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Political Opportunity, Community Identity, and the Emergence of a Local Anti-Expressway Movement*

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This study builds on the “community studies” tradition in urban sociology by examining the interconnections among political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and strategic framing in the emergence and outcome of a locally-based movement. Traditional urban analyses contend that there must be an intimate bond of community identity among individuals for them to engage in neighborhood collective action and political mobilization. This article challenges this assumption and examines “community identity” as a political strategy used by neighborhood coalitions and civil rights groups to contest public policies, neutralize counterframes and opposition, and mobilize constituents. I examine the emergence of an anti-expressway movement in Kansas City, Missouri during the 1960s and 1970s to illustrate the structural relationship between political opportunities, mobilization, and identity. Political opportunities not only create motivations for mobilization through “structural” changes (e.g., public policies, cycles of protest, and presence of external allies, etc.), but they also set in motion “ideational” shifts in political culture, expanding the cultural reservoir of strategic frames and enhancing the potency of movement framing.

This article explores the interconnections among political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and strategic framing in the emergence of a locally-based movement. Drawing on historical research and interview data, I examine the social conflicts between Kansas City, Missouri residents and civil rights groups, city elites, and state highway planners over the planning and construction of the South Midtown Freeway (SMF) from the late 1960s through today. In the late 1960s, the Missouri State Highway Department (MSHD) began to purchase and clear land in anticipation for the 8–10 lane expressway, a process that generated considerable opposition and protest from local residents, civil rights organizations, and environmental groups. As I show, residential areas along the path of the SMF were transformed into “defended neighborhoods” as local residents perceived the character of their community to be threatened by the highway. Scholarly analyses in the “urban community studies” tradition point to the significance of residential space as a basis for social cohesion, neighborhood identification, and collective action (Bennett 1997; Gans 1962; Suttles 1968; Wellman 1979). A central theme in these studies is that people’s identification with place can manifest itself in a variety of ways and arise in response to a number of perceived outside threats including urban renewal displacement (Gans 1962), hazardous waste contamination (Levine 1982), and punitive police practices (Wright 1997). As a central concept in urban community studies, the “defended neighborhood” illuminates how social conflict, community identity, and political mobilization can occur simultaneously in response to an outside threat.

This article builds on the “community studies” tradition by incorporating recent social movements research to illustrate the dynamic relationship between political opportunities and

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mobilizing structures to understand the strategic process of constructing movement frames and collective identity. Although the concept of political opportunity has been central to theories of local movement emergence for over two decades (Eisinger 1973; McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978), scholars have only recently begun to examine the mobilizing functions of social networks and movement organizations, and the cultural conditions in which movement frames and constructions of reality occur (Kubal 1998; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; Tarrow 1998). Social movements research recognizes that local movements draw on a variety of collective action “frames” to recruit members, and to forge and sustain collective action. While frames are borrowed and adapted to articulate grievances and motivate action, few researchers have examined the interactive relationships between framing processes and “objective” political changes that can encourage mobilization. Benford (1993:210) argues that “interpretive scholars have tended to neglect the historical, cultural, and structural contexts in which movement constructions of reality occur.” McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996) note that there is little systematic work on framing processes and their connection to mobilizing structures and political opportunities. This article focuses on framing as a “strategic process” (Zald 1996) and examines how the success of particular frames—e.g., “community” and “neighborhood”—in mobilizing action is shaped by a confluence of political opportunities and mobilizing structures, all of which must be considered to explain the emergence and success of a locally-based movement.

Most urban research focuses on the *a priori* dimensions of community identity, arguing that people’s attachment to place is a requisite for neighborhood collective action and mobilization. Rather than attributing forms of neighborhood political mobilization to expressions of community identity, this article focuses on the strategic and external uses of “community identity” in framing social conditions and mobilizing action. Friedman and McAdam (1992) and Bernstein (1997) have recently argued for pushing the study of collective identity away from its “internal” roles (as a precursor to collective action) to specifying the analytic levels of identity and its external and strategic dimensions. Yet recent social movements research on the strategic uses of collective identity has remained distinct from urban research on community identity. Like race, class, and gender, places can become important mechanisms through which collective identity is defined and expressed (Castells 1997; Cuba and Hummon 1993; Orum 1998; Wright 1997). As an instance of place identity, community identity can be understood dramaturgically (Goffman 1959) as the “collective portrayal” (Bernstein 1997:538) of a particular neighborhood or community in the political arena, whether that be in city council hearings, town meetings, or through direct protest. Thus, instead of asking how community identity influences and shapes the mobilization of neighborhoods and other locally-based movements, this paper addresses the following questions: how is community identity deployed strategically as a form of collective action to empower neighborhoods? How is the choice and success of a particular collective action frame in mobilizing action shaped by the confluence of political opportunities and mobilizing structures?

Community Identity and Local Social Movements

One of the classic questions in urban sociology is how community identity and attachment to place can provide a significant locus of sentiment and meaning for individuals and groups (McKenzie 1925; Park 1925). Contrary to expectations implicit in early studies of urban life that predicted the demise of community and community identity (Nisbet 1953; Stein 1960; Wirth 1938), the salience of place for urban dwellers in the United States and around the world prompted social scientists in the 1950s and later to rethink models of local community rooted in assumptions about the rootlessness and isolation of urban life. Instead, the resiliency of community identity among urban residents led to a search for more accurate, less one-dimensional means of understanding not only the persistence of diverse forms of

community cohesion, but also the emergence of new forms of community identity surrounding historical preservation drives, large-scale demolition and urban renewal and other growth-oriented threats to urban neighborhoods (Gans 1962; Hunter 1974; Hunter and Suttles 1972; Janowitz 1967). For example, in his study of a poor multiethnic Chicago neighborhood, Gerald Suttles (1968) found that people's identification with place was powerful enough to overcome ethnic and racial differences and create a unity based upon shared residence. Community identity could manifest itself in a variety of ways and arise in response to a number of perceived threats including urban renewal displacement and neighborhood racial transition. Suttles (1972:37) referred to this type of community as the "defended neighborhood" and argued that "members are joined in a common plight whether or not they like it."

Urban research on community identity has paralleled the emergence of "collective identity" (CI) theory within the New Social Movements (NSM) research. Despite much heterogeneity, CI theory emphasizes the socially "constructed" aspects of identity—e.g., ways in which gender, ethnic, and racial identities, grievances, ideology, and local cultures are negotiated, defined, and produced by movement activists (for overviews see Buechler 1995; Johnston, Larana and Gusfield 1994). Central to this constructionist approach is the idea that collective identity is mutable, contingent, a product of social ascriptions, and a reflexive process involving internal and external forces and actors (Castells 1983, 1997; Melucci 1989, 1995; Touraine 1981). Hunt, Benford, and Snow (1994) examine how activists use sentimental imagery, nostalgia, and other rhetorical devices and various techniques of "framing" to tap into latent sources of collective identity or build new identities in an effort to recruit sympathizers, gain political currency, and achieve movement goals. Taylor and Whittier (1995:173) conceptualize collective identity as consisting of three interrelated processes: (1) the construction of group boundaries that establish differences between a challenging group and dominant group; (2) the creation and use of interpretive frameworks that challenge dominant representations of the challenging group; and (3) the use of symbols and actions to challenge existing systems of inequality. The imagery, motifs, and rhetorical shifts characterized in CI research reflect the use of cultural representations in a symbolic struggle over rights, resources, and the empathy and support of constituents, neutral observers, and opponents alike.

To date, most research in the tradition of urban community studies and collective identity theory has adopted a "bottom up" approach to collective identity, examining how identity logically precedes mobilization and collective action. Yet a number of scholars have argued for moving the study of collective identity toward a more "top down" approach that connects identity construction processes with different structural levels of movement activity and political opportunities (Bernstein 1997; Friedman and McAdam 1992). Early work by Downey (1986) focused on integrating the dimensions of ideology and identity into resource mobilization theory, examining how identity structured the initial selection and later modification of mobilization strategies. Recently, Stoecker (1995) has identified three levels of social structure—social movement community, social movement, social movement organization (SMO)—that create the "boundaries across which collective identities converge or diverge" during movement activity. For Stoecker (1994, 1995:113), collective identity is not a stable or unchanging category but is "produced and reproduced continually through the life course of a social movement as activists interact with targets and other audiences." Bernstein (1997:538) argues that collective identity can be "strategically deployed" by movement activists for the purpose of: (1) confronting the "values, categories, and practices of the dominant culture;" or (2) challenging the dominant culture's perception of a minority group. According to Bernstein, these "identity strategies" are determined "by the configuration of political access, structure of social movement organizations, and the type and extent of opposition" (1997:539). Friedman and McAdam (1992), Stoecker (1994; 1995), and Bernstein (1997) point to the external and strategic dimensions of collective identity in an effort to understand and explain the structural relationship between identity and mobilization. Yet there are few empirical examples that

connect the strategic dimensions of collective identity with formal and informal mobilizing structures or explore how changes in political opportunity influence movement strategies.

Connecting Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Strategies

A major goal in this article is to advance our understanding of movement dynamics by examining the interconnections among political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and strategic framing processes for a locally based movement. In their recent survey of social movements research, McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996:7) argue that scholars “have tended to study only one aspect of a movement, for example, the effect of expanding political opportunities or the organizational dynamics of collective action” (e.g., mobilizing structures). McAdam (1996: 354) criticizes the “ideational biases” in much of the framing literature for an almost exclusive concern with ideas and their formal expression without close attention to movement tactics, mobilizing structures, and changing political opportunities that shape and mediate the “signifying work” of movements. Framing analyses have also been criticized for failing to specify the links between movement frames and participant mobilization (Benford 1993) and for employing tautological reasoning—e.g., “frames are successful because they are resonant and they are resonant because they are successful” (Kubal 1998:542). Whereas social movements researchers recognize that political opportunities are central to understanding the timing and form of collective action (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996), few researchers have attempted to clarify the linkages between political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes more precisely to account for the movement emergence and success (Almeida and Stearns 1998).

“Political opportunity” refers to the various aspects of government structure, public policy, and political conditions that “bound the possibilities for change and political action” and explain the differential outcomes of social movements (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996:1634). Eisinger’s (1973) initial use of the concept focused on “open” and “closed” local government structures that had a differential impact on riot activity in a number of U.S. cities. Tilly (1978) and Kitschelt (1986) applied Eisinger’s original ideas to national politics, analyzing the influence of political structures on movement outcomes across a number of nations. McAdam’s (1982) study of black insurgency during the 1960s examined how broad based cycles of protest initiated a wave of mobilization across a number of different movements. Recently, Tarrow (1998) has emphasized how cleavages among elites, availability of influential allies, and shifts in ruling alignments can encourage mobilization and affect movement success. Gamson and Meyer (1996) draw a distinction between “institutional” and “dynamic” aspects of political opportunity. The institutional aspects are relatively stable components of political opportunity, such as traditions and procedural elements of different levels of government. The dynamic aspects of political opportunity fluctuate over time and include public policies, political discourse, and elite instability that affect a specific movement’s emergence and decline. The distinction between institutional and dynamic aspects of political opportunity emphasizes the shifting political context in which social movements struggle rather than the internal dynamics of movements.

For Tarrow (1998:7), political opportunities represent “structuring cues” that are a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for people to engage in collective action. In the absence of sufficient organization (formal or informal), political opportunities are not likely to be seized by challengers to produce sustained social movements. McCarthy (1996:142) identifies formal and informal “mobilizing structures” that comprise the collective building blocks of social movements. “Informal” mobilizing structures can include pre-existing social networks and neighborhood coalitions, indigenous organizations, and informal groups. “Formal” mobilizing structures can include social movement organizations (SMOs), churches, professional associ-

ations, and the relative openness of the local government to reform. Mobilizing structures are the seedbeds in which framing processes and strategies germinate. In their studies of the civil rights movement, Aldon Morris (1984) and Doug McAdam (1982) document the role of black churches in framing social conditions, identifying sources of racial injustice, and generating rationales for collective action that were disseminated through subcultural networks and indigenous organizations. The work of Morris and McAdam illustrate how framing processes are activated and deployed through informal and formal mobilizing structures. Strategic frames could not succeed in generating movement protest in the absence of appropriate mobilizing structures and political opportunities.

The next sections draw on evidence from the expressway controversy to document the confluence of political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and strategic framing. Using this interactional framework, I examine "community identity" as a political strategy used by neighborhood leaders and civil rights groups to frame social conditions, articulate grievances, and contest urban expressway initiatives. Rather than attributing certain forms of neighborhood political activism to expressions of community identity, I illustrate how community identity can be deployed strategically as a form of collective action to empower neighborhoods, mobilize potential constituents, and transform local and national politics. I focus on changes in federal anti-poverty policies, availability of influential elites, the emergence of a national anti-expressway movement and other social movements (e.g., the Civil Rights movement), and the changing racial composition of city neighborhoods and political institutions in Kansas City. Changes in federal policies can open up political access to locally-based movements, reveal opponents' vulnerability, and provide political legitimacy to groups challenging the status quo (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Tarrow 1998). External allies can provide local groups with strategies and tactics, legal advice, and material resources (Almeida and Stearns 1998). The presence of broad-based social movements can legitimate heightened protest across different geographical areas and levels of society (Tarrow 1998). Changing population and demographic factors can spawn collective action by creating race- and ethnic-based voting blocs, formal neighborhood organizations, and new sources of social identity linked to particular spaces or "habitats" within the city.

Data and Method

The *urban case study* (Orum, Feagin and Sjoberg 1991) is a particularly useful research design for examining how changing political opportunity, mobilizing structures, and framing processes affect the fate of a locally-based movement. Orum and Feagin (1991:121) note that the case study "is a method that relies on the examination of a single instance of a phenomenon to explore, often in rich detail, the hows and whys of a problem." Urban case studies have had a long and honored tradition in American sociology as illustrated by the in-depth and multifaceted work of Lynd and Lynd's *Middletown* (1929), Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943), Gans' *Urban Villagers* (1962), Suttles' *Social Order of the Slum* (1968), and others. As all these classic works show, the detailed and rich data gathered through a well-crafted case study of a single phenomenon can offer a researcher empirical and theoretical gains in understanding larger social complexes of actors, actions, and motives. Unlike other research designs, the urban case study embeds the concrete experience of local people in the aspects of the particular environment in which they live (Orum, Feagin and Sjoberg 1991). The advantage of case study research is that it can capture people as they experience their everyday circumstances, thereby allowing the analyst to uncover and understand the motives and decisions of key actors and networks of actors.

I use data from four major sources to examine the social conflicts surrounding the SMF controversy and rise of a locally-based anti-expressway movement. First, I examined public documents and planning reports issued by the Missouri State Highway Department (MSHD),

Kansas City's Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority (LCRA), and the Kansas City, Missouri City Development Department, among other agencies. Second, I examined hundreds of pages of court documents, testimony, and correspondence between national civil rights organizations, local neighborhood coalitions, and state highway planners involved in the lawsuit to determine the final character of the expressway (*Citizens Environmental Council, et al., vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al.*). Third, I searched three local newspapers (e.g., the *Kansas City Times*, *Kansas City Star*, and the *Kansas City Call*) and a number of local archives for material about the SMF and neighborhood response to the expressway. I consulted newspapers and archival data to acquire greater familiarity with the area traversed by the expressway and to identify the various neighborhood coalitions, protest groups, and other local residents and city leaders involved in the conflict over the design and construction of the SMF.

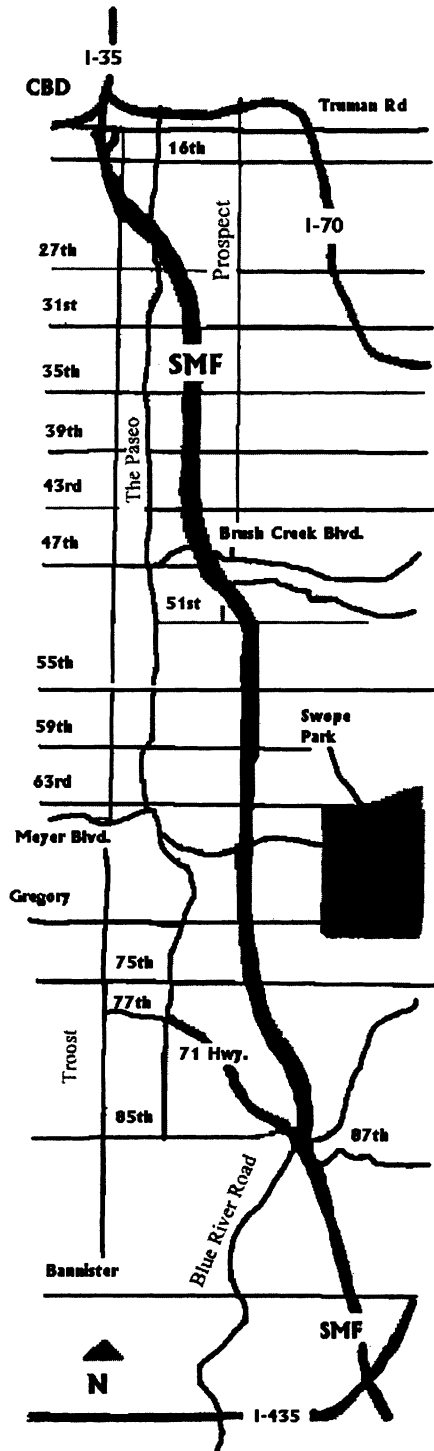
Lastly, this study draws on data from numerous informal conversations, oral histories, and twenty-one in-depth interviews conducted in 1996 with local residents who had first-hand knowledge and experience with the expressway controversy. I gathered these interviews through a snowball sample that included seven white males, three white females, seven African American males, and four African American females. Most of the interviewees were either former or current real estate agents, civil rights activists, neighborhood coalition leaders, city planners, church leaders, block club heads, and the like. To protect the confidentiality of interviewees I use pseudonyms for nonpublic persons quoted in the paper.

Political Opportunities and the Emergence of a Local Anti-Expressway Movement

The SMF was the last major highway planned and built as part of the Kansas City metropolitan area's overall transportation plan linking suburban areas with the Central Business District (CBD). Plans for SMF to run southeast from the CBD through the eastern areas of Kansas City, Missouri were first presented to the Kansas City, Missouri City Plan Commission in March, 1951. Over the next decade, the final route for the proposed 8–10 lane highway was discussed and finalized by the City Council, local and metropolitan planning agencies, and the Missouri State Highway Department (MSHD). Following the endorsement of the expressway by the City Council, in February, 1966 the MSHD informed the City that the Highway Department would begin construction on the road at the southern end and proceed to the north. In June, 1966 and October, 1966 the MSHD received approval from the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) to begin construction of southern segment of the SMF (City Development Department 1969; Metropolitan Planning Commission 1970). By the end of 1966, the basic route of the SMF had been laid out and approved by the BPR, the City Council, and the MSHD.¹ Map 1 shows the route of the SMF, renamed the Bruce R. Watkins Drive in 1987, running south from the CBD, through southeast Kansas City, Missouri neighborhoods and connecting with suburban areas.

Despite the anticipated dislocation of thousands of residents and businesses as a result of the SMF construction, early opposition to the new expressway was ineffective in interrupting the MSHD's plans. Several perfunctory public hearings were held in October and November, 1967, and in January and December, 1968, but despite the airing of individual citizen complaints, the hearings had no effect on the MSHD's plans (*Kansas City Star* 1967a, 1967b, 1968b,

1. Document C-30. Letter from Sharpe to Snider. 11/15/66; Document S-31. Letter from Fletcher to Sharpe. 2/26/66; Document S-38. Request from Program Approval. form PR-48. 10/19/66; Document F-39. Letter from Hickman to Snider. 11/17/66; Document F-41. Letter from Hickman to Snider. 12/13/66. *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/21/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-11, S-9/5. Box 6. National Archives-Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri.



Map 1 • South Mid-Town Freeway (SMF; Bruce R. Watkins Drive)

1968c; *Kansas City Times* 1968a, 1968d, 1968e; *Kansas City Call* 1968e). For the most part, highway engineers for the MSHD asserted that professional and objective traffic studies had identified the most efficient route for the SMF, and that public complaints and other opposition could not justify changing final designs and plans.² Highway officials championed the new expressway, as a “key element in the city’s overall transportation planning,” maintaining that it was necessary to satisfy future forecast travel demands and serve as “a major north-south highway through the central part of the United States from the Gulf to Canada.”³ In 1969, the Kansas City Highway Committee referred to the expressway as an “urgently needed project” while Mayor Charles Wheeler described the freeway as “inevitable” (*Kansas City Star* 1973a). The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, the Mid-American Regional Council (MARC), and the Building Trades Council all lauded the potential effect of the new highway, which would supposedly spur suburban development on the southeast fringes of the metropolitan area and create hundreds of new jobs (*Kansas City Times* 1976b). The *Kansas City Times* and *Kansas City Star* were also enthusiastic about the coming SMF with editorials published in 1969 and 1973 denouncing “pointless public meetings” for “dragging” the building of the “vital” expressway “conceived in the name of progress” (*Kansas City Times* 1973; *Kansas City Star* 1969).

Serious challenges to the disruptive effect of the SMF on city neighborhoods did not come until early 1969 when a grassroots coalition of neighborhood organizations sought legal and financial assistance from the NAACP and several other civil rights organizations to challenge the legality of the SMF and halt further property acquisition for the expressway (*Kansas City Times* 1968d; *Kansas City Star* 1968b). The NAACP agreed to furnish legal and financial assistance to this coalition of sixteen neighborhood organizations representing several thousand affected residents and two city council members. Four years later this coalition was joined by the Citizen’s Environmental Council of Kansas City and filed suit in the U.S. District Court to halt further displacement, neighborhood disruption, and prevent the construction of the SMF.⁴ Defendants in the suit were the City of Kansas City, Missouri, the Mid-American Regional Council (MARC), the U.S. Department of Transportation, and the MSHD. In addition to the Citizen’s Environmental Council, plaintiffs in the suit included the Concerned Citizens Opposed to the South Midtown Freeway, the Beacon Hill Association, the Concerned Citizens for Inner City Problems (CCIP), and the Citywide Coalition of Neighborhood Associations. By this time, local opposition to the SMF had intensified as neighborhood coalitions, housing activists, and civil rights groups such as the Council on Religion and Race, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) repeatedly accused the MSHD of destabilizing schools, blighting neighborhoods, and following racially discriminatory relocation activities (*Kansas City Times* 1968e; *Kansas City Star* 1969).

Much of this increased opposition to the expressway was nurtured and supported by policy reforms set in motion by Great Society legislation and changing structures of political opportunity influenced by contemporary social movements. For example, Legal Aid Services opened up access to litigation by poor people for the first time, enabling lawyers to launch a

2. Memorandum from Hickman to Turner, 9/6/68. Document F-94; Memorandum from Kennedy to Hickman, 5/8/67. Document F-45; Memorandum from Travis to Hazlett (no date). Document R-126; Resolution: Metropolitan Planning Commission. 9/7/68. Document M-95. Letter from Eurman to Dill. 9/10/68. Document M-96; Letter from Snider to Eurman. 9/17/68. Document S-97. *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/21/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-11, S-9/5. Box 6. National Archives-Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri.

3. Transcript: Public Hearing, 2/17/76. Route 71, Jackson County, South Mid-town Freeway, 14th Street to 95th Street. *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/21/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-11, S-9/5. Box 3. National Archives-Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri; *Kansas City Times* 1969.

4. *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/21/73; *Kansas City Star* 1973c; *Kansas City Times* 1974.

class-action lawsuit to challenge the destabilizing impact of highway displacement. In addition, neighborhood coalitions and leaders forged strong ties to mass-based social movements organizations—the NAACP, CORE, SCLC—that supplied legal aid, material resources, and information on expressway battles in other cities to challenge urban displacement. Influenced as well by other contemporary movements (e.g., the Civil Rights, New Left, and Anti-Vietnam War), neighborhood activists and leaders saw the conflict over the SMF in terms of preserving and empowering neighborhoods. One African American neighborhood leader in Kansas City remembered “we were piggybacking off the city rights movement . . . the national civil rights movement dovetailed with the Kansas City neighborhood community’s new political clout” (interview with Carl Feldman). A former city council member recalled that,

It was only upon the advent of the Model Cities Program and the OEO Program, called here the Human Resources Corporation, that the black community became organized in any sense . . . [During the 1970s] the raising of community consciousness in terms of [civil rights] . . . and the impact of the SMF was a major thread of concern on neighborhoods.⁵

Neighborhood leaders and activists encountered a mixture of government support and opposition from government bodies in Kansas City, Missouri. Up to 1980, the city manager, Mayor Charles Wheeler (1972 to 1980), and a slim majority of city council members supported the design and construction of the SMF. In contrast, other city council members, the Kansas City, Missouri School District Board, and Mayor Ilus Davis (1964 to 1972) opposed the expressway (*Kansas City Times* 1968b, 1968c). In 1970, the city council passed a resolution supporting the building of the SMF by a slim 7–6 vote. By this time, other members of the city council, including Bruce R. Watkins, Joel Pelofsky, and Harold Hamil had emerged as vocal opponents of the MSHD’s plans, speaking out at numerous public hearings and neighborhood meetings against the expressway (*Kansas City Star* 1967b, 1968a, 1970, 1973c). Thus, a politically divided city council and an oppositional school board provided a window of political opportunity for SMF opponents to challenge the destabilizing impact of the expressway. Dissenting city council members and other elected leaders opposed to the SMF provided political allies to aid in neighborhood mobilization and venues in which to press claims against the expressway.

The opening of political access for neighborhood groups opposed to the SMF was also enhanced by the changing racial composition of political institutions in Kansas City and the State of Missouri. Prior to the 1960s, there were no African Americans serving on the City Council, School Board, or in the Missouri House or Senate. In 1962, seven grassroots leaders founded Freedom, Inc., Kansas City’s first African American political organization, to nominate candidates for office, mobilize voters, and organize communities. As a result, two African Americans were elected to the 13 member Kansas City, Missouri City Council in 1963. By the late 1960s, African Americans securely held both the in-district and district-at-large City Council seats in the predominantly black Third District, a major district traversed by the SMF. In 1969, African Americans held four out of twenty-three Missouri State House seats and two out of five seats on the Kansas City, Missouri School Board. By the early 1970s, African American political empowerment in Kansas City had reached a point that African Americans securely held seats on the City Council, the KCMSD board, and the Missouri Senate. Although the majority of elected positions on these government bodies were still dominated by whites, the increasing strength of African American representation provided a platform from which new leaders could challenge the MSHD and encourage local opposition and mobilization against the expressway (*Kansas City Call* 1976a).

5. Affidavit of Joel Pelofsky. 6/29/79. “Comments on the Proposed South Midtown Freeway as it Relates to the Growth and Development of Kansas City.” *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/21/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-11, S-9/5. Box 4. National Archives-Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri.

Table 1 • Total Population and African American Population in Kansas City, Missouri, 1950–1980

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Percent Increase</i>	<i>African American Population</i>	<i>Percent Increase</i>	<i>% African American of Total</i>
1950	456,622	14.4	55,682	34.0	12.2
1960	475,539	4.1	83,130	49.3	17.5
1970	507,330	9.3	112,120	74.1	22.1
1980	448,159	-11.7	122,699	9.1	27.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

The election of African Americans to the city council and other government positions occurred in the context of dramatic changes in the racial composition of the city population in the decades after 1950. Table 1 shows total and African American populations in Kansas City, Missouri from 1950 to 1980. As this table indicates, there was a 49.3 percent increase in African American population between 1950 and 1960 and a 74.1 percent increase between 1960 and 1970. From 1950 to 1980, the percentage of Kansas City residents who were African American increased from 12.2 percent to 27.4 percent.

Census data indicate there was increasing racial concentration and segregation in the city neighborhoods traversed by and adjacent to the SMF from 1950 to 1980. In 1950, only three out of thirty-three census tracts in the area bounded by Troost Avenue, 27th Street to 85th Street (see Map 1) had a population of 50 percent or more African American. This number increased to thirteen census tracts in 1960, twenty-eight by 1970, and all thirty-three census tracts by 1980. By 1980, twenty out of thirty-three census tracts within this area were over 90 percent African American. The changing racial composition of the city population had the political effect of establishing a new and powerful voting block that increased African American electoral strength at the local level. In addition, the increasing geographical concentration of African Americans in city neighborhoods created fertile political ground for the growth of civil rights groups with ties to national-level organizations, leadership structures, and financial resources.

Framing, Tactics, and Mobilizing Opposition

Social movements researchers recognize that political opportunities provide incentives for mobilizing but, by themselves, do not produce sustained local movements. The process requires challengers to tap into or construct unifying mobilizing structures and strategically “frame” their messages and claims to appeal to prospective constituents (Tarrow 1998). Successful frames are empirically credible (Polletta 1998) and convey a sense of urgency, severity of condition, and probability of success (Klandermans 1997). The choice of a specific frame can be seen as a political strategy that can profoundly affect the nature of collective action and have implications for future activism (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). However, movement activists cannot simply pick and choose frames of meaning from an inexhaustible tool kit of cultural symbols. Nor can frames be simply read as “text,” independent of changing political conditions and institutional dynamics. Diani’s (1996) case study of the Northern League in Italy shows how different political contexts and opportunities shape the success of particular framing strategies. Clemens’s (1996) work on the U.S. labor movement in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century shows how different movement organizations play a strategic role in framing grievances and motivating collective action. The work of Diani, Clemens, and other scholars highlight how movement constructions of reality and the framing of

social conditions, including the diagnosis of a problem in need of remedy and the rationale for collective action, are shaped and conditioned by changing political opportunities and access to various mobilizing structures. Political opportunities not only encourage mobilization through “objective” political changes (e.g., transformations in public policy, opening of access, cycles of protest, etc.) but also through the interpretive changes they set in motion (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996). While framing processes can incite collective action, the cultural reservoir of strategic frames available to movements can expand or contract as political opportunities change.

Throughout the expressway controversy, anti-expressway opponents framed their grievances in racial terms, appropriating the “civil rights” master frame used by many other social movements during the cycle of protest during the 1960s (Snow and Benford 1992; Tarrow 1998:118–119). As Tarrow (1996) and others have pointed out, the rise of the Civil Rights movement and the Great Society legislation of the 1960s set in motion a broad shift in American social and political culture, public policy, and political opportunity (Cloward and Piven 1975; Edsall and Edsall 1991; Graham 1990; Lemann 1991; Morris 1984). The fluctuating currents of cultural change and reform politics that marked the 1960s were prompted by increasing protest from many social movements including a broad-based environmental movement and women’s movement, in addition to the Civil Rights movement. As Snow and Benford (1992) recognize, the signifying and framing work of these social movements heightened the politization of other protest groups during the 1960s and 1970s. Included in these other movements were combative groups of expressway opponents and housing activists committed to fighting urban displacement, and proposing alternative transportation systems and redevelopment plans. In the context of civil rights protest and militancy, civil rights became a useful frame to contest the MSHD’s actions through the legal system and to generate opposition to the expressway. It brought together otherwise diverse and unconnected groups, including interracial neighborhood coalitions, and civil rights and environmental organizations.

Residential propinquity and the shared historical experience of racial segregation formed the basis of highway opponents’ claims that neighborhoods had a political “right” to exempt themselves from the construction of the SMF. Specifically, accusations of racism and racial discrimination permeated public debates over the expressway as local housing activists and civil rights leaders attempted to define neighborhoods as victims of a white power structure bent on reinforcing residential segregation and denying civil rights. During the early 1970s, local anti-expressway groups argued that the state was subjecting residents to “hardship and deprivations in connection with relocation not experienced to any substantially equal degree by white individuals and families in Kansas City, Missouri who have or will be displaced by [expressway].”⁶ Leaders of neighborhood organizations maintained that it would be “minority groups and low income groups of the city who will suffer from the building of a new freeway designed to get suburbanites to and from their places of work.”⁷ Other neighborhood leaders, civil rights activists, and anti-expressway opponents remembered that residents felt that the SMF was “a white road” designed to bypass and isolate the black community.

The original plans for the Bruce Watkins Freeway was to have a superhighway that cut through the black part of the city, no stoplights, white entrance white exit. . . . People felt that they were not given fair compensation for their properties by the highway department. You heard all kinds of horror stories, you still hear them. (interview with Frank Royton 1996)

6. Additional Proposed Stipulations of Facet Regarding issues 1, 2, 3, and 4. *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/21/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-11, S-9/5. National Archives-Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri.

7. Affidavit of Daniel Levine. No Date. *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/12/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-11, S-9/5. Box 4. National Archives-Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri.

The Bruce R. Watkins Freeway would have caused isolation within the black community, had they not taken that case to court . . . So, here you have the state wanting to make a freeway that tied into I-70 and completely bypass the entire black community and not pick up until you got to Grandview [a southeastern suburb]. You could have gotten on at I-70 and not gotten off this new freeway until you were in Grandview, there were no entrances or exits into the minority community, that's what created the lawsuit. We're fighting with the state which is trying to isolate the community and other powers that really try to force isolation [by] cutting off the black community. They're saying we can get downtown and we don't even have to deal with you, we can bypass you and go on home. (Public Hearing 1996; Mayor's Task Force on Race Relations; Housing, Neighborhoods, and Economic Development Cluster)

As one member of the Kansas City, Missouri City Council from 1971 to 1979 put it,

The selection of the route of the SMF had obvious racial overtones. . . . The [expressway] went through primarily black and lower middle class neighborhoods, with some exceptions. It is quite obvious that the SMF was going to receive less community comment if it was located in an area of politically disadvantaged people. While there may have been other reasons for its selection, the dearth of analytical material suggests a significant reason was the racial composition of the right-of-way community.⁸

One community leader attempted to frame the expressway controversy in both racial and class terms, arguing that the SMF was a threat to both black and low-income and middle class neighborhoods in the city:

[I]t is precisely the white population of . . . suburban areas for whom the freeway is primarily built Just as happened after the Second World War when the federal government in effect gave middle-income whites billions of dollars in the form of housing subsidies and mortgage deductions to help them escape from the noise, overcrowding, old housing, and other problems of the central city, it is particularly minority groups and low income groups of the city who will suffer from the building of a new freeway designed to get suburbanites to and from their places of work.⁹

During the early 1970s, the development of neighborhood opposition to the SMF took the form of increased public visibility for affected residents, through demonstrations and direct action, and attendance at city council meetings and public hearings over right-of-way acquisition and clearance. One SMF opponent and neighborhood leader recalled his experience with organizing neighborhoods to fight highway displacement:

I remember that people in neighborhoods took a stand [on] these issues, they got organized. We went down to city council meetings and other meetings to oppose the [SMF] A bunch of neighbors and people from neighborhood groups were down [at public meetings] virtually every day asking questions and getting up to the microphone and saying everything from, you know, 'this is more of your rich people bullshit and we're sick and tired and fed up with it,' to people like me getting up and talking about the economics and some of the more detailed issues about what good is it for the city. (interview with Philip Manning 1996)

One life-long African American resident remembered that in the early 1970s "there was protest after protest from the black community to the highway coming through here. In fact, [our] church was right in the path of it . . . and we protested and they changed their plans" (interview with Brian Charles 1996). Another African American resident and former assistant city manager recalled how "people came together" as a result of "a lot of protest at meetings."

8. Affidavit of Joel Pelofsky. 6/29/79. "Comments on the Proposed South Midtown Freeway as it Relates to the Growth and Development of Kansas City." *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/21/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-11, S-9/5. Box 4. National Archives-Central Plains Region. Kansas City, Missouri.

9. Affidavit of Daniel Levine. No Date. *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/12/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-11, S-9/5. Box 4. National Archives-Central Plains Region. Kansas City, Missouri.

People felt that negotiations with the Highway Department were conducted in poor faith. People were frustrated and disillusioned. And so, there was a bitter taste in the mouths of African American residents relative to the [SMF]. [As a result] people came together because of what they thought were unjust [practices] on the part of the state highway department. (interview with Bill Alvin 1996)

As these interviews and oral histories indicate, anti-expressway opponents attempted to generate public opposition and mobilize residents by borrowing strategies and tactics developed by national civil rights groups. Accusations of citizen non-involvement, forced condemnation and inadequate compensation, and hasty and segregative relocation practices tended to resonate with local African Americans' observations and experiences with racial discrimination. Within the broader context of heightened civil rights protest, anti-expressway opponents claimed that the SMF was a threat to African American neighborhoods, and that neighborhood political mobilization, direct protest, and litigation were necessary to overcome the MSHD's plans.

The Strategic Construction of Community Identity

Most urban sociologists and social movement scholars agree that collective identities are "constructed." But there is much disagreement over whether identities are "inherited like old clothes and applied to contention," as Tarrow (1996:107) puts it, or strategically deployed for the purpose of political struggle and bringing about social change, as Stoecker (1994, 1995), and Bernstein (1997) argue. In the urban community studies tradition, the "defended neighborhood" marks itself off from other neighborhoods by emphasizing those attributes that it can lose when confronted with the threat of displacement or destabilization. The idea that communities conceive and construct their identity in response to an outside threat assumes a degree of social cohesion and collective awareness. However, as Gans (1962) and other urban scholars have shown, awareness of an outside threat and willingness to fight are not sufficient conditions for the construction of a community identity or defense of neighborhood. Moreover, as Champion and Fine (1998:84) point out, community members "do not participate equally in discussion of identity; rather the dialogue is dominated by a few who chose to speak for the community." In addition, in some periods, the presentation of issues or grievances by neighborhood coalitions and organizations can be limited or encouraged through interactions with the state, access to the polity, and the larger cultural context and political opportunities in which protest movements arise. Focusing on identity as a political strategy helps to illustrate the interactive and dynamic relationship between political opportunities and identity construction processes.

Prior to 1973, direct action, protest, and demonstration at public meetings defined the nature of collective action and opposition to the SMF. After 1973, as a result of the lawsuit and legal challenge through the courts, expressway opposition shifted toward building a collective identity at the neighborhood level and formulating an alternative perspective on urban redevelopment to challenge the MSHD. In an effort to forge a collective unity among the diverse organizations opposed to the expressway, lawyers from Legal Aid and the NAACP attempted to define the area traversed by the SMF as a holistic "community" under attack by the highway department. Phrases such as "our homes," "our neighborhood," and "our schools," functioned as coordinating symbols to unify opposition and focus public sentiment on the impending loss of community and the threat the SMF posed to family, schools, and neighborhood. According to one distraught resident at a public hearing held by the MSHD in February, 1976, "Planners don't have people in mind when they plan these things (freeways). They don't care about our schools that are uprooted. They don't care about the psychological impact on our children" (*Kansas City Call* 1976b).

As one city council member opposed to the SMF put it,

The SMF is a political comment on the lack of political power in the black community. It does not serve the black community except to divide it. It takes vast amounts of land and deprives the black community of the ability to redevelop itself in a chosen location. . . . The black community has had no involvement in the design of the South Midtown. . . . It is also true that the SMF [has] no real support in the community that it penetrates.¹⁰

By this time, city council member Bruce R. Watkins had emerged as one of the most persistent opponents of the expressway fearing that the SMF would destabilize inner city communities, displace thousands of residents, and establish a “Berlin Wall” segregating blacks in the city. For Watkins, the SMF symbolized the dominance of suburban outsiders and other powerful interests over the economic and political fortunes of urban neighborhoods, especially African American neighborhoods. According to Watkins, “I can see no value of this freeway to this immediate community, outside of allowing those who moved out of the city to get downtown faster without driving through our community.”¹¹ In early 1976, Watkins attacked city council members for supporting the MSHD’s building of the SMF remarking, “I’m just as frustrated as many people in the community. For years no one has given a damn about what happens to poor people. They just go in and take property and say to hell with it” (*Kansas City Times* 1976a). As Watkins argued at a February 1976 public meeting,

The Highway Department has systematically gone in . . . and stole much of the property it has today. We were against it (the freeway) because it would not only disrupt our community, it would bring hardships and disrupt our neighborhoods and bring hardship on the people who live there . . . In many instances the Highway Department has resegregated these people in relocating them. They have been placed in inferior properties and I think it is unfair. We have had for years total neglect of our community. We have been abused, misused, and mistreated. (*Kansas City Call* 1976b)

The Legal Aid lawyer who filed the 1973 suit to block construction of the SMF recalled that the suit was about gaining “enough ‘people power’ to fight suburban and downtown money power” and use the courts to challenge

powerful non-taxpaying powers from suburbia who want to have a fast way to get downtown regardless of how many people and lives will be disrupted. . . . [The] powerful interests are served [by the SMF] and people without power are manipulated and their properties are stolen because they don’t have the power or knowledge to fight. Nevertheless, we are learning. That is why we filed the lawsuit. (*Kansas City Call* 1976c)

By the middle 1970s, various neighborhood organizations and coalitions and anti-expressway opponents were defining otherwise unconnected neighborhoods as unified and cohesive in an effort to create the impression of widespread membership and unified opposition to the expressway (*Kansas City Call* 1976d). In turn, highway officials for the state of Missouri claimed that there were “few distinct neighborhoods” in the path of the SMF and that “the removal of houses within a freeway corridor does not necessarily constitute destruction of neighborhoods.”¹² Various civil rights groups and neighborhood coalitions such as the City-

10. Affidavit of Joel Pelofsky. 6/29/79. “Comments on the Proposed South Midtown Freeway as it Relates to the Growth and Development of Kansas City.” *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/21/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-II, S-9/5. Box 4. National Archives-Central Plains Region. Kansas City, Missouri.

11. Watkins’ statement appears on p. 225 of Missouri State Highway Department. March 1976. “Revised Final Environmental Impact Statement. South Midtown Freeway.” Volume 1. FHWA-MO-EIS-71-27-FS-2 (Revised). X310. Box 201. Arthur A. Benson II. Legal Papers. KC 250. Western History Manuscript Collection—Kansas City (WHMC-KC).

12. Affidavit of Ned Diekroeger. 7/16/80; Affidavit of Thomas H. Holt. 3/27/79; Affidavit of William Rockford Langley. 3/26/79; Bruce R. Morgan. 3/22/79. “Impact of the Proposed South Mid-Town Freeway on Neighborhoods, Housing, Segregation, and Employment.” *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/21/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-11, S-9/5. Box 4. National Archives-Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri.

wide Coalition of Neighborhood Organizations, Freedom, Inc., and the Metropolitan Inter-church Agency, among other anti-expressway groups countered that there were indeed several close-knit neighborhoods in the path of the expressway and a great many social networks that would be disrupted by the relocation of families (*Kansas City Star* 1976; *Kansas City Times* 1976b).

Transcripts of public meetings conducted in 1973, 1976, and 1978 indicate substantial opposition to the expressway with neighborhood leaders accusing the highway department of destroying the city's charm, undermining neighborhood property values, and creating blight and abandonment.¹³ In 1976, the Citywide Coalition of Neighborhood Organizations called for an immediate halt to building the SMF because the expressway "is more a liability than an asset to our community" (*Kansas City Star* 1976). In addition, expert witnesses for the plaintiffs in the highway litigation undertook a number of empirical studies to show that individuals residing in the path of the SMF defined their places of residence as tied to a specific neighborhood with explicit geographical boundaries and leadership structures. For example, random surveys of eighty residents living adjacent to the SMF taken in 1975 and 1978 by the plaintiffs found the average length of residence was almost twelve years and almost all considered the area to be a "neighborhood."¹⁴

Oral histories and interviews with neighborhood activists who participated in or observed the events surrounding the SMF controversy demonstrate the powerful symbolic meaning of "neighborhood," and "community" in motivating action and constructing a collective identity. As one city council member argued,

A neighborhood is a group of people living together, who have common interests and who are supported by service businesses and industries within reach. In any realistic definition of neighborhood, it is fatuous to say that the black community was not a neighborhood. [The MSMD] used definitions of neighborhood which grew out of a segregated history and [did] not reflect the reality of consciousness which existed in the SMF corridor. It is true that it was not as politically powerful as white communities. It is also true that it did not receive the benefits of the community efforts of City Hall. But nonetheless, that does not make it any less a neighborhood. Any attempt to write-off the black community as not a neighborhood, and, therefore, scatter it, by relocation, is to treat it in the same way as this country has treated Indians, juveniles, and once upon a time, slaves.¹⁵

The continued existence of these definable neighborhoods in the path of the South Mid-town Freeway in light of the amount of damage already done by acquisition demonstrates further their strength. Prolonged uncertainty over the future of the freeway may well be detrimental to them, but [it] seems clear that these viable neighborhoods will survive and grow stronger. Their very existence means that these areas can overcome what has happened and begin toward a shared goal of improving the area.¹⁶

As one local activist and expert witness for the plaintiffs wrote in 1979,

13. Transcripts of Public Hearings, 3/18/73, 2/17/76, 3/8/78. Route 71, Jackson County, South Mid-town Freeway, 14th Street to 95th Street; *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/21/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-11, S-9/5. Box 3. National Archives-Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri; *Kansas City Star* 1973b; *Kansas City Times* 1973, 1978.

14. Affidavit of Philip Olson. 1/15/79. *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/21/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-11, S-95. Box 4. National Archives-Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri.

15. Affidavit of Joel Pelofsky. 6/29/79. "Comments on the Proposed South Midtown Freeway as it Relates to the Growth and Development of Kansas City." *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/21/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-11, S-9/5. Box 4. National Archives-Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri.

16. "Comments of Plaintiffs in Citizens Environmental Council, et al. V. Brinegar, et al., Regarding the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement." No author. Box 350. Arthur A. Benson II. Legal papers. KC 250. Western Historical Manuscript Collection—Kansas City (WHMC-KC).

The survival of . . . neighborhoods [in the path of the SMF] depend entirely on the SMF not being built. The principal reason for ensuring the survival of neighborhoods is that they are a primary factor in the economic stability of the city. . . . Neighborhoods [in the path of the SMF] would disappear once the freeway [is] built and the total relocation of residents has been completed.¹⁷

One African American woman who was a neighborhood coalition leader and activist, remembered how the threat of the SMF was the motivation for the formation of the East Meyer Community Association. This person told me:

East Meyer started back in 1976. And it started as a result of . . . the realization of the Missouri Highway Department wanting to put in a freeway right down the middle. East Meyer worked with churches and other religious groups to help stabilize the community. We wanted to establish a 'connection' to each other because many people were not able to 'connect' with one another because of the unsettling effect of the freeway . . . Even today, East Meyer works to organize people and hold meetings with neighbors to prevent politicians and the Highway Department from turning the Watkins Drive into a freeway. (interview with Betty Fields 1996)

The above quotes communicate a powerful meaning of community identity and attachment to place. For SMF opponents, "neighborhood" did not mean a collection of unconnected dwellings and people but to a substantial degree became defined as a battlefield of contending interests and insurgent activity. Images and discourses of "neighborhood" had both a functional and symbolic designation that were deeply interwoven with race. On the one hand, neighborhood referred to an objective reality (i.e., the explicit physical boundaries of the neighborhood area). On the other hand, it denoted a common subjectivity based on residential propinquity and shared experiences with racial prejudice and discrimination. Each of these bases of affiliation afforded legitimacy to neighborhood leaders and residents challenging the SMF. Not only did these framings resonate with the life experiences and observations of local African Americans and neighborhood leaders, but they also effectively neutralized the counterframes, of "progress" and "development" put forth by highway planners and engineers, thereby undermining the legitimacy of their claims to expertise.

As the above interviews and oral histories indicate, anti-expressway opponents used both "catastrophizing" claims to emphasize the severity and potential harmful consequences of the SMF, and "victimizing" claims to highlight the plight of vulnerable and poor inner city neighborhoods against a powerful MSHD and its accomplices at the city, state, and federal levels (Kubal 1998). City residents and neighborhood leaders emphasized the threat the expressway posed to the "stability of neighborhoods," the "quality of life," and "the future of Kansas City." As one movement leader put it in 1976, "we can have the South Midtown Freeway or we can have Kansas City. We can't have both" (*Kansas City Star* 1976). Once these and related sentiments were validated, amplified, and diffused, mobilization of neighborhood residents to oppose the SMF became unproblematic. The protection and promotion of their residential space became a source of collective identity and political mobilization for residents in the path of the SMF. In the process, local residents engaged in new forms of collective action (militant, direct action) created new associational bonds in practical forms (interracial coalitions of anti-expressway opponents) and, as a result, developed a sense of community solidarity (e.g., "us" vs. "them"). Thus, the "defense" of neighborhood did not refer to simply a matter of holding traditional ground but represented a significant social creation whereby new associations, neighborhood connections, and links with outside organizations were forged through interactions with the state.

During the years prior to the emergence of intense protest against the SMF, the 1950s and 1960s, the MSHD viewed the SMF as a straightforward matter of rational and objective trans-

17. Affidavit of Philip Olson. 1/15/79. *Citizens Environmental Council, et al., Plaintiffs, vs. Claude S. Brinegar, et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 73CV349. United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. Western Division. Filed 6/21/73. A-021-85-0073. R401, V-11, S-9/5. Box 4. National Archives-Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri.

portation planning and physical clearance. However, by the middle to late 1970s, as a result of the increasingly truculent opposition of inner-city neighborhoods and civil rights groups to the MSHD's plans, city leaders and other local elites began to question the benefits of the expressway for the city. By this time, anti-expressway groups and coalitions of residents living in the path of SMF were insisting that social life in their neighborhoods revolved around a series of meaningful and valuable relationships worth preserving. Much of this transformation in thinking about city neighborhoods and neighborhood life was nurtured and buttressed by a formidable nationally-based anti-expressway movement that had emerged in many cities to challenge the disruptive impact of highways on city neighborhoods. In other cities, including Boston (Gekenheimer 1976; Lupo 1971; Sloan 1974), New York (Huxtable 1972; Whalen 1965), and New Orleans (Baumbach and Borah 1981), freeway revolts helped spawn contentious coalitions and networks of neighborhood organizations, civil rights groups, and housing activists dedicating to halting expressway building and creating a more inclusive and democratic planning process (Mohl 1993; Rose 1990; Whitt 1982). In many cities, leaders of neighborhood coalitions framed their opposition to expressway building by appealing to the integrity, autonomy, and social identity of their neighborhoods. Highways were defined as "white men's roads through black men's bedrooms" (Rose 1990:116) and neighborhood leaders and anti-expressway opponents argued that neighborhoods had a "right" to exclude themselves from expressways designed for the benefit of suburban outsiders.

As a result of protest and litigation, property acquisition and clearance for the SMF right-of-way was halted by the federal courts in 1975. Four years later, the *Kansas City Times*, a strong supporter of the expressway in the 1960s and early 1970s, called for an immediate and permanent halt to building the SMF, referring to the vacant land in the right-of-way as a "gash on the cityscape" (*Kansas City Times* 1979). In 1980, U.S. District Court Judge John W. Oliver urged proponents of the SMF to accept a more modest 4-lane roadway in place of the 8–10 lane high-speed expressway to settle the federal court suit (*Kansas City Star* 1980a). Later that year, the Kansas City, Missouri City Council withdrew its previous endorsement of the highway in favor of a scaled-down parkway version that would be "attractive and appealing and would enhance the aesthetics of the neighborhood," according to future mayor, Emanuel Cleaver (*Kansas City Star* 1980b). In 1985, after twelve years of litigation, the lawsuit was settled and the SMF was redesigned as a four-lane landscaped boulevard (*Kansas City Star* 1985a, 1985b, 1987; *Kansas City Times* 1985). Two years later, the Kansas City, Missouri City Council renamed the roadway the "Bruce R. Watkins Drive," after the deceased African American city council member and 1980 mayoral candidate who had been an ardent opponent of the SMF during the 1970s (*Kansas City Times* 1986, 1987). Construction of the parkway is expected to be completed by the year 2002 (*Kansas City Star* 1994, 1996).

Although highway planners and engineers vigorously resisted this change in plans, by the 1980s there was no going back to the freewheeling days of large-scale displacement, unilateral decision making, and citizen non-involvement. Although SMF opposition groups were unsuccessful in curtailing some of the most deleterious impacts of displacement, they were successful in getting original plans altered. Unlike the "urban villagers" in Boston's West End (Gans 1962), residents and neighborhood leaders in the path of the SMF were able to overcome a lack of internal material resources, build strong ties with outside organizations, and thwart the MSHD's plans for a high-speed expressway. In the process, leaders of neighborhood coalitions and civil rights groups emerged as capable of challenging expressway plans by using the courts and legal system to demand a more inclusive highway planning process and citizen review and scrutiny of city and state urban redevelopment initiatives. Today, unlike the 1940s and 1950s, highway builders, engineers, and city leaders and planners in Kansas City face an intimidating and uncompromising coalition of neighborhood and civil rights organizations armed with new legal tools, a unified organizational base, and sophisticated arguments to challenge unpopular urban redevelopment drives.

Conclusion

In this study, I have focused on a specific case to illustrate the interactive effects of changing political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes in the emergence of a local social movement. The volatile mix of anti-poverty policies and civil rights protest that marked the 1960s were the building blocks—or “window of opportunity” (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996)—for the development of an anti-expressway movement that was able to generate and supply the material and legal resources needed to support and sustain local resistance against highway displacement. Changing political opportunities, including cleavages among local elites, the availability of influential allies, and the changing racial composition of the city population and government bodies provided access to the local polity for expressway opponents. Formal and informal mobilizing structures (e.g., neighborhood coalitions and civil rights organizations) facilitated the dissemination of grievances throughout the community, thereby enhancing the resonance of specific frames, and providing rationales for action and resistance to the SMF. Negative interactions with the MSHD and a mixture of local government opposition and support led to the deployment of community identity to mobilize potential constituents and encourage neighborhood empowerment and resistance to the expressway.

The interactional approach taken in this article bridges gaps between research in the “urban community studies” tradition and social movements research on local movements and collective identity. Most urban research maintains that some sort of community identity is necessary to translate individual and group interests into collective action, to create and mobilize a constituency, and to forge a political consciousness around place. In other words, instances of community identity are usually taken as the starting point, not as the result, of other social processes (e.g., local political action, mobilization, and organization). Rather than viewing community identity as a product of activism, this research has examined community identity as a political strategy used by anti-expressway opponents to secure recognition for neighborhoods, create and mobilize a constituency, and contest highway plans. “Community” was a useful frame bridging strategy, based on traditional American political rhetoric, between anti-expressway opponents (many of whom were outsiders), local and national civil rights groups, and neighborhood coalitions. Williams (1995:139) suggests that the symbol of community contains a multiplicity of meanings that “provide political actors with a venue for argument, but one that leaves the specifics of content artfully ambiguous.” In this sense, community identity can be viewed as a “cultural resource” that groups wield more or less self-consciously in their social and political struggles. It was in the process of struggle against the state that the inherited rhetoric of community was transformed into a new and broader political strategy to unify otherwise disconnected groups and neighborhoods opposed to the SMF into a powerful local anti-expressway movement.

The interactional framework used in this article also helps shed light on the structural relationship between collective identity and political mobilization. Political opportunities not only create motivations for political mobilization through “structural” changes (e.g., public policies, cycles of protest, and presence of external allies, etc.), but they also set in motion “ideational” shifts in political culture, expanding the cultural reservoir of strategic frames and enhancing the potency of movement framing. In the case of the SMF, community identity was taken selectively by anti-expressway opponents from a cultural reservoir of available themes and combined with innovative forms of collective action (legal challenge through the courts, etc.) to generate resistance to the expressway. While political opportunities provided incentives for mobilization, civil rights groups and neighborhood organizations were the crucibles for construction and deployment of community identity. This case has pointed out that peoples’ identification with place is tied not only to their ability to articulate compelling collective representations of residence, but also to available mobilizing structures that shape the mecha-

nisms by which groups construct their collective identity. From an interactional approach, political (and cultural) opportunities and mobilizing structures affect identity construction processes while those processes create new organizations, transform political culture, or eliminate opportunities.

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