

**THE AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND SPECULATIONS ON POLITICAL
THERMODYNAMICS**

Michael Francis McCullough

Brooklyn College, Political Science Department (retired), Brooklyn, New York

ABSTRACT

In 1956, state legislators in Montgomery, Alabama, stung by the ongoing boycott against racial segregation on the city's buses, passed a law stating that white and black players or spectators were prohibited from playing or sitting together at "any game of cards, dice, dominoes, checkers, baseball, softball, basketball, football, track, or in swimming pools, lakes or ponds, or on any beaches". The success of the boycotters in desegregating buses later that year marked the beginning of the American Civil Rights Movement and the beginning of the end of egregious racist practices like those sanctioned by the state's lawmakers.

This essay seeks to demonstrate how the political transition from the strictures of Jim Crow culture to one of greater racial equality can be interpreted in thermodynamic terms – and to offer in the process one example of how it is possible to bridge the two-cultures divide between the physical sciences and political science. Operating variables shared across political and thermodynamic systems include degrees of self-organization and disorganization, openness and closure, unpredictability and predictability, and distance from equilibrium. Jim Crow closure denied to blacks myriad avenues of participation in society, pressing them toward a predictable, stifling equilibrium, having ultimately a socially and politically disorganizing or entropic effect. The civil rights protest movement moved American society away from the Jim Crow equilibrium, producing a bifurcation or restructuring crisis, ultimately opening previously denied social and political options for the black community, enabling greater self-organization not only for blacks but for the broader polity as it discovered benefits in interracial collaboration.

Keywords: power-over, disorganizing, entropic, power-with, self-organizing