In a first-ever longitudinal study assessing black civic participation after the civil rights movement, Fredrick C. Harris, Valeria Sinclair-Chapman, and Brian D. McKenzie demonstrate that the changes in black activism since the civil rights movement are characterized by a tug-of-war between black political power on one side and economic conditions in black communities on the other. As blacks gain greater access and influence within the political system, black participation in political activities increases while downward turns in the economic conditions of black communities produce less civic involvement in black communities. During the course of black activism from the early 1970s to the 1990s, the quest for black political empowerment and the realities of economic and social life acted as countervailing forces in which negative economic and social conditions in black communities weakened the ability of blacks to organize so that their political voices could be heard.

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Countervailing Forces in African-American Civic Activism, 1973–1994

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To the political activists who made a difference despite the odds:

Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hammer, and Bayard Rustin

And to the political scientists on whose shoulders we stand:

William E. Nelson, Jr., Hanes Walton, Jr.,
and Linda Faye Williams
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