
Preface

Three years ago we set out to write a book about industrial and occupational change in the South. We were particularly interested in changes during the 1970s because this decade was a time of national fascination with the Sunbelt states and the South in particular. In many ways, the South was riding the crest of a wave which never appeared to break. Progress seemed to be rampant, at least when measured as growth and development in urban areas. Cities such as Atlanta, Dallas, and Houston all rose to national prominence during the 1970s. But we wondered what benefits had been felt in the nonmetropolitan areas of the South.

Geographically, the South constitutes about one-quarter of the continental United States. But more than its geographic size, it often appears to be a “larger-than-life” kind of place. It has a sense of its own history and of its place in the U.S. which sets it apart from all other regions. To be sure, New England “Yankees” have a regional identity. But their numbers are fewer and the area has never quite conveyed or contained the mystique associated with the South. In the U.S., there is no rival to the passion evoked by the term ‘Southerner’ (ruling out the term ‘Texan’). Phrased differently, one is more likely to hear the term ‘Southerner’ than any other regional identifier *and* it

is rarely used in a dispassionate way. To be a Southerner is to have one's very existence grounded in the region, its history, and its people.

While regional identity may be seen as a positive thing, thinking of the region and its people in any homogeneous way entails a great probability of error. This is because the region is so varied — ranging from the Piedmont to the Gulf Coast; from the swamps of Florida and Louisiana to the mountains of Virginia and Tennessee; from the predominantly white population of the Appalachians to the heavily black population of the Black Belt (see map 1, p. 00); from relative prosperity in urban places to poverty in rural ones.

The nonmetropolitan areas of the South are easy to overlook, as are most nonmetropolitan areas in the U.S. Unless we travel through rural areas, away from the interstate highway system, we have few opportunities to see the people referred to in a presidential report as “those left behind.” This book, which was motivated by our professional identities with rural sociology and our inherent interest in rural populations, devotes considerable attention to the people of the rural South. In nearly all cases, we do this by comparing them to urban residents.

Unlike many academic books, this book goes far beyond a recitation of facts, figures, and analyses. While our own view of the sociological world has been influenced by various schools of thought in sociology and economics, it would be fair to say that we never envisioned this book for academic audiences only. Instead, we wanted to write a readable book which might be read by politicians, policy makers, policy analysts, and concerned citizens. Thus when we reach the book's final chapters we spend little time on the usual academic format of theoretical discussion with a nod or two in the direction of the need for more work. There is always the need for more work, and theoretical discussion may be fruitful and crucial to the advancement of scientific knowledge. Our principal concern, though, is to make known to a wide audience the effects of a historic *de facto* industrial policy, effects that are neither academic nor theoretical.

We wanted to write a book which would detail the changes that occurred during a decade of great optimism and growth. Our thesis is that this growth has not been evenly distributed over the region: Urban areas are most likely to have benefited while rural areas tended to languish. Both areas, however, have been affected by the region's de facto industrial policy.

Additionally, we wondered about race and sex groups — how had they fared during the era of growth? Given the national push for affirmative action in all spheres of American life, we had some reason to believe that blacks and whites, men and women, would be distributed differently in the occupational structure in 1980 than in 1970. While there were differences, it was clear to us that ten years is a short span of time over which to measure social change. The distribution of race and sex groups did change, but the changes were generally minor. For example, while domestic workers declined drastically, janitorial service workers increased at about the same rate.

To help assess the growth and decline of jobs, we not only looked at these changes in the aggregate but we also identified four types of counties: large urban counties; small urban counties; rural counties; and counties with large black populations. We further analyzed data (where possible) by breaking industrial employment and occupational figures into groups by race and sex of employees.

Having examined patterns of recent occupational and industrial change in various rural and urban counties in the South, we felt obligated to go a step further — to suggest strategies which could be followed to develop a more rational method of recruiting industries and jobs into the region. As we see it, no issue is more crucial than the development of such a method. If left unattended, we can expect free market economic forces to dictate the ebb and flow of prosperity and poverty, a cycle we associate with many parts of the country and with the South in particular. Thus the boom of today can quickly become the bust of tomorrow. We argue for a better way.

We capture the problem of radical rises and declines in the South's economy in our last chapter. Although we began our

book at a time when the region was still highly prosperous (or so it appeared), the precariousness of this state became apparent when oil prices fell, farmers went bust, and textile mills closed their doors. Suddenly good times turned bad. For us this was more support for our position that some form of regional or even national planning is necessary. States cannot be expected to cooperate spontaneously to prevent problems which transcend their individual borders.

Our book opens and closes by asking difficult questions about the economic progress which has occurred and what type of progress is desired in the years ahead. We believe that if existing economic development strategies continue, rural areas will fall further and further behind the large metropolitan centers of the region. As we see it, the stakes are great and the time is pivotal. America was founded on agriculture, which was for generations the very embodiment of the 'work ethic.' Hard work and farming went hand-in-glove. But increasingly, work is away from farming and, in rural areas, "hard work" is finding work.

We have written this book with both professional and personal commitments to the analysis of labor markets as a central sociological concern. But transcending this, we believe that a better society is only possible if sociologists and other social analysts step out from behind their analytical guises and seriously grapple with the issues before them. To that end, we hope that we have written a book in which readers will find themselves occasionally in agreement but also occasionally angered or disapproving. If we have done no more than make people think about the relationships between industries and jobs, about the people holding those jobs, and about the policies which influence both industries and people, we will have taken an important step. If we should also influence desirable change, so much the better.