Understanding the Dialectic of Discourse and Collective Action: Public Debate and Rioting in Antebellum Cincinnati[1]

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This analysis of the public debate and riots about abolitionism in antebellum Cincinnati uses constructivist approaches to demonstrate how discourse makes some forms of action possible and legitimate and, conversely, how collective action transforms the meaning and structure of discourse. Two incidents of mob violence in Cincinnati interrupted the discursive struggle over abolitionism, undermining some diagnoses and solutions while making others more compelling. Speakers incorporated the events into their discourses, thus creating new definitions of the situation and new means to resolve the problems it raised, abandoning or reworking discredited arguments, and reframing the issues in the debate. The conclusion discusses this study's implications for understanding the dialectical relationship between cultural representation and social action.

Throughout the 1830s many communities in the United States were embroiled in conflict over slavery and the new antislavery or abolition movement. Abolitionist agitation triggered public outcry, resolutions for anti-abolition legislation, and riots to silence the reformers. Situated in a border state and as the most important western center for the North–South trade, Cincinnati became a battleground to test the resolve of the fledgling abolition movement and the strength of Northern racism. Initially the battle was waged with words, but on July 30, 1836, city residents, frustrated by the inefficacy of words, took to the streets with bricks and clubs to destroy the abolitionist press in a night of rioting.

[1] I would like to thank Wendy Griswold, George Steinmetz, and Robert Fogel for their help and guidance. The participants in the Culture and Society Workshop (especially Penny Becker, Grant Blank, and Harriet Morgan) and my colleagues at the Center for the Study of History, Politics and Culture at the University of Chicago have provided constructive comments on earlier drafts. I am also grateful to the *AJS* reviewers for their suggestions and criticisms. This research was supported in part by a National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement Grant. Direct all correspondence to Stephen Ellingson, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1126 East 59th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637.

0002-9602/96/10101-0003$01.50

From August 1835 through the months following the riot of July 30, Cincinnati citizens argued over the propriety and right of antislavery advocates to publish and distribute their newspaper in the city. Yet the debate did not hinge on the question of slavery or abolition but rather on the antinomies of individual and communal rights, freedom and despotism, order and chaos. Three groups of citizens participated in the debate, creating discourses from which to contest the meaning of the debate and to mobilize action. Antiabolitionists claimed that abolitionism threatened the city's trade with the South, as well as the security of the city and the nation. They demanded an absolute cessation of abolition activity and sanctioned collective violence to secure that end. The abolitionists defended their right to publish on the subject of slavery and charged the antiabolitionists with trading Northern civil liberties for Southern dollars. A third group, "The Friends of Law, Order and the Constitution," created a discourse that rejected the positions of the other two as dangerous to the law, civil liberties, economy, and good order of the city. They advocated tolerance and upholding the law as the means to resolve the conflict, but their message was largely ignored until after the riot.

Before the riot, the struggle appeared to have been won by the antiabolitionists. Their discourse received widespread public support. They used this discourse to drive law and order supporters from the field and mobilize residents to silence the hated abolitionists through collective violence. However, their victory was short-lived. In a dramatic turnaround of public sentiment, the antiabolitionists and their discourse were repudiated after the riot, while the law and order position won public approval and abolitionism was granted legitimacy. What might account for the antiabolitionists' pyrrhic victory and the revitalization of law and order claims?

I argue that this turnaround—the delegitimization and repudiation of antiabolitionism—was made possible by the successful reframing of the debate by law and order and abolitionist speakers.[2] More generally my explanation rests on understanding the dialectical relationship between discourse and events. In the following analysis I demonstrate how the discursive struggle over abolitionism shaped the two episodes of collective action that interrupted the ongoing debate and, conversely, how these events changed the content, form, and legitimacy of competing discourses

[2] Discursive success refers to situations in which the arguments of one group determine the issues of debate, speakers abandon their own arguments and adopt those of others, or speakers are forced to alter their discourse in response to the claims or alternative definitions of rival speakers. It may also be identified by the degree to which audiences demonstrate their approval or support of one discourse over another.

and altered the configuration of the discursive field. Before turning to this analysis, I will situate my study within the literature on culture and collective action, outline my theoretical position that links events to the production and reception of discourse, and describe the data and historical background of the case.

THEORY AND METHOD

In recent years many social scientists have made the "linguistic turn" and have accorded great explanatory power to language.[3] Yet too often how and why language influences events (e.g., collective action) or processes of social and cultural change remains unspecified, hidden behind the jargon of discourse analysis or obscured when all social phenomena (e.g., institutions, relations of authority, collective actions) are defined as "texts" (e.g., Barthes 1972, 1986; Foucault 1980; Stedman-Jones 1983; see Palmer [1990] for a critique). However, this problem is being addressed by analysts who have identified how cultural objects (such as discourses or ideologies) may be used by actors to form lines of action (e.g., Swidler 1986) or how they enable actors to define certain issues, beliefs, and forms of action as legitimate and others as illegitimate—thus reproducing or challenging social structures and relations of power (Bourdieu 1991; Best 1990; Wagner-Pacifici 1986; Lears 1985; Gusfield 1981).[4] Yet many studies that examine the relationship between culture and action concentrate too narrowly on the shaping power of cultural objects and thus fail to take seriously how the nature and course of events (i.e., sequences of actions occurring through time) influence the meanings and forms of the cultural objects involved, and how the construction and reconstruction of meaning occurs at the nexus of event and cultural object (see Archer [1988] and Kane [1991] regarding the interdependent influence of culture and action on social change). At best, events are treated as arenas where the effective manipulation of cultural objects produces specific actions or results in some form of social change (e.g., see Wagner-Pacifici 1986; Condit 1990; Beisel 1993).

[3] See Palmer (1990) for a detailed account of the linguistic turn in the social sciences; Thompson (1990) and Bourdieu (1991) for more theoretical treatments of discourse; and Wuthnow (1992), Wagner-Pacifici (1986), Hunt (1984), and Sewell (1980) for empirical studies of discourse.

[4] Griswold (1987, p. 4) uses the term "cultural objects" to "refer to shared significance embodied in form, i.e., to an expression of social meanings that is tangible or can be put into words." This definition allows the analyst to specify more concretely the nature and content of culture under study, which minimizes problems regarding operationalization and facilitates an analysis that concentrates on how individuals (both speakers and audiences) interact with a cultural object to create meaning.

Sahlins (1981, 1985, 1991) and Sewell (in press) note that although events are shaped by some set of ideas, beliefs, or rules embodied in ritual, symbol, or speech (e.g., the killing of Captain Cook was predicated on the religious myths and ritual cycle of the Hawaiian islanders), they also transform these same cultural objects and social structures. Events disrupt the operative systems of ideas, beliefs, values, roles, and institutional practices of a given society (Sahlins 1991, p. 44). In so doing, events change the way in which social actors think about the meaning and importance they assign to modes of action and the rules that govern interaction, groups and their discourses, symbols, and rituals. In the event, the meanings carried by cultural objects are embodied in historic actors and actions and then reinterpreted and reconfigured based on the consequences (real or perceived) the event has for particular actors (Sahlins 1985, pp. xiv, 138, 144–49; Sewell 1992, p. 18).[5]

Recent work on social movements and collective action also stresses the definitional power of culture. In the shift from more structurally oriented theories of collective action (i.e., resource mobilization) to more culturally oriented approaches, scholars have focused attention on explaining how social movement organizations and actors interpret grievances and generate consensus on belief and action (Klandermans 1984, 1988), create collective identities (Melucci 1989), and produce the frames of meaning (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988, 1992; Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina 1982), vocabularies of motives, and social dramas necessary to mobilize constituents (Benford 1993*b;* Benford and Hunt 1992). Although this new approach adds a needed corrective in the literature, it tends to focus on the ideological and discursive work of movements without explaining how this work is related to collective action events that are primarily oriented toward demonstrating (rather than producing) a movement's or group's ideology (e.g., strikes, riots, marches; for exceptions see Tarrow [1994, pp. 129–33], Benford [1993*a,* pp. 689–94], and Gamson and Modigliani [1989, pp. 17–21]). In other words, we do not fully understand how episodes of collective action influence the processes of meaning construction and the content of movement frames or discourses.

Klandermans (1992) acknowledges this theoretical and empirical gap in the literature, noting that little attention has been given to the "social construction of meaning in action situations" or to the "processes of

[5] Sahlins (1991, pp. 80–82) conceptualizes the event as unfolding in three moments: *instantiation,* when social and cultural categories are represented by persons, objects, and acts; *denouement,* when the actual incidents occur; and *totalization,* when the consequences of the event are incorporated into and change the cultural categories that shaped the event.

interpreting, defining, and consciousness raising that occur among participants who interact during episodes of collective action" (p. 81; see also Gamson 1992, p. 70; Tarrow 1992, p. 175). The relationship between collective action events and the success or failure of movement discourses remains undertheorized and ungrounded in detailed empirical studies. Too often the events that scholars identify as having a powerful influence on movement discourses or frames are not collective actions engaged in or engendered by social movements but dramatic, nonmovement events such as humanmade disasters, major court decisions, or wars (McAdam 1994, p. 40; Snow and Benford 1992, pp. 149–50). These events are conceptualized as external forces that may generate attention on a particular problem, win credibility for a movement's frame, encourage new organizations to join a movement, or serve as a model of success that foments expectations among constituents of future movement victories (see Klandermans 1988, p. 185; 1992, pp. 92–93; Gamson 1988, pp. 233–37; McAdam 1982, pp. 48–51). This research points to the importance of events for understanding changes in consciousness or collective beliefs, and I build upon it by demonstrating *how* events are incorporated into existing sets of meaning and force movement actors to create new sets of meaning that will garner resources, attract constituents, or realize movement goals (see Tarrow 1989; Hirsch 1990; McAdam 1983; Gamson and Modigliani 1989).

To a certain degree the shift to culture in the social movement field has also been a shift inward. This inward shift is especially prominent in work that focuses on discourse (e.g., Gamson 1988; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Johnston 1991; Benford and Hunt 1992; Hunt 1992; Benford 1993*b*). The strength of these studies lies in their detailed analyses of the rhetorical strategies, media practices, or linguistic devices movement actors employ to construct injustice frames and rationales for action, link them to the interests and beliefs of specific audiences, or challenge the ideologies or frames of authorities, countermovements, or movement factions. Because many authors are primarily concerned with identifying and describing the various strategies movement actors use to construct meaning (e.g., the frame alignment process of Snow et al. [1986] or the dramaturgical techniques identified by Benford [1993*a*]), they tend to give little theoretical and empirical attention to how collective action events might influence the process of meaning construction.[6] Why do

[6] Although some scholars acknowledge that new frames, identities, or collective beliefs are constructed according to the experiences of movement actors and audiences in specific structural, historical, and event-driven contexts, the literature fails, both theoretically and empirically, to address how collective action and discourse, event and meaning are interrelated (e.g., Benford 1993*b,* p. 210; Gamson 1988, p. 242). Gamson

discourses change in the wake of collective action events? Do such events discredit frames of meaning or undermine rationales for action? Do they break the link between the interests and expectations of movements and their audiences and thus cause both sets of actors to evaluate, rework, or jettison all or part of a movement's discourse?

I address these questions by explicating the dialectical relationship between meaning construction (through discourse) and collective action. That is, I demonstrate how the two episodes of collective action in Cincinnati (events that are analytically separable from the discourses and seen as such by speakers) were shaped and made meaningful by the competing discourses and how they also brought about changes in the specific discourses and the configuration of the discursive field.

A second area of my study concerns the relationship between how meaning is produced and how movement actors and their audiences interact. In the extant literature, the discursive field is often conceived in narrow terms, thus simplifying the complex discursive and action-oriented relationships among various speakers and audiences.[7] A number of scholars are attending to this problem by examining the competitive relationships that exist among movements, government agencies, nonmovement organizations (e.g., churches), and the media. However, they tend to treat these relationships in a theoretical manner and do not test their ideas in extended empirical analyses (e.g., see Tarrow 1994, pp. 122–34; Klandermans 1988, pp. 185–86; Gamson 1988). In a recent work, Klandermans (1992, pp. 94–99) highlights the importance of conceptualizing movement fields as being populated by multiple organizations in systems of alliances and rivalries, but he only begins to discuss how patterns of interaction, discursive production, and collective action are related. Similarly, Hunt, Benford, and Snow (1994) explain how social movements construct the identities of protagonists, antagonists,

(1988, pp. 235–36) notes that "events take their meaning from the discourse in which they are embedded and collective action helps to shape these meanings for both movement constituents and a larger audience," but he fails to specify how this dialectic actually operates. He identifies the occupation of the Seabrook, New Hampshire, nuclear reactor site as an important event that opened up the nuclear power discourse, but he does not discuss how this event changed the discourse of the antinuclear movement. In a later article Gamson and Modigliani (1989, pp. 17–21) discuss how different "media packages" about nuclear energy incorporated the Seabrook demonstration and how a new package emerged after the event, but again they do not explicitly discuss how the competition between different actors over the meaning of the event changed the discourse about nuclear power.

[7] In this study I define speakers as those agents who both create discourses and articulate them in written and oral form. Speakers may refer to individuals or to the group that they represent.

and audiences within a movement field and frame outsiders' claims about the movement, but they do not discuss how outsiders or nonmovement groups construct counterframes or demonstrate how identities and claims change as a result of the interaction among competing groups. We have studies that ably discuss discursive work within a single movement (e.g., Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Benford 1993*b*), between movement factions (e.g., Benford 1993*a*), or between challengers and authorities (e.g., Gamson et al. 1982), but these studies generally do not analyze patterns of creation and reception among all the parties within a movement field during a specific event or period of time.[8] These studies do not address the ways in which groups within the field alter their discourses in response to one another or identify how the field expands or contracts based on the course of discursive struggle amidst episodes of protest (e.g., see Gamson and Modigliani 1989). In this article, I show how events and discursive production serve as catalysts for new (and outside) voices to become involved, for some audiences to organize, and for others to become quiescent.

A final issue that has not been fully addressed by studies that focus on movement discourse and framing is identifying which audiences are targeted by which movements and other groups within a field and for what reasons (on this critique, see Klandermans 1988, p. 192).[9] Although several recent studies illustrate how movements engage in different framing tasks or tailor their claims to appeal to targeted audiences, they are not concerned with understanding how these audiences interpret competing claims or how reception influences the continued use or alteration of specific arguments (e.g., Snow et al. 1986, pp. 468, 472; Benford 1993*a*, pp. 687–91; Gerhards and Rucht 1992). Yet if successful mobilization depends on linking movement frames with those held by targeted audiences (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Klandermans 1988), tapping into collective beliefs (e.g., Tarrow 1992), or constructing collective identities that are congruent with those held by specific audiences, then identifying the operative interests, expectations, and beliefs of a movement's targeted audiences is vital. Do movement and nonmovement speakers adopt different mobilization strategies (e.g., sets of arguments that identify problems or rationales for action) depending on the audi-

[8] Tarrow's (1989) work on the cycle of protest in Italy during the 1960s and 1970s provides a detailed map of the tactics and ideological positions of political parties, social movements, unions, and student organizations, but it is not explicitly concerned with explaining the relationship between meaning construction, discursive struggle, and collective action.

[9] For example, some studies treat audiences as an undifferentiated public (see Benford 1993*b*; Benford and Hunt 1992; Gamson and Modigliani 1989).

ences they address? Are some audiences more important and thus more likely to influence the content and form of discourses within a field? How do speakers incorporate the responses of particular audiences to episodes of collective action into their frames of meaning?

In sum, my study extends the extant work on framing, movement discourse, and the role of meaning by scholars within the constructivist approach to collective action by focusing on the dialectical relationship between collective action events and the production of discourses. I contend that we need to examine how episodes of collective action influence the strategies of meaning construction, the nature of discursive competition, and the content of the discourses within a particular field to more fully understand how speakers construct and reconstruct their diagnoses and solutions and how and why mobilization efforts succeed or fail. In the following case study I show how the two episodes of collective action undermined some diagnoses and solutions to the problem of abolitionism, while making others more creditable and legitimate. Speakers responded to the events and one another's interpretations of them by creating new definitions of the problem and the means to resolve it, abandoning discredited positions, or adopting newly legitimized discourses. The mobs and collective violence in general became the central points of contention in the discursive struggle and as such occasioned a transformation of individual discourses and the field of debate. Below I outline how discourses are constructed and then suggest how collective action events influence this process.

Discourse and Collective Action

I define a discourse as a relatively bounded set of arguments organized around a specific diagnosis of and solution to some social problem.[10] This definition narrows attention to those discourses oriented toward advocating or preventing some form of social change and thus toward the discursive work in social movement, political, or civic arenas. This definition also suggests that discourses are situated within a field of debate wherein speakers struggle with one another to establish meaning, earn legitimacy, and mobilize consensus on belief and action (see Bourdieu 1991; Volosinov 1986; Lears 1985; Hall 1982; Foucault 1965, 1980). Because discourses are created in reference and opposition to one another, an imperative of differentiation characterizes the process of creation and contestation. One of the common modes of differentiation is

[10] An argument is a series of claims, images, or tropes combined in a coherent manner and intended to persuade an audience through an appeal to logic, fact, belief, emotion, or external authority (Thompson 1990, p. 289).

for speakers to structure their discourses (and the field) around various sets of poles (i.e., pairs of fundamental oppositions) that condense what the debate is about, what can be discussed, and what problems can be addressed (Bourdieu 1991, pp. 185–91; Wuthnow 1989, p. 13).[11] Fields then become primary sites of contention, where competing speakers battle over which poles will govern debate because control over them endows some speakers with the power to set agendas and guide the direction and content of debate.

Speakers rely on a variety of strategies to establish or contend more effectively over the meaning and organization of the debate. These strategies include (1) shifting the definition of the situation from a specific or practical level (e.g., abolitionism injures the city's businesses) to a more general or conceptual level (e.g., the issue is not about abolitionism but about whether civil liberties will be preserved), (2) changing the focus of a discourse to render it more salient and resonant with a targeted audience or to gain entry into a debate (e.g., the abolitionists dropped their moral and economic arguments and concentrated on political arguments when only the latter generated support and attracted the attention of the other participants in the debate) and (3) reordering the institutional locus of the debate or bringing a specific discourse into closer articulation with institutional values, symbols, or practices (e.g., the law and order and abolition factions shifted the institutional locus from economics to politics and defined their positions as preserving the civil liberties and laws necessary to ensure orderly economic and social activity).

Discursive struggles often take place at the level of arguments, which are the building blocks of discourse. Arguments are both the means by which speakers create and justify their diagnoses and solutions and the carriers of economic, political, or moral goals and interests that motivate public debate. Speakers craft new arguments or adopt preexisting ones (in Cincinnati, speakers drew upon extant arguments about mobs, social order, commerce, and republican ideals; see nn. 25, 30), then arrange these arguments in different combinations in order to accomplish their

[11] I am not making a strong structuralist argument that all discourses and fields are organized around binary oppositions. I recognize that fields often are populated by multiple voices, each of which may address the issues or problems in complex and nonreductionistic ways. At the same time, speakers may construct the field and their discourses around poles as a way of simplifying the issues, setting the limits of what can be discussed, and more clearly distinguishing one discourse from another. Polarizing the field may also allow speakers to create clearly defined moral or political positions that will discredit other discourses and win legitimacy for some, thus forcing or encouraging audiences to support one position over another. In short, I see the polarization of discourses and discursive fields as an event-driven phenomenon rather than a necessary result of the internal logic of discourse (see Alexander 1992; Rogin 1987; Edelman 1988, pp. 66–89; Gusfield 1981, pp. 167–68).

goals. These goals might include advancing alternative conceptions of what the debate is about and what the potential consequences are, contesting ideologies or the meaning of categories that undergird different discourses (e.g., order or civil liberties), challenging or reinforcing collective beliefs, and discrediting rival speakers' arguments by aligning them with illegitimate ideologies or social groups (e.g., antiabolitionists tried to discredit the law and order position by linking it to abolitionists' arguments) or by constructing rivals as public enemies (see Edelman 1988, pp. 66–89; Rogin 1987; on strategies of discursive creation and contestation see Thompson [1990, pp. 60–67]; Edelman [1971, 1988]; Terdiman [1985]). As suggested by the social constructivist perspective in the social movements and social problems literature, the effectiveness of a particular discourse (or claims-making endeavor) may hinge on the fit between diagnosis and solution or between arguments and the interests of audiences (see Snow and Benford 1988; Benford 1993*a*, pp. 691–94; Best 1990, pp. 24–42; Edelman 1988, pp. 12–36). Speakers will reject solutions, change goals, or rework arguments when they contradict or fail to resonate with their audiences. Failure to do so may undermine the legitimacy of their position or impair their capacity to mobilize audiences. In the Cincinnati case, the antiabolition solution of collective violence undermined both the economic goal of prosperity and the political goal of ensuring a secure environment from which to conduct business. Instead of refitting the economic and political goals of Cincinnatians to the new context of vigilantism and collective violence, residents and the previous supporters of antiabolitionism alike rejected the discourse and solution of antiabolitionism during the third phase of the conflict.

Meaning is thus constructed through the ongoing process of contestation within a discursive field as speakers jockey to gain legitimacy for their positions, the support of targeted audiences, and the opportunity to implement their solutions. During this struggle, "issues are redefined, and means of action and outcomes are reevaluated; movement organizations, opponents, and countermovement organizations may be discredited; beliefs and ideologies are challenged or refuted; and competing organizations are deemed unreliable" (Klandermans 1992, p. 90).

Yet meaning is not constructed solely on the basis of the interaction among speakers; meaning is also produced as speakers modify their discourses in response to the episodes of collective action constituted by the debate and to the reception of discourse and event by audiences. During the course of discursive struggles over social change, actors implement actions designed to resolve specific problems; these actions disrupt the struggle and open the way for speakers to resignify what the debate means (Gamson 1988, p. 237; Archer 1988, pp. 154–82). Episodes of collective action provide new information actors use to evaluate the practical consequences of specific solutions, to confirm or refute arguments, and to assess how well competing arguments and poles articulate with the interests, beliefs, and experiential bases of particular audiences (i.e., their horizons of expectations).[12] This new information also may be defined as proof or evidence by competing groups to justify their particular claims. Both speakers and their audiences engage in this work of interpreting the event and assigning meaning to the potential consequences or implications of it for themselves, their social world, and the course of debate. Speakers' goals and interests (e.g., winning support for a particular diagnosis and solution) also may be subject to reevaluation and adjustment when collective action is seen as an inadequate means for realizing or protecting them, especially when audiences no longer view arguments favorably.

When the fit between collective action and horizons is loose (e.g., when rioting subverted the common interest of preserving social order), when collective action undermines diagnoses or solutions, or when it fails to achieve the intended results, audiences may alter their interests and beliefs, change the meaning of these interests and beliefs, or look for new means to realize them. As horizons change, some solutions may be rejected and some diagnoses judged incorrect, while others are accorded greater authority. Speakers respond to the event and altered horizons by reworking their discourses—jettisoning arguments that are untenable, adopting those of their rivals, or crafting new ones that incorporate the event (i.e., the episode of collective action) as the ground from which to assess the viability and legitimacy of old and new arguments—to make them more resonant with their audiences' new horizons of expectations and to help speakers compete more effectively within the field of debate. In short, collective action challenges or discredits some arguments and their underlying ideas, lends support for others, and in effect alters the social and cultural context of meaning production. This process compels speakers to reconstruct their discourses around the experience and consequences of collective actions.

Speakers, Audiences, and Data

Identifying the interests of speakers and the expectations of audiences helps the analyst to understand why a discourse is created and how it is received, as well as to assess the fit between the discourse and the interests and expectations (Griswold 1987). There were three groups of speak-

[12] I am borrowing the term "horizon of expectations" from Griswold (1987, p. 10), who uses it to designate the bundle of experiences, interests, or beliefs an audience brings with it when it receives a cultural object.

TABLE 1

OCCUPATIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF THE THREE DISCURSIVE GROUPS

Group	Commercial*	Professional†	Artisanal‡	Unknown§	*N*
Antiabolition	44 (52)	27 (32)	4 (5)	10 (12)	85
Law and order	7 (18)	12 (30)	10 (25)	11 (28)	40
Abolition	9 (31)	11 (38)	4 (14)	5 (17)	29

NOTE.—Nos. in parentheses are % of sample engaged in that class.

* Members of the commercial class include wholesale merchants, bankers, and owners of stores, real estate, foundries, mills, breweries, life insurance companies, or utility companies.

† Members of the professional class include attorneys, judges, ministers, editors, medical doctors, civil servants, clerks or managers of businesses, and school teachers.

‡ Members of the artisanal class include saddlers, hatters, machinists, carpenters, wire workers, bricklayers, and river pilots.

§ Participants in this category either were not listed in the city directory or no occupation was given.

ers involved in the Cincinnati debate over abolitionism: antiabolitionists, abolitionists, and the law and order faction. Each group organized its discourse around a set of arguments that were appropriated from a preexisting stock of arguments about mobs and disorder, race and abolitionism, and civil liberties and community rights. The members of all three groups were largely from the commercial and professional classes, although they differed in terms of occupational and social status.[13]

Table 1 divides the three groups according to the occupations of their members.[14] Although the professional class was equally represented among the three groups, members of the commercial class were more likely to belong to the antiabolition faction. Moreover, the city's social, economic, and political elite (i.e., wholesale merchants, owners of foundries or mills, bankers, lawyers and doctors with large practices, and ministers of the largest churches in the city) were disproportionately represented among antiabolitionists. Nearly 90% of the commercial antiabolitionists were from the upper tier of the city's elite, and over 40% (11 of the 27) of the professional men were prominent attorneys who often represented these commercial elites or were engaged themselves in real estate speculation or commercial investment (Glazer 1968, pp. 107–9).[15]

Abolitionists and the law and order group represented the middle level of the commercial and professional classes (e.g., small retailers, teachers, and clerks). Only one member of the law and order faction belonged to the commercial elite, and only six (or 15%) were high-status professionals. Similarly, abolitionists lacked the wealth, status, and social authority of the antiabolitionists. Only six abolitionists (about 21%) were from the elite, and over half of its professionals were low-status, low-paid schoolteachers (three men taught free blacks and three were women).

Although each group represented a specific population of the professional and commercial classes, all three directed their discourse toward the city's elite, who, as political officials and the primary employers in the city, held the authority to sanction or prevent a riot. Members of the three groups, especially the abolitionists, were probably aware that elites had condoned, sanctioned, and in some cases participated in previous antiabolition and antiblack riots (e.g., in New York City in 1833 and 1834, in Boston in 1835, and in Utica, N.Y., in 1835) and understood that most episodes of collective violence would not be allowed unless elites considered them unlikely to seriously threaten the law or their property (see Gilje 1987, pp. 17–25, 32–44, 83; Feldberg 1980, pp. 26, 42–44; Hammett 1976; Richards 1970, pp. 131–33; Weinbaum 1979, pp. 35, 41–42, 62). Thus all three groups hoped to persuade this powerful audience to support their claims and to legitimate their positions. The three groups also appealed to members from middle-class occupations, who were likely participants in any riot.[16] Many in both audiences were opposed to abolitionism, held racist opinions, and tended to value economic growth more than moral reform (see Aaron 1992, pp. 82–83, 295–99; Folk 1978, chap. 3 [on the 1829 Cincinnati race riot], pp. 58–62, 83;

[13] I obtained the names and occupations of the active creators and participants of the three groups from the proceedings of public meetings, organizational statements, published letters from participants, the city directory for 1836 (*Cincinnati Directory for the Years 1836/37* 1836), the OASS annual reports for 1835 and 1836 (OASS 1836, 1837), and app. A in Richards (1970, p. 174). There were not significant differences in political party affiliation among the three groups, because Whigs were dominant in each (Richards estimates roughly 60%–70% of each group were Whigs), although abolition and law and order discourses more strongly reflected Whig concerns about the pernicious effects of mobs on society.

[14] Table 1 represents the leaders of the three groups. The low number of artisans included in the table is not indicative of the actual number who participated in the riot nor who were members of an abolition society (Richards [1970, p. 140] notes that artisans were underrepresented because they were not among the leadership or active core of the society). Folk (1978, p. 108) suggests that many of the rioters were employed in the foundries and shipyards owned by antiabolitionist leaders or were employed in jobs dependent on the Southern trade.

[15] My classification agrees with Richards's (1970) assessment of the elite nature of the antiabolition coalition. Glazer (1968, pp. 109–10) divides the commercial class into a core of wealthy elites and a large class of small retailers of more modest wealth. He notes that of the 2,044 men involved in commercial occupations (excluding manufacturers) in 1840, only about 100 were involved in large-scale, wholesale activities and were extensively involved with the Southern trade, while the vast majority were small retailers who owned small amounts of property and were engaged in local trade. Only 5 of 43 or just over 10% of antiabolitionists in the commercial class were shop owners.

[16] Several historians suggest that participants in antebellum riots were generally from the middle classes and owned some property (see Gilje 1987, pp. 162–70; Feldberg 1983, pp. 43–53; Hammett 1976, p. 863; Grimstead 1972, p. 386).

Pih 1969; Wade 1954; Woodson 1916). Antiabolitionists possessed a distinct advantage over abolition and law and order speakers because they were speaking to two sets of listeners generally committed to their ideas and plan of action. In order to effectively counter antiabolitionism, the other two groups would be forced to overcome Cincinnatians' racism, hostility to abolitionism, and fears of losing the Southern trade.

At the same time, abolitionists and antiabolitionists targeted specific audiences who were likely to be receptive to their respective messages and possessed important resources (e.g., money or willingness to engage in action) each group hoped to tap. Abolitionists directed their message to an audience of state and national abolitionists because they hoped to secure the support, financial resources, and pressure of public opinion of a larger audience than was available to them in Cincinnati.[17] Antiabolitionists directed their message to Cincinnati's Southern neighbors, especially those in Kentucky and in South Carolina, in order to maintain amicable trade relations and avert a potential economic boycott. They also hoped to win the support and participation of those laborers engaged in work dependent on the Southern trade (e.g., steam engine manufacturing) and therefore scheduled their public meetings when workers in the manufacturing shops and mills were on their way home.

I drew the data for the textual analysis—editorials, letters to the editor, proceedings of public meetings, and narratives of the riot—primarily from six of Cincinnati's daily (*Whig, Republican, Gazette,* and *Post*) and weekly (*Philanthropist,* and *Cincinnati Journal and Western Luminary*) newspapers.[18] These papers represented the two political parties (Whig and Democrat), the abolition movement, and the Presbyterian community. The four dailies carried economic and political news and catered to a mercantile and professional audience. They had circulations that ranged from about 1,200 to 4,000 and were financed through subscriptions and local advertising.[19] Fear of losing the financial support of this

[17] Although there were only about 100 abolitionists in Cincinnati, the surrounding rural communities in southwest Ohio constituted one of the movement's strongholds (see Volpe 1990, p. 12). Nerone (1989, p. 44) suggests that many subscribers to Cincinnati's papers resided in these communities. As the official newspaper of the OASS, the *Philanthropist* had a statewide readership and many of its articles were reprinted in antislavery papers in New England, New York, and Pennsylvania.

[18] These newspapers, along with the *Baptist Cross and Journal, Western Christian Advocate,* and *Workingman's Friend* are available at the Cincinnati Historical Society or the Ohio State Historical Society.

[19] The *Gazette* published daily, weekly, and triweekly editions with a circulation of about 4,100. The circulation levels of the *Post* and *Whig* ranged between 1,200 and 1,800 for daily, triweekly, and weekly editions (see Hooper 1933, p. 90; Cist 1841, pp. 93–94). The *Republican* (a leading Democratic paper) had a combined daily and weekly circulation of 1,800 (Hooper 1933, p. 90; Nerone 1989, p. 293). The number of weekly subscribers to the *Philanthropist* grew from about 1,000 to over 1,700

audience certainly contributed to the strong antiabolitionist position taken by three of the four, although the editor of the *Gazette* was willing to risk the loss of subscription and advertising dollars to defend the abolitionists' civil liberties (see Aaron 1992, p. 238).[20] The *Philanthropist* was owned by the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society (OASS), and though it was financed primarily by subscriptions (it relied on some advertising revenue, but only a small part was from local businesses; see Nerone [1989, pp. 265, 273]) the society covered shortfalls (see OASS 1837, 1841, 1842, 1843). Thus James Birney, editor of the *Philanthropist,* did not face the same financial pressures to avoid positions contrary to the interests of Cincinnati's businessmen and could advance controversial causes, such as abolitionism, more easily than other editors could.[21] Although the majority of the articles in the *Philanthropist* were directed at abolitionists and thus dealt with slavery, abolitionism, or moral reform, it also published articles on local and national politics, economic news, and short stories. Birney was not, however, just preaching to the converted. He used the newspaper to attract new supporters and to engage the editors of Cincinnati's other papers in a discussion of slavery and the city's economic and political interests. Moreover, Birney could expect that many city residents would read the paper, given the common practice among readers from all classes of sharing newspapers and the easy access to newspapers in the city's reading rooms and taverns.[22] Table 2 links each paper with its party or organization and with its discursive position during the debate.

The *Whig, Gazette,* and *Philanthropist* were the primary voices of the antiabolition, law and order, and abolition positions, respectively. These three newspapers were the main producers of editorials and publishers of letters to the editor and of commentaries on the riot and debate from non-Cincinnatians. Editorials, letters, and outside commentaries ac-

during 1836 (Aaron 1992, p. 307). The circulation figures for Cincinnati's newspapers are similar to those for the average New York City daily (Folk 1978, p. 87).

[20] Throughout its history the *Gazette* risked alienating subscribers and the business community by opposing slavery, championing the civil liberties of minority groups (including blacks and abolitionists), and defending freedom of the press and editorial independence (see Hooper 1933, pp. 74–77; Weisenburger 1934, pp. 413–27; Folk 1978, pp. 49–54; Nerone 1989, pp. 152–53; Aaron 1992, pp. 301–13).

[21] Ohio abolitionists were not nearly as radical, however, as their New England counterparts, and Birney ran the risk of alienating some of his subscribers if his message were to approach the extremism published by William Lloyd Garrison in the *Liberator,* the newspaper of the New England abolitionists (see Gamble 1977).

[22] Readership data for pre–Civil War America is scarce, and historians are reluctant to make conclusive statements regarding readership. However, they contend that readership was much larger than circulation figures (see Nerone [1989, pp. 41–46] for an overview; see also Aaron 1992, p. 235).

TABLE 2

DISCURSIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL POSITION OF CINCINNATI NEWSPAPERS

Newspaper	Editor	Party/Organization	Position
Gazette	C. Hammond	Whig	Law and order
Whig	J. Conover	Whig	Antiabolition
Post	E. S. Thomas	Whig	Antiabolition
Republican	C. Ramsay	Democrat	Antiabolition
Philanthropist	J. Birney	OASS	Abolition
Cincinnati Journal & Western Luminary	T. Brainerd	Presbyterian	Law and order

counted for 85% of the texts produced (192 of 225 texts; 43% [97] were editorials, while letters and commentaries each accounted for roughly 21% [47 and 48, respectively]). The discursive struggle was divided into three discrete stages, punctuated by two episodes of collective action. During the first stage of the debate, speakers relied on editorials to establish their positions, especially the editor of the *Philanthropist,* who penned nearly half (14 of 30) of them. In the second stage, textual production was evenly split between editorials (23 of 54) and letters (21 of 54). The *Whig* was the most active editorial voice in this stage, and its pages were opened to both antiabolition and law and order speakers who struggled to define and defend different conceptions of social order and the means to preserve it. The final stage was dominated by the fight between the editors of the *Whig* and the *Gazette,* and a much stronger law and order voice was heard. The *Whig* published few letters in this stage and instead returned to editorials (two-thirds of its published texts). On the other hand, the *Gazette* produced 10 editorials and published 13 letters from new law and order supporters. The other law and order paper, the *Cincinnati Journal and Western Luminary* (hereafter referred to as *CJWL*) doubled its editorial production from the previous stage (from three to seven) and reprinted six outside commentaries that condemned the July 30 riot. The *Philanthropist* also followed this strategy by publishing extracts from 24 different newspapers across the North (see the tables in the appendix for a summary of discursive production in each stage).

ESTABLISHING THE ABOLITION PRESS: THE DIALECTIC OF DISCOURSE AND ACTION

As noted previously, the conflict over abolitionism in Cincinnati was divided into three discrete periods of public debate and separated by two

episodes of collective violence. In the following analysis I demonstrate how these episodes provided new information that the three groups and their audiences used to evaluate the claims and solutions articulated in the preceding period of debate. After each episode, speakers altered their discourses by framing new diagnoses and solutions according to the real and perceived outcomes of collective violence and formed new discursive alliances in order to gain legitimacy and support for their positions.

The Historical Context of Antebellum Collective Violence

The 1836 riot occurred in an environment marked by heightened concerns about order, sectionalism, and race and ethnicity; increasingly these concerns were translated into collective violence.[23] National identity and institutions remained unsettled, and groups that challenged the political basis for the Union or threatened white labor or Protestantism were often made the object of ideological and physical attack (e.g., Masons, Catholics, Irish immigrants, free blacks). Rioting was considered a quasi-legitimate means of voicing popular opinion about or disapproval of political events, labor relations, and public morality, as well as a means for "the people" to correct "social abuses in instances where the legal system was unable or unwilling to act" (Grimstead 1972, p. 365).[24]

One of the primary focuses of social conflict and rioting during the 1830s was the abolition movement. It challenged commonly held beliefs about race relations, citizenship rights, and the nature of republican government. Thus it generated heated opposition. This opposition was based on the perception that the movement questioned the legitimacy of the Constitution and the compromises necessary to create the nation, prom-

[23] There was a significant increase in the frequency and intensity of urban collective violence during the 1830s. Richards (1970, p. 12) notes that there were 21 mobs during the 1820s, 115 during the 1830s (77% between 1834 and 1836), and 64 in the 1840s. Richards defines mobs as, "those situations where dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of persons temporarily assisted one another and in a violent or turbulent manner broke up meetings, assaulted abolitionists, damaged or destroyed property" (p. 5).

[24] Riots or mob violence were considered quasi-legitimate in part because they posed no real threat to existing structures of society and in part because the upper classes believed that the lower classes would not act independently and that they could control the lower classes (see Grimstead 1972, p. 365; Weinbaum 1979, p. 62). Thus many riots received the explicit or tacit approval of civic authorities and the local elite. Although both parties tolerated rioting, Whigs were far more likely to voice disapproval and alarm than Democrats, because mobs subverted the foundations of society: established authority and law (Hammett 1976, p. 858; Ashworth 1987, pp. 52–61, 111–25; Howe 1979, pp. 23–42). The Democratic ideology of popular sovereignty was used to justify extralegal collective violence (see Feldberg 1980, pp. 90–91, 96–97; Grimstead 1972, pp. 368–74).

ised to destroy the Southern economic system and thus the networks of trade between Northern merchants and manufacturers and Southern cotton growers, promoted black citizenship rights and racial amalgamation, and denounced all institutions that would not promote emancipation. Although Democrats were especially opposed to abolition, the perceived dangers of the movement engendered bipartisan and widespread popular opposition (see Hammett 1979, pp. 859–63; Henig 1969, pp. 48–51; Silbey 1985, pp. 89–90).

The year 1835 witnessed a dramatic upsurge of abolitionist activity that was met in the South with economic threats against the North and demands for legal action against abolitionists. The American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) initiated a campaign to flood the South with its propaganda, and Southerners interpreted this campaign as an attempt by abolitionists to encourage slave insurrection and destroy the legalized system of slavery. Throughout the summer of 1835 and into the early months of 1836, Southern communities (especially in South Carolina) intercepted the mail, demanded an immediate end to the campaign, and urged the North to prove their commitment to the South and the Constitution by suppressing abolitionism. Mass meetings were held in both the South and the North at which abolitionists and their propaganda campaign were condemned and Northern communities pledged not to interfere with or discuss the slavery question (see Dumond 1961, pp. 204–10; Wyatt-Brown 1965; Savage 1938; Richards 1970, pp. 14–43). The crowds did more than listen; they acted collectively to destroy abolitionist presses and property, disrupt meetings, or tar and feather antislavery lecturers. The leading abolition newspapers reported 209 incidents during the 1830s and 1840s, while a less biased source, the *Niles' Weekly Register,* reported 48 (see Richards 1970, p. 14; Feldberg 1980, p. 5). New York City, Utica, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Alton, Illinois, were scenes of major antiabolition and antiblack riots between 1833 and 1838. The majority of antiabolition protests and riots (about three-quarters) were planned by the local professional and commercial elites and were intended to force abolitionist leaders to abandon movement activities (see Richards 1970, p. 111; Feldberg 1980, pp. 45–46).

It was not surprising that Cincinnati should be the scene of a riot against abolitionists. In 1834, city residents protested when the students at Lane Seminary formed an antislavery society, and the board of trustees avoided a riot by outlawing the new society. To protest the AASS's propaganda campaign, Cincinnatians held a mass meeting in the summer of 1835 at which they pledged to defend the constitutional right of Southern citizens to hold slaves and urged Northern citizens to stop the abolitionists (Savage 1938, p. 50). In addition, the city's economy depended

on Southern trade and Southern visitors.[25] Cincinnati's merchants began planning to build a rail line to Charleston in 1835 and 1836 that would expand their markets and minimize trade losses to other Western river cities (see Aaron 1992, p. 296).[26] Abolitionism represented a threat to the new transportation link and the Southern trade in general. Merchants, manufacturers, and workers (especially those from shipyards and engine foundries) responded as they had to previous threats to the city's businesses by acting collectively to preserve their businesses and jobs as well as the city's long-term economic vitality (see Aaron 1992, pp. 82–83; Marcus 1991, p. 56).

Stage 1: Formation of the Discursive Positions, Summer 1835–July 12, 1836

Stage 1 opened in the late summer of 1835 when James Birney announced his decision to establish an abolitionist newspaper in Cincinnati. City officials and members of the commercial and professional elite met with Birney to dissuade him from this enterprise. Birney rejected their overtures, and in December the editors of the *Whig, Post,* and *Republican* urged Cincinnatians to prevent the publication and distribution of an abolitionist paper in the city. Birney began publishing in January 1836, and the debate culminated in a large public meeting at the end of the month at which the abolitionists were denounced and warned to stop publication or face the possibility of mob action. The riot failed to materialize, most likely because the antiabolitionist leaders refused to sanction violence, and Birney was free to discuss the issues through the spring.

The first stage was characterized by the struggle, primarily between abolitionists and antiabolitionists, to formulate the arguments each used to define the issues of debate, construct the other as the enemy, and win

[25] The importance of the Southern trade is evident in the following statistics regarding Cincinnati exports: In 1830 the value of steam engines and sugar mills sent to New Orleans was estimated at $300,000 (with a value of total manufactures at $1,000,000). By 1835 local production of steam engines, cotton gins, sugar mills, and steamboats was valued at $4 million to $5 million (Beery 1943, p. 235). During the 1830s, manufactured goods accounted for approximately one-fourth to one-third of the city's total exports, while pork accounted for 30%–44% of total exports (see Pred 1973, p. 133; Glazer 1968, p. 56; Beery 1943, p. 253). Folk (1978, p. 90) notes the importance of Southern visitors to the city's service industry during the summer months.

[26] This early plan for a Southern rail link was put on hold by an inability to raise $500,000 in start-up money, resistance by canal and steamboat interests, and the technological infeasibility of bridging the Ohio River (see Stover 1961, pp. 19–42; Reed 1966).

public support.[27] At issue during this stage was whether or not residents would allow an abolitionist press to be established and its literature distributed in the city, and the debate hinged on the opposition between slavery and antislavery. The antiabolitionists aligned themselves at the slavery pole and built their definition of the debate on two interrelated arguments that would become the focus of the contest.[28] It was anchored on the commercial threat argument, in which abolitionists were vilified as threats to the city's economic prosperity because they would drive away the Southern trade (see the editorial in the *Republican,* January 18, 1836).[29] The city's mercantile, engine-building, steamboat-manufacturing, and meat-packing industries largely served the South, and these industries' leaders feared a Southern boycott if the city became a center for abolitionist activity. Thus the primary concern of the antiabolitionists was to protect the economy (and their businesses) from disruption by abolitionism. To this end a second argument was created that emphasized how the politics of the movement imperiled the Southern trade.

The political threat argument claimed the activities of Birney and his fellow abolitionists would inflame sectional divisions and weaken the bonds of the Union (e.g., see *Republican,* January 14). Moreover antiabolitionists argued that the North was constitutionally bound not to interfere with the South's domestic affairs. Charles Ramsey, editor of the *Republican,* called abolitionism an unpatriotic movement and warned that abolitionists were secretly "seeking to undermine the institutions of our country and to revolutionize the land." He continued by arguing that these radicals "cannot appreciate the beauties of order, peace and good government. They are longing for *turmoil* and *strife* and *anarchy;* they would destroy our whole system of government—*social, political, and religious*" (January 14; emphasis in original). Both arguments provided a rationale to avoid public discussion of slavery and were intended to reassure Cincinnati's Southern trading partners that the city did not approve of abolitionism and was acting to stop the movement's work.

Many of the antiabolitionists' arguments were introduced or developed at the public meeting they called on January 22. Private meetings and

[27] The discourse of law and order remained largely undefined and unspoken during the first stage. Its leading spokesperson, Charles Hammond of the *Gazette,* refused to sanction the antiabolitionists' efforts to silence the abolition press, but he also refused to sanction the policies of a movement he believed to be dangerous to the city and the nation. Thus he did not fully enter the debate during this stage (see his editorial, January 22).

[28] The antiabolitionists introduced a racial argument during the first stage but abandoned it once the debate was defined in economic and political terms.

[29] Because all the newspaper quotes in this article are from 1836, I will cite them by month and day only.

editorial attacks had failed to persuade Birney to stop publishing his newspaper, and antiabolitionist leaders hoped the condemnation of abolitionism by the public would be successful. The *Republican* reported that a crowd of 500–600 turned out that represented elites, middle-class merchants and clerks, and "the most respectable tradesmen and artisans" (January 25). It was a partisan crowd that reportedly cheered wildly during several speeches in which Birney was derided as an advocate of amalgamation and abolitionism was portrayed as a serious threat to the city's vital Southern trade and the Charleston–Cincinnati railroad project. The crowd unanimously passed several antiabolition resolutions and shouted down Birney when he tried to respond to the attacks and present the platform of the abolition movement (see *Philanthropist,* January 29; *Gazette,* January 27; *Republican,* January 25; *Whig,* January 25; Folk 1978, pp. 74–81).

Denied a voice at the meeting, Birney, as the spokesperson for the OASS, responded in the *Philanthropist* of January 29 by defending the movement and by trying to shift attention away from economic issues to political ones. He rejected the commercial threat argument. Instead he offered an alternative definition of what was at stake in the controversy about abolitionism and in so doing recast the antiabolitionists' political threat argument. The real issue, according to Birney, was the potential loss of the civil liberties of the North. He argued that recent efforts of slaveholders and their Northern allies to silence abolitionists—by censoring the mail, preventing their petitions from being received in Congress, threatening to destroy his press, and mobilizing the Northern press to discredit the movement—were manifestations of the insidious power of slaveholders. By suppressing the abolitionists' freedoms, this power also threatened to subvert every citizen's constitutional rights: "*Commerce* is desirable; investment of capital is advantageous; the encouragement of manufactures is profitable; but desirable, advantageous, and profitable as they all may be, if they are to be bought only by a submissive surrender of the liberty of the press, the freedom of speech, and personal security, the PEOPLE will yet speak in a voice of thunder, *they are too dear!*" (*Philanthropist,* January 29; emphasis in original).

Birney published a 10-part series from February through April in which he reiterated his attacks on slavery and the antiabolitionists. He argued that abolition was in the best interests of the slaveholders and the nation because the growing population of slaves and free blacks in the South threatened to embroil the nation in a bloody race war. This argument and his attacks on the slaveholding power represented an attempt to focus the debate on political concerns. However, the antiabolitionists refused to answer this series, thus refusing to recognize the existence or legitimacy of those claims and rejecting his definition of the

debate (see Wagner-Pacifici 1986, pp. 134–41; Bourdieu 1984, p. 480; 1991, pp. 128–36). By adopting this strategy, the antiabolitionists signaled to the public that the ideas of the abolitionists were not deserving of comment and, if ignored, the movement would ultimately fail for lack of support. Although Birney continued to promote abolitionism into June, his bid to redefine the debate fell on deaf ears. Thus stage 1 ended with the antiabolitionists still enjoying public support.

Stage 2: Reconfiguring the Discursive Field, July 13–July 30

Opposition to abolitionism was on the rise in early July. A large mob prevented Birney from addressing the city's black residents at their Independence Day celebration on the fifth, and in his July 8 editorial Birney castigated Cincinnatians for their immoral treatment of runaway slaves (see Folk 1978, pp. 89–91). On July 12 a group of 20 antiabolitionists conducted a midnight raid on the office of the *Philanthropist*. They dismantled the press and destroyed various printing materials. This event signaled a new stage in which the field was reconfigured and the debate was conducted on the terms of the law and order and abolition discourses. It marked a turning point of the debate insofar as it motivated the law and order faction to enter as full participants and provided the grounds for new diagnoses and definitions of the discursive poles. The event also united (albeit unintentionally) law and order supporters and abolitionists in a defense of law and civil liberties against the alleged lawlessness and betrayal of republican virtues by antiabolitionists. Neither of these reworked discourses were used successfully, however, to mobilize the public, and the antiabolitionists' call to silence the reform movement culminated in a riot that destroyed the abolition press.

Whereas the debate in stage 1 focused on the opposing benefits and dangers of slavery and abolition, in stage 2 it revolved around competing definitions of social order. The July 12 attack was the first instance of real violence to suppress the abolitionists' freedom of speech. It disrupted the debate and forced a reevaluation of the competing sets of diagnoses and solutions by participants and some members of their audiences. The midnight raid provided speakers and audiences with a publicly observed example of the real damages to property and civil liberties that followed from the antiabolitionist solution and fueled speculation on what potential consequences could follow from further mobs. Moreover it seemed to awaken a fear that antiabolitionism might not protect the economic interests of the city or address the previously articulated interest (held by many merchants and businessmen) of preserving public order. Thus the mob acted as a catalyst for new speakers to become involved and participants to alter their discourses. After the first mob, new law and order

speakers (i.e., the *CJWL* and the letter writers published in the *Whig* and the *Gazette*) entered the debate and Hammond of the *Gazette* became more vocal. The event persuaded some antiabolitionists to switch allegiances and support a law and order position, at least temporarily (e.g., James Conover, editor of the *Whig*), and it convinced abolitionists to focus their discourse on the threats to political security and civil rights posed by mob action. The incident was incorporated into the arguments of all three groups, as each offered alternative interpretations of what the raid and the ongoing public debate meant, who was at fault, and how the conflict over abolitionism might be resolved.

Although law and order speakers attributed part of the blame for the city's unrest on the abolitionists and in no way condoned their activities, they reserved their strongest attacks for mob action and its antiabolition advocates. They tried to redefine the debate in terms of the opposition of order and chaos and argued that the real political danger was not so much the potential for disunion or the loss of liberties but the destruction of the legal basis for social order. Mobs were defined as grave threats to the existence of society because they subverted impartial civil law and instituted arbitrary "lynch law," ignored the rights guaranteed by republican government, and more generally undermined the social compact by which a Hobbesian state of nature had been civilized: "*Society cannot exist where law goes unheeded. . . .* If men cannot be protected by the community, they will protect themselves; each one will retake that right of self-defence which he surrendered to society in return for its protection" (*CJWL,* July 21; emphasis in original). Moreover, once a community had allowed a mob to act, other groups at odds with the mob or the will of the majority could also become the object of collective violence: "But at the heels of this [i.e., an abolition mob] follow a Jackson mob and a Harrison mob, a mob of workmen for wages, a mob on rail-road companies, and a mob on water companies" (anonymous letter in the *CJWL,* July 21). Although law and order speakers refused to sanction the tenets and activities of abolitionism, their belief that civil liberties were critical for a safe and orderly society led them to defend the reformers' freedoms of speech and press. This defense took on a sense of urgency as antiabolitionists intensified their vilifications and threats to set the mob loose toward the end of July.

According to Birney and the leaders of the OASS, this first mob action substantiated their claims about the political illegitimacy of antiabolitionism. In response, they narrowed their arguments to emphasize these political dangers and tried to align their movement with the cause of preserving law, civic order, and "the rights of every freeman in Ohio" (see *Philanthropist,* July 22). The abolitionists dropped slavery from their discourse and redoubled their efforts to define the debate as being about

the threat of slaveholders and their Northern allies (i.e., the city's commercial and professional elite) to take away the civil liberties of all Northern free men and in effect enslave them: "Slave emancipation, in itself, has become a matter of comparatively small moment. The aristocracy among us, are thrusting with deadly aim at the very life of our liberties. Take away the freedom of speech and of the press, and where is the hope of redressing any abuse or resisting any usurpation! None. . . . and in the now Free States, the poor will be reduced to the degradation of Russian boors and serfs" (*Philanthropist,* July 22). Birney also adopted the antimob argument used by law and order speakers and emphasized the potential political disorder threatened by mob action. In his comments on the July 12 event and in replies to the repeated threats of riot issued by antiabolition speakers, Birney evoked images of anarchy and used martial language to describe the dangers of mobs to civil liberties and political security.[30] This strategic shift of the abolitionists' discourse also reflected a shift in their goals or agenda, made because direct discussions of slavery and emancipation had garnered little interest or support during the previous stage. The adoption of a law and order position provided abolitionists with arguments that were more resonant with Cincinnatians and allowed them to portray the abolition movement as the champion of republican ideals.

The discourses of abolition and law and order also resembled one another when their advocates dismissed the antiabolitionists' commercial threat argument as unfounded and inappropriate. Birney demanded proof that the abolition movement had injured the city's trade and suggested that it was the South rather than Cincinnati that depended on the intersectional trade for prosperity (see his editorial of July 22). He and *Gazette* editor Charles Hammond expressed outrage that the antiabolitionists were willing to trade the sacred rights of the Constitution and especially the freedom of the press for "a hogshead of sugar" or "a hundred barrels of pork" (see *Philanthropist,* July 22, 29; *Gazette,* July 22). They stated that mobs created disorder and could be as damaging to the city's business (by driving away investors, traders, and visitors) as abolitionism and thus could not be allowed to continue. In a sharply

[30] Birney appropriated the antimob discourse created by the Federalists during the 1780s and 1790s to dispel popular protests that were heavily influenced by the example of the French Revolution. They built their discourse on condemnations of the "corp mobocratique," the "Reign of Terror," "Robespierre," "Jacobinism," and the "sans-culottes," and they claimed that American mobs could easily degenerate into bloody scenes of violence against the federal government and the nation's rulers (see Gilje 1987, pp. 101–12, 118). Mobs were variously described as intent on "overthrowing the safeguards of liberty," "invading the peace and property of quiet law-abiding citizens," and "trampling liberty underfoot" (see *Philanthropist,* July 15, 22, 29).

worded editorial, Hammond argued that economic prosperity was best secured by preserving the legal and political foundations of a society, rather than by resorting to "mobocratic doings":

> It is again alleged, that the toleration of Abolitionism injures our city—by bringing it into bad odor, with Southern men. And will not Mobocracy, also, injure our city? . . . Is the freedom of speech and of the press, to be weighed, in the balance, against pecuniary interest? Such was not the judgment of the founders of our Independence. Will the citizens of Cincinnati offer up their Constitution and their Laws upon the altar of interest? . . . Permanent security, in legal interests, is a more certain foundation for pecuniary prosperity than compliances with unreasonable humors, or angry misconceptions. (*Gazette,* July 22)

Both groups denied legitimacy to the economic grounding of the antiabolition discourse and redefined the debate in terms of order—the abolitionists set up the opposition between Northern civil liberties and the despotism of the slaveholding power, while law and order speakers claimed the conflict was about a more fundamental issue: the preservation of order in the face of chaos. Both demanded an end to the "spirit of mobocracy" as the only way to maintain the law and eliminate the public excitement that had brought the city to the brink of mob violence.

Antiabolitionists recast their discourse along the order-chaos axis, suggesting that the work of the other two groups to define the terms of the debate was successful. The commercial threat argument was subordinated to a new argument, self-preservation, in which collective violence was defended as the means to protect the community and the rights of the majority from the designs of abolitionists to overthrow the established relationships between North and South (see letters to the editor in the *Whig,* July 14, 19, 20, 23).[31] The self-preservation argument built upon the political threat argument of stage one in that it identified abolitionists as the source of social unrest whose activities had brought the city to the edge of mob violence and whose propaganda would ultimately bring about slave insurrection, sectional division, and national disunion. A few authors noted that these political dangers in turn would disrupt the city's businesses, but the majority stressed how abolitionism imperiled the peace and order of the city and the nation. Antiabolitionists claimed that existing laws and rights protecting the abolitionists could be altered and sacrificed in order to preserve the community:

[31] Antiabolitionists published 29 editorials and letters during stage 2. Only four contained the commercial threat argument, and, of these, two appeared immediately after the July 12 attack. The writer of a letter in the *Whig* of July 27 rejected the argument as a legitimate basis for suppressing the abolitionists (he cited political concerns to justify suppression). In comparison, seven of the 11 antiabolition items published during stage 1 emphasized the economic dangers of abolitionism.

> There is however, such a thing as "self-preservation," which every one admits to be paramount to all law, and which it is perfectly justifiable to adhere to at all hazards, no matter what the consequences. If a man stands in a threatening attitude with a knife at our throat, neither the law of God nor man requires us to wait patiently until the fatal stab is given, but we are perfectly justifiable in arresting the hand of the assassin even though in doing so we find it necessary to proceed to the severest extremities. If, then, the Abolitionists place themselves in the position of the assassin, what can they expect. (*Whig,* July 22)

Throughout this stage of the debate, speakers of the different discourses suggested competing visions of order and the causes of disorder and, through their respective constructions of Cincinnati's enemy, tried to gain public support to enact their visions and thus restore social order. Gusfield (1981, p. 81) notes, "When an image of social order is conveyed, its opposite—disorder—is also portrayed. The drama consists in seeing some players as victims, others as villains. Order is obtained through sacrifice so that unity is derived." Antiabolitionists demanded abolitionists to be the sacrifice needed to reestablish the disrupted commercial, political, and racial order of Cincinnati. They suggested that orderly society was based on majority rule and that it must be maintained at all costs, including recourse to popular violence. Antiabolitionists provided the city residents with two choices of social organization: an orderly, prosperous city in which abolitionism was silenced and the will of the majority ruled or a city in which a dangerous minority was allowed to continue the activities that would destroy the Union and drive away trade. By vilifying their counterparts, antiabolitionists provided Cincinnatians with instructions about how to understand and interact with members of the abolition movement and thus justified their solution of collective violence (see Holstein and Miller 1990, pp. 105–7).

The second stage of the debate reached a critical period when the antiabolitionists convened a public meeting on the evening of July 23 to "fairly and decisively test the will of the people, it being alleged that there is a settled determination existing in an overwhelming majority of the citizens to put down the alleged evil [i.e., abolitionism] by force, if admonitions are found insufficient" (cited from the official proceedings of the meeting in the *Philanthropist,* July 29; the same account was printed in the *Gazette,* July 25, the *Whig,* July 25, the *Republican,* July 26, and the *CJWL,* July 28). It was widely expected that the meeting had been called to organize a mob that would destroy the abolitionist press, and the adopted resolutions suggest that many Cincinnatians (perhaps as many as the 3,000 in attendance) were willing to use violence against the persons and property of the abolitionists.[32] The antiabolition-

[32] For example, the fifth resolution resolved, "That, in the opinion of this meeting, nothing short of the absolute discontinuance of the publication of the said Abolition

ists justified this solution by means of their political threat and self-preservation arguments. One resolution claimed that abolitionism aimed to destroy the Union and then defended the recourse to extralegal action by claiming that the antiabolitionists were following the example of their revolutionary ancestors who defied the king's law and dumped English tea into Boston Harbor (see the final resolution in the *Philanthropist,* July 29). Together, the set of resolutions vilified the abolitionists, blamed them for the state of civic unrest in the city, and offered a clear rationale for mob violence that refuted the abolitionists' civil liberties arguments. However, more moderate antiabolition leaders urged recourse to legal means and won a postponement. The officers of the meeting appointed a committee of prominent lawyers and merchants to meet with the abolitionists in private to persuade them to voluntarily stop publishing their newspaper and warn them that mob violence would result if they continued. When the committee failed, antiabolitionist leaders prepared to riot. In short, the reorientation of the debate around the question of order allowed speakers to redefine the meaning of the conflict in highly charged and polarized terms, as well as to heighten the importance of resolving the debate. No longer was it simply a matter of securing the Southern trade but also a question of preserving the political and legal order of the city and the nation. The reframing work of the second stage made compromise increasingly difficult and collective violence a more tenable and likely solution.

Although the debate was restructured according to the terms set by abolitionists and the law and order group, they were unable to prevent another episode of collective violence. Their lack of immediate success may be attributed to several factors. First, law and order speakers failed to establish an independent position. They were increasingly identified as supporters of the abolition movement by their defense of the reformers' civil liberties and their own admissions that they would rather see the abolitionists continue to publish their paper rather than suffer the evils of mob violence. The adoption of their antimob argument by abolitionists further blurred the distinctions between the two discourses, and antiabolitionists were able to discredit the law and order position by this association. This unintended alliance effectively eliminated the middle voice. The two major voices of law and order, the *Gazette* and the *Whig,* were caught in a no-win situation: they either could support an unpopular social movement and run the risk of losing subscribers or being made the object of a mob, or they could support the publicly approved position

paper, in this city, can prevent a resort to violence, which may be as disastrous to its publisher and supporters, as it must be to the good order, and fair fame of our city" (*Philanthropist,* July 29).

of antiabolitionism and its solution of collective violence to remove the threat to the city's peace. Conover of the *Whig* chose the latter position, while Hammond of the *Gazette* dropped out of the debate altogether.

Second, neither abolitionism nor law and order articulated a clear plan of action to resolve the conflict. Both groups urged citizens to obey the law and not relinquish their constitutional liberties. Law and order speakers also pleaded with the mayor and other city officials to enforce antiriot laws, but they made no provision for the public to be involved in resolving the city's problem of disorder. Law and order speakers were unwilling to sanction mob violence and violate constitutional rights, while at the same time they could not approve of abolitionism and the attendant disorder it was causing. Thus they found it extremely difficult to formulate and articulate concrete nonviolent solutions and limited the discourse's mobilization potential (see Snow and Benford 1988).

Third, both discourses failed to disprove the commercial threat argument of antiabolitionism. Although both had successfully placed the political bases for economic activity at the center of the contest so that preserving social order rather than business interests was given primacy, their discourses left unanswered the question of whether abolitionism would drive away the Southern trade. Both discourses emphasized the necessity of securing republican freedoms and the law but could not promise to keep traffic flowing on the Mississippi. The competing discourse of antiabolitionism promised to rid the city of abolitionism by intimidation or force, and its advocates claimed that this was the only sure means to preserve economic prosperity and the political order of the city and the nation. In a city identified by commerce and having grown rich from the Southern trade, the temporary disorder of collective violence seemed less risky than losing the trade because a despised minority were allowed to defame the city's Southern clients. Nevertheless, the successful reframing of the debate provided city residents with a set of alternative interpretations of what the debate and collective violence meant. Cincinnatians used the alternative interpretations to assess the viability of the three groups' claims and measures of conflict resolution. The July 30 riot would provide additional information residents and commentators from across the United States would use to evaluate the competing claims and determine which would be dominant.

The Riot

A riot was expected following the July 23 public meeting that condemned abolitionism,[33] but antiabolitionist leaders won a postponement. As noted

[33] This account of the riot is compiled from the narratives in the *Whig,* August 1, 2; the *Republican,* August 1; the *Gazette,* August 2, 3; the *Philanthropist,* September

above, the committee failed in its task; the abolitionists rejected the ultimatum to abandon their press, and the committee publicly disassociated itself from the consequences. The results of the meeting were published in the *Whig* and the *Republican* of July 30. The *Whig* added an editorial warning of and encouragement to riot:

> The editor and publisher of the Philanthropist, the abolition paper in this city seem . . . to be determined to put the great mass of the people of this city at utter and contemptuous defiance. We observe that the offensive paper appeared yesterday, *as usual,* bearing upon its front the name of James G. Birney as editor, and *A. Pugh,* as printer. Publishing office corner of Main and Seventh streets. Are the abolitionists in this city mad? Will they not take counsel of what has occurred? Or will they persist in contemning public sentiment until they bring upon themselves the excited vengeance of the multitude? Once more we say to them, *pause*! (Emphasis in original)[34]

At 6 p.m. on July 30 the antiabolitionists held an organizational meeting at which time they decided to destroy the press and run the abolition leaders out of town wearing a coat of tar and feathers (much like previous antiabolition mobs—see Richards [1970]; Feldberg [1980]). The mob (estimated at between 1,500 and 5,000 members) reassembled at 9 p.m., marched to the office of the *Philanthropist,* tore down the presses, scattered the types in the street, and dismantled the office. They proceeded to the home of the printer and searched the house for printing supplies. Finding none, they moved on to the homes of three abolition leaders, including James Birney. When they found the abolitionists had fled, the mob moved to the office of another OASS officer, Dr. Isaac Colby, dismantled his office, piled its contents in the street, and tried to set it on fire. One of the mob's leaders climbed atop and persuaded the mob not to burn the pile of debris but instead to drag the presses down into the Ohio River. Once this was accomplished, the mob paused for drinks at a hotel and then reassembled to attack buildings in an interracial neighborhood. The first attack was repelled by gunfire, but a second met no resistance and several buildings were gutted. It was now midnight and the mob was met by the mayor, who convinced the mob that it had accomplished its goals and should disperse. The majority of the mob dispersed, but a smaller mob attacked several houses and shops in a black

27; "Narrative of the Late Riotous Proceedings . . ." (1836); Folk (1978, pp. 141–51); and Richards (1970, pp. 98–100).

[34] The *Whig* issued an earlier warning to stop publishing or be stopped by a mob on July 27, and the *Republican* issued its warning of impending mob violence against the abolitionists on July 26.

neighborhood.[35] On Sunday, July 31, a smaller mob gathered outside a boarding house where Birney was rumored to be hiding, but before any action occurred the mayor intervened, conducted a search, and assured the crowd that Birney was not there. Later in the evening a mob threatened several black neighborhoods, but no personal or property damage was reported.

Stage 3: Repudiation and Revitalization, August–October 1836

Although the riot was contained to the night of July 30, the war of words continued into October. What stands out in the postriot debate is an overwhelming rejection of mob action and a strong challenge to the antiabolitionists' economic and self-preservation arguments. In editorials and lengthy reconstructions of the riot, abolition and law and order speakers targeted antiabolitionists as enemies of civil liberties and held them responsible for the riot. Recourse to mob violence was denounced because it destroyed the foundations of orderly society, (i.e., individual civil liberties and equal protection under the law). The antiabolitionists' argument that mob violence was a legitimate means to preserve the safety of the community against the threats of abolitionism was rejected on the grounds that mobs actually threatened to dissolve society:

> *There is no possible evil so great as mobs.* And this for the simple reason, that society is entirely disorganized by them;—while they reign society is resolved back to its original elements. . . . Law has perished, right is smothered, and instead of the terrible march of organised justice under strict control, there is the romping and raging of brute force driven on by brute passion. . . . A mob destroys quiet, perverts justice, tramples on virtue and by insecurity and panic consumes happiness, and repeated, shakes down society irretrievably—for *there is no society without law,* and no mob will observe laws on which they may trample with impunity. (*CJWL,* August 11; emphasis in original; see also August 18)

Agents of both discourses substantiated their counterarguments and their "order-chaos" definition by reprinting like-minded editorials from newspapers outside of Cincinnati.[36] These outside editorials denounced the riot, defended the abolitionists' rights and more generally the primacy of the liberty of speech, press, and conscience over the rights of property,

[35] The mob reportedly had planned to attack Lane Seminary, whose students generally supported abolitionism, but that plan was laid aside when the mob was told that students were armed and ready. The office of the *Gazette* also was targeted for destruction, but mob leaders prevented this attack.

[36] For examples, see *Gazette,* August 5, 8, 9, 16; *CJWL,* August 11; and *Philanthropist,* October 14, 21. Short excerpts were reprinted from New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, and Missouri newspapers.

vilified antiabolitionists as tools of Southern masters, and rejected the rioters' claims to be protecting the city's trade and the integrity of the Union.[37] The outside voices lent credibility to how the poles had been reframed internally. Moreover, the use of these commentaries may have been a tactic to suggest that there was statewide and perhaps national support for the claim that short-term economic pursuits must be subordinate to political security if society is to survive.

Law and order speakers reasserted their rejection of the antiabolitionists' commercial threat argument—in other words, subverting law and the freedoms of speech and press by riot simply to preserve material interests was declared an illegitimate basis for suppressing abolitionism. Charles Hammond, editor of the *Gazette* said, "We cannot consent to surrender any one of the blood-bought rights, which our fathers bequeathed to us, for the purpose of securing a southern trade" (August 4).[38] The repudiation of antiabolitionism was dramatized and validated when Southerners rejected the legitimacy of antiabolition claims that mob violence was necessary to preserve Cincinnati's trade with the South. The *Louisville Public Advertiser* on August 3 wrote, "This movement in Cincinnati is discreditable. It seems, by the correspondence between the Committee of Citizens and the Executive Anti-Slavery Committee, that the hostility to the Philanthropist was based on mere business calculations—it was alleged that the business of the city was affected by the course of the obnoxious print. . . . *It was interest; and interest only; that prompted a violation of law and order, in favor of the rights of slaveholders, and we cannot say we thank the Cincinnatians for what they have done*" (cited in the *CJWL,* August 11; emphasis in original).[39]

In general this strategy of definition (and the use of collective violence itself) discredited the antiabolition self-preservation and economic threat arguments and transformed the abolitionists into victims.[40] The aboli-

[37] For example, the editor of the *Troy Times* wrote, "The subject of slavery always has been discussed in Ohio, and always will be discussed when the people have a mind to it. The issue is, shall mobocracy prevail, or shall the laws and the constitution be preserved inviolate. . . . Is abolitionism to be put down by mobs? Is the discussion of political questions to be hushed by violence and the press be muzzled? And for what purpose? To pacify the south" (cited in the *Philanthropist,* October 21).

[38] The editor of the *CJWL* (August 11) also charged the antiabolitionists with having traded away sacred rights for a "muzzle of gold" and noted that the city's economy had not been injured by the abolition movement but was growing.

[39] In addition, the August 11 edition republished excerpts from editorials from the *Louisville City Gazette, St. Louis Republican,* and *Lexington Intelligencer* in which mobs were denounced and the law and order position commended. See also three reprinted articles from Louisville papers in the *Gazette,* August 4, 18.

[40] Law and order speakers, abolition speakers, and nonlocal papers also argued that the mob (and mobs in general) won public support for the abolition movement and

tionists were no longer labeled as the subverters of social order. Instead, outside commentators, law and order speakers, and, reportedly, the general public now defined them as the victims of a lawless and greed-motivated mob that violated their civil liberties (e.g., see letters published in the *CJWL,* August 11). When abolitionists won victim status, attention was directed away from the radicalness and more threatening features of their movement toward the injustices perpetrated against them. The victimization of the abolitionists signaled to the public that they were innocent and worthy of support, while suggesting that their victimizers, the antiabolitionists, deserved censure (see Holstein and Miller 1990). This discursive move facilitated the delegitimization of antiabolitionism.

Antiabolitionism was not only rejected by outside observers but also by citizens who had not been involved during the first two stages of the struggle. Individually and collectively they voiced their support of the law and order position and defended the abolitionists' civil liberties. Some of Cincinnati's leading families—Beecher, Gest, and Chase—who had remained silent spoke out against antiabolitionism in early August (Folk 1978, p. 158). The public statement of the young lawyer Salmon Chase is representative of the newly mobilized law and order supporters: "*Sooner than see ANY PRESS, however obnoxious,* destroyed, and put to silence by unlawful force, I would make almost any sacrifice. Much as I have deprecated the course of the Abolitionists, I regard all the consequences of their publications, as evils comparatively light, when contrasted with the evils produced by the prevalence of the mob spirit. FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND CONSTITUTIONAL LIBERTY, MUST LIVE OR PERISH TOGETHER" (*Gazette,* August 4; emphasis in original). These sentiments were echoed in the letters of five new writers in the *Gazette* (August 8, 23) and in the editorials of the city's Baptist, Episcopalian, and working-class newspapers (the *Baptist Cross and Journal,* the *Western Christian Advocate,* and the *Workingman's Friend*). They all joined the chorus of voices rejecting mob violence as a legitimate means of conflict resolution and expressed fear that the mob attack against the properties and civil liberties of one group could lead to similar attacks against other groups in the city.

Cincinnati's residents also acted collectively to maintain order and protest the use of violence by the antiabolition mob. After the second evening of mob activity (and with more threatened for the third night), the mayor issued a call on August 1 for citizens to act as deputies, and 80 men were deputized. They were joined by an additional 200 men,

thus claimed that antiabolitionism ultimately failed (e.g., see editorials and excerpts in the *CJWL,* August 11, and the *Philanthropist,* September 23 and October 21).

organized by local businessmen into small patrols, to prevent further violence during the first week of August (Folk 1978, p. 145). On August 3, Hammond and several others prepared a set of resolutions for a public meeting that evening called by the law and order group. The resolutions condemned the economic rationale used to justify the antiabolition mob as well as the use of violence and reiterated the need to protect the civil liberties and property of all citizens in order to make the city a safe place to live and work (see *Gazette,* August 4). Hammond's resolutions were not heard at the meeting, however, because antiabolitionists seized control of it and substituted a different set of resolutions. Although both the mob and abolitionists were condemned, the latter were still identified as the cause of trouble. Even so, the antiabolitionists concluded by adopting law and order concerns and pledging themselves to help the mayor: "Resolved, That this meeting deeply regret the cause of the recent occurrences, and entirely disapprove of Mobs or other unlawful assemblages. Resolved, That we will cordially support the city authorities in their efforts to preserve the public peace, and will heartily co-operate with each other in all exertions to effect that object" (*Gazette,* August 4; *Whig,* August 3).

This support for a law and order position marked the onset of the change in the antiabolition discourse. Many members of the commercial and professional elite abandoned the commercial threat, political threat, and self-preservation arguments and publicly distanced themselves from the use of collective violence. Several members of the antiabolition committee who had met with the abolitionists in late July claimed that they had not and still did not sanction the use of mob violence, especially interpersonal violence (see letters to the editor in the *Gazette,* August 3, 4, 16). The editor of the Presbyterian weekly noted that many antiabolitionists had abandoned their previous position and now embraced the position and goal of the law and order faction: "Many of the very men, who encouraged and acted with the mob of Saturday night, either ashamed or alarmed at the evil they had let loose upon us, were busy in suppressing any further riots" (*CJWL,* August 4). In addition, antiabolitionist editors abandoned the arguments of stages one and two in favor of arguments that mirrored those from the discourse of law and order, even to the point of urging the mayor to enforce the city's antiriot code (see *Whig,* August 1, 2, 13; *Republican,* August 5; Folk 1978, pp. 147–51). Although Conover and Ramsay continued to attack abolitionists and blamed the reformers as the cause of the riot, they rejected collective violence as a legitimate means to address the movement: "The rioters seem only to have aimed at the profligate. But, however, good their *intentions* may have been, their course was illegal, full of danger, and

destructive of good order, and therefore deserves the loud reprobation of every good citizen" (*Whig,* August 2; emphasis in original).

Thus antiabolitionism was repudiated by many Cincinnatians and largely abandoned by its former advocates and supporters. This state of affairs was set up by the reorientation of the debate around the issue of political and legal order during the second stage, which would organize future discursive competition. When the antiabolition solution—collective violence—was implemented, it provided new information that speakers and audiences used to assess the accuracy of competing diagnoses, the efficacy of this solution, and the potential consequences that might follow. Rather than restore social order, the riot created greater social disorder, violated the civil liberties of the abolitionists, and fostered the possibility that mobs would continue to suppress unpopular ideas or groups, destroy property, and thus lead to anarchy. The riot undermined the antiabolitionists' arguments and substantiated the claims advanced by law and order and abolition speakers during the second stage, claims that said mobs, such as those organized by the antiabolitionists, would dissolve the political and legal basis for society and hence undermine the conditions necessary to preserve long-term economic stability. Without the security of law and the protection of civil liberties, the community's economic interests could not be safeguarded; thus mobs and those groups and discourses that sanctioned them would damage the city's economy more than abolitionism did or could do.

Once collective violence was defined as incongruent with and dangerous to the economic and security interests of antiabolitionists and city residents (especially property owners), it became an indefensible solution and was abandoned in favor of the more credible and legitimate position of the law and order faction. The successful reframing of the debate was facilitated by several contextual factors: economic uncertainty, the unavailability of legal means to silence the abolition press, and the relative homogeneity of the competing factions. During the first two stages of the debate, antiabolitionists used the Southern threat of an economic boycott to justify their opposition to and actions against the abolition movement. If Cincinnati's businessmen had experienced financial losses as a result of the continued presence of abolitionism in the city, then the reframing work of abolition and law and order speakers would have been less likely to have succeeded (cf. McAdam 1983, pp. 742–43). However, the threatened boycott failed to materialize, Southern editors voiced their disapproval of the antiabolitionists course, and the mobs rather than the abolitionists were considered disruptive of commercial activity. Together these factors made it difficult to sustain the antiabolitionists' frame. Second, the unavailability of legal means to silence the press or disband

the movement ruled out alternative framings. If legal means had been available, antiabolitionists would have been able to define abolitionists as criminals (a potentially more potent vilification than that used in their economic threat argument) and more easily undermine the abolitionists' self-identification as victims and upholders of the law. Finally, the homogeneity of the three groups worked against the antiabolitionists. The abolitionists resembled their fellow Cincinnatians along a number of social dimensions-they shared a common race, practiced the same religion, held similar occupations, and shopped at the same stores. In many ways antiabolitionists were attacking people much like other city residents. If the abolitionists had been outsiders (i.e., foreigners or blacks) or could have been defined as such, the antiabolitionists may have been able to win public acceptance for mob violence, sustain their vilification of the abolitionists, and more effectively counter the abolition and law and order reframings. This conclusion is suggested by the successful definition of blacks, the Irish, and Roman Catholics as outsiders and the publicly sanctioned use of collective violence against these groups during the antebellum period (see Feldberg 1980; Grimstead 1972; see also Alexander 1992; Rogin 1987).[41]

The episodes of collective violence and the ensuing discursive struggles not only changed the meaning and import of some arguments and reconfigured the field of debate but also improved the fortunes of the abolition movement in Ohio. First, the abolitionists were allowed to publish their newspaper and engage in movement activities relatively unhindered until the early 1840s, when antiblack riots and opposition to the abolitionists' fugitive slave rescues temporarily silenced the abolition press. Second, the 1836 conflict provided the movement with national publicity and a discursive strategy (championing civil liberties and political order) that made their case more legitimate and politically important (see Folk 1978, pp. 193–204; Richards 1970, pp. 161–62). This nascent politicization of the movement attracted new recruits and triggered the rapid growth of the movement in Ohio. Between May 1836 and May 1837 the number of new abolition societies in Ohio rose from 133 to 213 (a 60% increase), and over two-thirds (54 of 80) were organized after the July riot. Only New York had more abolitionists by the end of the year (see the third and fourth AASS annual reports [1836, pp. 96–98; 1837, pp. 136–40] on the number of state societies; see also Folk [1978, p. 204]).

[41] During the Cincinnati antiblack and antiabolitionist mobs of 1841 and 1843, abolitionists were successfully defined as outsiders because the most vocal abolitionist was a recent immigrant from England (see Folk 1978, pp. 205–81, 330–51; Richards 1970, pp. 123–25).

In short, the 1836 antiabolition riots in Cincinnati occasioned changes in the discourses and organization of the field of debate. Speakers from all three groups responded by reframing the debate around the question of how best to preserve social order while addressing the presence of abolitionism in the city. In turn, some speakers switched allegiances and new actors joined the debate in support of preserving the law and social order. After the second mob, abolitionists and law and order speakers renewed their arguments that antiabolitionism threatened the political and economic security of the city. These arguments were more compelling to city residents who had witnessed the destruction the angry mob wreaked and who lived in fear of continued rioting for nearly a week. Mob action was rejected as a legitimate solution by many of its earlier advocates—the business and political elite—as well as by many of the city's other residents. The law and order position won widespread support, the discourse of antiabolitionism was reworked to closely resemble the law and order position, and abolitionism gained publicity, new constituents, and tacit permission to continue its activities in the city.

CONCLUSION

In a recent article, Gamson (1992, p. 70) claims that "there is an important and complicated relationship between the characteristics of events and the success of certain frames," and then argues that the key to understanding this relationship lies in examining how speakers and audiences interpret the event and why a particular interpretation is adopted. Unfortunately, most constructivist studies of collective action leave the nature of this relationship—how it is organized and how it changes—unspecified. We do not know how episodes of collective action affect the success or failure of different frames, nor whether and how speakers change arguments, extend frames, or tap into alternative collective beliefs following these episodes.

In this study of the Cincinnati antiabolition riot of 1836 I offer some answers to these question. First, I argue that the relationship between collective action and discourse is dialectical. Speakers shuttle between creating diagnoses and solutions to some social problem, implementing a solution through collective action, and then incorporating the action into their particular discourses as the grounds for evaluating and reworking arguments or redefining the subject of the debate. Competition among speakers defines and narrows the problem at hand and the possibilities for collective action. Episodes of collective action may lead speakers to reopen the discursive struggle by providing evidence for speakers and audiences who witnessed the event to assess the accuracy of competing diagnoses, measure the efficacy of the solution, or articulate new

arguments. Events, then, may change the underlying ideas or beliefs that make up the discourses and frames used by movement actors, resignify which set of collective beliefs are salient, and alter the meaning of actors' interests—all of which affect the power of a particular discourse or frame.

Law and order and abolition speakers reorganized the discursive struggle around the relationship of collective violence to order rather than the relationship of abolitionism to economic interests. In so doing, they changed the grounds by which to understand and judge the antiabolitionists' solution. Once this solution (i.e., mob action) was implemented, they had the evidence necessary to discredit antiabolitionism and demonstrate that their position was more congruent with the goal of preserving the political order that made economic activity possible and profitable. The power of this discursive position was evident not only by the support it received from previously unmobilized audiences but also by the support it received from antiabolitionists during the third stage. By focusing on this dialectic, we can enrich studies of movement tactics and protests that do not explicitly address how the arguments, frames, or beliefs that mobilized constituents are created and recreated following collective action (e.g., Tarrow 1989; Hirsch 1990).

Second, by conceptualizing the relationship in a dialectical manner, I also illustrate how actors within a discursive field use episodes of collective action to change alliances and reconfigure relations within a discursive field, which in turn may alter a group's legitimacy, base of support, and power to sanction or prevent further collective action. After the first mob, the law and order voices became more active in the debate as old and new speakers came to see that mob violence threatened their economic or civic interests. Meanwhile, abolitionists strategically adopted the arguments of the law and order group in a bid to define the movement as the champion of constitutional liberties instead of as the champion of the more unpopular ideas of emancipation and racial equality. They changed their argument to gain legitimacy, win new supporters, and forestall additional mob violence directed at them.

In addition, examining the dialectic between events and discursive production may help us understand more completely how and why frames of meaning are extended or transformed. Snow and his collaborators (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Benford 1993*a*, 1993*b*) suggest that movement frames, vocabularies of motives, or arguments are changed or fail because speakers tap into the wrong set of collective beliefs, advance goals that are incongruent with those of their audience, fail to create ideological or organizational alliances with other movements, or do not develop robust and interconnected diagnoses, solutions, and rationales. Yet as I argue, these processes of frame alignment are influenced as well by the course and interpretation of collective action

events. Such events intervene in the process of creating frames or discourses, change the value actors assign to collective beliefs, and motivate some groups to abandon a set of arguments and adopt those of a rival or create new ones. They also provide some speakers with new information that they can use to substantiate their claims and discredit the claims of others. In the case at hand, I argue that abolition and law and order speakers drew upon a preexisting discourse and set of collective beliefs about the sanctity of constitutional rights and the threat mobs posed to them to counter the antiabolitionists' political and commercial threat arguments. Their antimob and civil liberties arguments provided an alternative definition of what was at stake in the debate and how to preserve social order and the Southern trade. Although these arguments did not prevent the riot, they became the lens through which the riot and antiabolitionism were interpreted, discredited, and rendered indefensible during the third stage of the debate. Future research in the constructivist paradigm would not only benefit by attending more carefully to how and under what conditions collective action episodes shape meaning-making processes but will further our understanding of the dialectic between discourse and action by specifying how different forms of collective action (e.g., consciousness-raising campaigns, strikes, sit-ins, and riots) influence different framing tasks or discursive strategies.

Third, this study indicates that speakers occupying different positions within a field of debate may respond to episodes of collective action and construct their arguments in very different ways. Those speakers who occupy the challenger role (e.g., abolitionists and law and order speakers) may be more willing to extend and transform their discourses in order to win a place in the debate, influence the agenda, and even "force the sponsors of a legitimating frame to defend its underlying assumptions" (Gamson 1992, p. 68). The strategies challenger groups adopt to accomplish these goals and, in the Cincinnati case, to defeat the antiabolitionists' discourse and favored course of collective action may include: taking a morally or politically unassailable position (e.g., defending constitutional liberties); changing the stakes of the debate so that short-term solutions cannot resolve problems defined as deep-seated and requiring radical social-structural change; offering alternative diagnoses and solutions that reinforce and more closely fit the new horizon of expectations; and depicting the actions of opponents as imminent threats to the overall security of the social system, while redefining one's own group as the victim of the unjust actions.

Finally, this study demonstrates that we will be able to develop more comprehensive accounts of how and why arguments are constructed and reconstructed and discursive fields are reconfigured by attending more carefully to which audiences speakers target, how well their diagnoses

and solutions serve the interests and goals of those audiences, and how adept speakers are at responding to the changes in their audiences' beliefs, interests, or goals occasioned by collective action. In the Cincinnati case, the critical audience for all three groups was the economic and political elite, who possessed the power to sanction or prevent collective violence. Law and order and abolition speakers reframed the debate to change the meaning of order and to discredit collective violence as the best means to preserve order. This reframing allowed them to build a compelling case after the riot that violence and the antiabolition economic justifications for it were illegitimate and harmful to the interests of the elite. In the end, elites withdrew their support for antiabolitionism or became vocal supporters of the law and order position. The key to explaining these changes lies in understanding the ways in which speakers incorporate episodes of collective action into their preexisting discourses in order to make those discourses resonate more closely with an audience's new horizon of expectations or to win the support of new audiences. In sum, attending to the dialectic of culture and event helps us understand how and why social action is organized and its effect on discursive creation.

APPENDIX

Numerical Summary of Article Type by Source for Each Stage of the Debate

In the following tables I provide a summary of the number and type of articles each newspaper produced or published during the entire debate and during each stage.

TABLE A1

SUMMARY OF ALL ARTICLES USED IN THE DEBATE

Source	Editorials	Letters	Notices*	Meetings†	Outside Sources‡	*N*
Whig	29	17	3	4	0	53
Republican	13	5	2	3	5	28
Gazette	17	16	5	5	8	51
Philanthropist	22	3	2	3	28	58
Cincinnati Journal & Western Luminary	11	2	0	2	6	21
Post	5	4	4	0	1	14
N	97	47	16	17	48	225

* Notices refer to calls for public meetings, official city proclamations, and handbills threatening the abolitionists.

† Meetings refer to the published proceedings of public meetings.

‡ Outside sources refer to articles or editorials published in newspapers outside of Cincinnati.

TABLE A2

NUMBER AND TYPE OF ARTICLES PRODUCED IN STAGE 1

Source	Editorials	Letters	Notices	Meetings	Outside Sources	*N*
Whig	4	0	1	1	0	6
Republican	5	0	1	1	2	9
Gazette	4	1	1	1	0	7
Philanthropist	14	2	0	1	1	18
Cincinnati Journal & Western Luminary	1	0	0	0	0	1
Post	2	0	1	0	0	3
N	30	3	4	4	3	44

TABLE A3

NUMBER AND TYPE OF ARTICLES PRODUCED IN STAGE 2

Source	Editorials	Letters	Notices	Meetings	Outside Sources	*N*
Whig	9	13	0	1	0	23
Republican	3	3	1	1	1	9
Gazette	3	2	2	1	2	10
Philanthropist	4	1	2	1	3	11
Cincinnati Journal & Western Luminary	3	2	0	1	0	6
Post	1	0	2	0	0	3
N	23	21	7	5	6	62

TABLE A4

NUMBER AND TYPE OF ARTICLES PRODUCED IN STAGE 3

Source	Editorials*	Letters	Notices	Meetings	Outside Sources	*N*
Whig	16	4	2	2	0	24
Republican	5	2	0	1	2	10
Gazette	10	13	2	3	6	34
Philanthropist	4	0	0	1	24	29
Cincinnati Journal & Western Luminary	7	0	0	1	6	14
Post	2	4	1	0	1	8
N	44	23	5	8	39	119

* The riot narratives from the *Whig, Gazette, Republican,* and *Philanthropist* are included in the editorial column.

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