From Event-History Analysis to Simulation: Replaying the Tape of History for the 1960 Sit-ins

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ABSTRACT
The wave of sit-ins that swept through the American South in the spring of 1960 transformed the struggle for racial equality. This wave, like other eruptions of protest, seems to exemplify historical ‘contingency’. I will tease out some substantive implications of contingency and suggest ways in which they can be explored with empirical evidence. Kenneth Andrews (University of North Carolina) and I have investigated the diffusion of sit-ins across 334 cities in the South in 1960, using event-history analysis to compare the importance of news media, movement organizations, and social networks. I will examine predicted hazards to assess counterfactual alternatives to the event that actually precipitated the wave of sit-ins. I will also use the event-history model to ‘replay the tape of history’ and thus generate counterfactual protest waves that could have occurred in 1960. Multiple runs yield a range of feasible events, and thus provide a way to calibrate contingency.