre-war subsistence and export economy of corn,



wheat, sweet potatoes and livestock (Coleman 1991). The area, though fertile, presented cooler climates and a much shorter growing season for cotton, which remained a surplus crop.

Few settlers owned slaves and a vast majority of the families worked their own lands and raised their own crops on farms of fewer than 200 acres (Hahn 1983; Ayers 1984). Almost 25% of the farms in Greene County were over 500 acres compared to less than 1% of the farms that size in Whitfield (Ayers 1984). Nonetheless, while few farmers in Whitfield shared the economic status of the landed aristocracy of Greene County, even “the slaveless yeoman might wax fat in the sort of primitive prosperity which consisted in having an abundance of what they themselves could produce”(Cash 1941: 24). Their land dominated by smaller farms and not plantations, Whitfield residents were somewhat insulated from the effects of the post-war emancipation of slaves but they did not emerge from the war unscathed.

After the Civil War, the Upcountry was left as ravaged as the plantation belt. While not dependent upon the labor of blacks, Whitfield’s rail lines had been severely damaged by Sherman’s March to the Sea. Whitfield farmers needed the rails to ship their exports for cash to pay taxes and purchase items they could not raise (farm implements, medicines, etc.). Not only that, Union soldiers confiscated the county’s crops and cattle to feed their march from the mountains of Georgia to the coast. With no money in circulation and crops destroyed following the war, Upcountry farmers engaged in a “way out” identical to the black belt farmers – cotton, credit, and eventually crop liens (Ayers 1984; Coleman 1991; Hahn 1983). Furnishing merchants with exorbitant interest rates

and foreclosures did in a decade what generations of farming, despite its ups and downs, could not do. Share rents and sharecropping rose from 38.5% in 1890 to 47.6% by 1900 (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1895, 1902). Increasingly enmeshed, Whitfield farmers, once proud of their independence, found themselves landless and yet tied to the lands in much the same way as the freedmen of middle Georgia. By 1887, the editor of the local newspaper cautioned his readers that “the farmer who doesn’t grow his own provisions will hand poverty over to this children” (North Georgia Citizen 1/27/87: 2). This surely happened.

#### *Annual Price of Cotton*

As the foregoing paragraphs delineate, Georgia’s pre-eminence in the production of cotton was unrivaled before the war and Georgia plantations and farms played pivotal roles in this ascendant position. After the War, cotton production was again heralded as the solution to its poverty. One editorial exclaimed that “a certain city is paved with gold, but Dalton has the next best thing – cotton” (North Georgia Citizen 11/18/80: 3). A second editorial noted that a confederate general remarked after the War that “we still have the locks of Samson in that the world is obliged to buy our cotton” (North Georgia Citizen 9/4/94: 3). Cotton was potentially gold in the plantation belt as well as the Upcountry, but its price and subsequent profitability was based upon several factors. Many of these were beyond the control of its farmers. First, Georgia was part of a world economy and the price its cotton brought on the market depended upon the quality and extent of competing European cotton markets (Ayers 1984; Myers 1998). Second, costs of production such as wages paid and expenses of fertilizers and ginning fees likewise

depressed profitability. Third, the cotton harvest itself exerted an inverse effect upon the price of cotton. As noted previously, when prices were high and the potential for getting out of debt seemingly within reach, Georgia farmers overplanted the following year. This, of course, as the letter to Georgia farmers from Messrs. A. M. Sloan and Co. and cautioned, flooded the market and drove the price of cotton down the following year. The farmer's response was not wholly illogical but was not profitable. So while Georgia streets were paved with "the next best thing" to gold, the price cotton brought on the common market remained a source of constant strain to its farmers.

For the most part, prior research has found an inverse relationship between the price of cotton and punishment. In a time series study of extralegal violence, Beck et al. (1990) indicated that falling cotton prices predicted extralegal violence. Myers' (1998) time series study of its impact on prison admissions was likewise negative in predicting the incarceration of black males. Thus, as a measure of well-being (Olzak 1990), the price of cotton may be fairly robust but not without its problems. That is, Beck et al. (1990) also found that it is possible for cotton to bring high prices at the market in any given year but be unprofitable due to excessive costs. Thus, the variable may produce unexpected results. This may have been the case in Olzak's (1990) study wherein she obtained a positive relationship between the annual price of cotton and lynching. She interpreted this effect as a result of higher prices, increasing the need for stricter labor discipline to secure profits and hence punitive controls. An equally plausible interpretation provided by a reading of Beck et al. (1990) is that of profitability. If cotton was bringing "top dollar" at the factors but farmers were only breaking even, at best, or

losing money, at worse, one might obtain a positive relation between the price of cotton and social control in a given year.

Again, the price of cotton and its effects upon crime control claims obtain their meaning from both an economic model of punishment and an economic threat model. As a global index of well-being, escalating prices mean greater profits, and less economic strain on planters, small farmers, and the merchant class alike. All are able to pay off their notes. Thus, this reasoning argues for an inverse relation: as the price of cotton rises, overall crime coverage declines and crime is represented as less threatening. As blacks should be the benefactors of an aura of well-being that prosperity brings to an area, rising prices of cotton should predict declines in the coverage of black criminal behavior and their behavior should be represented as less threatening. However, it is quite possible that a positive relation might occur for one of two reasons. First, we might have high prices as a result of underplanting (demand exceeding supply) and if underplanting is not by design but by the inability to discipline labor, we might see increases in all of the above. Another scenario might result from Tolnay and Beck's (1995) observation that the price of cotton may reflect realized profits only (profits eroded by costs). Hence, in spite of high prices (illusory), profits are low and attention to crime and criminals might escalate. It is expected, however, that decreases in the price of cotton should increase crime coverage and that coverage should focus more on blacks. Additionally, the tone of the articles should become increasingly condemnatory with blacks being singled out disproportionately for condemnation. I expect that these effects will be stronger and more

immediate in Greene County than in Whitfield County because of the former's settled link to the cotton economy.

*Relative Size of the Black Population*

Of equal import to the economy and the subsequent effects of the price of cotton on farmers were the costs associated with its production. To remain competitive in an international cotton market, planter capitalists now had to keep labor costs as low as they had been during slavery. Planters instituted several attempts at labor cost controls – employing freedmen as wage hands, sharecroppers, and less often, as tenants – but costs continued to plague profits. As wage hands, freedmen averaged 40 - 50 cents per day for work. Even with liberal deductions for minor infractions (refusing an order, eating while on the job, attending a political rally, refusing overtime), the costs of labor in a dull crop year could ruin a farmer. One Greene County editor recounted the story of a farmer in Greene County who hired “a lot of freedmen last year, at standing wages” to cultivate his crops but was unable to pay them according to their contracts due to declining cotton prices. The freedmen with the assistance of the Freedmen's Bureau were able to seize his stock and apply it towards their wages. The farmer was ruined. The story ended with a dire warning to all farmers “not to pay standing wages” because of the uncertainty of cotton production and prices (Herald 1/30/68: 3).

As wage hands, freedmen resisted the gang-like working conditions of the new plantation economy such as Greene. It was too similar to slavery (Duncan 1986). Also, it seemed that contracts could be voided at any point during the service period with no wages owed if for unsatisfactory service (Raper 1943). Of course, this left freedmen

vulnerable to indebted planters who found in the Fall that their harvest was insufficient to cover wages. Freedmen who sought to control their own hours of work were increasingly bound by contracts and that failing, faced debt-peonage via sharecropping, crop liens, and imprisonment. Planters pushed for legislation as a method of curtailing the economic independence of blacks (Bartley 1983). Vagrancy statutes and other misdemeanor statutes were dusted off in the aftermath of the Civil War and vigorously enforced during planting and harvesting seasons in Greene County as planters were only too happy to pay fines involved and thus purchase the labor of black men at nominal costs in wholesale quantities (Bartley 1983; Ayers 1984, 1992). Crime became an asset to labor-strapped Georgia counties, especially those of the former plantation belt, as labor shortages and declining profits fed higher rates of arrests and imprisonment of blacks (Ayers 1992; Sterling 1994). Hence, sharecropping and convict lease arrangements became part of the same continuum of coerced labor as the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to a close (Ayers 1984).

Because of the need for a disciplined labor force comprised primarily of blacks, their emigration was a serious concern for planters in counties like Greene and blacks were generally discouraged from traveling freely. When waylaid on the road by a white man, a black man might be arrested for vagrancy, trespassing, or slander, at best, or worse, murdered unless a white man was willing to vouch for his character (Sterling 1994). It is surely within this context that the black educator Booker T. Washington's exhorted blacks in 1896 to "sit down your bucket where you are"(Washington 1901).

Planters complained that blacks would not work unless compelled to do so (DeCanio 1974; Bartley 1983; Duncan 1986). But while there was ample evidence that

blacks were willing to work for fair wages (DeCanio 1974), the public mythology that blacks were given to indolence prevailed in discourse. Hence, the Greene County newspaper regularly deplored the reliance on black labor and extolled the virtues of white immigration to the area. Editors saw this as a way of lifting Greene County out of its postwar poverty, unwittingly acknowledging that being white changed the relationship of capital-to-labor. However, few white immigrants came to Greene County in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and fewer, yet, remained (Bryant 1992).

There was an obvious split in sentiments, therefore. Planters preferred black laborers to whites because they were more exploitable; merchants and those of the professional classes and small farmers clamored for their exodus (Bryant 1992). To the merchants and professionals (insofar as they were different from planters) and to small white farmers, freed blacks were no longer an asset to the community, except as criminals. The public demand for improvements in the post-Reconstruction South, especially road building projects, triggered compensatory increases in the rate at which blacks were arrested and fined for minor violations (Sterling 1994). Often failing to pay their fines, blacks were hired out to private entrepreneurs who paid their fines into the cash-strapped county treasuries. In this sense, blacks were exploited for money and labor. Otherwise, blacks produced very little income for merchants, earning too little money to purchase the products increasingly imported from the North and lining the merchant's shelves. Nor could they afford the services of the town druggists, doctors, and lawyers. Furthermore, their efforts at becoming self-sufficient – saving what money they could,

investing in a plot of land, and learning to read – threatened the status of poor whites in Greene County.

In contrast to large black populations in plantation counties such as Greene, Upcountry areas had relatively few black farmers. These individuals increasingly competed for land and status with white farmers in Whitfield County, working as tenants and sharecroppers for the most part (Ayers 1984). For this reason, the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were punctuated with increasingly lethal terror in the Upcountry regions.

As the previous narrative suggests, growing cotton as a cash crop was considered by many southerners, rich and poor, to be the best way to emerge from the devastation of the Civil War. Growing cotton was a labor intensive operation, requiring as many as four plowings within a year between April (planting) and October (harvesting). Economic elites in the old plantation belt counties like Greene had a stake in reclaiming and maintaining control over the mass of emancipated blacks. In the rural areas of the Upcountry, white families were increasingly pulled into its production.

Prior research on the relative size of the black population has shown interesting effects upon extralegal and legal forms of punishment. Depending upon the time frame and source of data, somewhere between 1,748 and 4,000 persons were lynched in the South following emancipation by clandestine individuals and mass mobs. A vast majority were black (Beck et al. 1990; Soule 1992; Brundage 1993; Tolnay and Beck 1995). Researchers have found that as relative size of the black population in an area increased (Liska 1987; Soule 1992), so did the rate of lynchings (Beck et al. 1990; Tolnay



et al. 1996). Tolnay et al. (1996) found that the effects were non-linear, growing weaker as concentrations got higher which are consistent with Blalock's economic threat model.

In the exercise of legal social control, however, the relative size of the black population had the opposite effect. Myers (1990b, 1993) found that decreases in the relative size of the black male population resulted in increases in the rate of incarceration suggesting that the latter was used as a means of capturing labor. In the agricultural sector, such as would be in Greene and Whitfield, black incarceration rates appeared to respond to changes in the demand for their labor.

This dual nature of the relative size of the black population is interesting and taps into the fact that blacks were both a resource and a threat in postbellum Georgia (Adamson 1983). Indeed, Tolnay et al. (1989b) as well as Myers (1998) observed that how blacks were perceived depended upon whose interests were at stake. For poor and working class whites, competing blacks represented a threat to their wages and social status and, hence, their presence helped fuel decades of lethal terror to remove the threat. However, elite whites, who played central roles in promoting the fear of poor whites on its own behalf (Nash 1973; Wilson 1978; Beck et al. 1990; Redding 1992; Tomaskovic-Devey and Roscigno 1996), were hurt by declines in black population. Hence, one might see the percent black registering positive and negative effects depending upon whose interests are considered.

If crime claims reflect threat as researchers contend (Fishman 1978; Hall et al. 1978; Gans 1979; Barlow et al. 1995a, 1995b), I expect the relative size of the black population to have different effects upon the number and nature of crime control claims

in Greene and Whitfield counties. In Greene County, because of its historic dependence on black labor and its resort to criminalization as a labor control strategy (Ayers 1984), I expect that as the relative size of the black population decreases, crime coverage should increase and focus more on blacks. Additionally, I expect that the tone of the claims should become more condemnatory as relative size diminishes and disproportionately single blacks out for condemnation. However, decreases in the size of a minority population might eliminate competition for scarce resources (land, status, etc.) and contribute to an overall sense of community and prosperity in predominantly white Whitfield. Here, I expect that as the relative size of the black population decreases, the coverage of crime and criminals decreases as well. The focus on black crime should diminish. Additionally, the tone of claims should become less condemnatory and black crime should not be disproportionately singled out for condemnation.

#### *Racial Inequality*

For the most part, freedmen struggled in the years following emancipation to buy their own land and to control their own labors. Indeed, the number of acreage owned by black landowners in Greene County grew exponentially, from 421 acres in 1870 to 7,560 acres by 1894 (Raper 1943). Of course, the vast majority of freedmen continued to be landless in Greene County throughout the remaining decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bryant 1992) but it did not prevent them from aspiring to own their own land and therefore their own labor. These aspirations were often stifled by the refusal of whites to sell land to blacks and if they were able to come into its possession, to sell them the fertilizer necessary to eke a living out of the now depleted soil, or to extend them credit (Duncan

1986; Sterling 1994). When these indirect and practical efforts at thwarting economic independence failed, the message was made more explicit, at least to whites. A front page article in the Greensboro Herald, sporting a rare headline for the times and being titled “Advice to The Negroes,” extracted a speech delivered by a Mississippi official:

Most of you want land. Allow me to say in all sincerity, as your friend, regarding you in your present position, that is the last thing you do want. If you had land, what would you do with it? You would want provisions, plows, hoes, axes...where are these to come from? Now, I will tell you what you want – first of all, you want a year’s provisions and clothing for yourself and families, or the means of buying them. Now you want horses or mules, then...farming utensils...last something to feed the horse or mules. When you get thus equipped, there will be no trouble about the land.... (Herald 8/31/67: 1)

What blacks needed, according to the established logic of the day, was a sharecropping arrangement and this proved to be the most exploitative method of controlling the labor supply and protecting the profits for larger planters. In this arrangement, the freedmen planted, chopped, and harvested the crop in anticipation of a share at the end. More often than not, his “share” was nullified by the extension of prior credit on provisions and a continuous debt cycle, which tied the cropper and his family to the land. This metaphor “tied to the land” accommodated the paternalistic view of blacks as incapable of self-sufficiency and being landless removed competition for status vis-a-vis small white farmers (Duncan 1986).

Clearly, another economic indicator of the degree of autonomy freed blacks were gaining vis-a-vis their former masters and whites in general was the extent to which black families acquired property. Land remained one of the most important property acquisitions and source of wealth as well as status, and as freed blacks acquired mules,

purchased small plots, and grew their own subsistence and cotton crops, albeit on a small scale, whites vigorously reacted. Reactions ranged from advice (“you don’t need land”), to restricting the sale of land and fertilizers, to outright intimidation. Their attempts were largely successful as Banks (1905) noted that southern blacks owned one in eight-five acres of improved land in 1875 yet only one in twenty-five three decades later.

Land was an important basis of social organization in the agrarian South (Tomascovic-Devey and Roscigno 1996) and the extent to which inequality in property diminished between blacks and whites was most likely a good indicator of whether or not the planter aristocracy was gaining or losing its laborers, and the class of poor, white farmers was gaining or losing their status.

Previous research suggests that racial inequality has implications for punishment. A cross-sectional study by Corzine, Huff-Corzine and Creech (1988) showed that the farm tenancy system of cotton producing areas in the South increased lynching rates. Similarly, Soule (1992) examined the effects of overall levels of farm tenancy on lynching rates in Georgia between 1890 and 1900 and found a positive relationship. In both studies, then, as the percentage of all farm tenancy rose, suggesting diminishing racial inequality, extralegal violence rose. As most tenants in Georgia were landless whites in the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Myers 1998) and most lynching victims were black, both studies suggest that poor whites embraced extralegal controls to eliminate the threat of racial equality. Indeed, the last thing poor whites perceived as standing between them and freed blacks was the status of being a “freeholder.” Again, racial inequality operated differently in the realm of legal social control. Myers (1998)

found that as inequality diminished, the rate of incarceration for blacks diminished and whites became more vulnerable to legal social control.

Studies using an economic threat perspective (Blalock 1967) suggest that declines in racial inequality ultimately precipitate competition for scarce resources and punitive responses by whites. However, responses vary by class. Economic elites are threatened by a perceived loss of control over scarce labor. Small white farmers and poor whites are threatened by a perceived loss of status. Racial inequality should therefore similarly affect crime control claims in Greene County and Whitfield County, though for different reasons. I expect that diminishing racial inequality facilitates the construction of crime as more threatening, especially black crime. Additionally, the tone of the articles should become increasingly condemnatory with blacks being singled out disproportionately for condemnation. But due to the smaller threshold of threat that near-levels of equality generates, this effect should be more immediate and intense in Whitfield County than in Greene County.

## **Conclusion**

In a neo-Marxian sense, crime control claims are a cultural resource to which dominant elites have disproportionate access and which are used to define a situation that privileges their interests. Based upon the foregoing literature in the punishment tradition, structural determinants were identified as possible influences on crime control claims. Again, the assumption guiding this review is that if these structural factors explain punishment and if crime control claims intervene, then these structural factors should explain crime control claims as well. Chapter 4 presents the methodology for modeling

these influences. Specifically, it introduces the newspaper data sources and the content-analytic procedure used to identify measures of crime control claims of interest to this project. These measures are the level of crime control claims, the focus of crime control claims, the condemnatory tone of crime control claims, and racial disparity in condemnatory tone. It also introduces ARIMA time-series techniques which are used to assess the timing, nature, and strength of effects of economic crises, national political events, price of cotton, relative size of the black population, and racial inequality on these four measures of crime control claims.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The theories presented in the previous chapters argue that dominant groups in a society attempt to secure and maintain structures of power and influence which protect their interests, especially during times of immense social change. At these times, ideologies are marketed which represent threat to the community and shape community interests in concert with those of dominant elites. Economic interests are powerful players in the construction of threat but other sources of power may prevail as well. Of particular relevance to this project is the neo-Marxian contention that threat is mobilized and given expression in crime control claims which serve as resources for crafting consensus around punitive social control responses.

Building upon the sources of threat to elite interests presented in chapter 3, this chapter first presents the data sources and sampling procedures upon which a model of structural influences of scripted threat is built. Next, it describes the dependent and independent measures. The concluding section of the chapter presents the analytic strategy used to test the effects of economic crises, national political campaigns, and social changes on crime control claims in postbellum Georgia.

## **Data Sources and Sampling Procedures**

Data were secured from microfilmed versions of the two county newspapers in the sample: the Greensboro Herald (which merged with the Georgia Home Journal in January, 1887 to form the Herald and Journal) of Greene County and the North Georgia Citizen of Whitfield County for the dates of January, 1870 to January, 1900. Both newspapers were weekly editions, distributed on Thursday or Friday of each week for a total of 50 editions per year (no editions between Christmas and the New Year). The two newspapers were the dominant press organs for each county and were selected in part because they enjoyed fairly uninterrupted publication during the period under study.

Due to the potentially large data base of crime stories from 50 editions over a 30-year period for two counties, I chose a 20% systematic sampling procedure with a random start, stratified on the basis of seasonality. Systematic sampling ensured representativeness, while stratification addressed the observation that issues of crime and its control in the public discourse appear to be tied to the planting, harvesting, and “settling-up” seasons of the postbellum cotton economy (Duncan, 1986; Smith, 1975). Hence a subset of four seasons with three months each – roughly inclusive of planting (April - June), harvesting (July - September), and settling-up seasons (October - December) – was used to help ensure adequate representation of these periods in the study.

Obtaining a 20% stratified random sample (10 issues/year) was a two-step process. First, I used a table of random numbers (Babbe 1995), to select a random point in the table by closing my eyes and pointing to the chart. This was my starting point.



Using the chart as a vertical array of numbers and using only the last two digits of each row (representing months 1-12), I progressed down the columns counting every 5<sup>th</sup> row of numbers until I obtained four numbers; making certain that one number was representative of each of the four seasons. If during this process I obtained a month from a season already represented, I took the next number until a new season was represented. After obtaining four months in this manner (one from each season), the next number 1-12 became the random month selected. I repeated the process, obtaining a second set of months from each of the four seasons and a random month for a total of 10 months each year.

The next step involved selecting the issue for each month to include in the study. This step involved another random start and movement across the set of rows. I counted every 5<sup>th</sup> number in the column until I obtained a number 1-4 for each month in the year. This time, I used only the last digit of each number (representative of four weekly issues each month). I wrote this issue number beside the corresponding month selected for that year. I repeated this process until I obtained an issue for each of the months selected.

I repeated the process for each year under study and for each county under study resulting in a target base of 600 issues. Each targeted issue of the Greensboro Herald (and later Herald - Journal) and North Georgia Citizen was read in its entirety and the articles on crime news were copied. If an issue in the list was missing, I selected the next issue for examination. The resulting data base from this sampling procedure (n=2012) represents the population of articles printed during this period.

Copying the articles from microfilm was time-consuming, but it avoided the possibility that errors and/or omissions would be made in recording data from each story. The unit of analysis was a single story. The designation of a single story was derived by using several contextual clues. First, if the story included a headline, then all the material included in that story was considered a single article. This was rare, however, as most references to crime and its control were sandwiched between advertisements and society columns. There were no categories of news by section and very little use of “white space” to denote when one story ended and another began. The notable exception to this lack of boundaries was in the realm of advertisements. Most often, these were the most attractive and readable sections of the newspapers and occupied 80% of the copy space, especially on front pages. Headlines failing, a second contextual clue was the use of “all caps” in the first few words of an item to signal the introduction of a new story. Again, this was fairly rare but more common than the use of headlines.

For the most part, news items were presented in a seamless montage of notes and quotes: snippets on the economy, reproductions of military orders, and political declarations all liberally and randomly sprinkled with poetry, social entertainment, homilies, gossip, tragedies, and sermons. Therefore, a final contextual clue to a single item (when no headlines or subheads appeared) involved a change in topic (e.g., from crime to politics). Hence, a single story might include references to several different crime-related incidents yet, for recording purposes, was considered a single story until another topic intervened. Admittedly, the single story designation could be problematic

for coding purposes because the tone of the article could vary among the different incidences related. A word about tone will be discussed later.

For each item or story, I recorded the date, page, and source of the story and whether it reported local, state, regional, or national news (See Appendix A). I noted headlines, if any, and the point at which the news items entered into the public discourse. That is, I noted whether or not the story pertained primarily to claims at the event stage (crime stories) or at the processing stage (social control stories). Items recorded at the event stage were principally about normative violations that might be regarded today as “street crime.” They fell into the three categories of property, person, and moral order offenses. I did not code white collar crime or business crime (fraud, embezzlement, forgeries, counterfeiting), prohibition crimes (operating distilleries), rhetoric on temperance, election riots, or labor riots. These events are rarely the crime stories examined in modern day studies of crime claims; thus, the restriction allows for comparative generalizations. Items recorded at the processing stage consisted of stories primarily about police work (arrests, investigations, escapes), court proceedings (including announcements of court dates, testimonies, convictions, and sentencings), legal and extra-legal executions, and comments on the criminal justice system. Both sets of stories comprised a single data base of claims called “crime control claims.”

In addition to noting whether the story primarily concerned claims at the event or processing stage, I recorded the type of behavior considered – property, person, or moral order violation; the race and sex of perpetrator (when available); the race and sex of

victims (when available); the number of lines of text; and placement of the article (first or last page; top, middle, or bottom of page). I also recorded whether the tone of the text was sympathetic, condemnatory, or neutral. Since tone is a subjective assessment, a word about how it was determined follows.

### The “Long Preliminary Soak”

In introductory remarks to Paper Voices, Stuart Hall (1975) advises that researchers engaged in critical analyses of newspapers must gain an intimate understanding of the text in order to know when, what, and how to count instances of texts. This avoids the familiar pitfall of critical analysis: assuming that the researcher’s interpretation reflects the writer’s intent (Weber 1985). In other words, if the researcher wishes to draw inferences from the text which are valid, then it is vitally important that he or she attempt to enter the writer’s cultural frame. And, this is especially advised when reading historical documents. One way of gaining entry is the “long preliminary soak” (Hall 1975: 15). This is initially done by uncritically reading the text and later deducing categories for coding.

For purposes of this project, the process of “soaking” was done in three stages. In the first stage, I treated the 30-year span of articles for each county as a single text and read each article without making any critical judgments. The purpose of this first reading was to simply immerse myself in the culture. What was immediately apparent was the taken-for-granted nature of the texts in terms of what the writer(s) assumed his audience already knew about a story. In other words, stories often began as though an interrupted conversation had resumed and many facts of the event were publicly known. For

example, the entire text of a story is this: “His Highness the Pope is on his horse again (#281). Clearly, the writer assumes that everyone knows who Pope is and what this statement means. Or, in discussing the news from neighboring Walker County Superior Court, the writer first describes his trip to the LaFayette courthouse in the “congenial” company of Col. Shumate and the breathtaking view of the North Georgia countryside. He then launches into the “doings of the court” with these words:

The criminal docket, after the transaction of much civil business was reached on Thursday morning, and a man by the name of Carpenter and another named McElhaney, were sentenced to the penitentiary for five years, the first for breaking into the store of J.W. Cavender, at Villanow, and the latter for entering the store of Hiram Smith, at Cedar Grove, and stealing money and goods therefrom. Two negroes were also “sent up” for one year each, one for stealing a hog, and the other for stealing a lot of wheat.

(3081)

Note the informal nature of the reporting as well as the convention of referring to the black defendants simply as “negroes.” Generally, if the name of a black defendant was added to a story, it was quickly followed by the term “negro” to differentiate the offender from white defendants who were either regularly named and/or afforded the moniker of “Mr.” if of significant social standing. The above story in its entirety was rather unusual, however, in that it was more than 50 lines in length. Most crime control claims were short, averaging less than ten lines of text. Indeed, “news in a nutshell” was the mantra of these journalists as snippets ruled the page.

As I read other historical documents of the time and continued to read the news texts, however, I began to encounter “Ah, hah” moments wherein I too realized the writer’s referent without it being explicitly stated. I was entering the writers’ cultural

frame. I concluded this stage with an impression of variation in the tone of the crime control texts but was unable to pinpoint why. To understand and categorize this variation in tone was the goal of the second stage of coding.

Stage two was a textual analysis wherein I sought to ascertain the tonal elements of stories. I asked, what made some stories appear to be more condemnatory or more sympathetic to the offender than other stories? Throughout the second reading of the Greene County and Whitfield County texts, I recorded notes and eventually developed a list of six (6) features, each of which seemed to distinguish these texts from one another and which occurred with some regularity. **Sympathetic** text generally featured ideas that:

1. Absolved the offender of intent to cause harm or responsibility;
2. Made substantial efforts to explain the behavior or used quotes of influential people (police, upstanding neighbors, etc.) to do so;
3. Contextualized the event and provided a biography for the offender;
4. Constructed the victim as causing the harm;
5. Used words such as “unintentional,” “unfortunate,” “accidental” in describing the act or renamed the offense a “tragedy;”
6. Highlighted contrition on the part of the offender.

In other words, stories containing one or more of the above features had the effect of mitigating the offense and sympathizing with the offender. Note the following examples:

(no headlines)

Some hungry thief broke into Mr. Cartwright’s smokehouse a few nights ago and carried off some of his meat. Whoever the rogue was, must have been in a *desperate strait*, as such things are rare in this community.

(0301)

(no headlines)

Joe Durham shot and killed Addison Newbury on Thursday last over a dispute. *Newbury was a troublesome lot.*

(2333)

(no headlines)

The confinement of young Farrell in our county jail, on the charge of murder, should be a *sad* warning to young men who are in the habit of drinking intoxicating spirits. But for a day of carousal(sic) he would not be where he is.

(3006)

(headlines: One Student *Kills* Another at the Auburn Male College)

A most *sad occurrence* took place at the East Alabama Male College, situated at Auburn, Alabama, one day last week. Two young men, aged about 19 years each, were attending college and were room mates, and of course, the *best of friends*. It seems that while in their room they began playing with an apple, by pitching it at each other and at last one of them threw it rather hard, striking his friend in the face. This so enraged him for a moment that he seized a chair and struck the other over the head, felling him to the floor. When, *fearing he had seriously hurt his room mate*, he picked him up, put him on the bed and endeavored to get him to speak. The wounded boy lay thus insensible for a day and a half while the other one told no one about it...death ensued. He could have been saved if assistance had been called in time. It is supposed the young man who gave the blow was *not conscious of the serious damage* he had done and hoping his friend would soon be over it, preferred to keep the affair quite; but alas, too late!

This sad occurrence has cast a gloom over the whole village.....  
We deeply lament its occurrence.

(0018)

The first two examples attempt to explain the behavior of the offender and in the second instance, the writer interjects the idea that the victim (Newbury) invited the harm. In the third example, the writer infers that young Farrell's behavior is totally out of character for him and uses the opportunity to warn other young men of Farrell's status of the hazards of drinking. The last example presents multiple features of sympathetic text

in that the offender is given a biography, is absolved of intent, and is contrite. This degree of contextualization is most common in sympathetic rhetoric where attempts are often made to fully explain the behavior of the offender. However, this level of empathy and offender biography is typically missing from condemnatory texts and it generally has the effect of removing the offender from a realm of familiarity.

I found that **condemnatory** texts had one or more features that:

1. Called for punishment or penal enactments; often editorializing, giving advice or using quotes of individuals to do so;
2. Used words like “brutal,” “savage,” “outrage,” “notorious,” etc. to describe the act or the offender;
3. Noted the offender’s prior record or prior instances of offensive behavior;
4. Constructed the victim as “innocent” or “pure” and inviting no harm;
5. Used coupling strategies such as equating race with crime, community residence with crime, or poverty with crime;
6. Highlighted guilt or confession of the offender.

Note the following examples:

(headlines: Divorce Case)

A trial for divorce between Levi Thorton and his wife, Mary Ann, occurred on Monday, in the Superior Court of this county. It is the first case we have known where the parties were colored, which induces us to notice it. The case was regularly conducted by able and learned counsel....the grounds relied on by the Plaintiff were adultery and habitual drunkenness of the defendant. An intelligent and patient jury were impaneled and brought in a verdict for a total divorce. This is a step in the right direction, provided it be *followed up by a strict enforcement of the criminal laws against the offense of adultery and fornication*. Our colored population should be made to understand that their privileges of citizenship are accompanied with the same obligations to observe the law in these respects as upon their white neighbors.

(0002)



(no headlines)

Mr. A. J. Williams of Madison, Ga., was knocked down and robbed of \$800 near his residence on Friday night last. He was struck on the back of the head, is still insensible and will no doubt die from the effects of the blow.

(0066)

(headlines: Attempt to Poison)

A most *diabolical* attempt was made, on yesterday, to poison the family of our *esteemed friend and fellow citizen, Thos. W. Robinson, Esq.* On drinking water from the bucket, as usual, after breakfast, Mr. R. noticed a peculiar and unpleasant taste; and upon a more thorough examination of the water, it was found to contain strychnine. An antidote was immediately applied....

Previously, there had been some unpleasantness between Mr. R. and the housegirl. She has been arrested and is now in duress. It is well the deadly infusion was thus early discovered, else the whole family might have been made victims of this *wicked* and *malicious* attempt at *wholesale* murder.

(0008)

In the first example, the writer called for penal enactments following a civil case for divorce and took the opportunity to educate the black community on proper conduct, textually equating race with depravity. In the second example, the coverage of the event and its brevity represents an act that appears to be inexplicable and fearful in its randomness. And in the last example, several negative representations were made of the attempted murder – diabolical, wicked, malicious, and wholesale. In all three cases, it appears that the texts intended to connect the reader emotionally to the victims and to invite punitive responses to the offenders' behavior.

The final stage of the coding process was a rereading of the 30-year array comparing each text to these deductively derived features. This final stage resulted in

texts coded as condemnatory, sympathetic, or neutral in tone. In the event of the latter, I coded a text neutral if it contained both sympathetic and condemnatory features (as might be the case if several unrelated incidences were considered as a single article), possessed none of those features, or was too short to determine its tone reliably. Note the following examples of neutral text:

(headlines: *Shocking Homicide*)

We learn that Dr. Carr, of Washington county, recently shot and killed his son-in-law, Mr. Seaton Grantland. A Court of inquiry brought in a verdict of *justifiable homicide*, as it was said Grantland was advancing on Carr with a cocked pistol. *The affair is deeply deplored*, and has thrown large circles of most worthy friends on either side, into the deepest and life-long affliction. Cannot something be done to put a stop to the *terrible tragedies* which seem to be multiplying all over the land? If *penal enactments* could be coupled with moral efforts to discourage the wearing of concealed weapons, we believe it would have a salutary effect. Let our legislators think of it.

(0022)

(no headlines)

A cutting affray occurred on Saturday night last, in the store-room adjoining one of the Bar-rooms of our city. A quarrel between Henry Johnson and Marion Butler resulted in the former being considerably gashed by a knife in the hands of the latter. Dr. Walker's services were in requisition; we learn Johnson is doing well.

(0048)

(no headlines)

The Toccoa Herald records the killing of Mr. Moses Brown, by two brothers named Fulgum.

(0071)

In the first example, condemnatory and sympathetic features coexisted. For instance, the homicide is “shocking” and “deeply deplored” and a subsequent call is made for penal enactments to curtail concealed weapons violations. However, condemnatory representations are softened by the prominent placement of a verdict of “justifiable

homicide” as well as terming the event “tragic.” These latter textual elements had the effect of pardoning the offender in spite of the negative representation of the act. In the second example, the text contains neither condemnatory nor sympathetic dimensions and the last example was typical of an article too short to reliably code for tone.

### **Description of Sample**

In sum, I collected data on a variety of variables including numbers and sources of stories, stage of entry, types of behavior, race and sex of offenders and victims, story tone, and placement of article, to name a few. Table 4.1 describes the variables selected for analysis in this project.

Disparity in entry stage of claims is apparent. Claims tended to be generated by criminal processing in Greene County in contrast to criminal events and behavior in Whitfield County. The press in Greene County, with its better established court system, was better attuned to the formal processing of crime such as court appearances, trials, and sentencing. This disparity in entry stage of claims could also be due to the Upcountry’s longer standing tradition of dealing with injuries on a more informal, face-to-face basis and thus by-passing the criminal justice system for redress for much of the nineteenth century (Ayers 1984).

Claims surrounding black crimes and its control dominated more of the discourse in Greene County than in Whitfield County. However, given Whitfield’s much smaller black population, black presence in crime control claims in this context far exceeded their presence in the population.

Table 4.1 Crime Control Claims, by County

Variable	Greene County (n = 720)	Whitfield County (n = 1292)
Level of Claims		
Event stage	46.3	51.9
Processing stage	53.7	48.1
Race of Offenders in Claims		
Black	55.8	50.7
White	44.2	49.3
Tone of Claims		
Neutral	58.2	63.3
Condemnatory	29.4	29.7
Sympathetic	12.4	7.0
Black/White Ratio in Condemnatory Tone		
	2.5	1.9

The majority of crime control claims in Greene and Whitfield counties were neutral. However, this result may be due more to the convention of newspaper writers to present snippets of information than to provide readers with balanced news stories on crime and social control. Relatedly, condemnatory claims significantly outpaced sympathetic claims in both counties with Whitfield being less likely to report crime control claims sympathetically. This last point is interesting in that Whitfield was the smaller and less demographically diverse county of the two and yet appeared considerably more crime control conscious than the former plantation county of Greene. That is to say, over a 30-year period, Whitfield contributed two-thirds of the data on crime control claims to this study. And while this is not to say that Whitfield was overly concerned with crime and its control whereas Greene was not, the data do suggest that crime control

claims disproportionately dominated the discourse in Whitfield than in Greene and that this discourse tended to be less sympathetic. Whitfield's reputation for being more adverse to moderation in most things including crime and its reaction (Ayers 1984) may account for this disparity in the reporting on crime and its control. Finally, Greene County claims selected the activities of black perpetrators as disproportionately threatening to a greater extent than did the claims in Whitfield County. This is not too surprising considering the much larger base of freedmen in Greene County than in Whitfield County.

In summary, crime control claims in Greene County were process-stage oriented, race-driven, and neutral but with substantially more condemnatory than sympathetic rhetoric. Whitfield's claims appear to be event-stage oriented, race-driven, and neutral with substantially more condemnatory than sympathetic rhetoric. Both counties disproportionately targeted the activities of black offenders for condemnation. However, the racial disparity in condemnatory tone in Greene County was much greater than in Whitfield County. Nonetheless, press coverage in Greene and Whitfield counties was more similar than different. But as "even slightly different societies create and punish different kinds and amounts of crime" (Ayers 1984: 106), it should be interesting to determine if these slight variations have structural influences and if these influences are the same in both contexts.

#### Measures of Crime Control Claims

The data described in the previous section provide the basis for the construction of the four dependent measures in this project. These are: level of crime control claims,

black crime control claims, condemnatory crime control claims, and racial disparity in condemnatory tone. A discussion of each measure follows.

*Level of Crime Control Claims*

The first measure is the number of articles on crime and social control in each of the two counties. Figure 4.1 presents the 30-year trends in this measure.

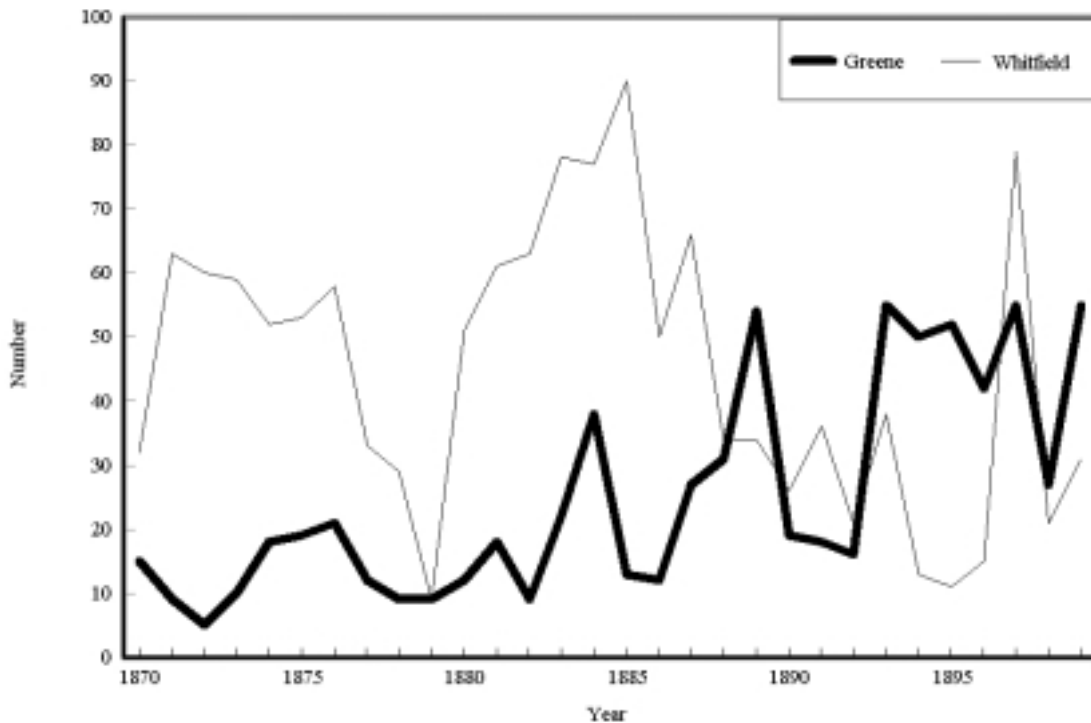


Figure 4.1 Level of Crime Control Claims

Note that the level of crime control claims fluctuated quickly and dramatically across the time span. This sort of fluctuation does not appear to correspond with the theoretical operation of crime as some theorists contend. Owing an intellectual debt in part to Durkheim, many radical theorists suggest that crimes are not mere “sporadic

occurrences...but are regular...features of a social system characterized by intense stratification and pervasive class conflict” (Taylor, Walton, and Young 1975: 75). What varies therefore is not the rate of crime but its social salience (Erikson 1966). Indeed, the decades of the 1870s, 1880s and the 1890s embroiled the South in a number of economic crises (depressions and recessions) as well as in tumultuous political campaigns. Spikes in coverage appear to coincide or closely follow some of these events. The spikes in coverage coincide at some point with the depressions of 1873 (duration of about 5 years), 1882 (duration of three years), and 1893 (duration of about one and one-half years).

Whitfield consistently registers more crime control claims than Greene, with more erratic dips and upturns in coverage. We see much less variability in the level of coverage in Greene County across these events than in Whitfield County.

#### *Black Crime Control Claims*

A reversal of the level of coverage in crime control claims is apparent in the next dependent measure, however. As previously noted, crime control claims were much more numerous in Whitfield County than in Greene County. However, in problematizing a particular population, the Greene County context was important. Figure 4.2 presents the 30-year trends in the percentage of all crime control claims that represented black offenders to the public.

This figure provides visual support of Table 4.1 which indicated that race was an important factor in the crime control claims. In both contexts, claims pertaining to black offenders equaled or exceeded 50 percent. This was generally more so the case in Greene than in Whitfield County. Although there were striking shifts in the levels of black crime

claims within context and across time, it is interesting to note that the effects of economic crises are more immediate in Greene than in Whitfield County. This is especially true of the depression of 1873, the recession of 1887, and the depression of 1893 in Greene County where spikes in Whitfield followed those in Greene. This immediacy suggests that greater numbers of blacks in the population and the greater dependency of Greene County on black labor may have generated a more immediate sense of their presence during economic crises.

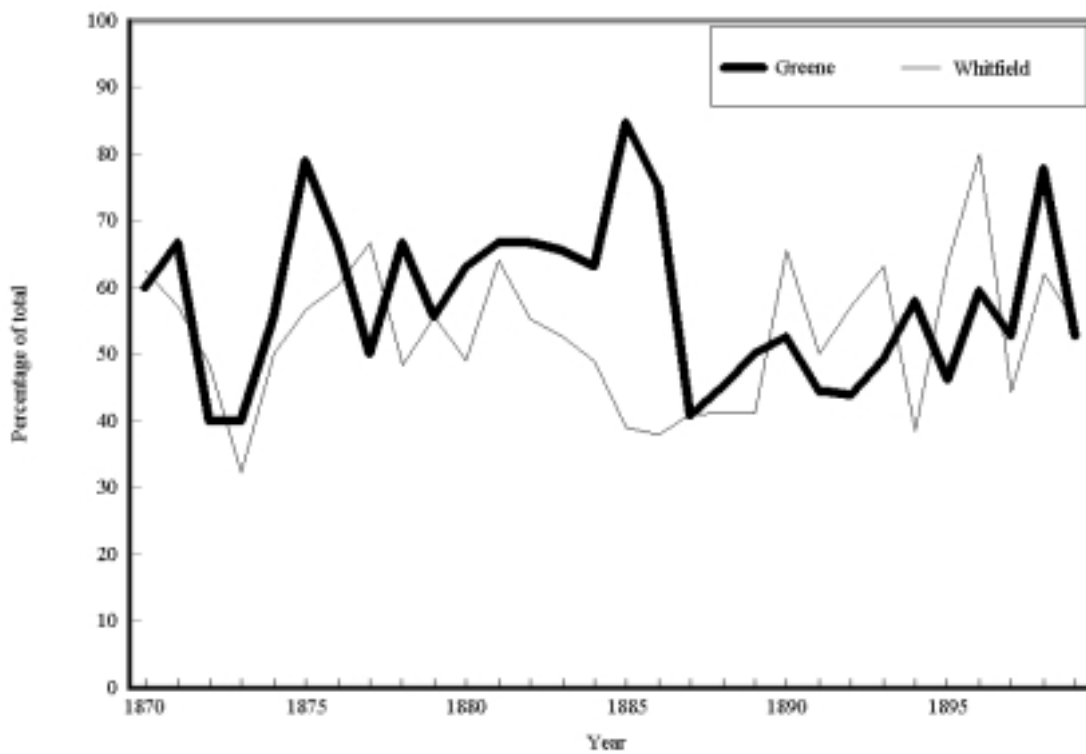


Figure 4.2 Black Crime Control Claims



### *Condemnatory Crime Control Claims*

A third measure of crime control claims is the percentage of all crime control claims that are condemnatory in tone. As Figure 4.3 shows, while both counties had roughly similar proportions of negative accounts (see Table 4.1), there are more dramatic shifts in Greene than in Whitfield County. Also, it appears that the various crises which beset the South in the 1870s and early 1880s moderated condemnation. This is an unexpected result. The prevailing wisdom is that as economic crises occur, punitive accounts of crime and other punitive reactions (escalations in social control responses) escalate. In the case of these two counties, the reactions may be more importantly conditioned by the length of the crises. For instance, the onset of the earliest and longest running depressions of 1873 and 1882 in both counties (65 and 38 months, respectively) produced more tolerant rhetoric initially but the tone appeared to become progressively condemnatory as these crises lengthened.

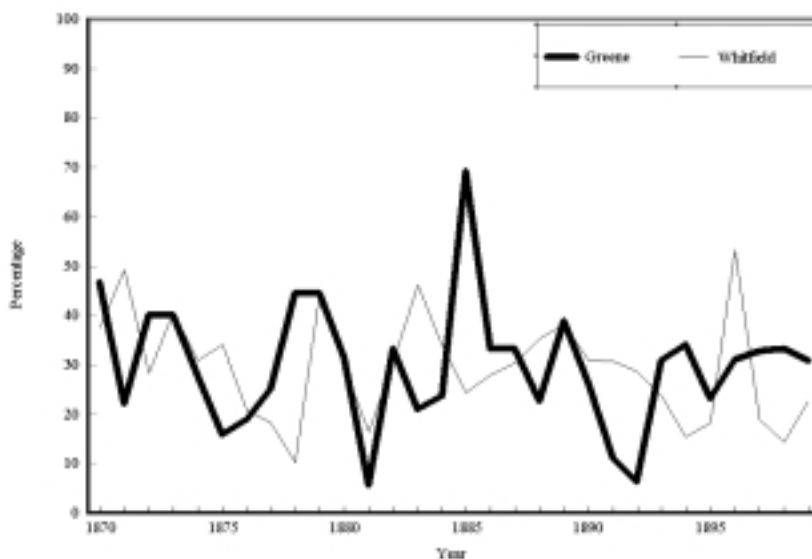


Figure 4.3 Condemnatory Tone of Crime Control Claims

As the decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century went forward, however, economic crises registered mixed effects. In Whitfield, where crime control claims were a more regular feature of the news, crises generally coincided with an escalation in condemnatory tone although the effects were not especially long-lasting. In Greene County, the tendency for economic crises to trigger condemnatory accounts of crime and social control wasn't reached until the mid-1890s. It is also primarily in Greene County that late 19<sup>th</sup> century national elections coincided with condemnatory tone in crime control claims.

#### *Racial Disparity in Condemnatory Tone*

As previously noted, black crime control claims and condemnatory crime control claims varied widely across time and contexts. A question logically following from these data is that when condemnatory tone occurred, was it more likely to be found in black than in white crime control claims? Thus, the final measure of crime control claims is the racial disparity in condemnatory tone. This measure was constructed by dividing the percentage of condemnatory black crime control claims by the percentage of condemnatory white crime control claims. Ratios greater than one indicate that the condemnatory tone "favored" blacks; ratios less than one indicate that the condemnatory tone "favored" whites. If the ratio equaled one, the condemnatory tone was at parity. All zero values were transformed to one; all values equal to or greater than ten were restricted to ten. Figure 4.4 presents the 30-year trend in the ratios.

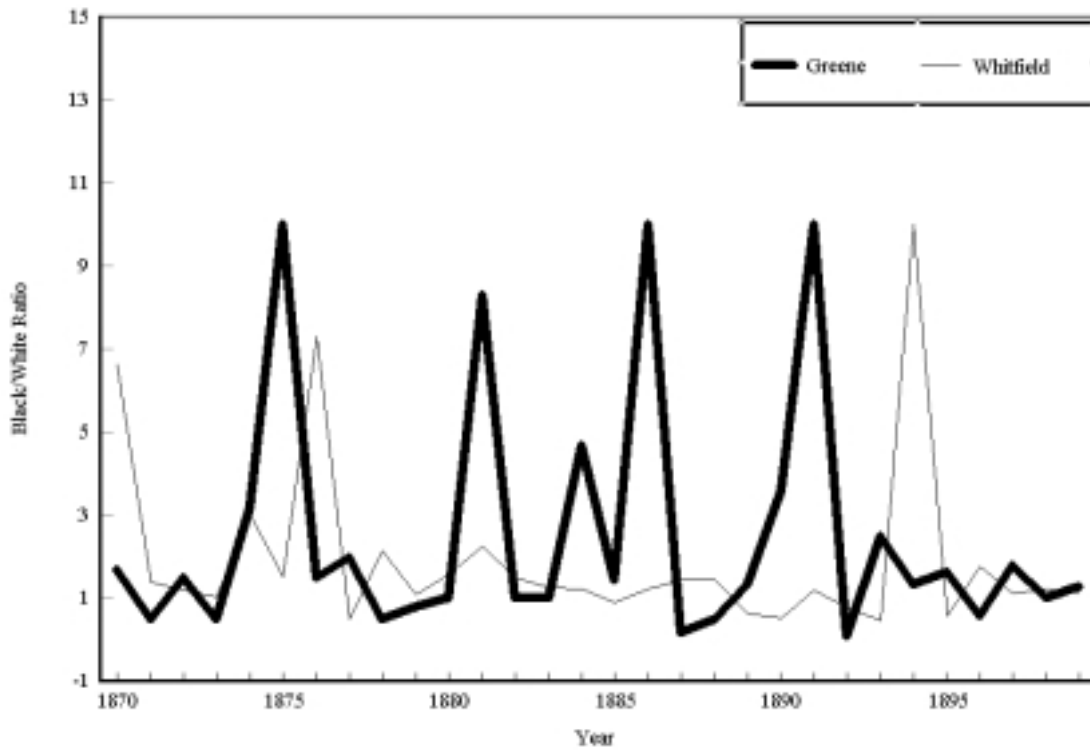


Figure 4.4 Racial Disparity in Condemnatory Tone

It is clear from the graph that context matters for the extent to which black crime was represented as more threatening. In the context of predominantly white Whitfield County where crime control claims were not only more frequent, more punitive, and disproportionately black, there was nonetheless little evidence that black crime accounts were selectively represented as more threatening. Much of the time, the crime control accounts were at parity with only a few instances of substantial racial disparity in tone evident. Again, these appeared to coincide with the more acute crises in the 1870s (Panic of 1873) and 1890s. In contrast, when condemnation occurred in Greene County, it

appeared more often than not to target the activities of black offenders. This may not be too surprising considering the numerical superiority of blacks in Greene County.

Consequently, it is likely in contexts where a problem population dominates that crime is not only represented as population-specific (black, in this instance) but as more threatening as well. Economic crises and political events did not seem to change this overall pattern in threat construction in that condemnation in Whitfield continued to target the behavior of white offenders. However, the selection of black crime for condemnation punctuated the trend graph in Greene County at intervals consistent with economic and/or political events. For example, the first major depression of the decade (1873-1879) witnessed a spike in racially disparate tones of claims targeting blacks. A similar spike occurred toward the end of the next longest running depression in the following decade (1882-1884). The “heartbreaking nineties” (Arnett [1922] 1967: 156), so-named because of the frequency of economic crises in the South, produced a mixed reaction for this measure in that the decade of the 1890s opened with a spike in punitive black claims. Much of the waning years produced punitive accounts of white offenders. This latter spike in white punitive accounts may have been conditioned by national elections, however. For instance, it is possible that the emergence of Populism during this period prompted a shift in rhetorical constructs from black to white threat as a reflection of a potentially impending dissolution of white electoral power.

#### Events and Social Changes

As indicated in the previous chapters, structural influences provide a rationale for understanding punishment and punitive social discourse. According to Rusche and

Kirchheimer ([1939] 1968) and Rusche ([1933] 1980), societal reaction to crime is determined by the general economic and political conditions of a society. Their labor-related theory of punishment suggests that when labor is not needed, imprisonment rates and severity of punishment rise and societal reaction to infractions turn punitive. In contrast, when labor is needed, punishment functions to make the unwilling work and to keep wages down by capturing a labor force at reduced wages. Under this condition, leniency prevails.

Researchers examining various manifestations of adverse economic conditions generally find support for an economic model of punishment (Greenberg 1977; Adamson 1984; Melossi 1985, 1989; Box 1987; Myers and Sabol 1987; Hale 1989; Chiricos and Delone 1992). So too does research suggest that the State, through the legal system, helps to control that portion of surplus labor that is young, active, and potentially threatening (Spitzer 1975; Chiricos and Delone 1992). Nonetheless, the model is not without its critics and contradictions (Greenberg 1980; Galster and Scaturro 1985; Iverarity and Grattet 1989; Melossi 1989; Jacobs and Helms 1996).

Melossi (1985) offers that it is not the swings in the economy per se that effect swings in punishment so much as the accompanying discourse. He characterizes business cycles as political wherein fluctuations are accompanied by vocabularies of punitive motives. If the upswing is accompanied by a feeling of security, then punishment will be lenient and vice versa. In the latter case, a vocabulary of punitive motives orients the actions of social control agents to the business cycle and to stresses in the society

(unemployment, for example). What intervenes between business cycles and punishment is not crime but a situated meaning of crime.

The literature on media (Barlow et al. 1995a, 1995b; Hall et al. 1978; Hickman 1982; Humphries 1981), provides support for a theory of social discourse intervening between crime, the economy, and punishment. Likewise, Beckett (1997) and others (Jacobs and Helms 1996; Beckett and Sasson 2001; Jacobs and Carmichael 2001) provide evidence of the effects of political events on claims of threat.

With these points in mind, several structural features of the 19<sup>th</sup> century southern landscape should have implications for the generation of crime control claims. These include periodic economic crises, national political campaigns, and changing economic and demographic patterns. The following sections consider each of these factors.

#### *Economic Crises*

The decades following the emancipation of southern slaves included a series of economic depressions and recessions (see Table 4.2) which had their genesis in panics in European and northeastern markets (Myers 1998). Postbellum southern farmers, black and white alike, were caught up in an international market for which they were wholly unprepared and their vulnerability to external events and forces meant that periodic crises were felt by planter, farmers, and tenants alike (Ayers 1984; Bartley 1983).

As Myers (1998) indicates, many of these crises were short-lived but a few were sustained. For instance, the depression of 1873, though moderate in effects, was especially long-lasting. The depressions of 1882 and 1893 were particularly severe and, of course, the numerous recessions which punctuated the late-nineteenth century created a great deal

of anxiety in a region that was struggling to emerge from a debt-strapped financial condition (Bryant 1992).

Table 4.2 Economic crises, 1870 - 1900

Years	Worst Year	Duration (Months)	Rank in terms of Severity
1873 - 1879	1876	65	15
1882 - 1884	1884	38	16
1887 - 1888		13	3
1890 - 1891		10	9
1893 - 1894	1894	17	18
1895 - 1897		18	14
1899 - 1900		18	14

Note: The mildest downturns are ranked 1-5, the most severe, 16-20. Table reproduced from Myers (1998: 64).

According to Ayers (1984: 169), as “lamentations over the hard times in the local papers reached their peak in Greene and Whitfield,” so too did punitive reactions to offenses. Greene County newspapers wrote of the “Panic of 1873” and the Whitfield papers were equally attuned to the rate of business failures that the depression of 1893 wrought in its community. Accordingly, the percentage of business and agribusiness failures in the South during the decades of the 1880s and 1890s exceeded by far those in other parts of the country (Ayers 1984).

Economic crises posed a threat to the interests of dominant elites, engendering the use of crime control resources (newspapers) to craft consensus for heightened social control (Barlow et al. 1995a, 1995b; Hall et al. 1978; Humphries 1981). Therefore, depressions and recessions should increase the level of crime control claims in Greene and

Whitfield County newspapers. This increase should be more immediately and intensely felt in Greene County than in Whitfield County because the former was more firmly enmeshed in the external economic system. The second expectation is that depressions and recessions facilitated the construction of a threatening population (black). Due to the peculiar labor needs of Greene County, this effect should be more immediate and intense in Greene County than in Whitfield County. Third, the tone of crime control claims should become more condemnatory during sustained economic crises in both counties. Finally, the racial disparity in tone of claims should select the behavior of black offenders as particularly threatening during economic crises. This relationship should be more immediate in Greene County than in Whitfield County because of its larger black population.

#### *National Political Campaigns*

During the late nineteenth century, politics was an important feature of southern social and economic relations. Ties between northern businessmen and southern legislatures helped account for the tremendous expansion of prison populations in late 1870s as legislatures were pressured by planters to address the unreliability of labor supply in the South (Adamson 1983). Often with motives of its own, legislatures sought to retain legitimacy and rebuild their coffers decimated by the Civil War thereby instituting convict lease systems throughout Georgia (Myers 1998). This system worked in tandem with other methods such as Black codes, vagrancy laws, peonage and sharecropping statutes to secure black subordination (Sellin 1976). However, white dominance was regularly tested by national elections wherein the extension of suffrage to blacks was a regular Republican



campaign theme. Consequently, law and order issues and a subsequent criminalization of a threatening population attended postbellum election events (Bartley 1983; Duncan 1986; Sterling 1994).

Hall et al. (1978), Beckett (1997) and Beckett and Sasson (2001) indicate that elites are able to promote favored issues through the media. Inasmuch as editors and reporters were drawn from the class of individuals with a stake in preserving the political status quo in postbellum Greene and Whitfield counties, several effects of campaigns upon crime control claims are expected. First, national elections should generate increases in the level of crime control claims. Second and relatedly, elections should make black crime more salient. Third, the tone of crime control claims should become more condemnatory during elections. Finally, elections should generate a racial disparity in tone of claims that selects the behavior of black offenders as particularly threatening. In terms of saliency and racial disparity, I expect that political effects will be stronger in the earlier decades in Greene County and in the latter decades in Whitfield County because of the different timing of political threat. That is, black political threat was probably effectively controlled by the 1880s in the plantation counties but the Populist movement may have re-focused the energies of whites in delegitimizing black claims for citizenship in Upcountry counties like Whitfield. Due to a lagged effect of political campaigns on media discourse (Beckett 1997), effects may be both immediate and delayed by as many as fifteen months.

#### *Price of Cotton*

The economic model of punishment argues that labor surpluses influence the severity of punishment a society adopts. Labor surplus is typically operationalized as

unemployment or indices of gross national product (GNP). In a 19<sup>th</sup> century agrarian context, this critical concept is captured by the price of cotton. Figure 4.5 presents the 30-year trends in the annual price (cents) per pound of cotton. The measure is deflated, removing its inflationary component and presented in a constant dollar amount. Falling prices throughout this period suggested that planters and small farmers, black and white, were increasingly debt-strapped.

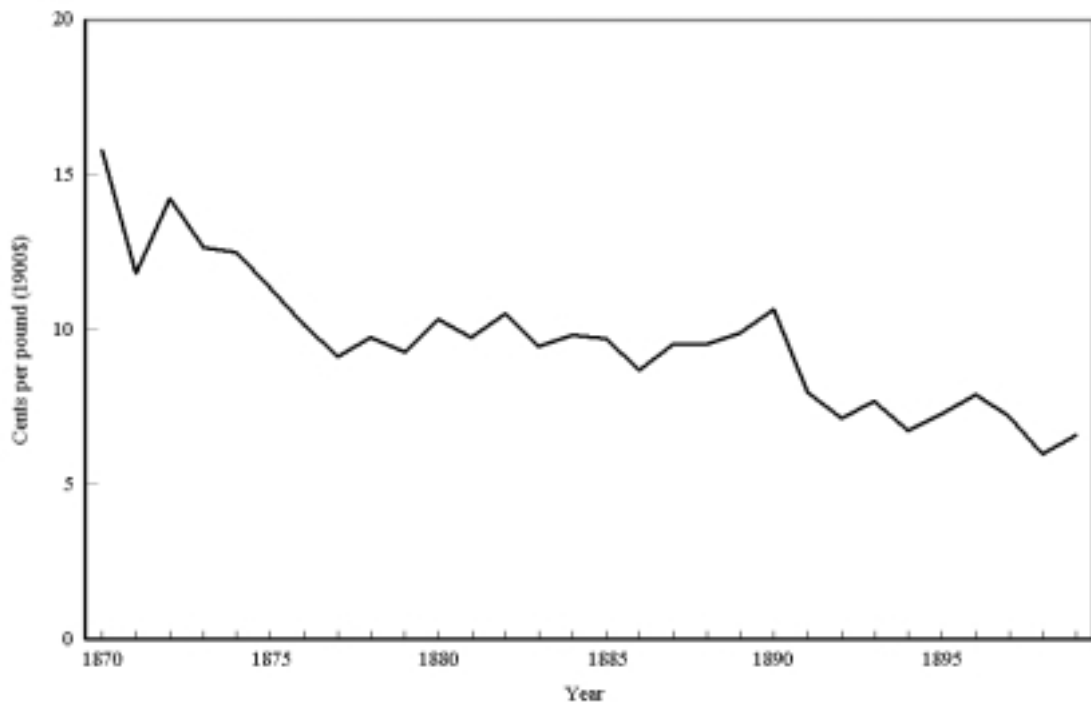


Figure 4.5. Price of Cotton

As noted in Chapter 3, the literature establishes a link between declining cotton prices and punitive social discourse. For example, Myers (1991) found that declining cotton prices increased the rate at which both blacks and whites were incarcerated in Georgia. Similarly, Beck and Tolnay (1990) found that lethal mob violence against blacks increased whenever inflationary rates of cotton eroded real income. The expectation here is that as cotton prices decline, the level of crime control claims in Greene and Whitfield County newspapers will increase. The second expectation is that declining cotton prices will facilitate the construction of a problem population (black) which had to be controlled. Third, the tone of crime control claims should become more condemnatory as cotton prices fall. Finally, the racial disparity in tone should target the behavior of black offenders as more threatening. Again, these relationships between the price of cotton and crime claims should be most evident and most immediate in Greene than in Whitfield County because of its firm involvement in the cotton economy.

#### *Relative Size of the Black Population*

Blalock's (1967) economic threat hypothesis contends that competition results from perceived minority group threat to the established supremacy of dominant economic elites. Chapter 3 established the link between a cotton economy threatened by the emancipation of its slaves and concomitant issues of profitability, labor shortages, and social divisions constructed around race and threat perceptions. Researchers in the threat tradition have found that the relative size of the black population in the South was tightly linked with the frequency of lynching (Beck and Tolnay 1990; Tolnay, Deane, and Beck 1996). Noting however that minority presence may also be a resource (Adamson 1983),

research has shown that diminishing minority population predicts increases in legal social control (Myers 1990b, 1993, 1998). Table 4.3 presents comparative data on the relative size of the black population in Greene County and in Whitfield County.

Table 4.3 Relative Size of the Black Population

	1870	1880	1890	1900
Percent Black				
Greene	65.49	68.24	68.73	67.81
Whitfield	14.94	18.57	14.94	12.59

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900. Washington, DC.

The relative size of the black population in Greene County remained remarkably stable across the thirty year period due to black growth off-set by concomitant increases in the white population base. Nonetheless, there is some evidence that Greene County was becoming progressively “blacker” as the 20<sup>th</sup> century dawned. In contrast, with the exception of a surge in black population in the 1880s, the relative size of the black population in Whitfield County continued to diminish over time. This was due to larger annual increases in the white population than in the black population; perhaps due to a combination of white emigration and increasing white intolerance of minority presence. In short, Whitfield County was getting progressively “whiter” as the 20<sup>th</sup> century dawned. Table 4.3 suggests that the relative size of the black population in postbellum Georgia operated as expected: increasing in tandem with the labor intensive demands of a cotton economy in Greene County but decreasing in the volatile atmosphere of the Upcountry.

Within the economic threat tradition, the relative size of the black population has important implications for punishment and punitive social discourse but its implications are complicated by the dual nature of threat. Tolnay, Beck, and Massey (1989) as well as Myers (1998) observe that perceptions of blacks depended upon whose interests were at stake. For poor and working class whites, competing blacks represented a threat to wages and social status. Having little left to defend but their color, status threats fueled decades of white-on-black lethal terror. However, elite whites, who played central roles in promoting the fear of poor whites on its own behalf (Nash 1973; Wilson 1978; Beck and Tolnay 1990; Redding 1992; Tomaskovic-Devey and Roscigno 1996), were hurt by declines in black population. Hence, one might see percentage black registering positive and negative effects depending upon whose interests are considered. In Greene County, decreases in the relative size of the black population should escalate the level of crime control claims and generate the construction of blacks as threatening. The tone of crime control claims should become more condemnatory as black presence decreases. Last, the racial disparity in condemnatory tone of claims targeting blacks should become larger as the relative size of black population declines. That is, the condemnatory tone of black crime control claims should increase as their relative presence decreases. These relationships between relative size and the nature of crime control claims in Greene County are generated by the labor intensive needs of plantation capitalism.

The converse is expected in Whitfield. Here, decreases in the relative size of the black population should decrease the level of crime control claims and should moderate the construction of blacks as threatening. The tone of crime control claims should become

less condemnatory as black presence decreases. Finally, the racial disparity in tone of claims targeting blacks should become smaller as well. These relationships between relative size of the black population and crime control claims in Whitfield are due to diminished threats to white privilege that declining minority populations engender.

### *Racial Inequality*

This measure was constructed by dividing the per capita value of white-owned property by the per capita value of black-owned property, in constant 1900 dollars. As a measure of inequality, it is important for two reasons. First, land and property ownership were the basis of political and social power in the agrarian South (Tomascovic-Devey and Roscigno 1996). Second, inequality has implications for punishment and social discourse.

As an indicator of economic threat, researchers have found that as inequality diminished, extralegal violence escalated (Corzine, Huff-Corzine, and Creech 1988; Soule 1992). The escalation in extralegal social control is attributed to blacks competing successfully for land, political, and social equality. In the arena of legal social control, however, diminishing inequality allowed blacks to avoid incarceration while increasing white vulnerability to legal social control (Myers 1990, 1991, 1998). The economic threat hypothesis also suggests that as threat escalates, so should punitive social discourse. But inequality was experienced differently in Greene than in Whitfield County and thus registered different meanings.

With ratios as high as 72:1 in the 1880s, Figure 4.6 shows extremes in black/white per capita wealth in Greene County over the 30-year period. To the extent that inequality was an index of elite dominance, these extremes should generate a climate of well-being at

least for elite whites and thus moderate the construction of threat. There is evidence that the gap in inequality began to narrow, however, suggesting that white economic dominance was increasingly challenged by blacks as the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to a close. Specifically, racial inequality registered a 61 percent decline in Greene County, from 59:1 in 1874 to 36:1 by 1899. In contrast, inequality in Whitfield County was less pronounced (though still substantial) in the early years (20:1 in 1874), declining by 40 percent in the waning years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (8:1 by 1899). This trend suggests that the white farmer/tenant/sharecropper was not much more well-off than his black counterpart.

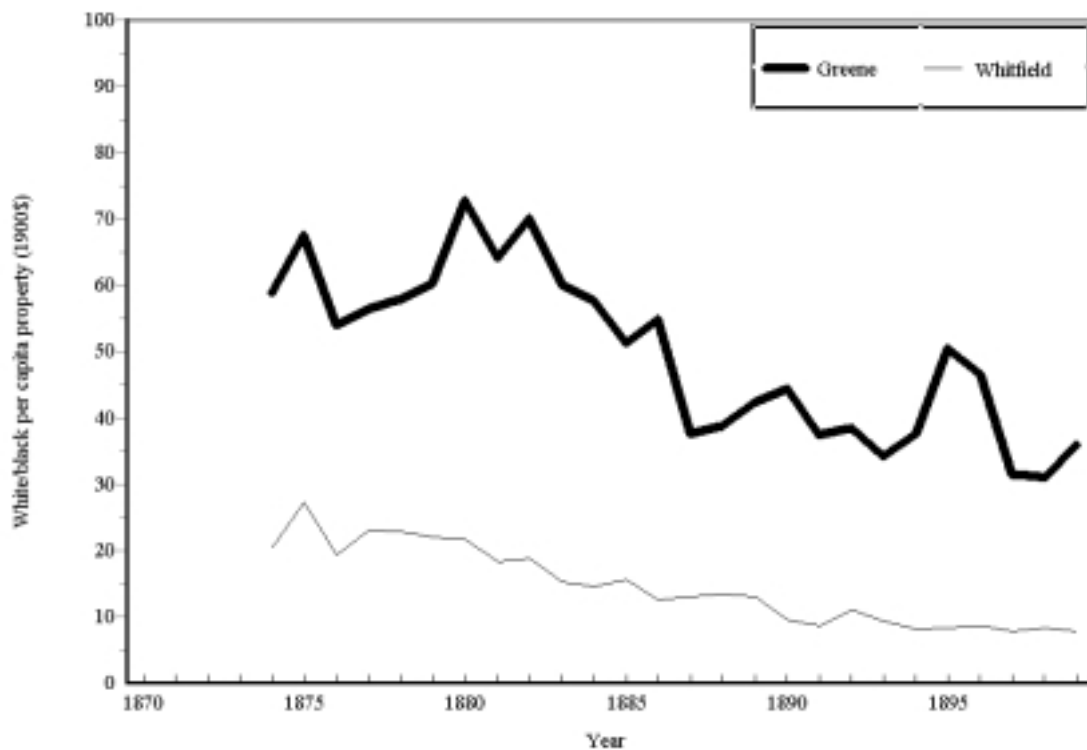


Figure 4.6 Racial Inequality

Diminishing inequality should have similar effects in both contexts but for different reasons. Declines in inequality should generate increases in the level of crime control claims and in the construction of blacks as threatening. Third, the tone of crime control claims should become more condemnatory as inequality decreases. Last, the racial disparity in the tone of claims targeting blacks should become larger. That is, the condemnatory tone of black crime control claims should increase as inequality decreases. Furthermore, the relationships between racial inequality and the nature of crime claims will be more immediate and intense in Whitfield County than in Greene County due to the smaller threshold of threat that near-levels of equality generated in the former.

Again, these effects had different causes. In Greene County, inequality may have been an index of how successfully economic elites exerted labor discipline. Diminishing inequality in this context suggested a loss of economic dominance and concomitant escalation in crime control claims. However, declines in inequality in Whitfield contributed to a generalized climate of anxiety and status threat, conditions equally conducive to punitive social discourse.

### **Control Measure**

To support the argument that media discourse on crime was a function of structural conditions and not of crime, a surrogate measure of crime was constructed. It is the percentage of males in the population aged 18-44 years. A percentage measure of the rate of crime is preferable to one using the number of young males in the population because the former statistic allows the comparison of the two counties over time and/or at the same point in time. Admittedly, however, this measure is a crude index of the crime rate and



overestimates the rate of crime, but other indexes are sorely absent in historical research.

U.S. crime statistics were not officially collected until the 1930s (Barkan 2001).

Consequently, the historical researcher has had to rely upon imperfect measures of the

crime rate. Statistics at the county level can be gleaned from records of indictments, but

this codification does not exist for Greene and Whitfield Counties. Ayers (1984)

presented brief data on the numbers and percentages of indictments, by offense and/or by

race in Greene and Whitfield counties, but he aggregated these data. Furthermore, even if

indictment data were available, it is likely that they are a product of the same structural

conditions producing crime control claims.

Table 4.4 presents comparative data on the relative size of the young male population. As the population most prone to engage in criminal activity, there appears to be only slight changes in both counties.

Table 4.4 Relative Size of the Young Male Population

	1870	1880	1890	1900
Percent Young Male				
Greene	17.25	16.60	15.37	15.45
Whitfield	16.15	16.94	15.81	17.33

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900. Washington, DC.

The relative size of the young male population declined in Greene County over the 30-year span; the reverse was true in Whitfield County. Taken in conjunction with the relative size of the black population, Greene County became “blacker” and older as the 19<sup>th</sup> century concluded; Whitfield County became “whiter” and younger.

Decreases in the relative size of the young male population should decrease the level of crime control claims and the construction of blacks as threatening. Crime control claims should become less condemnatory as the relative number of young males in the population decreases. Last, the racial disparity in tone of claims targeting blacks should become smaller as the relative size of young male population declines.

### **Analytic Techniques**

The analysis uses time series regression to confirm the impressions of the relationships discussed in the previous sections. ARIMA models, Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (McCleary and Hay 1980; also referred to as the Box-Jenkins approach) are built from the data and assume that random shocks (“white noise”) drive the observations. Thus, by integrating the shocks and modeling the underlying continuous process, the researcher can draw inferences about the independent impact of specific events and incremental social changes. The ARIMA technique assumes that (1) the most important determinant of any observation is a current stimulus; (2) current observations are determined to a lesser extent by a prior stimulus; (3) current observations are also determined to a lesser extent by a prior observation; and (4) current observations may be determined in part by stimuli and observations more remote in time (McCleary and Hay 1980). In other words, and importantly, the effects of past events on current observations are assumed to diminish exponentially over time but with some residual effects. With ARIMA modeling, therefore, we are able to assess the timing, direction, and magnitude of impact of events and social changes and determine the persistence of effects over time.

The first stage of the analysis, intervention analysis, assesses the impact of economic crises and national political campaigns on crime control claims. The multivariate stage of the analysis assesses the impact of incremental social change such as the price of cotton, percentage black, racial inequality, and percentage young males.

### Intervention Analysis

The first step in assessing the impact of economic crises and national political campaigns is the identification of cross-correlation functions (CCFs). The CCF is a standardized measure with a range between -1 and +1. It represents between-series correlation of a current stimulus and past, present, and future values of a series of observations. The cross-correlation function allows us to assess the direction of a relationship (positive or negative), its magnitude, its timing, and its duration. For this measure to be accurate, the input series (shocks or events) and the output series (time observations) must be stationary in variance and level.

Stationarity implies that the observations have both a stable variance and exhibit no trend or drift. To determine if the variance was stable, I logged each input and output series and compared the error sum of squares with the unlogged series. In each instance, logging reduced the variance substantially. Log transformation was thus required to stabilize the variance and was done for each series.

To ascertain the presence of drift or trend in a series, I estimated an autocorrelation function for each series. This function measures within-series correlation. Persistent autocorrelations suggest that the time observations may not be trendless and therefore tend to drift away from an expected value. Where this occurred, I took the first difference of

the series and re-examined the autocorrelation function. As indicated by the process ( $X_t - X_{t-1}, X_{t-1} - X_{t-2}, \dots$ ), differencing assigns equal weight to all of the observations by removing the prior inputs from the current observation and leaves an observation that is random. Among the output series, first differencing was required for one series: the level of crime control claims in Greene County. All remaining output series fluctuated around their expected level (mean) and did not require differencing. Each input series required differencing; several were modeled as first-order autoregressive processes to remove the remaining autocorrelations.<sup>1</sup>

Once the series were rendered stationary in variance and level, cross-correlation functions were estimated and inspected for significant impacts of events. The most common impact was represented by a single significant cross-correlation. Using the significant cross-correlation as a guide, I estimated zero-order transfer functions,  $\omega X_{t-1}$ . The parameter  $\omega$  estimates the direction and magnitude of the impact, while the subscript denotes its timing. Only estimates that both were significant and contributed substantially (>2%) to reducing unexplained variance were included in final intervention models.

### Multivariate Analysis

The second stage of the analysis examined the relationship between crime control claims and the four social change series. The analysis proceeded in much the same way as the intervention analysis: examining cross-correlation functions and estimating the relationships using the zero-order transfer functions. In three instances, data were derived from the residuals of the intervention analysis and had the effect of modeling the social change effects net of the impacts of events. These series were: the level of crime control

claims and racial disparity in claims in Greene County and racial disparity in claims in Whitfield County.

### **Conclusion**

Crime control claims in the public domain fluctuated quickly and dramatically across the 30-year time span of this project. As discussed earlier, this sort of fluctuation may reflect factors other than the rate of crime. ARIMA modeling allows us to identify the effects of both specific events and structural changes. Chapter 5 presents the results of the intervention stage of this analytic strategy, using economic crises and national political campaigns as explanatory events. What I find is that under selected conditions, certain crime control claims are predicted. Specifically, these conditions require acute and extensive economic crises and contested political events. The claims most vulnerable to these structural influences are those which disproportionately target the activities of black offenders for condemnation.

## CHAPTER 5

### INTERVENTION ANALYSIS

Chapter 4 indicates that context mattered in the generation of crime control claims. The rugged, predominantly white, historically violent Upcountry county of Whitfield registered almost twice as much coverage of crime control events as did the plantation county of Greene. Race played an important part in the construction of crime control claims, especially in Greene County. Both contexts produced condemnatory accounts in excess of sympathetic accounts but in Greene County, condemnation appeared particularly reserved for black offenders. Crime appeared to be not just black but threatening as well. All trends fluctuated dramatically across time and appeared to coincide at some point or another with recurrent economic crises and political events.

ARIMA modeling procedures were used to confirm these impressions and the results are presented in this chapter. First, however, I review the hypotheses guiding this project. Next, I present the results of analysis that estimates the effects of economic crises and political events on crime control claims. A discussion of the findings concludes the chapter.

#### **Review of Hypotheses**

Two sets of hypotheses, each with a subset of four expectations for crime control claims, guided this analysis. The first set of hypotheses examines economic crises. The

expectations are that economic crises should increase the level of crime control claims, the salience of black crime control claims, the condemnatory tone of crime control claims, and the racial disparity in tone. These effects will be stronger and more immediate in Greene County than in Whitfield County. The rationale for this difference lies in the former's embeddedness in an externally-driven economic system based on cotton. The second set of hypotheses examines political effects. The expectations are that elections should increase the level of crime control claims, the salience of black crime control claims, the condemnatory tone of claims, and the racial disparity in tone. In terms of saliency and racial disparity, I expect the timing of election impacts to vary by context. Political effects should be more immediate and intense in the earlier decades in Greene County and more immediate and intense in Whitfield in the latter decades. The rationale for this difference lies in the fact that the political threat blacks posed was effectively controlled by the mid-1880s in the plantation counties. In the Upcountry, the Populist movement re-focused the energies of whites in delegitimizing black claims for citizenship as the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to a close (Bartley 1983).

### **Level of Crime Control Claims**

Table 5.1 presents the results of the significant cross-correlation functions (CCFs) between economic crises and the level of crime control claims. Of the seven economic depressions and/or recessions, only two were significantly cross-correlated with the level of crime control claims in Greene County. Both occurred in the “heartbreaking nineties” (Arnett [1922] 1967: 156), but only one operated as expected. Contrary to expectation, the Recession of 1890 lowered the level of crime control claims. The longer and more severe

Depression of 1893 increased coverage as expected. Also as predicted, both impacts were immediate.

Table 5.1 Cross-correlations between events and level of crime control claims

Event	Greene County CCF <sub>lag</sub>	Whitfield County CCF <sub>lag</sub>
Depressions/Recessions		
1873-1879	-.01 <sub>6</sub>	-.43 <sub>6</sub> <sup>*</sup>
1890-1891	-.36 <sub>0</sub> <sup>*</sup>	-.12 <sub>0</sub>
1893-1894	.39 <sub>0</sub> <sup>*</sup>	-.33 <sub>1</sub> <sup>*</sup>
1895-1897	-.00 <sub>0</sub>	-.38 <sub>0</sub> <sup>*</sup>
Elections		
1884	-.38 <sub>1</sub> <sup>*</sup>	.26 <sub>1</sub>
1888	-.37 <sub>2</sub> <sup>*</sup>	-.12 <sub>2</sub>
1892	.39 <sub>1</sub> <sup>*</sup>	-.33 <sub>2</sub> <sup>*</sup>

\* p <.05

In Whitfield County, three economic crises were associated with lower rather than higher levels of crime control coverage. In two instances, the cross-correlations were quite large and, as expected, delayed. The longest delay was with the Panic of 1873 with negative effects not registering until the last year of the depression (1879). Indeed, crime control claims responded to the severity of crises, with severe depressions moderating claims to a greater extent than milder recessions. The severe Depression of 1893



immediately augmented the level of claims in Greene County, but reduced the level of claims in Whitfield County one year later.

Table 5.1 indicates that three election years were strongly related to the level of crime control claims in Greene County. Only the 1892 election exerted the expected influence. The Election of 1884 had a one-year delayed effect but contrary to expectation, it muted coverage. The Election of 1888 also muted coverage, two years later. The Election of 1892 did increase coverage but the relationship was later than expected. Also, both the 1888 and the 1892 Election cross-correlations could be attributed to the economic crises of 1890 and 1893. Thus, the independent effects of political campaigns is difficult to gauge in this instance.

In Whitfield County, only one election registered a significant cross-correlation and it operated contrary to expectation. The Election of 1892 appeared to suppress the coverage of crime after a two year delay. The intensity of the relationships was felt far more in Greene than in Whitfield County.

Of the significant cross-correlations discussed thus far, only three generated impacts of substantive significance. Table 5.2 estimates these effects, all of which occurred in Greene County. As expected, the acute Depression of 1893 significantly increased crime control claims, reducing the unexplained variance by almost 7 percent. In contrast, the milder Recession of 1890 and the one-year delayed reaction to the Election of 1884 had smaller and negative impacts upon coverage. Together, these three events reduced the unexplained variance by almost 19 percent.

Table 5.2 Impact of events on level of crime control claims in Greene County

Event	Transfer Function	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model Full
1890 -1891 Recession	$\tilde{\omega}_0$	-1.04 (-1.90)			-1.04 (-2.21)
1893 - 1894 Depression	$\tilde{\omega}_0$		1.23 (2.30)		1.23 (2.61)
1884 Election	$\tilde{\omega}_1$			-1.07 (-1.95)	-1.07 (-2.27)
Original SSE		.58	.58	.58	.58
Model SSE		.55	.54	.55	.47
% Reduction in SSE		5.17%	6.90%	5.17%	18.97%

Note: t-values are in parenthesis. SSE denotes error sum of squares.

### Black Crime Control Claims

Table 5.3 presents the significant cross-correlation functions (CCFs) between economic crises and black crime control claims. Of the seven economic depressions and/or recessions, only one was significantly cross-correlated with black crime control claims. Contrary to expectation, the onset of the Panic of 1873 reduced black crime control claims and the reduction was most intense in Whitfield County. For the remaining decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, economic crises had no effect.

I also expected that elections would increase the saliency of black crime and that this impact should be stronger in the earlier decades in Greene County and in the latter decades in Whitfield. In Greene County, only the 1884 election was associated with an

elevation in saliency of black crime control claims, after a delay of one year. The remaining electoral events had no relationship.

Table 5.3 Cross-correlations between events and black crime control claims

Event	Greene County CCF <sub>lag</sub>	Whitfield County CCF <sub>lag</sub>
Depressions/Recessions		
1873-1879	-.32 <sub>0</sub>	-.43 <sub>0</sub> *
Elections		
1872	-.31 <sub>1</sub>	-.43 <sub>1</sub> *
1884	.36 <sub>1</sub> *	-.25 <sub>1</sub>
1896	.04 <sub>0</sub>	.39 <sub>0</sub> *

\* p <.05

In Whitfield, the Election of 1872 reduced the saliency of black crime claims one year later, contrary to expectation. Only the 1896 Populist election generated the expected increase in black crime control claims. Unfortunately, both cross-correlations coincided with economic crises and are confounded for that reason. None of the cross-correlations generated significant transfer functions upon estimation (results not shown). Hence, neither economic crises nor political events predicted significant changes in the saliency of black crime control claims.

### Condemnatory Crime Control Claims

Table 5.4 indicates that virtually no economic crises were associated with increases in the condemnatory tone of crime control claims in either context. In Greene County,

tone was unaffected by the enduring Panic of 1873 and by the destabilizing events in the 1890s. Contrary to expectation, the Panic of 1873 suppressed condemnatory tone in Whitfield County. Again, the suppression was not felt until the latter years of the depression.

In Greene County, tone responded to election campaigns, generally within a year, but the effect was sometimes surprising. The 1880 election muted the condemnatory rhetoric of claims. The following election year (1884) in which the level of crime control claims were reduced was associated with an escalation in tone, as expected. But when the level of crime control claims escalated during the 1892 Populist threat, condemnatory tone was intensely suppressed. Each of these effects can be traced to an election since they did not coincide with an economic depression or recession.

In Whitfield County, there was a significant cross-correlation between the Election of 1876 and condemnatory crime control claims. This election suppressed claims, delayed by two years. However, the cross-correlation coincided with the prolonged Panic of 1873 and cannot be interpreted as an independent relationship. None of these significant cross-correlations yielded transfer functions that were statistically significant or made noteworthy reductions in unexplained variance (results not shown).

Table 5.4 Cross-correlations between events and condemnatory crime control claims

Event	Greene County CCF <sub>lag</sub>	Whitfield County CCF <sub>lag</sub>
Depressions/Recessions		
1873-1879	.19 <sub>5</sub>	-.45 <sub>5</sub> *
Elections		
1876	.18 <sub>2</sub>	-.46 <sub>2</sub> *
1880	-.54 <sub>1</sub> *	-.24 <sub>1</sub>
1884	.34 <sub>1</sub> *	-.05 <sub>1</sub>
1892	-.51 <sub>0</sub> *	.02 <sub>0</sub>

\* p < .05

### Racial Disparity in Condemnatory Tone

Thus far, economic crises and elections seldom predicted black crime control claims or condemnatory tone. Nonetheless, the interaction of these two aspects of coverage is captured by the final output series, racial disparity in condemnatory tone. Table 5.5 presents the significant CCFs between economic and political events and racial disparity in condemnatory tone. While most events had little or no association with racial disparity, there were more exceptions to this rule in Greene than in Whitfield County.

Strong associations were evident in three of seven economic crises in Greene County and in two of seven crises in Whitfield County. Similarly, five of seven national elections suggested significant causal relationships in Greene County, but only

two in Whitfield County. Nonetheless, cross-correlations in both contexts identified significant transfer function relationships.

Table 5.5 Cross-correlations between events and racial disparity in condemnatory tone

Event	Greene County CCF <sub>lag</sub>	Whitfield County CCF <sub>lag</sub>
Depressions/Recessions		
1873-1879	.33 <sub>2</sub> <sup>*</sup>	.44 <sub>3</sub> <sup>*</sup>
1887-1888	-.35 <sub>0</sub> <sup>*</sup>	.01 <sub>0</sub>
1890-1891	.33 <sub>1</sub> <sup>*</sup>	-.02 <sub>1</sub>
1893-1894	-.01 <sub>1</sub>	.52 <sub>1</sub> <sup>*</sup>
Elections		
1872	.33 <sub>3</sub> <sup>*</sup>	.04 <sub>3</sub>
1876	.01 <sub>0</sub>	.43 <sub>0</sub> <sup>*</sup>
1880	.30 <sub>1</sub> <sup>*</sup>	.14 <sub>1</sub>
1884	.33 <sub>2</sub> <sup>*</sup>	-.02 <sub>2</sub>
1888	.33 <sub>3</sub> <sup>*</sup>	-.02 <sub>3</sub>
1892	-.47 <sub>0</sub> <sup>*</sup>	-.52 <sub>2</sub> <sup>*</sup>

\* p < .05

Table 5.6 confirms that six events predicted racial disparity in tone in Greene County. The estimates indicate that the Panic of 1873 escalated racial disparity in crime control claims in Greene County. The impact was delayed by two years and unlike crime control coverage in general (table 5.1) the effect was strong and positive. However, the

remaining economic crises had mixed results. Contrary to expectation, the milder Recession of 1887 immediately suppressed the racial disparity in tone. The slightly more acute Recession of 1890 had predictable results, however, increasing the racial disparity in tone as the recession neared its end. In all, these three economic events reduced the unexplained variance by almost 9 percent (not shown). The depression and recessions in the latter 1890s were unrelated to racial disparity in tone.

In five of the seven elections under consideration, significant CCFs were obtained; four of these are in the expected direction. Three of these events existed independently of economic crises and attained significant transfer function upon estimation. The Election of 1880 was associated with an increase in racial disparity in tone one year later. The following national election of 1884 also was associated with an increase two years later. In contrast, the national election of 1892 suppressed racial disparity in tone. Of the three events, the election of 1892 had the most dramatic impact and immediately suppressed racial disparity. Together, elections accounted for more variation in racial disparity in tone than did economic crises (11.3%).

Table 5.6 Impact of events on racial disparity in condemnatory tone in Greene County

Event	Transfer Function	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Full Model
1873 - 1879 Depression	$\tilde{\omega}_2$	2.30 (2.06)						2.30 (3.38)
1887 - 1888 Recession	$\tilde{\omega}_0$		-1.71 (-1.52)					-1.71 (-2.51)
1890 - 1891 Recession	$\tilde{\omega}_1$			2.30 (2.09)				2.30 (3.38)
1880 Election	$\tilde{\omega}_1$				2.12 (1.90)			2.12 (3.10)
1884 Election	$\tilde{\omega}_2$					2.30 (2.06)		2.30 (3.38)
1892 Election	$\tilde{\omega}_0$						-2.41 (-2.23)	-2.41 (-3.61)
Original SSE		1.15	1.15	1.15	1.15	1.15	1.15	1.15
Model SSE		1.12	1.13	1.10	1.12	1.12	1.80	.67
%Reduction in SSE		2.61%	1.74%	4.35%	2.61%	2.61%	6.09%	41.74%

Note: t-values are in parenthesis. SSE denotes error sum of squares.



In Whitfield County, a simpler picture emerged. Table 5.7 presents the results of the transfer function estimation. Both the Panic of 1873 and the Depression of 1893 predicted strong upsurges in condemnatory tone “favoring” blacks. In other words, extended economic crises targeted black crime as disproportionately threatening. These two events accounted for 39 percent of the variation in racial disparity with the later depression explaining much more than the earlier event. Significant cross-correlations between the elections of 1876 and 1892 are confounded with the Panic of 1873 and the Depression of 1893. Consequently, these election effects were not estimated.

Table 5.7 Impact of events on racial disparity in condemnatory tone in Whitfield County

Event	Transfer Function	Model 1	Model 2	Full Model
1873 - 1879 Depression	$\tilde{\omega}_3$	1.99 (3.04)		1.99 (4.11)
1893 Depression	$\tilde{\omega}_1$		2.30 (3.87)	2.30 (4.76)
Original SSE		.79	.79	.79
Model SSE		.66	.57	.48
% Reduction in SSE		16.46%	25.32%	39.24%

Note: t-values are in parenthesis. SSE denotes error sum of squares.

## Discussion

The results of the intervention analysis indicated that economic crises had no consistent impacts on crime control claims. Nonetheless, notable exceptions existed

which suggest that claims responded to crises at significant points in time. Furthermore, the analysis indicated that the nature of the impact depended upon the context.

The first set of expectations for this project involved economic crises and the level of crime control claims, the saliency of black crime, the condemnatory tone of claims, and racial disparity in tone. First, it was expected that economic crises would increase the level of crime control claims and that this increase would be more immediately and more intensely felt in Greene than in Whitfield County. This hypothesis received mixed support. In fact, most crises had little or no impact on this output series. However, notable exceptions suggest that the duration and severity of crises mattered. Extended crises in the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century escalated the level of crime control claims in Greene County but suppressed claims in Whitfield County. In fact, the longer the economic crises, the more intensely suppressed were claims. Overall, crime was given less attention during economic downturns in Upcounty Whitfield County. This suppression is interesting. Although Whitfield County engaged in a relatively large amount of discourse on crime and its control during this time span, its coverage appeared to moderate during the most severe economic crises. As expected, the effects of economic crises on claims tended to be more immediate in Greene County than in Whitfield. This is attributed to its being more firmly enmeshed in an external economic system.

Media studies suggest that election campaigns politicize crime, elevating its overall salience (Beckett 1997). Therefore, I expected that elections would raise the level of crime control claims. This prediction received virtually no support. Most national elections actually suppressed the level of crime control claims in the news. This was true

in both contexts. One notable exception was the Populist threat during the Election of 1892 which elevated crime control claims in Greene County. This effect was confounded with an economic crisis, however.

I also expected that black crime control claims would become more salient during economic crises and political events and that this response would be more immediate and more intense in Greene than in Whitfield County. These hypotheses received no support. Neither economic crises nor political events predicted significant changes in the salience of black crime control claims. This was quite surprising because I expected that Greene County's large black population would be a target for a disproportionate presence in crime control accounts during economic crises and electoral events.

I also expected that the timing of political effects would vary by context as well. In the earlier decades in Greene County, blacks were actively advocating for the right to vote. In the latter decades in Whitfield County, black votes were potentially pivotal during Populist challenges to Democratic control. Historians note that politicians and other officials often used crime to delegitimize the black civil rights agenda during the postbellum decades (Bartley 1983; Duncan 1986; Sterling 1994). Therefore, the political threat hypothesis (Blalock 1967) led me to expect an increase saliency of black crime during these periods. This expectation received no support.

The hypothesis that crime control claims would become more condemnatory in tone during economic crises and elections, especially in Greene County also received no support. Tone did not respond to the onset or severity of economic crises in either context. In Greene County, condemnatory tone was strongly associated with several national

elections in both early and late postbellum decades but relationships were often contrary to expectation. Furthermore, none of the relationships produced significant transfer functions. In Whitfield, an early campaign (Election of 1876) was associated with a suppression of tone but it too failed to produce a significant transfer function.

Finally, I expected that the racial disparity in tone would increase during economic crises and elections, especially in Greene County. I also expected political effects to vary by the timing of threat – increasing racial disparity during earlier decades in Greene County and later in Whitfield County. These hypotheses received some support.

In Greene County, of the numerous strong cross-correlations between economic crises and political elections, six events predicted significant changes in racial disparity in claims: three economic events and three political elections. Upsurges in racial disparity in tone were noted in the earliest major depression in the series (Panic of 1873) as well as a second major depression in the 1890s (Depression of 1890). Only the milder Recession of 1887 suppressed disparity. There was also good and early support for the effects of election campaigns, with elections accounting for more variation in racial disparity in tone than economic crises. The Elections of 1880 and 1884 increased racial disparity in tone. A third election (1892) suppressed it. Examining the timing of threat, the significant effect of the Election of 1892 is interesting. According to Bartley (1983), Populism in Georgia, led by Tom Watson, forced Georgia Democrats in 1892 to appeal to black voters for support. Their strategy may have been successful inasmuch as Democrat Grover Cleveland, having lost his re-election bid in 1888, regained the presidency in the 1892 elections. The suppression of racial disparity coinciding with the Election of 1892 was,

perhaps, a conciliatory move on the part of Democrats to appeal to black voters in the wake of the Populist threat.

Of all of the series, it is in the effects of economic crises on racial disparity in tone that Whitfield County was most like Greene County. In contrast to Greene County, severe crises typically suppressed general crime coverage and black crime control claims in Whitfield County. Like Greene County, however, acute crises escalated racial disparity in tone. Two economic crises in particular significantly predicted upsurges in racial disparity. Both of these events were major depressions (Panic of 1873 and Depression of 1893). In both contexts, therefore, acute and extended crises rendered black crime as disproportionately threatening although in the case of Greene County, racial disparity in tone was effected by crises of short as well as long duration. The impact of national elections was difficult to gauge in Whitfield County since events were confounded with economic crises and, therefore, not estimated.

All impacts tended to be more immediate in Greene County than in Whitfield County and the multiple sources of structural influences on this series supports the view of Greene County as being more structurally embedded than Whitfield County.

In many instances, then, differences in context produced striking differences in the effects of large scale structural events on crime control claims. Chapter 6 examines the effects of changes in the price of cotton, relative size of the black population, and racial inequality on the generation of crime control claims, net of crime. In contrast to the effects of larger structural events such as economic crises and political elections, crime control

claims are largely independent of incremental social change. One notable exception is the role of inequality in focusing attention upon crime in Greene County.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES**

The previous chapter indicates that postbellum economic crises and national political events seldom predicted changes in the amount and/or substance of media claims of crime. One notable exception was the finding that acute and extended economic crises predicted racial disparity in crime control claims. I also found that racial disparity in tone was predicted by contested national elections in Greene County. For the most part, impacts tended to occur in the more structurally embedded of the two contexts – Greene County, as expected. In this chapter, I examine the effects of smaller incremental social change on crime control claims. In the following sections, I first, review the hypotheses related to the effects of social change. Next, I present the results of multivariate ARIMA modeling procedures. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings.

#### **Review of Hypotheses**

Four sets of hypotheses, each with a subset of four expectations for crime control claims, guided this stage of the analysis. The first set of hypotheses examines the effects of the price of cotton. The expectations are that decreases in the price of cotton should increase the level of crime control claims, the salience of black crime control claims, the condemnatory tone of claims, and the racial disparity in tone. I expect that these effects

will be stronger and more immediate in Greene County than in Whitfield County because of the former's settled link to the cotton economy.

The second set of hypotheses pertains to the relative size of the black population. In Greene County, I expect that as the relative size of the black population decreases, the level of crime control claims, the salience of black crime control claims, the condemnatory tone of claims, and the racial disparity in crime control claims will increase. This effect is due to Greene's historic dependence on black labor and the threat to the labor supply that a diminishing black population invoked. However, decreases in the size of the black population in predominantly white Whitfield County might reduce competition for scarce resources (land, status, etc.) and contribute to an overall sense of well-being. Therefore, I expect that as the relative size of the black population decreases, the level of crime control claims, the salience of black crime control claims, the condemnatory tone of claims, and the racial disparity in tone will decrease. I expect these effects to be stronger and more immediate in Greene County than in Whitfield County.

The third set of hypotheses pertains to racial inequality. To the extent that crime control claims reflect the source of dominant threat in a community, diminishing racial inequality should escalate crime control claims in Greene County and Whitfield County, though for different reasons. For economic elites, diminishing racial inequality could be perceived as a loss of control over scarce labor; small white farmers and poor whites could perceive diminishing inequality as a loss of status. Therefore, I expect that as racial inequality diminishes, the level of crime control claims, the salience of black crime control claims, the condemnatory tone of crime control claims, and the racial disparity in tone will



increase. Furthermore, these effects will be more intensely felt in Whitfield County than in Greene County due to the lower threshold of threat that near-levels of equality possibly established in the former.

The final set of hypotheses predicts the effects of the relative size of the young male population on crime control claims. I expect that decreases in the relative size of the young male population should lower the level of crime control claims, the salience of black crime control claims, the condemnatory tone of crime control claims, and the racial disparity in tone.

### Level of Crime Control Claims

Table 6.1 presents the results of the significant cross-correlation functions (CCFs) between social changes and the level of crime control claims. Racial inequality appears to influence the amount of crime coverage in both counties, though not always as expected. The cross-correlations identified significant transfer functions and the estimates are presented in Table 6.2.

Table 6.1 Cross-correlations between social change and level of crime control claims

Social Change	Greene County CCF <sub>lag</sub>	Whitfield County CCF <sub>lag</sub>
Racial Inequality	.45 <sub>1</sub> * -.47 <sub>2</sub> *	.48 <sub>5</sub> *

\* p < .05

In Greene County, as the economic gap between blacks and whites diminished, the attention given to crime control claims in the media declined, one year later. However, by

the second year, the impact displayed the expected direction with declining inequality escalating the levels of crime control claims. Incorporating racial inequality in the model of crime control claims reduced the unexplained variance by almost nine percent.

In Whitfield County, diminishing racial inequality was unexpectedly related to dramatic reductions in levels of crime control claims but unlike the one year lag in Greene County, this impact was delayed by five years. Incorporating racial inequality in this model of crime control claims reduced the unexplained variance by almost eighty-four percent.

Table 6.2 Impact of social change on level of crime control claims

Social Change	Transfer Function	Greene County	Whitfield County
Racial Inequality	$\omega_a$	.98 (1.87)	1.30 (27.58)
	$\omega_a$	.95 (1.83)	
$\chi^2$ of residuals (p)		2.26 (.89)	3.45 (.75)
Original SSE		.45	3.70
Model SSE		.41	.60
% Reduction in SSE		8.89%	83.78%

Note: t-values are in parenthesis. SSE denotes error sum of squares

<sup>a</sup>For Greene County, the transfer function is  $\omega_1 - \omega_2$ ; for Whitfield County, the transfer function is  $\omega_5$ .

### Black Crime Control Claims

Three social change phenomena – price of cotton, racial inequality, and the relative size of the young male population – were cross-correlated with black crime control claims.

Table 6.3 presents the significant cross-correlations and indicates that dips in cotton prices unexpectedly appeared to reduce the salience of black crime control claims in Greene County. Declines in the young male population also tended to reduce the salience of black crime control claims, as expected. Both relationships were delayed by one year. These cross-correlations generated significant transfer function relationships and will be discussed shortly.

Table 6.3 Cross-correlations between social change and black crime control claims

Social Change	Greene County CCF <sub>lag</sub>	Whitfield County CCF <sub>lag</sub>
Price of Cotton	.32 <sub>1</sub> *	-.50 <sub>4</sub> *
Racial Inequality	-.14 <sub>5</sub>	-.39 <sub>5</sub> *
Percentage Young Male	.32 <sub>1</sub> *	.38 <sub>4</sub> *

\*p <.05

While cotton price displayed an unexpected relationship in Greene County and racial inequality was unimportant, a different picture emerges in Whitfield County. Declining prices and diminishing racial inequality appeared to escalate black crime control claims. These relationships were delayed by four and five years, respectively, but the relationships were as expected. Reductions in the relative size of the young male population also tended to reduce the salience of black crime control claims, as expected. Neither of the CCFs in Whitfield County produced reliable transfer functions, and these results are not shown. Table 6.4 confirms the significant impacts in Greene County.

Declining cotton prices substantially reduced the salience of black crime control claims within a year. As it was expected that declining cotton prices would facilitate the construction of blacks as threatening, this effect is unexpected. Declines in the relative size of the young male population did reduce the salience of black crime control claims within a year, as predicted. Due to the shortness of the series, a single model containing both series could not be estimated.

Table 6.4 Impact of social change on black crime control claims in Greene County

Social Change	Transfer Function	Model 1	Model 2
Price of Cotton	$\omega_1$	1.78 (49.95)	
Percentage Young Male	$\omega_1$		1.45 (104.08)
Noise Component	$\phi$	(a)	
$\chi^2$ of residuals (p)		27.42 (.00)	5.81 (.44)
Original SSE		4.04	4.04
Model SSE		.43	.21
% Reduction in SSE		89.36%	94.80%

Note: t-values are in parenthesis. SSE denotes error sum of squares  
(a) Series was too short to estimate noise component.

### Condemnatory Crime Control Claims

Table 6.5 presents the significant cross-correlations between social change and condemnatory crime control claims. Like black crime control claims, condemnatory crime control claims in Greene County are significantly associated with cotton price and the

relative size of the young male population. The cross-correlations yield significant transfer function relationships and will be discussed shortly. However, an additional influence on condemnatory crime control claims not observed for black crime control claims, is the relative size of the black population. Declining size tends to immediately reduce, not escalate, the condemnatory tone of claims. This is unexpected since it was predicted that declines in this demographic category signals labor scarcity in Greene County and thus escalates the tone of crime control claims.

Table 6.5 Cross-correlations between social change and condemnatory crime control claims

Social Change	Greene County CCF <sub>lag</sub>	Whitfield County CCF <sub>lag</sub>
Price of Cotton	.45 <sub>0</sub> *	.02 <sub>0</sub>
Percentage Black	.37 <sub>0</sub> *	-.34 <sub>4</sub> *
Racial Inequality	.09 <sub>4</sub>	.57 <sub>4</sub> *
Percentage Young Male	.37 <sub>2</sub> *	-.11 <sub>2</sub>

\*p < .05

In Whitfield County, the relative size of the black population also displays surprising tendencies. The significant cross-correlation suggests that as the proportion of blacks in the population declines, associated increases occur in the condemnatory tone of crime control claims. The relationship is delayed by four years and is contrary to expectations. Nonetheless, the cross-correlation for the relative size of the black population failed to generate significant transfer function upon estimation in either county.

Significant cross-correlations for cotton price and young males in the population in Greene County and racial inequality in Whitfield County, however, yielded substantial transfer functions. I will turn now to a discussion of these effects.

It was predicted that declining cotton prices would trigger an escalation in condemnatory crime control claims. This did not occur. Table 6.6 indicates that reductions in the price of cotton immediately and dramatically reduced condemnatory crime control claims in Greene County. The relative size of the young male population also had a significant impact on claims. As expected, decreases in young males substantially moderated the tone of crime control claims after a two year delay. Due to the shortness of the series, a single model containing both series could not be estimated.

After a substantial delay of four years, and contrary to expectations, diminishing racial inequality reduced rather than escalated the condemnatory tone of crime control claims in Whitfield County.

### **Racial Disparity in Condemnatory Tone**

Again, the intersection of black crime control claims and condemnatory tone is captured by the final input series, racial disparity in condemnatory tone. Table 6.7 presents the significant CCFs between social change and racial disparity in condemnatory tone. As with black crime control claims in general, three social change phenomena – price of cotton, racial inequality, and the relative size of the young male population – were cross-correlated with racial disparity in tone.

Table 6.6 Impact of social change on condemnatory crime control claims

Social Change	Transfer Function	Greene County		Whitfield County
		1	2	
Price of Cotton	$\hat{\omega}_0$	1.46 (31.14)		
Racial Inequality	$\hat{\omega}_4$			1.20 (30.61)
Percentage Young Male	$\hat{\omega}_2$		1.18 (31.79)	
Noise component	$\theta_3$			-.52 ( 2.28)
$\chi^2$ of residuals (p)		4.70 ( .58)	4.86 ( .56)	4.85 ( .43)
Original SSE		3.33	3.33	3.34
Model SSE		.58	.55	.50
% Reduction in SSE		82.58%	83.48%	85.03%

Note: t-values are in parenthesis. SSE denotes error sum of squares.

Table 6.7 Cross-correlations between social change and racial disparity in tone

Social Change	Greene County $CCF_{lag}$	Whitfield County $CCF_{lag}$
Price of Cotton	.32 <sub>0</sub> *	-.02 <sub>0</sub>
Racial Inequality	-.19 <sub>3</sub>	.35 <sub>3</sub> *
Percentage Young Male	-.34 <sub>3</sub> *	.23 <sub>3</sub>

\*p < .05

The price of cotton and the relative size of the young male population continue to display unexpected relationships in Greene County. Dips in cotton price tend to immediately moderate rather than escalate racial disparity in tone. Reductions in the relative size of the young male population seem to augment rather than lower the racial disparity in tone, three years later as well. In Whitfield County, racial inequality appeared to exert the lone influence on racial disparity in tone. The relationship suggests, however, that as inequality diminishes, so too did racial disparity in tone. This is contrary to prediction and there was a three year lag in the relationship.

Of the significant cross-correlations, only the price of cotton in Greene County generated impacts of substantive significance. Table 6.8 estimates this effect. Declining cotton prices substantially and immediately reduced the racial disparity in condemnatory tone. This effect is contrary to expectation and reduces the unexplained variance by five percent.

Table 6.8      Impact of social change on racial disparity in condemnatory tone in Greene County

Social Change	Transfer Function	Model
Price of Cotton	$\omega_0$	.09 (1.96)
$\chi^2$ of residuals (p)		3.58 (.73)
Original SSE		.59
Model SSE		.56
% Reduction in SSE		5.08%

Note: t-values are in parenthesis. SSE denotes error sum of squares.



## **Discussion**

The results of the multivariate analysis indicate social change had no consistent effects upon crime control claims. Context clearly shaped the nature and extent of influences.

The first set of expectations involved the price of cotton and crime control claims. I expected that as the price of cotton fell, the level of crime control claims, the salience of black crime control claims, the condemnatory tone of claims, and racial disparity in crime control claims would increase. Furthermore, I expected that these effects would be stronger and more immediate in Greene County than in Whitfield County because of the former's historical dependence upon cotton production. For the most part, the annual price of cotton failed to predict upsurges in the coverage of crime and the nature of the texts. In Upcountry Whitfield County, declining cotton prices tended to increase the salience of black crime control claims after a delay of four years. However, in the former plantation county of Greene, falling cotton prices reduced rather than elevated the salience of black crime control claims, the condemnatory tone of claims, and the racial disparity in tone. As expected, these effects were typically immediate but contrary to expectation.

The second set of hypotheses examined the role of the relative size of the black population in the generation of crime control claims. I expected that decreases in this critical labor pool in Greene County would be perceived as threatening to economic elites and thus generate upsurges in crime coverage, the salience of black crime control claims, the condemnatory tone of crime control claims, and racial disparity in tone. In contrast, I expected that declines in the relative size of the black population would lower crime

coverage, reduce the salience of black crime control claims, moderate condemnatory tone, and suppress racial disparity in tone in Whitfield County. This was not the case. The relative size of the black population was largely ineffective in predicting the number and substance of crime control claims. There was a tendency for declining population ratios to immediately mute the condemnatory tone of claims in Greene County and to trigger condemnatory tone in Whitfield County. However, both relationships are contrary to expectation.

The third set of hypotheses considers the effect of racial inequality on crime control claims. I expected that diminishing racial inequality would constitute economic and/or status threat and would escalate the level of crime control claims, the salience of black crime control claims, the condemnatory tone of claims, and racial disparity in tone. Furthermore, I expected that these effects would be more intensely felt in Whitfield County than in Greene County due to the former's near-levels of black/white equality. This aspect of social change received mixed support.

In Greene County, diminishing racial inequality triggered increased crime coverage in the media. This effect was delayed by two years. Nonetheless, it suggests that as blacks struggled in postbellum Georgia to acquire property and landed status, plantation county elites may have felt threatened by a loss of control over scarce labor. Consequently, this economic threat materialized as a heightened concern for crime in the media. Diminishing racial inequality also tended to increase the salience of black crime control claims after extensive delay (five years) in Whitfield County. For the most part, however, a reduction in the gap between blacks and whites failed to materialize as threat in Whitfield County.

In fact, diminishing racial inequality reduced rather than increased the level of crime control claims and suppressed the condemnatory tone of claims, with a five and four year delay, respectively. It was predicted that as the gap between blacks and whites narrowed, small farmers and poor whites would react punitively to the perceived loss of status that equality engendered. Status threats justified decades of lethal terror in postbellum Georgia (Ayers 1984; Beck et al. 1989; Tolnay et al. 1989; Beck and Tolnay 1990; Tomaskovic-Devey and Roscigno 1996). It is quite possible that unlike economic threat, status threat in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not carried by the media in increased crime control claims.

The final set of hypotheses examined the role of the relative size of the young male population in the generation of crime control claims. I expected that decreases in the size of this demographic group should reduce crime coverage, the salience of black crime control claims, the condemnatory tone of claims, and the racial disparity in tone. These expectations received some support. While exhibiting no influence on crime coverage in general, increases in the relative size of the young male population did augment the saliency of black crime claims and the condemnatory tone of claims in Greene County, with a one and two year delay, respectively. There was also a tendency for black crime to become increasingly salient in Whitfield County four-years after growth in the young male population. Hence, black crime receives more attention in the media as young male predominance increases.

In sum, incremental social change had little or no effect upon the vast majority of crime control claims. When effects were noted, claims were more responsive to incremental social change in Greene County than in Whitfield County. However, in many

instances, the effects were contrary to expectation. Chapter 7 achieves a synthesis of the results of the intervention and multivariate analyses and discusses the implications of this study for a model of punishment. While the results provide very little support for the contention that vocabularies of punitive motive (as operationalized in this project) reflect structural influences and, thus, elite interests in this 19<sup>th</sup> century context, specific conditions and instances of impact are noteworthy.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Introduction**

In “Punishment and social action: Changing vocabularies of punitive motive within a political business cycle,” Melossi (1985) offers a corrective to Rusche and Kirchheimer’s ([1939] 1968) economic model of punishment. Melossi observes that if business indices such as unemployment move in concert with imprisonment rates, for example, it is not because crime has intervened. He says that something else is going on in the motivational constructs of those individuals entrusted with social control which links the state of the economy to their professional activities. What is missing from the model of punishment, therefore, is this linking mechanism, which Melossi calls “vocabularies of punitive motive.”

Twentieth century literature on the media finds support for a theory of social discourse intervening between crime, social structure, and punishment. These insights were applied to a 19<sup>th</sup> century context. This project, therefore, attempted to substantiate the contention that economic and political interests found concrete expression in social discourse.

Using crime control texts from two postbellum newspapers in Georgia, several hypotheses were generated. Specifically, it was expected that economic crises and

political events facilitated crime control claims and that declining cotton prices and declining racial inequality triggered crime control claims. Additionally, it was expected that changes in the size of the black workforce would generate changes in crime control claims, as well.

The following sections present a synthesis of my findings and discuss the implications of the project for the sociology of media and punishment traditions. The chapter concludes with limitations of the project and comments on further research.

### **Synthesis of Findings**

Chapter 4 indicated that substantial variation in the public discourse on crime and its control occurred over a 30-year period. In accounting for this variation, time-series analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6 identified important structural sources. The findings indicated that while the generation of a discourse on crime cannot be understood as primarily a response to structural factors, several measures of crime control claims are receptive to structural imperatives. It is important to note that each measure responded to a unique set of influences and none reacted to more than a selected number of factors. Consequently, no single event or social change phenomena played a pivotal role across crime control claims or contexts. Making broad generalizations difficult, the inconsistency clearly highlights the need to regard the mediated discourse on crime as a socially situated activity. In other words, the rhetorical environment that gives meaning to crime and produces criminals is likely determined by a constellation of social contextual factors that are historically contingent and changing (Pfohl 1994).

Extended economic crises in the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were decisive influences on the overall salience of crime in the public discourse in Greene County. For example, the acute Depression of 1893 reduced unexplained variance in the level of crime control claims by 7 percent. More decisive were the effects of declining inequality on coverage. Reducing the unexplained variance by 9 percent, declining inequality initially suppressed then escalated the generation of crime control claims within two years. Other factors appeared unrelated to the coverage of crime in Greene County with the possible exception of the Populist threat in the latter decades. The Election of 1892 suggested that Populism increased the level of crime control claims in the media but its presence was confounded by economic crises.

A number of unexpected relationships were noted in predicting the level of crime control claims in both contexts, especially in Whitfield County. First, while extended crises escalated crime control claims in Greene County, crime was given less attention during economic downturns in Whitfield County. Indeed, severe depressions tended to moderate claims to a greater extent than milder recessions. Several reasons might account for this contradiction. One, a review of contextual effects across each county confirms that overall, Whitfield County was much less linked to structural imperatives than was Greene County. Historically, Whitfield County was less dependent upon an economy shaped by international and national market conditions. This independence might be further attributed to an individualistic ethos shaped by the demands of an Upcountry environment. Additionally, since Whitfield County operated on the fringes of the economic restructuring of the South, there may have existed a greater propensity to re-

present this community as a beacon of the New South. As discussed in Chapter 3, postbellum southern newspapers reviled their detractors and bolstered their communities with unexcelled zeal. Requiring industrial, financial, and human capital investments, newspaper editors sought to place each community in its best light. Perhaps, anticipating success in attracting all three, especially white emigrants, the Whitfield County press suppressed the attention paid to crime, especially during the worst downturns. This promotional tactic may have been successful in part, since the county grew progressively “whiter” during the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A second noteworthy contradiction is that national elections tended to moderate the attention paid to crime in both counties. This is interesting since 20<sup>th</sup> century media researchers (Hall et al. 1978; Beckett 1997; Beckett and Sasson 2001) indicated that crime was a favored issue of elites during national elections. In this 19<sup>th</sup> century context, however, national elections diverted energy away from crime. This was due partly to the critical nature of postbellum politics to the maintenance of a status quo. Consequently, the exploitation of crime for political gain may be a 20<sup>th</sup> century discovery.

A third noteworthy contradiction involved the relationship between diminishing racial inequality and the level of crime control claims in Whitfield County. Initially, I expected that inequality would have a similar effect of escalating crime control claims in both contexts, though for different reasons. Furthermore, I expected a different magnitude of impact. Since the black/white gap was so narrow in Whitfield County, I expected that declining inequality might register more intense effects in Whitfield County. Neither result (similar effect or greater magnitude) occurred. The expectation that equality threatens



white economic control and is then read as a heightened concern for crime was given some support in the Greene County context. However, if increasing equality also affected white social status, as much of the extralegal literature suggested, then this condition was not 'read' as an increase in crime in the newspaper discourse of Whitfield County. Such a reading might require a much larger minority base for social threat to register than was present in Whitfield County. This result suggests a modification of the status threat variant of the minority threat hypothesis (Blalock 1967). When a minority population is less numerous, declining inequality is less threatening and less 'read' as crime.

As the foregoing discussion indicates, the coverage of crime in the media showed scattered receptivity to structural effects. When our attention shifts to understanding the social conditions promoting the salience of black crime, we see more ambiguity. Large structural shifts, such as economic crises and political events, failed to predict significant changes in black crime control claims. More particularistic social phenomena, such as changes in the price of cotton, size of the black population, and racial inequality also failed to show decisive impacts in either county. One notable exception is that the size of the young male population predicted the degree to which blacks were represented in crime control claims in Greene County and was strongly associated with black representation in Whitfield County.

This lack of structuring of black crime salience may be due to a number of factors, one of which is that the problematization of the black population was in its infancy during this period. Despite the exaggerated attention to alleged interracial rape, 19<sup>th</sup> century black crime largely involved black victims and was of little concern to the white reading

public. This was probably especially true during adverse conditions. Indeed, when we examine the influence of economic crises and political events on black crime control claims, we see that early events were strongly associated with a suppression rather than an escalation of black crime control claims. Declining cotton price, central to understanding the attention paid to black crime in the Greene County context, was second only to the size of the young male population in explanatory power. However, cotton prices substantially reduced the salience of black crime claims within a year. Again, the suggestion is that during hard times, newspaper space was better devoted to more pressing matters than news on blacks. Other factors contributing to the somewhat ambiguous relationship of black crime control claims to the social context will be discussed later. For the most part, however, we are left with few good explanations for the changes observed in black crime control claims over time.

On the other hand, condemnatory crime control claims were more tightly linked to the social structure than were black crime control claims. However, the relationships tended to contradict expectations generated by theories on media and punishment. The contradictory nature of influences on condemnatory tone may be the clearest expression of Melossi's (1985) contention that the media may be the site of competing vocabularies of motives. He argues that some vocabularies may follow variations in the political business cycle while others are more responsive to other social inputs. For instance, economic crises were not central to the generation of condemnatory crime control claims in either context. National elections, more often than not, muted rather than escalated the tone of crime claims. In a 19<sup>th</sup> century context, this suppression is likely due to political rhetoric

taking precedence over rather than promoting a public indignation of crime. As with crime control claims in general, the exploitation of crime news for political gain had not yet materialized. Additional contradictions were noted in the relationship of social change phenomena to condemnatory tone. Most interesting were the effects of the price of cotton and racial inequality. Contrary effects suggest, however, that motives other than those reflecting political and economic interests were operating.

As argued previously, the idea of labor surplus is captured in the price of cotton. However, when the price of cotton dipped (signaling labor surplus), the rhetoric became more lenient in Greene County. This was surprising since the labor-related theory of punishment (Rusche and Kirchheimer ([1939] 1968) expects that when labor is not needed, imprisonment rates and severity of punishment increase, and societal reaction to infractions turns punitive. As with crime control claims in general, a lenient rhetorical posture amid plummeting cotton prices may reflect the aforementioned “promotion thesis”: newspapers promoting their community as a defensive posture. As stated in Chapter 3, a siege mentality was often reflected in the texts. There was widespread belief in the North, at least in the perception of southerners, that “southernness” was the cause of the breakdown in the moral fiber and economic stability of the South. Furthermore, crime was a manifestation of this collapse. Consequently, editorials in the Greene County and Whitfield County newspapers took great pains to debunk the thesis. Thus, a backlash against perceived northern contempt for the southern way of life may account for declining cotton prices promoting rhetorical leniency.

What lends additional credence to the supposition that motives independent of the economy and/or politics may have prevailed is that declines in the relative size of the black population also correlated with a muting of condemnatory tone in Greene. It was expected that declines in this demographic category represented labor scarcity and would thus generate increasing rhetorical punitiveness. While labor scarcity may have threatened plantation elites, the tendency for the rhetoric to moderate condemnatory tone possibly reflected the motives of a newly emerging class of merchant elites who were reassured by the exodus of blacks. One local writer asserts:

The present severe times must continue for a considerable period. The result...a daily diminishing power of the land owners to employ even the cheapest labor...the landless laborer must seek other parts to earn his substance. It is not an unmixed evil. It will scatter the black laborers over the whole United States.... A stronger, better society, as a whole, will result. (Herald-Journal 5/10/89: 4)

Responding as self-appointed guardians of a moral order rent asunder by the civil war and its aftermath, postbellum newspaper editors embraced the role of restoring each locale to its rightful place of honor in the eyes of the world (Carter 1969).

Another unexpected relationship was that diminishing racial inequality reduced rather than escalated the condemnatory tone of claims in Whitfield County. This input variable had a similar contradictory effect upon the level of crime control claims. Thus, diminishing inequality had beneficial effects in Whitfield County, reducing the attention paid to crime in general and its condemnatory characterization. Again, this may indicate that status threats were not carried in rhetoric on crime in this 19<sup>th</sup> century context. The

fact that the last measure of crime control claims reacted unexpectedly to changes in inequality in Whitfield County supports this contention.

Shifting our attention to racial disparity in tone, we find relatively good support for structural explanations. However, large structural changes – economic and political – are more central to this variation than are incremental social change. In both contexts, acute and extended crises rendered considerable variation. In Greene County, the Panic of 1873 escalated the extent to which condemnation varied by race within two years, as did the acute Recession of 1890. Both events reduced the unexplained variance by almost 7 percent. Elections, however, accounted for more variation than did economic crises. For example, the contested elections of 1880 and 1884 escalated racial disparity in tone, both within two years, reducing unexplained variance by 11 percent. The suppression of racial disparity during the 1892 Populist campaign was also a likely response by white southern Democrats to the threat of a coalition between blacks and independent white voters.

Likewise, the Panic of 1873 and the Depression of 1893 predicted strong upsurges in Whitfield County claims targeting black offenders for condemnation, reducing unexplained variance by 39 percent. Racial disparity in tone was unaffected by electoral politics, however. This is not too surprising considering the loosely coupled nature of most crime control claims in Whitfield County to political events.

Social change – the price of cotton, size of the black population, racial inequality, and size of the young, male population – all failed to predict changes in racial disparity consistent with expectations. Thus, a number of contradictions were evident. Dips in

cotton price immediately moderated racial disparity in tone in Greene County and the input series was unproductive in Whitfield County. Again, dips in cotton price might trigger a defensive posture. Extolling the virtues of the South may moderate the degree to which crime control claims targeted blacks for condemnation, especially during temporary set-backs. The fact that the milder Recession of 1887 also immediately suppressed racial disparity in tone in Greene County supports this contention. Thus, severe and extended economic downturns rather than mild events are more central to understanding the variation in crime control claims in a tightly enmeshed context such as Greene County.

Another contradiction of note is the effect of racial inequality in structuring racial disparity in tone. Expecting that diminishing inequality would immediately register as status threat in Whitfield County, it was surprising that this did not occur. Equality apparently moderated the degree to which condemnation varied by race, though after a three-year delay. So while economic threat as diminishing racial inequality was carried weakly in one measure of crime control claims (i.e., the level of crime control claims in Greene County), a status-based meaning of inequality in Whitfield County showed much less explanatory power. This may be due to the negligible size of the minority population in the latter context.

Structural changes had qualitatively different effects on the generation of crime control claims in Greene County and Whitfield County. The health of the economy was more central to Greene County's rhetorical climate than to Whitfield's. Yet, different crises, political events, and social change were important for the two contexts though the

impacts differed as well. Generalizations, therefore, depend largely upon which dimension of crime control claims are considered. As correlations and impacts were strongest among the level of crime control claims and racial disparity in tone, these two dimensions merit further attention. For instance, economic downturns and contested political events were more central to understanding changes in the level of crime control claims and the racial disparity in claims in Greene County. Yet, claims in the Whitfield County context were generally more insulated from effects of these structural changes. More often than not, and contrary to expectations, economic downturns and declining racial inequality suppressed the attention given crime and the extent to which the negative characterization of crime varied by race, after extensive delays.

In sum, crime control claims were better linked to social context in Greene County than in Whitfield County, responding more quickly to economic crises and declining inequality with less contradictory behavior. This is due in part to Whitfield County being less structurally embedded in the cotton economy. Also, as was noted in Chapter 4, Greene County was a more stratified community than Whitfield with a top-down, formal processing of crime via its court system. This is in contrast to the more informal, event-generated processes in Whitfield County. Consequently, the extent to which court processes themselves are highly attuned to social context might explain the more coupled nature of claims in Greene County. It follows, then, that a context involving a highly differentiated court system is more conducive to the production of vocabularies translating social structural conditions into penal events.

Social demographic changes accounted for considerably less of the unexplained variance in both contexts. Indeed, the vast majority of unsupported hypotheses involved social change phenomena and speculation as to why this occurred seems warranted.

### **Unsupported Hypotheses**

Due to the exploratory nature of this research, the high number of unsupported hypotheses is not too surprising. With 20<sup>th</sup> century media and 19<sup>th</sup> century punishment traditions as a guide, the goal of the project was to identify possible structural sources of variation in crime control claims. Therefore, one plausible explanation for the high number of unsupported hypotheses is that extrapolations from 20<sup>th</sup> century media research simply do not work in a 19<sup>th</sup> century context. For example, Barlow et al. (1995a, 1995b) suggested that escalation in crime control claims and negative characterization of criminals are more likely during periods of labor surplus (high unemployment). Examining the punishment literature, this notion of labor surplus is captured in the price of cotton. By and large, however, this input series produced changes contrary to expectations or had no effect at all. This result suggests that modifications of the hypothesized relationships are in order, which I will discuss later, and/or that a better expression of labor surplus and demand in a 19<sup>th</sup> century context might be cotton harvest. For instance, a large cotton harvest might suggest a disciplined labor force and minimal unemployment. In contrast, a small cotton harvest, which was greatly feared by newspaper editors, increasingly meant that cotton was left unpicked in the fields. Unfortunately, this measure was unavailable at the county level.



As with the price of cotton, racial inequality typically produced changes contrary to expectations or had no effect on crime control claims. In a 20<sup>th</sup> century context, increasing income inequality predicts greater punitiveness as a hegemonic project (Hall et al. 1978). However, threat perspectives suggest that inequality operates differently in a 19<sup>th</sup> century context and this difference led me to expect that declining inequality disturbed the complementarity of niches (Nagel 1986), promoting punitiveness. This expectation received mixed support in Greene County and none in Whitfield County. Again, context was crucial in understanding the source of changes to the rhetorical construction of threat.

Another dismal performer was the relative size of the black population. Several 20<sup>th</sup> century media theorists (Fishman 1978; Hall et al. 1978; Humphries 1981) posit that increases in the relative size of the young, black male population triggers a punitive discourse and fear of crime that outstrips its reality. Unfortunately, data on black males were unavailable for this period and the relative size of the black population was used instead. Nonetheless, this change may add the specification needed to model its influence on crime control claims. By and large, relative size of the black population produced minimal effects.

A second plausible explanation for the high number of unsupported hypotheses is that we simply don't know enough about rhetorical climate to know when to rely upon the insights of the 19<sup>th</sup> century punishment literature and when to rely upon the insights of the 20<sup>th</sup> century media literature in explaining relationships. For example, the 19<sup>th</sup> century punishment literature led me to expect an inverse relationship between inequality and the

various measures of crime control claims. To the extent that diminishing racial inequality threatens white dominance, either economic or status, crime control rhetoric should escalate. Furthermore, this escalation should target the activities of blacks. However, 20<sup>th</sup> century media literature expects a positive relationship between inequality and crime control claims. Hence, as racial inequality diminishes, we should expect concomitant reductions in crime control claims, especially those claims targeting blacks. The underlying assumption is that crime in the news is ultimately a hegemonic project (Hall et al. 1978; Barlow et al. 1995a, 1995b). Its purpose is to deflect attention away from structural sources of inequality, thus preserving the status quo. By inference, reductions in racial inequality reduce the need for this obfuscation. Punitive social controls of a problem population are no longer needed.

Hypotheses derived from an economic threat perspective were effective in understanding the role of inequality and selected crime control claims in predominantly black Greene County. However, in predominantly white Whitfield County, the relationship of racial inequality to crime control claims comported more with a hegemonic definition wherein social control of a problem population was less needed. In short, the negligible minority population conditioned the role of racial inequality in reducing the attention paid to crime and/or relying on claims which disproportionately targeted blacks for control.

On the other hand, both literature bases led me to expect that a labor-related theory of punishment was adequate in understanding the role of labor surplus to rhetorical climate. Thus, the expectation was that as the price of cotton fell (19<sup>th</sup> century index of

unemployment), a punitive discourse escalated. For the most part, this did not occur. If the correct relationship is reverse in this context: as the price of cotton fell, punitive vocabularies fell, then it suggests that economic models of threat must be attuned to other social sources of influence. Indeed, as southern counties struggled to reconstruct their economies, problematizing crime had the potential to discourage growth, investments, and emigration. The power of newspaper editors to fashion a rhetoric independent of the economy suggests that their power relative to other elites had strengthened. Hence, an adequate “grounded labeling theory,” or what Melossi (1985) refers to as vocabularies of punitive motives, must consider that rhetoric obtains its force from a confluence of factors.

Finally, the high number of unsupported hypotheses may be due to the nature of the output series. As stated previously, measures of social change generally failed to explain variation in crime control claims. This may be due to the fact that social change measures are at the county level. And while crime control claims too are at the county level, the claims included texts of regional and national stories. These stories were not self-selected, but part of a “boilerplate.” Boilerplates were preprinted pages (usually first and last pages) obtained from an outside publishing source and added to the local edition. This practice continued in Greene County and Whitfield County possibly throughout the 1870s and early 1880s. The implication of this practice is that the locally-derived input measures were expected to explain variation in texts involving regional and national claims. This result may explain the decoupled nature of the social change series and crime control claims. The fact that larger structural changes involving regional and

national events were more effective in explaining claims lends credence to this speculation. To test this speculation requires that output measures are categorized by source of news: local, state, regional, and national. Unfortunately, I did not anticipate the possibility that inclusion of regional and national news might obscure the relationships between the series. Therefore, the data for news source are available, existing in raw, uncoded form. Impressionistically, crime control claims derived equally from local/state and regional/national sources, especially in the earlier years. However, this is an impression only and future research is needed to clarify these relationships.

Notwithstanding the number of unsupported hypotheses, this project makes a valuable contribution to a study of punishment processes. Discussion turns now to the study's implications.

### **Implications of Study**

In exploring the mediated constructions of threat from Melossi's (1985) "grounded labeling theory" of punishment, this project has sought to move beyond accounts of crime control claims which give primacy to organizational factors. These perspectives regard media coverage of crime as a function primarily of criminal behavior and/or editorial decision-making. However, if asked, do social structural variables consistently explain the variation noted in postbellum crime control claims, the answer must be no. Indeed, the results of this study provide very little support for the contention that vocabularies of punitive motive (as operationalized in this project) reflect structural influences and, thus, elite interests in this 19<sup>th</sup> century context. Yet, crime control claims are not fiercely independent of structural imperatives as the "democracy-at-work" thesis

(Beckett 1997: 4) presumes. There are “moments” when social structural factors intrude on what might be organizational processes. These moments are best predicted under conditions of intense economic strain, contested national elections, and social change which affect the level of crime control claims, especially, and the extent to which blacks are targeted for condemnation, net of crime. That is, race not only intervenes in how the economy shapes punishment (as many researchers have found) but it also intervenes in how the economy shapes the discourse on crime. Additionally, I find support for political events triggering negative characterization of crime on the basis of race in Greene County.

The implications of these findings are that economic and political crises are more likely to trigger belief systems constructed along race and circulated in social discourse to produce a deviant population that is black. Thus, similar offensive behavior is evaluated and, therefore, likely responded to differently. Differential discourse likely accounts for the historic (and contemporary) reaction to black crime as more threatening. In this instance, then, the generality of the 20<sup>th</sup> century media research appears to be extended.

Hence, this project has contributed to a sociological analysis of punishment processes by proffering a modification to Melossi’s theory of punitive motives intervening between crime, social structure, and punishment. At best, structural factors predict changes in certain vocabularies (claims which disproportionately target the behavior of blacks for condemnation) under certain conditions (intense strain). It is at these moments that social facts are likely translated into penal events.

This research also identified the social context most sensitive to structural variation in crime control claims; that is, contexts wherein official source definitions of crime and criminals predominated. Such is the case in Greene County where the press was attuned to court processes. Arguing that source definitions of crime are inherently ideological (Hall et al. 1978; Tuchman 1978), the implications are that shared meanings potentially promoted a social problems discourse favorable to elite interests. This point leads to one additional finding. As noted previously, interests other than economic and political might account for the high number of contradictory findings. In this instance, the suppression of crime control claims under various social conditions might have resulted from editors' and publishers' desire to promote their communities. Again, the findings suggest that a "grounded labeling theory" of punishment must consider the possibility that vocabularies of punitive motives derive their impetus from competing sources of interest.

### **Limitations of Study**

In introducing this project, I stated that it "will contribute to criminological theory by providing substantiation of public discourse" as a possible intervening mechanism between crime and crime control. This was a lofty challenge considering the exploratory nature of the project. Indeed, the high number of unsupported hypotheses highlight the exploratory nature of the project. To my knowledge, no research has successfully modeled the relationship between vocabularies, the economy, and social control. Hence, there was no certainty as to what structural conditions promoted these vocabularies and/or

if they translated these conditions into penal events. This study is a first step in the process.

But while making important discoveries regarding the nature of impact, this project has several limitations. First, it is not a pure test of Melossi's (1985) "grounded labeling theory" of punishment. Melossi contends that vocabularies of punitive motives are circulated in "authoritative texts." These texts have the capacity to shape penal events in accordance with the political business cycle and are pronouncements by judicial officials, legislative acts, and quotes by economic and political elites. Only secondarily are media texts capable of directing "the use of law." I found, however, that the informal, conversational nature of the media discourse rendered the text not only extremely accessible to the reading public but also served as a running commentary on social problems. This, coupled with the fact that many of the editors and publishers, especially in Greene County, were part of the legal elite led me to expect that in this postbellum context, crime news functioned authoritatively. Moreover, I expected that their interests were intertwined with those of the economic and political elites. However, it is quite possible that if quotes and legislative acts had been used, there may have been fewer unsupported and contradictory hypothesis. Unfortunately, few regularly published quotes by officials on punishment exist in this context. Future research might combine media texts with those scattered sources for examination, however.

Second, identifying structural influences net of crime suggests that punishment in postbellum Georgia fluctuated, at times, on the basis of a punitive public discourse rather than on the basis of the actual rate of crime itself. Such a conclusion has tremendous

implications for understanding the zeal to punish legally as well as extralegally. This conclusion is necessarily tentative, however, due to the crude crime rate constructed for this project. Unfortunately, other indices are unavailable.

Finally, generalizations from this project are tentative due to the shortness of the series. The Box-Jenkins approach to multivariate time series analysis requires a minimum of fifty observations (McCleary and Hay 1980). This project had access to thirty. Therefore, many of the transfer functions failed to sustain themselves upon estimation. However, the rigorous identification process produced robust cross-correlation functions and confirmed independent relationships among the input and output series. Consequently, while the results are tentative, the strong correlations indicate the plausible existence of causal relationships. Future research using a more refined methodology should resolve this limitation.

## **Conclusion**

The results of this study indicate that ideology is an important aspect of the process of punishment; a possibility which Rusche and Kirchheimer ([1939] 1968) ignore. Specifically, it suggests that belief systems pertaining to the construct of race in America are activated and actualized in discourse during intense periods of conflict, making problem populations more vulnerable to social control. This implies that if rhetorical climate is at the intersection of crime and crime control, triggering punitive responses, then we can more fully understand the zeal to punish which crime rhetoric promotes. Irwin and Austin (1994) argue this point well. In It's About Time: America's Imprisonment Binge, they posit that punitive approaches to crime have depleted



America's young male population, leaving its correctional institutions overburdened and unable to meet the demands of a coerced public. This coercion stems from the public's misperception of crime and the nature of threat to society. Underlying the "grounded labeling theory" of punishment is the recognition that punishment responds to socially constructed "facts." To be aware of the idea of social structure (Mills 1959) and how it is implicated in the social construction of threat represents a necessary corrective to the coercion. Understanding the processes underlying the translation of structural imperatives into penal events will serve such a corrective.

**APPENDIX A**  
**CODING FORM**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(ID #)

**I. ARTICLE INFORMATION:**

Da/Dte: \_\_\_\_\_ Page/Col. \_\_\_\_\_ Source: \_\_\_\_\_

Subtitle: \_\_\_\_\_

Headline/Column (circle): \_\_\_\_\_

**II. ELEMENTS OF FORM**

<b>A. Coverage Type</b> ____ news item ____ feature ____ editorial/opinion ____ follow-up ____ social control ____ ____ other (what?) ____	<b>B. Behavior</b> ____ property violation ____ persons violation ____ moral order (what?) ____ ____ mixed violations ____ other (what?) ____ ____ unstated	<b>C. How Behavior Explained</b> ____ Individual Explanation ____ genetic/mental illness ____ immoral/fam/indo ____ provoked ____ free/voluntaristic ____ Societal Conditions ____ What? _____ ____ No explanation
--	---	---

<b>D. Tone Predictions Present?</b>	____ yes ____ no
Elite Statements Present? ("Vocabs")	____ yes ____ no
Sympathy-worthiness?	____ yes ____ no
Condemnation-worthiness?	____ yes ____ no
Treated-as-criminal?	____ yes ____ no

If vocabs, by whom (circle)? judges pronouncements, police statements,  
quotes of politicians, interest groups, experts, community residents

<b>E. Position of Text and Emphasis</b>	Space Allocated? _____ lines _____ cols.		
____ Front Pages	____ Middle Pages	____ Last Pages	____ Headlines
____ Above the Fold	____ Below the Fold	____ X-Lge. Type	____ Subtitles

**III. STRATEGIES OF REPRESENTATION:** How was condemnation or sympathy achieved?  
Coupling (what?) \_\_\_\_\_ Characterization (what?) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ Essentialism (what?) \_\_\_\_\_ Public Eye  
Other \_\_\_\_\_ Other Techniques: Contextualization? yes no

**IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF OFFENDER PRESENT?** (circle): age, marital status, occupation, local residence, friends, religion, education, ex-convict

		<u>Offender</u>				<u>Victim</u>			
Race:	Black	White	unst	dk		Black	White	unst	dk
Gender:	Male	Female	unst	dk		Male	Female	unst	dk

## NOTES

### Chapter 1

- (a) The “Fourth Estate” is a term taken from the days of the British Parliament with its three estates: Lords Spiritual, Lords Temporal, and Common. The gallery, which was occupied by news reporters, became known as the “Fourth Estate” (Hulteng et al. 1983:75).
- (b) There seems to be a split in the constructionist camp with “contextual constructionists” admitting that an understanding of the context is indelibly linked to the process of claimsmaking, however.

### Chapter 4

1. After differencing, the relative size of the black population in Greene County and the relative size of the young male population in Whitfield County displayed extended autocorrelated errors with the price of cotton in Greene County and the percentage black in Whitfield County, respectively. These impacts were estimated, and analysis used the residuals from the estimated model.

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